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Russia's Lavrov Says Fighting Is Abating in Eastern Ukraine

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov speaks during a news conference after a meeting with his counterpart from Zambia, Harry Kalaba, in Moscow April 17, 2015.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said he believes a surge in cease-fire violations in east Ukraine has passed, adding Moscow will work to prevent violence escalating again.

Moscow stands accused by the West and Kiev of driving the separatist pro-Russian rebellion in east Ukraine, providing it with troops and arms, training and intelligence. Moscow denies this.

Fighting has picked up in recent weeks despite a cease-fire in place since February, with hot spots including around the airport in the rebel stronghold of Donetsk and the village of Shyrokyne, en route to the city of Mariupol on the Azov Sea.

"We are disquieted at the continued cease-fire violations, which have been very intense indeed in recent days. Now the situation is calming down. We will actively facilitate the strengthening of this tendency," Lavrov told a news conference.

Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said in Kiev on Monday that no Ukrainian servicemen had been killed or injured in fighting over the previous 24 hours.

"The number of cease-fire violations by the enemy has fallen considerably," he told a news conference.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is monitoring the cease-fire, said on Monday its staff were able to access Shyrokyne for the seventh consecutive day on Sunday, indicating relative calm in the area.

But the truce is tenuous, with both sides on the ground in east Ukraine expecting fighting to pick up again.

Western diplomats in Moscow, however, say that is unlikely before the May 9 military parade in Moscow to honor the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe.

They say Russian President Vladimir Putin would not want to further jeopardize a chance to show off Russia's military prowess and fuel national pride after most Western leaders decided to skip it over Ukraine.

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