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Ukraine Separatists Grant Putin's Appeal for Safety Corridor

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A separatist inspects a gun at a destroyed war memorial at Savur-Mohyla, a hill east of the city of Donetsk, Ukraine.

A leader of separatist forces in eastern Ukraine, Alexander Zakharchenko, said on Friday he had agreed to open a humanitarian corridor for encircled Ukraine troops, answering a request from President Vladimir Putin.

"We are ready to open up a humanitarian corridor," Zakharchenko, prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, told Rossiya 24 TV, adding that troops would have to leave behind their heavy armored vehicles and ammunition.

In a statement published on the Kremlin website in the early hours of Friday, Putin — who congratulated the separatists with their "significant success" — called for a safety corridor to let Kiev government forces leave the region.

"I call on the militia forces to open a humanitarian corridor for encircled Ukraine servicemen in order to avoid pointless victims, to allow them to leave the fighting area without

impediment, join their families..., to provide urgent medical aid to those wounded as a result of the military operation," he said

Putin also said Russia will continue to provide humanitarian aid to civilians in east Ukraine, less than a week after Russia's first aid convoy delivered supplies to east Ukraine and then returned to Russia.

But it was not clear if the government in Kiev would accept the offer. It has accused Russian troops of illegally entering Eastern Ukraine and, backed by its U.S. and European allies, has said it will fight to defend its soil.

Material from the Moscow Times has been included in this report.

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