

Norway Suspends Political Contact With Russia, Prime Minister Says

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Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg talking with her Ukrainian counterpart Arseniy Yatsenyuk during a meeting in Kiev, Nov. 18.

Norway has suspended all political contact with Moscow and has canceled a previously planned joint military exercise with Russia because of the conflict in Ukraine, the Norwegian prime minister said.

The only interactions that remain between the two countries are "local-level contacts" related to maritime transport and fishing, Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg said in an interview with Ukraine's *Gazeta.zn.ua* news site published Friday.

"There had been no problems in our cooperation during the past 10 years," she was quoted as saying. "But now because of the illegal annexation in Crimea and the Russian activities in the eastern Ukrainian regions, we have frozen all political contacts with Moscow."

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine this spring, in a move that Kiev and Western nations have denounced as illegal, and it continues to back pro-Moscow separatists in Ukraine's east.

Ukraine and the West have also accused Russia of supplying militants with fighters and weapons, though Moscow says all the Russian fighters in eastern Ukraine are acting as "volunteers."

Solberg told Gazeta.zn.ua that Norway would be recalling its military experts "who were working with Russia on strengthening trust," and has canceled joint war games that had been planned between the two countries.

"All of this is because of the situation in Ukraine," she said.

Past military cooperation between Russia and Norway included "regular meetings" between top defense officials and two large-scale annual exercises involving the countries' Navy forces, according to the NATO-Russia Council website.

The largest Russian-Norwegian exercise, Pomor, has been held every year since 1994 and sees the countries' naval and air forces practice anti-terrorism measures, search and rescue operations and their response to environmental disasters, the site said.

The other joint exercise, called Barents, focuses on rescue operations and reacting to the fallout from oil spills, the website said.

In recent months, NATO has reported increased Russian military activity in the skies above Moscow's northwestern neighbors. Norway scrambled F-16s to track four Russian bombers last month, Reuters reported.

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