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Russia Says EU Does Not Want Ukraine Truce to Hold

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused "someone in the European Union" on Tuesday of trying to ensure a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine does not hold.

Pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian government agreed the truce in the Belarussian capital Minsk on Feb. 12, but it has failed to end all fighting and the Lithuanian president told Reuters it was now all but dead.

Lavrov deflected the blame on to Kiev at a news conference in Moscow and accused the EU of turning a blind eye to attacks which have killed civilians in rebel-held areas.

"Judging by certain signs, someone in the European Union wants the EU to allow the Ukrainian government not to implement the Minsk agreements," he said after talks with Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz.

He gave no more details but also described what he called increased military activity

by Ukrainian forces in recent weeks as an attempt to tear up the ceasefire accord.

The EU did not immediately respond to Lavrov's remarks but has regularly urged all sides to implement the Minsk deal and underlined Moscow's responsibilities in particular.

Most EU leaders say they hope the ceasefire can be shored up but Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite said: "The ceasefire no longer exists."

"The situation is changing of course every day, but we are relying on NATO information, and NATO information is such that, really, the Minsk agreement is over," she said in an interview in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius.

Kiev and the West accuse Moscow of sending arms and troops to help the separatists in fighting which has killed more than 6,100 people in just over a year.

Russia denies the accusations and says the West instigated the overthrow of a Moscow-backed Ukrainian president last year as part of efforts to reduce Russian influence in the region.

Under the Minsk deal, weapons bigger than 100 mm calibre, including large artillery, heavy mortar and powerful rocket systems, should have been withdrawn from the frontline.

In Kiev, Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said the separatists were building up military equipment for more attacks. A rebel leader, Andrei Purgin, said this was a "political declaration for the Western public."

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