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Ukraine Separatists Want to Boost Forces to 100,000

By The Moscow Times

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Members of a special unit of the Ukrainian armed forces line up before departing to take part in a military operation, during a farewell ceremony in Kharkiv, Jan. 30, 2015.

Separatists battling government troops in east Ukraine plan a general mobilization and aim to boost their fighting force to 100,000 men, one of their main leaders said Monday.

Alexander Zakharchenko, leader of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), was quoted by Russian news agencies as saying the mobilization would take place next week.

"A general mobilization is planned in the DNR in 10 days. Ten thousand men will be called up," RIA news agency quoted Zakharchenko as saying in the city of Donetsk, though he did not make clear how the mobilization would be enforced.

"The joint army of the DNR and the LNR will be 100,000 men strong," Interfax news agency quoted him as saying, referring to the neighboring self-proclaimed Luhansk People's

Republic.

"Mobilization is the first stage; there will be volunteers first and we will see what to do next."

Zakharchenko, who was elected in a vote in November that was not recognized by Kiev or the West, did not say how many separatists were currently fighting in east Ukraine.

Kiev, NATO and Western governments say they have evidence that Russia has sent troops and weapons to back the separatists but Moscow denies this. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko put the number of Russian troops in the east last month at 9,000.

Fighting has increased in eastern Ukraine in the past few weeks and hopes of easing the situation faded after peace talks collapsed on Saturday. Kiev has also mobilized more troops because of the surge in fighting.

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