The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Germany Urges Russia to Help Secure Release of OSCE Hostages

April 28, 2014



Officials from the OSCE mission in Ukraine leaving the mayor's office with a detained observer in Slovyansk.

BERLIN — Germany urged Moscow on Monday to use its influence on pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine to secure the release of observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, who are being held in the city of Slovyansk.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert said Berlin condemned the detention of the team, which includes four Germans, calling it "against the law and without justification."

The release of one of the eight hostages on medical grounds was "a positive step" but the other seven must also be freed "immediately, unconditionally and unharmed," said Seibert.

"We ask the Russian government to act publicly and internally for their release, to distance itself clearly from such acts and to use its influence on pro-Russian perpetrators and forces in eastern Ukraine to secure their release," he said.

Seibert said that the presence of armed, masked men when the OSCE observers were paraded before the media in Slovyansk on Sunday — in what he called a "revolting spectacle" — made it clear beyond any doubt that they were the hostages of the city's self-styled mayor, Vyacheslav Ponomaryov.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walker Steinmeier spoke with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov on Saturday and again on Monday to urge Moscow to make it clear to the separatists that their actions were unacceptable, a ministry spokesman said.

Russia responded to the appeal by questioning why the observers had ventured into a tense environment to begin with.

A senior Russian diplomat said on Monday it had been "extremely irresponsible" to send military monitors from the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe to turbulent eastern Ukraine.

Andrei Kelin, Moscow's ambassador to the Vienna-based OSCE, said however that it would be a good step toward easing the conflict to release the seven European monitors, who are being held by pro-Russian rebels.

"We have made statements for the benefit of these people and we hope that negotiations will continue and I hope also that it will be a success," he told reporters after an extraordinary meeting of the 57-nation European security body.

The observers are not the first to be taken hostage by separatists in Slovyansk. Last week, Ukrainian journalist Irma Krat was detained on suspicion of espionage for the new government in Kiev. She was accused of "war crimes" and as of Monday was still being held.

See also:

Ukrainian Rebels Free Swedish OSCE Hostage in Slovyansk

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/04/28/germany-urges-russia-to-help-secure-release-of-osce-hostages-a34737