

Lavrov Calls on U.S. to Diffuse Tensions in Ukraine

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has told U.S. counterpart John Kerry the U.S. should use its influence to make Ukraine's government stop military operations in south-east Ukraine, the Russian foreign ministry said.

Lavrov also said that it was important that the mediating role of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe was increased to secure Kiev's fulfilment of the Geneva declaration on de-escalating tensions in Ukraine.

"Chances of this still exist," the ministry said in a statement on Saturday, as long as all Ukrainian regions are represented in a national dialogue on constitutional reform, and "terrorists" from the Right Sector — a Ukrainian ultranationalist group in western Ukraine — group are curbed.

Lavrov, in a phone conversation with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, also said he was concerned about reports that Ukraine's army was preparing to storm cities in south-east Ukraine including Slovyansk, according to a statement from the foreign

ministry.

The town of Slovyansk in eastern Ukraine has been turned into heavily fortified redoubt by pro-Russian separatists.

On Saturday Ukraine said it was pressing on with an offensive in the area for a second day, and had recaptured a television tower and a security services building from rebels in Kramatorsk, a town near the rebel stronghold of Slovyansk.

Steinmeier agreed that violence should halt, the statement said.

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