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Still No Sign of Integration for Occupied Ukrainian Regions

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The Russia-installed governors of the four Ukrainian regions Moscow claims as its own. **Valery Sharifulin/TASS**

The Kremlin maintains direct control over the four Ukrainian regions that Moscow claims as its own territory amid continuing fighting and a lack of established borders, Russia's Kommersant daily reported Monday, citing unnamed presidential administration sources.

Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions are not included in any of Russia's eight federal districts and do not have their own presidential envoy, according to the publication.

Citing two Kremlin sources, Kommersant said Moscow could move to integrate the partially occupied territories into Russia's regional administrative system either after regional elections this fall or whenever Moscow declares an end to what it refers to as its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

The Kremlin has also not instructed the authorities it controls in any of the four regions to lay

the groundwork for their integration into the Russian Federation, Kommersant cited two sources close to the leaders of two of the four occupied Ukrainian territories.

The issue of forming federal districts may gain relevance "in the process of stabilization and complete liberation of these territories," according to Viktor Vodolatsky, a deputy in Russia's lower house of parliament, who oversees the Luhansk region.

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"The presidential administration has taken over the functions of the federal district and is successfully coping with the task," Kommersant quoted Vodolatsky as saying.

The captured territories could be integrated into Russia's regional structure following legislative elections there on Sept. 10, 2023, said Duma lawmaker Igor Kastukevich, who oversees the Kherson region.

Moscow has been claiming the four Ukrainian regions to be legally Russian territory after a series of rushed referendums in September 2022 that were widely condemned as a sham by the international community.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the accession of all four Ukrainian regions into law in October.

Russian media reported ahead of these moves that the four captured Ukrainian regions could become part of a new Crimean Federal District, which would also include Crimea, which Moscow illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said last week that the administration was "studying various options" for the incorporation of the Ukrainian regions into Russia's regional administrative hierarchy.

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