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CORRIDORS OF POWER

Agreements on peace settlement in east Ukraine may be reached in contact group meeting on September 5 - Putin

ULAN-BATOR. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said he believes representatives of the Kyiv administration and south-eastern Ukraine should reach agreements on the peaceful settlement in the contact group meeting scheduled to take place in Minsk on September 5.

"I believe the authorities of Kyiv and south-eastern Ukraine could reach final agreements in the contact group meeting on September 5," Putin told reporters in Ulan-Bator on Wednesday.

According to earlier reports, the next meeting of the contact group involving representatives of the administrations of Kyiv and south-eastern Ukraine, the OSCE and Russia is scheduled to take place in Minsk on Friday.

Ukraine should withdraw subdivisions from settlements to stop bloodshed - Putin

ULAN-BATOR. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Both conflict parties should agree and carry out a set of actions in order to stop the bloodshed and stabilize the situation in south-eastern Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

"The first thing is to stop active offensive operations by the armed forces and armed formations of militia of south-eastern Ukraine in the direction of Donetsk and Luhansk," Putin told reporters.

Putin said that during his flight to Mongolia he drafted his own plan to resolve the Ukrainian crisis.

"The second thing is to withdraw armed subdivisions of Ukrainian law enforcers to a distance, ruling out the possibility of artillery and all multiple launch system strikes on settlements," the Russian president said.

"The third thing is to foresee carrying out comprehensive and objective international control with regard to compliance with ceasefire conditions and monitoring the situation created this way in the security sector," Putin said.

"The fourth thing is to rule out the application of combat aircraft against civilians and settlements in the conflict zone. Then to organize the exchange of persons kept forcibly under the 'all for all' formula, without any preliminary conditions," the Russian president said.

"The sixth thing is to open humanitarian corridors to move refugees and deliver humanitarian cargo to cities and other Donbas settlements - the Donetsk and Luhansk regions," he said.

"And finally, the seventh thing is to ensure the possibility of sending damage repair brigades to Donbas settlements to restore social and vital infrastructure facilities and to help them," Putin said.

The Kyiv authorities and representatives of south-eastern Ukraine could reach and affirm final agreements during the contact group meeting scheduled for September 5, 2014, the Russian president said.

Putin expects Kyiv to support progress emerging in relations with Moscow

ULAN-BATOR. Sept 4 (Interfax) - It is hoped that the Ukrainian authorities will support the progress which has emerged in bilateral relations with Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in Ulan-Bator on Wednesday.

"I count a lot that the Ukrainian authorities will support the progress emerging in the bilateral relations," Putin said.

Kyiv should use the work of the contact group "for a final settlement of the situation in south-eastern Ukraine," the Russian president said.

Putin says he and Poroshenko have close views on settlement of situation in Ukraine

ULAN-BATOR. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said he and his Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko have largely similar views of ways of resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

"I had a phone conversation with President Poroshenko this morning and our views, at least it seemed to me, on the ways of resolving the conflict are very close, as diplomats say," Putin told reporters.

Putin said he "made some sketches, some 'action plan'" when he was on the plane to Mongolia.

Putin's plan has seven points, which are aimed at 'stopping the bloodshed and stabilizing the situation in south-eastern Ukraine,'.

"I would like to say that [...] this statement followed today's phone conversation with President Poroshenko," Putin said.

Putin said he is hoping that "the Ukrainian administration will back the impending progress in bilateral relations and is using positive things in the work of the contact group to achieve a final and comprehensive settlement to the situation in eastern Ukraine."

Putin also said the lawful rights of the people living in that territory should be fully and unconditionally protected.

Putin invites president of Mongolia to celebrations of 70th anniversary of Victory in Great Patriotic War

ULAN-BATOR. Sept 4 (Interfax) - During a visit to Mongolia, Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated his Mongolian counterpart Tsakhia Elbegdorj on the 75th anniversary of the victory in the battle on the Khalkin Gol River and invited him to visit Moscow to attend the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War in May 2015.

"We are now marking the 75th anniversary of one of the central events of our history, our joint victory in the battle on the Khalkin Gol River. The heroism and bravery of the soldiers who defended the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Mongolia became symbols of our friendship. Russia remembers and values the help provided to us in the years of the Great Patriotic War. We

are looking forward to seeing you in Moscow at the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the Victory in May 2015," Putin said.

"Our relations are developing in the military sphere, humanitarian sphere and, of course, in economics. I am very happy to be able to discuss the entire range of our bilateral relations," Putin said.

