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Russian MPs Greenlight Putin's Recognition of Rebel Ukrainian Regions

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duma.gov.ru

Russian lawmakers on Tuesday ratified President Vladimir Putin's decree recognizing the independence of Ukraine's separatist republics that Kyiv and Western governments denounced as illegal.

A live video feed of the lower-house State Duma session showed a unanimous vote in favor of the agreements, followed by a standing ovation at the packed legislature.

Russia's upper-house Federation Council followed the Duma in unanimously ratifying Putin's decrees recognizing the pro-Moscow regions in two separate votes Tuesday afternoon.

Donetsk and Luhansk currently occupy one-third of the territory they had controlled when they broke away from Ukraine in 2014. It remains unclear whether Russia will recognize the separatist republics according to their current borders or their full proclaimed territories.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said Moscow recognizes both territories' independence "within the

borders under which the republics' leadership exercises its powers."

But Kremlin threw further confusion onto the issue, saying Russia recognizes Donetsk and Luhansk "within the boundaries in which they proclaimed themselves."

In Monday's televised address announcing his recognition of the republics' independence, Putin demanded that Kyiv halt military operations against them or face more bloodshed. Ukraine has accused Russia and the breakaway republics of falsely blaming Kyiv of attacks.

Putin's decrees published Monday order Russia's Foreign Ministry to "establish diplomatic relations" with Donetsk and Luhansk as well as instruct the Russian Armed Forces to deploy "peacekeepers" to the regions.

Videos and eyewitness accounts said afterward that armored vehicles had crossed into the Moscow-backed breakaway territories.

The Kremlin said it could not confirm those reports, saying that Putin and the heads of the two republics have the authority to deploy Russian troops "based on feasibility and the situation."

Russian lawmakers also ratified Putin's "friendship and cooperation" treaties with Donetsk and Luhansk, allowing the sides military, financial and other areas of cooperation.

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