

Poroshenko Ends Cease-Fire, Promises to Attack Rebels in East Ukraine

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Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko addresses deputies during a session of parliament in Kiev, June 19.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said Tuesday that government forces would renew offensive operations against rebels and "free our lands," hours after a cease-fire to allow for peace talks with the pro-Russian separatists had expired.

Poroshenko, who accuses Russia of fanning violence in eastern Ukraine, dismissed Moscow's offers to defuse the crisis, and blamed the rebels for failing to keep to the truce or follow a peace plan that he had outlined.

"We will attack and free our lands. The decision not to continue the cease-fire is our answer to terrorists, militants and marauders," he said in a televised statement delivered in front of the blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag.

The speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament, Seregi Naryshkin, voiced calls later Tuesday to renew the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine, Interfax reported.

"We think that without a truce, without the start of dialogue, it is simply impossible to restore peace, justice and law and order in Ukraine," Naryshkin, an ally of President Vladimir Putin, was quoted as saying.

Poroshenko's announcement came after a four-way phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin and German and French leaders aimed at helping end the crisis in Ukraine's Russian-speaking east where government forces have been battling rebels since April.

Poroshenko had extended a government cease-fire last week until 10 p.m. local time on Monday to allow for peace talks with the so-called contact group involving separatist leaders, a former Ukrainian president, a senior representative of the OSCE rights and security body, and Moscow's ambassador to Kiev.

"The unique chance to implement the peace plan was not realized. It happened because of the criminal actions of the militants. They publicly declared their unwillingness to support the peace plan as a whole and in particular the cease-fire," Poroshenko said.

Moscow could face more penalties from the European Union on top of existing asset freezes and visa bans unless pro-Russian rebels act to wind down the crisis in the Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk provinces.

Before his announcement, Poroshenko had met with security chiefs, some of whom had called against a cease-fire extension because of military losses and fears that the rebels were using it as an opportunity to regroup and rearm.

A statement tweeted by the Foreign Ministry said 27 Ukrainian servicemen had been killed and 69 wounded since the cease-fire began on June 20.

Sanctions Warning

Putin had urged during the telephone call for an extended cease-fire, a Kremlin statement said.

At Putin's request, the Russian parliament last week revoked the right it had granted him in March to invade Ukraine in defense of its Russian-speakers.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told state television that Moscow was ready to allow OSCE monitors and Ukraine's border guards to enter the Russian side of the border for joint control. Kiev accuses Russia of letting fighters and weapons to cross the porous border into eastern Ukraine.

"The revocation of permission [by lawmakers] to send Russian troops into Ukraine was positive but symbolic," Poroshenko said. "We also did not expect any concrete steps on the de-escalation of the situation, including boosting control over the border."

EU leaders said Friday that they were ready to meet again at any time to adopt more sanctions on Russia. Diplomats said they could target new people and companies with asset freezes as early as next week. More than 60 names are already on the list.

Although it has drawn up a list of hard-hitting economic sanctions, the EU is still hesitating

over deploying them because of fears among some member states of antagonizing Russia, their major energy supplier.

Poroshenko, who had been under Western pressure to extend the cease-fire, faced rising anger at home over the military deaths. Local media said hundreds of people had gathered outside of his administration building in Kiev in anticipation of a statement on the fate of the truce.

However, he said he was willing to return to a cease-fire "at any moment" if it became clear that all sides were ready to carry out all aspects of the peace plan, including the freeing of hostages and creating effective border controls.

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