Elbegdorj, for his part, said: "I congratulate you, Vladimir Vladimirovich, on Victory Day. Our friendship, which was solidified in the battle on the Khalkin Gol River, grew even stronger in the years of WWII. We have always been proud to remember the heroism of Soviet soldiers who fought for the freedom and happiness of the people of Mongolia," he said.

"We are proud that the people of our countries have always worked side by side in times of war and peace. We have a long history of working together on the battlefield, on land, and in space. I am confident that your visit will turn a new page in the history of our relations. Mongolia wants to develop relations with the Russian Federation in all spheres," the Mongolian president said.

Russia to raise issue of violence towards reporters in Ukraine at UN Human Rights Council

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Russia intends to raise the issue of the situation of journalists working in Ukraine at the UN Human Rights Council.

"We will raise the issue of murders, kidnappings and violence over reporters in Ukraine at the UN Human Rights Council meeting very strongly," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov tweeted.

Peskov: Putin's plan for Ukraine amounts to proposals on pressing measures

GORNO-ALTAISK. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Putin's plan for a settlement in Ukraine proposed by the Russian president on Wednesday amounts only to proposals on pressing measures, presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov has said.

"This is not an exhaustive plan. This is a proposal of pressing measures while all the rest is the subject of further talks," Peskov said to Interfax, answering a question about the absence of questions relating to the status of territories in south-eastern Ukraine from the plan.

He stressed that the main purpose of the measures proposed by the Russian president is to stop the bloodshed and stabilize the situation in southeastern Ukraine.

"This is not a dogma which someone is insisting on and which is being imposed on someone. It can be used as a basis in full or in part. The main thing is that the sides in the conflict stop the fighting as soon as possible and get down to talks," Peskov said.

The press secretary said that Putin's plan was announced and a response to it should follow. "It was announced to the whole world," Peskov said, remarking that now the Kremlin is waiting for a response.

No Russian troops in Ukraine - Peskov after Obama's statement

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Top Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has refuted U.S. President Barack Obama's statement that there are Russian troops on Ukrainian territory.

"We have stated many times that there are no Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine. And while President Obama is saying that there are no doubts about it, officials from the U.S. State Department simultaneously with their president are saying that the U.S. does not have any evidence of the presence of the Russian military in the territory of Ukraine. This situation stresses the reluctance to rely on facts," Peskov said to the Russian News Service.

"It is simply an obsession to ascribe Russia a destructive role in the development of the Ukrainian crisis with which we categorically disagree," he said.

Earlier during a visit to Tallinn Obama said that "Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine are not a humanitarian or peacekeeping mission." "They are Russian combat forces with Russian weapons in Russian tanks," he said. "These are the facts that can be proved," and "they cannot be questioned," he said at a press conference.

Protection of journalists important issue for all Russian agencies - Peskov

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The state is permanently working to protect Russian journalists, including those who work in war zones, the Kremlin said.

"The protection of journalists is an important area in the work of all Russian agencies. The protection of all citizens, especially journalists, this work is being done on a permanent basis," Russian presidential press officer Dmitry Peskov told Russian News Service, responding to a question as to whether new measures will be taken to protect journalists working in war zones, especially in Ukraine.

It was reported on Wednesday morning that Andrei Stenin, a photojournalist with Russia Today, had been killed in Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin has extended his condolences to the journalist's relatives and loved ones and expressed his sympathy to Russia Today staff.

ISIL Islamists threaten not just Russia but to all Europe - Margelov

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Threats of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist cell regarding Russia are at the same time threats to Europe, where many caliphate supporters are, Russian Federation Council international affairs committee head Mikhail Margelov said.

Information exists that ISIL army has almost 80% foreign militants and participants of clashes in Syria, Margelov told Interfax. "And while the EU authorities have been racking their brains over new sanctions regarding Russia, a deadly dangerous center of the 'global caliphate' has formed in the Middle East. And ISIL threats addressed to Russia are simultaneously threats to Europe, where quite a lot of caliphate supporters are," he said.

Furthermore, the person who executed U.S. reporters spoke London cockney, Margelov said.

"The ISIL poses a direct threat to Muslim countries as well because this cell does not consider their authorities to be 'real Muslims.' After seizing Mosul, Iraq, ISIL representatives announced the creation of 'the first truly Muslim world rule.' So from this viewpoint the governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are 'not true'," Margelov said. Not to mention the fact that terrorist of different cells are fighting not in two Muslim countries alone - Iraq and Syria - they are also active in Lebanon, Mali and other Middle Eastern and African states, he said.

