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Ukraine Suspends All Cargo Traffic With Separatist Republics

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Dmitry Rogulin / TASS

Ukraine's national security council has ruled to halt all cargo traffic passing between government-held areas and the separatist-controlled regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Council Secretary Oleksandr Turchynov said that traffic would remain blocked until the Russian-backed separatists handed over control over coal mines in Donbass and fulfill their part of the 2015 Minsk agreement.

Exceptions will be made for humanitarian cargo, Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko has said.

The decision comes as Kiev tries to end a rail and road blockade imposed by nationalist Ukrainian activists opposed to all forms of trade with the breakaway republics. The blockades, which have been ongoing since January, have caused severe material shortages of coal and iron ore in both government and separatist areas. The Ukrainian authorities in Kiev

has repeatedly urged demonstrators to call off the blockade, citing fears of blackouts.

Forces in Donetsk retaliated on March 1, when separatist troops seized independently-owned industrial assets based in rebel territory. Many belong to Ukraine's richest man, Rinat Akhmetov. Some 40 mines and enrichment plans were seized, according to separatist forces, who described the move as "re-nationalization."

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