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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Backs Ukraine Separatists' Full Territorial Claims

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Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the independent of the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics on Monday. **Kremlin.ru**

Russia backs the full territorial claims of separatists in eastern Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday evening.

Speaking at a press conference, Putin said: "We recognized them. And this means that we recognized all their fundamental documents, including the constitution. And the constitution spells out the borders within the Donetsk and Luhansk regions at the time when they were part of Ukraine."

Leaders in the breakaway states control less than half of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine but claim sovereignty over the entire area, including major port city Mariupol, which is currently under Kyiv's control.

Putin's backing for the separatists' claims to territory controlled by the Ukrainian government threatens to further escalate the situation in the country, less than 24 hours after

Putin's shock decision to recognize the republics' independence.

Putin said it was up to the separatists in Ukraine to negotiate with the government in Kyiv to resolve the border dispute. Kyiv refuses to talk to the rebels and President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has repeatedly called for a summit with Putin to discuss the issue.

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The statement came as Russia's parliament voted to give Putin permission to send Russian armed forces abroad, paving the way for troops to be sent into the DNR and LNR for peacekeeping purposes, Moscow says. Those claims have been slammed by the West, with the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations saying overnight it was "nonsense" that Russian forces would be used for peacekeeping.

In the short update, televised on Russian state TV channels, Putin also declared the Minsk peace agreements dead and called on Ukraine to drop its ambitions to join NATO and to demilitarize.

Russia has amassed 150,000 troops around Ukraine including in Belarus and Crimea, which Moscow annexed from Kyiv in 2014.

Western governments scrambled to respond to Russia's recognition of the breakaway states, imposing sanctions on Moscow and threatening more measures would be leveled against Russia should Putin press ahead with plans to invade the rest of Ukraine.

AFP contributed reporting.

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