

Russia Accuses Kiev of Lacking Control After Donetsk Clashes

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia's Foreign Ministry building in central Moscow.

Russian authorities said Friday that they reserve the right to protect Russian citizens in Ukraine following clashes between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian demonstrators in Donetsk.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement on its website that Kiev had demonstrated an inability to control the situation in Ukraine after 13 people were hospitalized and one man was killed when opposing rallies turned violent in the eastern Ukrainian city.

The statement said that demonstrators were protesting peacefully against the Ukrainian authorities before being attacked by right-wing groups armed with non-lethal weapons.

However, this version of events contradicts an earlier account that blamed the pro-Russian protesters for the outbreak of violence.

Citing an unidentified participant in the rallies, Novosti Donbassa reported Friday that those in favor of Eastern Ukrainian secession to Russia initiated the clashes by throwing smoke canisters at those rallying in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Ukrainian police have so far detained four people in connection with the events, but did not say if they were from the pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian side, RIA Novosti reported Friday.

The ministry also took the opportunity to reiterate Moscow's official line — that Russia has a right to protect the interests of its citizens in Ukraine.

On Thursday, Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed that it had started exercises in the Southern Military District, on Ukraine's border, which involved 8,500 artillerymen, and the Foreign Ministry's announcement is likely to heighten fears that Russia will use the unrest in Donetsk to justify an invasion.

Tensions are already high in Ukraine ahead of a referendum in Crimea — planned for Sunday — that could pave the way for the Black Sea peninsula to become part of Russia.

On Wednesday, interim Ukrainian President Arseniy Yatsenyuk said Russia was trying to provoke a response from Ukraine, as a pretext to move into the mainland.

Ukraine does not intend to go on the offensive, but it will "not be inactive in the face of continued aggression," Yatsenyuk said, Agence France Presse reported.

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