"Militants of the ISIL cell addressed a threat 'to free Chechnya and the Caucasus' to Russian President Vladimir Putin and threatened Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose army, by the way, crushed part of the cell fighting in Syria," Margelov said.

Now Iraq has become the main theater of terrorist actions and outrages by ISIL, which has not lost the fighting capacity, the senator said. However, Iraq is just a base because the caliphate declared by the ISIL should also include Syria and is seen as "global" one in the future, he said. "So the threats of terrorist attacks at Caucasus should be taken seriously. The caliphate map was released last year. In particular, Russian regions, where Wahhabist cells operate, were marked on the map and North Caucasus and the Volga region were shaded densely," Margelov said.

At the same time, it is possible this map cannot be trusted 100% as terrorists are trained in modern IT and can have wishful thinking, Margelov said. "Nevertheless, caliphate supporters exist on the territory and some natives of our country fight within the ISIL. Chechen Omar Al-Shishani, born in the Pankisi Gorge, has been recently named a commander in one of the ISIL videos," Margelov said.

Latest statements by Yatsenyuk prove level of U.S. influence on Ukrainian authorities - Pushkov

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The policy regarding Russia being carried out by Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk is agreed with the U.S. administration but is absolutely unnecessary for his country, Russian State Duma international affairs committee Alexei Pushkov said.

"Yatsenyuk is simply carrying out the line of complete opposition to Russia by Ukraine - the line, which I am certain, is agreed with Washington. So this is complete separation of Ukraine from Russia and turning Ukraine into a country in constant conflict with Russia," Pushkov told Interfax on Wednesday when asked to comment on Yatsenyuk's statements.

The Ukrainian prime minister said in particular that in new defense doctrine of Ukraine, Russia should be recognized as an aggressor and the only country threatening Ukraine's territorial integrity and national security.

At the same time, the Ukrainian authorities are starting to build a fence at the border with Russia in the framework of the Stena (Wall) project, Yatsenyuk said. "We are beginning the Stena project. This is the building of a real state border between Ukraine and Russia," the Ukrainian prime minister said at a Cabinet of Ministers meeting on Wednesday.

These statements of Yatsenyuk "prove to what extent the Ukrainian authorities are under U.S. influence," Pushkov said.

"In my point of view, this line is absolutely opportunistic. It is possibly needed by the U.S. in order to maintain a high tension level in relations between Kyiv and Moscow but it is not needed utterly objectively either by the Ukrainian state or by the Ukrainian populace. And further development of the situation will definitely prove this," the Duma committee head said.

MP Pushkov: Putin-Poroshenko agreement may be first step towards Ukrainian peace

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - An agreement between the Russian and Ukrainian presidents regarding the promotion of a ceasefire in Donbas may be the first step towards ending the military standoff, State Duma International Affairs Committee Chairman Alexei Pushkov.

"If this agreement is developed, it may be the first step towards ending the military standoff, as, in my opinion, further hostilities will not give a final advantage to either side and, most importantly, the developing events have been demonstrating until now that Kyiv is unable to crush the resistance," Pushkov told Interfax on Wednesday.

Obviously, the problem of eastern Ukraine does not have a military solution, he opined.

"As we remember, Poroshenko said when he took the office that he would stop the war a week after his inauguration. It seems he expected to crush the militia resistance within a week and to impose the will of Kyiv on the eastern regions. More than three months have passed since then and, as we can see, the only result is that the Ukrainian army has been retreating for the past two weeks. Meanwhile, the militia is holding more solid positions than it used to," the parliamentarian pointed out.

Therefore, an agreement on steps promoting a ceasefire will have paramount importance in the case it is fulfilled, Pushkov said. Any negotiating process will be impossible without a ceasefire, he added.

"Until now Kyiv has been denying any possibility of negotiations with the militia, but the situation on the battlefield and the latest dynamics negative for Kyiv objectively prompt the Ukrainian administration to hold these talks," he said.

A position declared by Russia a long time ago that there is no alternative to the settlement of this problem at negotiations is now being proven, Pushkov said.

"I think this is the main meaning of this agreement," he added.

Russian Foreign Ministry envoy insists on probe into journalist deaths in Ukraine

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Russia insists on an efficient investigation into the circumstances of photojournalist Andrei Stenin's death and other crimes against journalists and civilians in Ukraine, says Russian Foreign Ministry Human Rights Commissioner Konstantin Dolgov.

