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Kremlin Says Russia 'In Favour' of Returning Donbass to Ukraine

By The Moscow Times

May 26, 2016



Rebels on a tank get ready to take position near the Sergey Prokofiev International Airport during fighting with Ukrainian government forces in the town of Donetsk, eastern Ukraine.

The Kremlin is ready to support the return of Ukraine's troubled eastern regions to Kiev government control, according to President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov, the RIA Novosti news agency reported on Thursday.

In a move some have interpreted as an invitation to dialogue, and others as bluff, Peskov said on Thursday that Moscow fully supported Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's pledge to re-establish control over the war-torn regions. Such support was, however, conditional on changes being "dictated by humanitarian concerns."

A day earlier, the head of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic Alexander Zakharchenko declared that the separatist statelet would only agree to Kiev control once "Ukraine becomes a state again." For this to happen, "there would need to be change of government."

The new government would also be required to condemn the "2014 putsch," the separatist leader added, referring to the popular revolution that toppled former President Viktor Yanukovych.

It is unlikely that Moscow is ready to abandon separatists in eastern Ukraine that it has supported since the beginning of the conflict.

Peskov's comments, moreover, come at a time of an uptick in fighting, with Kiev reporting "record" losses for over a year. According to Ukrainian military command, seven Ukrainian soldiers were killed on May 23 alone.

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