

KamAZ Says Maidan Activists Hijacked 40 of Its Trucks

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A file photo of a man checking out some KamAZ trucks.

Russia's largest truck manufacturer has asked the Russian, Kazakh and Ukrainian authorities to help them retrieve more than 40 of its vehicles that were stolen on Sunday by gunmen who were supposedly retaliating against Moscow over the Crimean referendum.

A batch of KamAZ trucks was being moved to Kazakhstan from Chernihiv, 140 kilometers north of Kiev, when a group of armed men claiming to represent the pro-European Maidan protest movement halted the convoy outside the Ukrainian city, the company said in a statement on its website.

The firm's private security team called the police when the men demanded to see export documents for the convoy. Shortly after, two jeeps loaded with about 60 armed gunmen arrived to support the hijackers, who said they would open fire if the convoy attempted to resume its journey.

Seven trucks were returned to the depot in Chernihiv by the gunmen, but 43 were driven away from the border crossing at Senkivka — 90 kilometers to the north — and are still missing.

The company said that the stolen trucks are worth more than \$2.7 million in total.

On Sunday, 96 percent of Crimeans voted for their region to become part of Russia and the gunmen said that their actions were a response to the Moscow-backed referendum, according to KamAZ's statement.

"Russia seizes our belongings in Crimea, and we confiscate Russian vehicles," the gunmen were quoted as saying.

Though KamAZ made it clear that it is a private company and that, therefore, the gunmen's actions won't hurt the Russian state, the trucks have not been returned.

Furthermore, the armed men have since threatened to steal an additional 150 trucks from the depot.

Russia moved troops into Crimea after former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich was removed following months-long protests centered on Kiev's Independence Square — known as the Maidan. The Kremlin justified its actions by saying that it needed to protect the interests of ethnic Russians living in the region.

Moscow has said it will respect the outcome of the vote, which was organized by the region's new pro-Russian authorities.

The pro-European interim government in Kiev and the West have both said that the referendum is illegal and have refused to acknowledge the result.

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