"A full-scale investigation should be conducted, and this concerns not only Rossiya Segodnya international news agency photojournalist Andrei Stenin's death but also all other crimes, including the burning of people in Odesa and the shootings in Mariupol on May 9. The Ukrainian authorities should take all the necessary measures themselves, including the punishment of those guilty," Dolgov said in an interview published in the Thursday issue of Izvestia.

These investigations should be conducted under efficient control by international institutions, he said.

"However, we don't see the political will in Kyiv so far," he said.

Russia will not allow "the investigation to be taken into shadows," Dolgov said.

"We will be using political and diplomatic methods, including statements in international formats. This is Russia's position at the highest level," he added.

The international community, primarily the U.S. and the EU supporting Ukraine, should prompt Kyiv to conduct such an investigation, he said.

Dolgov suggested that the U.S. position looks especially strange now, considering that two U.S. journalists were recently killed by Islamic State terrorists in Iraq, and therefore, he said, the tragedy of Stenin's and other journalists' deaths in Ukraine should be close and understandable to the Americans.

Duma considers Yatsenyuk's statements on building wall at Russian border to be exalted rhetoric

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk's promises to build a wall along the border with Russia are nothing more than pre-election PR, first deputy head of the Russian State Duma committee for international affairs Leonid Kalashnikov (of the Russian Communist Party) told Interfax on Wednesday.

"Different plans Ukrainian politicians are currently attempting to voice several times a day are mostly related to the political situation and the upcoming elections to the Verkhovna Rada. Tomorrow they will propose building a sarcophagus over Russia - the screams about the wall are of this sort for me," Kalashnikov said.

The intention to erect a wall between Ukraine and Russia and, for instance, walls being constructed in Israel or at the U.S. border cannot be compared, not only due to technical aspects of the border length but due a number of other parameters, he said.

"So if the Ukrainian authorities did plan to use the possible truce between Donbas and the Ukrainian authorities to build the wall at the border, this is impossible because this project is not doable," the politicians said.

Such "projects" are political rhetoric - "every politician is trying to earn points for himself or herself ahead of the elections to the Verkhovna Rada because they will be treated in future as to how many per cent they get at these elections," Kalashnikov said. "And anti-Russian rhetoric in Ukrainian society, which has been poisoned by propaganda, draws more attention today. Not to mention such exalted rhetoric as Yatsenyuk's," he said.

The Ukrainian authorities started building fence at the border with Russia in the framework of the Stena (Wall) project, Yatsenyuk said on Wednesday.

The border between Ukraine and Russia amounts to 2,295 km, while the total Ukrainian border is 6,993 km, including 1,355 km of coastline.

Crimea suffers brief blackouts amid reduced power supply from Ukraine - Aksenov

SIMFEROPOL. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Crimean authorities had to briefly suspend power to residential areas of the peninsula on Wednesday because of the reduced electricity flow from Ukraine, acting Crimean Republic Head Sergei Aksenov said on Thursday.

"No more than 300 megawatts are supplied [from Ukraine to Crimea] in the evening. There were power outages in Dzhankoy, Simferopol and the Krasnogvardeisky district yesterday. Just briefly," Aksenov told reporters in Simferopol.

The acting head of the republic added that the region did not have a sharp deficit of electricity.

"We are no longer using reserve generators. Hopefully, the supply of 300 megawatts will continue," Aksenov said, noting that amount had been agreed upon by the energy ministries of Russia and Ukraine.

In turn, the Sevastopolenergo Energy Company press service said some residential areas of Sevastopol had to be temporarily disconnected from the power grid on Wednesday evening because of the limited power supply from Ukraine.

Russia willing to work toward Ukraine conflict de-escalation together with OSCE - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Moscow is ready to take practical steps toward the de-escalation of the conflict in Ukraine in line with a plan Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed on Wednesday, says Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

"We hope these calls will be heard, especially by Kyiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk. We are ready to ensure practical steps toward de-escalation together with the OSCE," Lavrov said in opening a meeting with Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly President Ilkka Kanerva on Thursday.

Lavrov expects contact group of Ukraine meeting in Minsk to use Putin's proposals to settle conflict

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Moscow expects that Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposals on settling the conflict in Ukraine will be used during a session of the contact group for Ukraine in Minsk on Friday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"We hope that the conflicting parties will use these ideas and try to reach an agreement during the contact group session," Lavrov said at a meeting with Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjorn Jagland in Moscow on Thursday.

