The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Says Ukraine's Separatist Vote Does Not Violate Minsk Deal

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November 04, 2014



Election information sheets picture Alexander Zakharchenko, who went on to win the election as head of the Donetsk People's Republic, an entity proclaimed by armed rebels last April.

Russia has blocked a United Nations Security Council statement accusing Ukrainian separatists of breaching a peace agreement with Kiev, as Western governments continue to denounce Sunday's vote as illegitimate.

The draft document — the result of two-day long discussions between the 15 members of Security Council up until the eve of the Sunday balloting — was rejected by the Russian delegation to the United Nations as "inadequate," Russia's state-run TASS and RIA Novosti news agencies reported Monday.

"[The Security Council] drafted this document, but their will was blocked by Russia," Ukraine's Ambassador Yuriy Sergeyev told a press conference at the UN.

In the document, the Security Council condemned Sunday's elections in Donetsk and Luhansk as having violated a peace agreement struck in the Belarussian capital Minsk in early September. The deal set the terms for the regions to elect their local representative officials under Ukrainian law on Dec. 7.

But the ballot organized by separatists this Sunday, a month ahead of the agreed date, saw a ballot dominated by outside pro-Russian separatist leaders and bypassed Ukraine's Electoral Commission.

Kiev, the West and the UN have denounced the vote as a direct violation of the Minsk deal — with Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko calling it "an electoral farce" — but Moscow maintains that the balloting was legitimate.

Sergeyev, the Ukrainian ambassador, said Monday that his mission would continue "consultations" with Security Council members, including Russia.

Chances of persuading Russia to withdraw its support for the separatists appeared slim, following months of staunch defiance amid a rising death toll in the Ukrainian conflict and Western sanctions against Moscow.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov pledged ahead of the rebel votes that Moscow "will, of course, recognize" their results, and in a statement issued Monday, his ministry said Russian officials "respect the will" of separatist voters.

But while Russia has refused calls to denounce the election, the country has refrained from recognizing the eastern Ukrainian regions as independent states. While evading separatist calls for secession, Russia has instead argued that the vote should force new peace talks between the rebels and Kiev.

Ukraine's President Poroshenko said Monday that following the rebel "pseudo-elections," he would ask a national security council meeting to revoke the local self-governance provisions offered to separatists under the Minsk deal.

"We have demonstrated to the inhabitants of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and to the outside world the sincere wish of Kiev for a political settlement," Poroshenko said in a statement on his administration's website. "The militants have rejected this opportunity."

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