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Ukraine President Stands By Foreign and Defense Chiefs

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KIEV — Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko nominated his foreign and defense ministers for new terms Tuesday, signaling a major change in policy is unlikely in the conflict with pro-Russian separatists in the east.

Parliament was expected to endorse Pavlo Klimkin as foreign minister and Stepan Poltorak as defense chief in the government of Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who has kept his job as prime minister following an election. They are currently acting ministers.

Kiev has taken a tough line against the rebels under Poroshenko and Yatsenyuk, cutting aid to the eastern regions that have rebelled against Kiev's rule, while fighting has continued in the east despite a cease-fire agreed Sept. 5.

Tensions remain high over the crisis, with European Union foreign ministers warning of a military buildup by Russia in the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea annexed from Ukraine in March.

But Kiev and Moscow both expressed some optimism over an agreement "in principle" by Ukrainian forces and the separatists to start a truce in the rebel-held Luhansk region from Friday.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said he had not received confirmation of the agreement, reported by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a security and rights group, but said it was encouraging.

"If this is so, then we can say that a real chance is appearing on the road to de-escalation of tensions in southeast Ukraine," he told a Foreign Ministry briefing in Moscow.

Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said talks were also under way between the Ukrainian military and the rebels on reaching a cease-fire in the Donetsk region, where fighting has also continued despite the Sept. 5 cease-fire.

Kiev and Moscow have traded blame for the failure of the three-month-old cease-fire to end the conflict that has killed more than 4,300 people since mid-April and caused the worst rift between Russia and the West since the Cold War ended.

Western powers and NATO have accused Russia of sending arms and troops to back rebels who rose up after Russia annexed Crimea following the overthrow of a Moscow-backed president a month earlier, but Moscow denies this.

"We condemn Russia's military build-up in Crimea," EU foreign ministers said after a meeting in Brussels. "We are also concerned with Russia's stated plans for further military build-up on the Black Sea."

The ministers condemned Russia's "continued and deliberate destabilization of eastern Ukraine in breach of international law, including the provision of tanks, advanced air defense systems and other heavy weapons to the separatists."

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