Moscow is trying to make its contribution to efforts to start a dialogue between Kyiv and the southeastern part of Ukraine, Lavrov said. "The Council of Europe can and should play a constructive role at this difficult time," he said.

Lavrov insisted that decisions made by the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the UN Security Council should be implemented fully. "This concerns investigations into all crimes and all incidents that have taken place on Maidan

[in Kyiv], the tragedy in Odesa, the Boeing crash, a ceasefire, and the normalization of dialogue," he said.

The Council of Europe's and the OSCE's principles have lacked respect and fallen victim to double standards as of late, he said.

"As long as we don't abandon attempts to perpetuate the dividing lines in Europe, we will face challenges like the current one from time to time," he said.

Jagland said in response that the conflict in Ukraine is a very important challenge to all European institutions, including the Council of Europe, as they were founded following WWII and the Statute of the Council of Europe says that the member-states have to prevent armed conflicts using peaceful methods.

The Council of Europe attaches special significance to the protection of the rights of the people who suffer in the Ukrainian conflict, as their rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights have been systematically violated, he said.

Lavrov agreed that the European institutions are experiencing a crisis now. "We have a crisis of European institutions. We are convinced that high principles that were put in the foundation of the OSCE and the Council of Europe are not fully respected and fall victim to double standards," he said.

CoE Sec Gen hopes Putin's peace plan creates positive dynamics in Ukrainian crisis settlement

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjorn Jagland positively views Russian President Vladimir Putin's initiative for settling the crisis in eastern Ukraine but says it should be supported with concrete steps.

Jagland said in Moscow on Thursday answering a question from Interfax it was good the initiative had been made and added they should hope it could lead to something.

It is very important to maintain positive dynamics in the fulfillment of such proposals and to make one positive step after another under such circumstances, he stressed.

A prisoner swap could be one of these positive steps, the Council of Europe secretary general stated.

OSCE calls on Russian parliamentarians to cooperate to settle Ukraine crisis

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly President Ilkka Kanerva has called on Russian parliamentarians to cooperate with the OSCE PA to promote a political settlement of the conflict in Ukraine.

Meeting with Russian Federation Council Chair Valentina Matviyenko on Thursday, Kanerva said the situation surrounding Ukraine is continuing to worsen, and the OSCE PA cannot be indifferent to this.

Kanerva said he implied efforts toward the conflict's de-escalation and the arrangement of a sustainable political dialogue, which is extremely important now, taking into account the worsening humanitarian situation in the region.

The OSCE PA is urging Russia to display its commitment to OSCE principles, while the organization is seeking to perform its role as a mediator in settling the Ukraine crisis, so as to stop the conflict from spreading and prevent its destructive consequences together, he said.

Matviyenko responded that the OSCE in general plays a positive role in the Ukraine crisis.

"The main issue today is a ceasefire, and all efforts should be focused on this so as to start a negotiating process then. We expect the OSCE to promote the improvement of a humanitarian situation in southeastern Ukraine. We also support the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and hope it will be impartial in its judgments about the events," she said.

Matviyenko said she implied OSCE's impartial judgments about war crimes committed by the Ukrainian armed forces and mass human rights abuses and shootings on Maidan and in Mariupol and the burning of civilians in Odesa.

Russia sees the OSCE's role in conducting constitutional reform in Ukraine to ensure the legitimate rights of the people living in the southeastern part of the country, Matviyenko said. "Without this, it is difficult to expect an internal Ukrainian settlement. The rights of Russian Orthodox Church believers are massively infringed upon in Ukraine today, priests are being badly harassed, and there have been instances of murders, and the Ukrainian authorities are obstructing the work of Russian media outlets in any way they can and kill Russian journalists. The last case is the killing of Russian journalist Andrei Stenin," Matviyenko said.

Russia also expects the OSCE mission to contribute to the international investigation into the MH17 crash in Ukraine, Matviyenko said. "We expect an open and impartial investigation. Immediately after the Boeing crash, there were unfounded accusations addressed to the militia and Russia," she said.

"There is the impression that someone is deliberately dragging out the investigation so as not to name those who are truly responsible for this disaster," Matviyenko said.

Naryshkin says Putin's peace plan for Ukraine can really work

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The peace plan of Russian President Vladimir Putin for eastern Ukraine can stop the civil war if it is put into practice, State Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin said.

"In our opinion, this is a realistic and efficient ceasefire plan," Naryshkin told reporters after he had met with Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjorn Jagland.

