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Moscow Voices Concern Over OSCE Moves to 'Relocate' Ukraine Staff

By AFP

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OSCE flags are pictured at the Stanitsa Luganskaya checkpoint during a visit by an OSCE delegation. **Alexander Reka/TASS**

Russia on Sunday said it was concerned by the decision of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to relocate some of their Ukraine-based monitors.

The OSCE "informed the participating states of the decision by 'a number of countries' to relocate their national staff of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine 'due to deteriorating security conditions'", foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

"These decisions cannot but cause our serious concern."

The OSCE has served as the world's eyes and ears for the eight-year conflict across Ukraine's Russian-backed separatist east that has claimed more than 14,000 lives.

Weeks of tensions over Ukraine have seen Russia nearly surround its western neighbour with

more than 100,000 troops intensified, with Washington warning that an all-out Russian invasion could begin "any day".

Zakharova said the OSCE move further inflamed tensions over Ukraine, adding that the monitoring mission could be used as a "tool" to stage a possible provocation.

"We call on the OSCE leadership to resolutely stop attempts to manipulate the mission and prevent the organization from being drawn into dirty political games," Zakharova added.

Images on social media showed convoys of its white SUVs leaving various parts of the conflict zone because of the staff's need to comply with their respective governments' travel advisories.

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