9 Dead After Pro-Russian Rebels Down Ukrainian Helicopter

June 25, 2014

A pro-Russian separatist guards a road checkpoint in the Luhansk region, eastern Ukraine.

Rebels shot down a Ukrainian helicopter carrying technicians who had been installing equipment to monitor violations of a peace plan in Ukraine's rebellious east, killing all nine people on board, a military spokesman has said.

The technicians had been returning from setting up specialized equipment when their Mi-8 cargo helicopter was struck by a rebel missile near Slovyansk in eastern Ukraine, government forces spokesman Vladyslav Seleznyov said Tuesday.

"There were 9 people on board. According to preliminary information ... all those on board were killed," Seleznyov said on his Facebook page. The nine dead included a three-man crew.

"The [rebel] fighters, having fired the rocket, hid in the nearby village of Bylbasovka," he said.

The incident took place just hours after pro-Russian separatists on Monday night announced

a cease-fire until June 27 to match a week-long truce by government forces which has been ordered by President Petro Poroshenko.

It was the second time a helicopter has been brought down by rebel fire from Slovyansk, a separatist stronghold. On May 30, rebels there also downed a military helicopter killing 14 servicemen, including one general.

Dmytro Tymchuk, a military analyst known to have good sources in the armed forces, said the helicopter had been brought down by a missile fired from a shoulder-held launcher.

The truce announcement on Monday night by separatist leaders had raised the first real prospect of an end to hostilities since the insurgency erupted in the largely Russian-speaking east in April.

But Tuesday's helicopter incident seemed certain to put the cease-fire on both sides under fresh pressure.

Elsewhere, a rebel spokesman in Donetsk said a shootout broke out near the city's airport, which is under Ukrainian control. Rebels opened fire on two Ukrainian armored personnel carriers leaving the grounds of the airport, according to a witness.

Safety Corridor

Earlier Tuesday Poroshenko, who is trying to secure national and international support for his plan to end two and a half months of fighting, said the pro-Russian separatists had violated their own cease-fire with overnight attacks on military posts and checkpoints which killed one government soldier and wounded seven others.

Separately, spokesman Seleznyov said two Ukrainian servicemen had been killed when rebels fired at two military roadblocks on Tuesday.

Poroshenko's plan would offer a safety "corridor" back to Russia for pro-Russian fighters who lay down their arms and has secured the backing of Western governments and qualified support from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Some of the rebels say they will adhere to the cease-fire announced Monday night after talks between separatist leaders and a "contact" group of officials, including former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, Moscow's envoy to Kiev, and a high-ranking representative from the OSCE security and rights watchdog.

But in the rebel stronghold of Slovyansk, near where the helicopter was brought down Tuesday, separatists appeared to be dissociating themselves from the cease-fire agreement.

"Talks with them [the Kiev governmen] are possible only from a position of force and no other way. We should not trust a single letter," said Igor Strelkov, the top rebel commander in Slovyansk, as quoted on the Facebook page of Pavel Gubarev, the self-styled governor of the "Donetsk People's Republic".

"They [Ukrainian troops] are trying to quickly and calmly take and reinforce new positions under the cover of the cease-fire treaty," Strelkov was quoted as saying.

See also:

[Ukraine Separatists Down Army Helicopter, 14 Killed](#)