He said they had discussed the new ideas about the peaceful settlement of the Ukrainian conflict put forward by the Russian president.

Ukraine plans to renounce non-aligned status aim to disrupt political dialogue - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Kyiv authorities' intention to revise Ukraine's non-aligned status derails the efforts toward peacefully settling the conflict in the southeastern part of the country, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"Right at the moment while approaches are being explored to start resolving the concrete problem between Kyiv and the militias, the Kyiv authorities aired the demand on discarding the non-

aligned status and starting accession to NATO. This is a sure attempt to derail all efforts aimed at arranging a dialogue with the aim of ensuring national security," Lavrov said at a meeting with the Council of Europe secretary general on Thursday.

The Russian minister urged other countries to stop provoking such approaches and continue work toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

"It is necessary to curb such attempts, stop provoking such approaches from abroad, and work together toward the same goal, that is, ensure national unity in Ukraine," Lavrov said.

At the same time, Lavrov stressed that Russia wants the Ukrainian people to win in this conflict, while some Western countries wish for a NATO victory.

"Some of our Western partners, including the most influential United States, want NATO to win and to have a situation in which America dictates its will to everyone. This exceptionalist philosophy that President Obama has repeatedly declared won't make and already hasn't made any good," he said.

Ukraine declared a course toward Euro-Atlantic integration along with closer ties with the European Union in 2005, immediately after President Viktor Yushchenko came to power. The NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 was a milestone in Ukraine's NATO membership drive, as it expected to be granted a Membership Action Plan at it. However, the NATO members decided not to grant this plan to Ukraine, arguing that its population was not properly prepared for this step.

In 2010, the Ukrainian parliament passed a bill entitled On the Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policies, which was submitted to the parliament by then-President Viktor Yanukovich. The document declared the non-bloc status of Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic integration policies were removed from it.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk had said on August 29 that the Cabinet submitted legislation on renouncing Ukraine's non-aligned status to the parliament. "In line with the National Security and Defense Council decision, the Ukrainian government submitted legislation to the parliament on renouncing the Ukrainian state's non-aligned status and resuming Ukraine's course toward NATO membership," he said.

The adoption of the bill would mean that Ukraine would be forbidden to become a member of either the Customs Union or the Eurasian Union, he said.

The Ukrainian Cabinet of ministers approved a bill on renouncing Ukraine's non-aligned status and resuming a course toward Euro-Atlantic integration on Wednesday, and now the Verkhonva Rada is supposed to pass the legislation.

"This legislation should be passed by the parliament," Yatsenyuk said at a government session on Wednesday.

Putin's plan for Ukraine targets shift to peaceful humanitarian action - expert

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The plan of Russian President Vladimir Putin for Ukraine may help reduce the scope of the humanitarian catastrophe in the southeast but its implementation depends to a large degree on Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko who does not control some Ukrainian paramilitary units, Institute of Political Studies Director Sergei Markov said.

"Clearly, this is not a comprehensive settlement plan. This is a plan lessening the degree of the humanitarian catastrophe. This is the most important. Actually, Putin has suggested a shift from the military humanitarian operation to a peaceful humanitarian action," Markov told Interfax on Wednesday.

In the opinion of the expert, the Russian president has made rather concrete proposals. "The plan suggests that Ukrainian troops move from Donetsk and Luhansk to a distance, which will keep these cities outside of the artillery's reach. Simultaneously, Kyiv should commit to avoid air strikes on big cities. Humanitarian corridors should be created for refugees and the arrival of repairmen teams in these cities to restore the infrastructure," he said.

A lot will depend on the ability of the Ukrainian president to implement the scenario proposed by Putin. "It is still a question whether Poroshenko can implement this peace plan even if he supports it. Not all the military units are subordinate to the Ukrainian president," Markov said.

Moscow doubts French reputation of reliable partner amid Mistral deal situation

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The halted delivery of Mistral-class helicopter carriers to Russia casts doubt on the reputation of Paris as a reliable partner, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

"The reputation of France as a reliable partner which honors its contract commitments has been sacrificed to U.S. political ambitions. Where have the times when Paris refused to yield to the U.S. pressure, for instance, in the issue of Iraq, gone?" ministry deputy spokesperson Maria Zakharova wrote on Facebook.

French President Francois Hollande announced the halt of the delivery of the first Mistral-class helicopter carrier to Russia on Wednesday. The statement was made after Hollande had met with the French Defense Committee and concluded that conditions "were not right" for the delivery of the first helicopter carrier to Russia.

