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Moscow Blames Kiev for 'Mass Grave' in Ukraine

By Allison Quinn

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A pro-Russian rebel walking past what fellow rebels say is a grave containing five bodies in Ukraine this week.

Russia's Investigative Committee has vowed to open a probe into reports of a mass grave discovered near Donetsk in Ukraine's restive east, the TASS news agency reported Wednesday.

"Information about the killing of citizens whose bodies were found in a mass grave near Donetsk will be checked by the Investigative Committee's central directorate as part of a criminal case into the use of prohibited means of warfare against peaceful civilians in southeastern Ukraine," TASS cited the committee's spokesman, Vladimir Markin, as saying Wednesday.

Markin was referring to a case opened over the summer regarding Ukrainian authorities over the use of prohibited means of warfare and killing of civilians.

Andrei Kelin, Russia's envoy to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, was cited by RIA Novosti as saying monitors from the organization had visited the site and documented details.

"The mission was already there, they documented what happened, and information about it should appear later today in the observers' report," Kelin was cited as saying. While the OSCE does not have the authority to conduct its own investigation into the matter, he said, it would be willing to assist in coordinating an international probe, according to the report.

Earlier Wednesday, Alexei Pushkov, the outspoken firebrand head of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee, placed all blame for the newly discovered grave on Kiev.

"Russia must and will raise the matter with international organizations — PACE and OSCE — about how those in power in Kiev right now hold direct responsibility for these war crimes and crimes against humanity," Pushkov was cited by TASS as saying.

The number of bodies in the grave and details about the victims remain unclear. Media reports on the graves, which were said to have been discovered near the village of Nizhnyaya Krynka by pro-Russian separatists on Tuesday, have relied on information from the separatists.

Russia's state-run television channel Rossia-24 published a report citing unconfirmed information from United Russia lawmaker Vyacheslav Nikonov, who said the grave contained the bodies of several women who were found to have been raped and tortured.

It was unclear where Nikonov had received such information. According to that report, the grave contained four bodies.

Another report by the Ukrainian news site Novosti Donbassa said residents of Nizhnyaya Krynka had shown the grave to OSCE monitors Wednesday. That report, which did not specify the number of bodies found, said a grave marker had been erected above the site reading, "They died for [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's lies."

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