A source in the NATO administration told Interfax on the same day that the alliance had nothing to do with the French president's decision not to deliver the Mistral-class ship to Russia. He said it was a sovereign decision of a member country of the organization.

The source added that certain NATO alliance members had told France it was the wrong time to supply such weapons to Russia but NATO as a whole did not pressure Paris.

The Russian government's Military Industrial Commission Deputy Chairman Oleg Bochkarev told Interfax-AVN on Thursday, Russia has not received any documents from France regarding a possible repeal of the contract for the delivery of Mistral-class helicopter carriers to the Russian Navy.

Russia expects Mistral contract to be carried out - minister

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Russia presumes that the contract with France on building Mistral aircraft carriers for the Russian Navy will be carried out as agreed upon, Russian Industry and Trade Minister Denis Manturov said.

"Russia presumes that the contract will be carried out in line with the contractual relations that were formed in their time," Manturov told journalists on Thursday.

Putin's plan should be discussed with all parties to Ukraine conflict - OSCE PA president

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly believes it would be helpful to discuss a plan for settling the crisis in eastern Ukraine proposed by Russian President Vladimir Putin with all parties to the conflict, says OSCE PA President Ilkka Kanerva.

Speaking to journalists following a closed meeting with Russian Federation Council Chair Valentina Matviyenko on Thursday, Kanerva said Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had informed him of Putin's plan earlier this morning, and it would be helpful and constructive to discuss this plan with other parties to the conflict in Ukraine.

At the same time, the OSCE has a lot of its own initiatives, including a road map for settling the conflict, he said.

He welcomed what he sees as a constructive approach demonstrated by Putin but said the OSCE PA certainly cannot rely solely on one plan in its work.

The problem of Ukraine has a lot of aspects, and it would be helpful to discuss all these peace initiatives toward resolving the conflict so as to develop joint proposals, Kanerva said.

Putin aired his plan for resolving the Ukraine crisis on Wednesday.

U.S. supports 'war party' in Kyiv - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The 'war party' in Kyiv enjoys active support from the United States, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"An outbreak of anti-Russian rhetoric that we are witnessing right at the moment when most active efforts are being made to achieve a political settlement shows only that the 'war party' in Kyiv enjoys active support from the outside, in this particular case from the U.S. side," Lavrov said following negotiations with the Kyrgyz foreign minister on Thursday.

Moscow expects reaction from Kyiv, militia to Putin's plan on peace settlement in Ukraine - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Moscow expects reaction from Kyiv and the militia on Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposals to de-escalate the conflict in Ukraine, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a news conference following talks with his Kyrgyz counterpart.

"We expect that the reaction of official Kyiv and militia will come. We did, do and will do everything depending on us in order for the proposals on beginning dialogue to materialize, starting with the main task - a ceasefire," Lavrov told Interfax.

"War party" in Ukraine aspires to continue bloodshed, undermines Poroshenko's positions - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Opponents of a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine cast doubt on the legitimacy of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's actions, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a news conference in Moscow.

"Those who are taking the path of war now by supporting violent radical elements in Kyiv, they take a huge responsibility, including not only for the continuing bloodshed but as to [what are] essentially attempts to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the actions of the current Ukrainian president," Lavrov said.

ARMY

Baltic NATO bases primary targets in case of aggression against Russia - ex Air Force commander

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - NATO bases near Russian borders, including those in the Baltic states, would be the priority targets in air superiority warfare if NATO resorts to aggression against Russia, says Army Gen. Pyotr Deinekin, the former commander of the Russian Air Forces in 1991-1998.

"As concerns the use of the Baltic states as airbases, this position is right from the aggressor's viewpoint. But those who give their consent to such an advance of NATO infrastructure eastwards should remember that these airbases will certainly be the first targets in air superiority warfare," Deinekin told Interfax-AVN on Wednesday in commenting on U.S. President Barack Obama's statement on preparedness to deploy U.S. Air Force units at an Estonian naval base.

Speaking earlier in Tallinn on the bolstering of U.S. military presence in Europe, including in the Baltic states, Obama said, "This initiative will include additional Air Force units and aircraft for training exercises here, in the Nordic Baltic region, and we agree with our Estonian allies that an ideal location to host and support these exercises would be Amari Airbase here in Estonia. With the support of Congress and our Estonian friends, I am confident that we can make this happen."

Russia should respond to approaching of NATO infrastructure by deploying bases near U.S. border - former Russian Air Force commander

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - General Pyotr Deinekin, who was commander-in-chief of the Russian Air Force between 1991 and 1998, believes an effective response to the approach of the NATO military infrastructure to the Russian territory would be the deployment of Russian air bases near U.S. borders.

"As to the response to NATO's expansion to the east, we have enough experience of deploying our aviation bases near the U.S. territory. In my view, it's time to respond to requests made by some South American countries to strengthen their independence using the Russian army," Deinekin told Interfax-AVN on Wednesday.

Deinekin also spoke in favor of restoring the Russian radio reconnaissance center in Lourdes, Cuba, and more active flights by Russian strategic aviation to the coast of the U.S. and other regions of the world.

"America has not smelled gunpowder since the Civil War between the North and the South and has always fought on foreign territories," he said.

Commenting on the earlier announced plans to adjust Russian military doctrine, specifically, due to the events in Ukraine, NATO expansion to the east, and the U.S. plans to deploy missile defense systems in Europe, the general opined, "this should have been done long ago."

"We considered the countries that are members of NATO to be our probable enemies over the course of several decades. Then our potential enemy transformed into partners in the fight against drugs amid the talks about 'democracy' (we didn't know it would be 'dollar democracy'). However, such friendship did not last long. The conductors of the Cold War eventually returned to their places and they now tell European leaders what to do," Deinekin said.

Deinekin reiterated that Russia cannot be conquered. "The experience of two world wars showed that, as soon as the issue becomes one of national security, all people of Russia rise, regardless of faith or ethnic origin. All people stand up for Russia's defense. Such people cannot be conquered," he said.

Shoigu tells Peru defense minister about situation in SE Ukraine, Russia's relief aid

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu raised the issue of the Ukrainian crisis in the course of his talks with his Peruvian counterpart Pedro Cateriano Bellido, Interfax-AVN was told by the Defense Ministry press service.

"Shoigu made an evaluation of the situation in south-eastern Ukraine known to his Peruvian colleague and also informed him of the efforts made to deliver humanitarian aid to the population of the neighboring country," the press service said.

The ministers also "discussed the state of bilateral relations in defense, mapped out promising directions of their development, including the training of Peruvian servicemen at Russian Defense Ministry colleges, and joint events of practical significance," the report says.

In the course of the talks "the two sides gave a positive evaluation of the current level of interaction in the military-technical sphere, singling out the constructive role of the Russian-Peruvian combined commission for military-technical cooperation," the press service said.

Wednesday's meeting was the second between the defense ministers of Russia and Peru. The first took place in Lima in October 2013 during Sergei Shoigu's visit to South America.

Defense Ministry, General Staff revise military development plans due to increased security threats - source

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - The sharp exacerbation of the situation in the world is causing the Russian Defense Ministry and General Staff to revise their military development plans for the short-term perspective," a high-ranking military source told Interfax-AVN on Wednesday.

"Security threats to Russia have sharply increased. They are associated with the NATO plans to expand the alliance's military presence in Eastern Europe, the threats made by the Islamic State to take the military action in the Northern Caucasus, and the 'militant rhetoric' in Ukraine," the source said.

"In this situation, Russia has no choice but to revise its military development plans," he said.

"The plans of the Defense Ministry and the General Staff to increase the number and combat composition of the Air Landing Troops should be regarded in this context. In particular, the pol-

icies of the Air Landing Troops development approved by the Russian Defense Ministry envision the formation of new units, the introduction of parachute brigades (air assault) third-regiment divisions (Air Landing Troops divisions until recently had two regiments), and massive introduction of new weapons and military equipment," the source said.

A battalion tactical group staffed solely by contract servicemen will be created in every combined arms brigade of the Ground Forces. "Thus, the Ground Forces have followed the example of the Air Landing Troops, which decided to create five first-line battalions staffed solely by contract servicemen several years ago," the source said.

"The attack power of the Ground Forces will be increasing rapidly, in particular, due to the increase of the supply to the troops of operative-tactical missile systems Iskander-M and the expansion of the geography of their deployment, including using the Kaliningrad special district," the source said.

The source also said the plan of actions of the Russia Navy for the period until 2020 has been adjusted and now envisages the expansion of the presence of the Russian Navy in some key regions of the world oceans, specifically in the Arctic. The fleet construction program will be adjusted appropriately, the source said.

The source would not comment on changes to the plans for the development of the Strategic Missile Troops (RVSN) and the Aerospace Defense Troops, adding that "everything that has been planned will be done within a shorter period of time." The source did not rule out the possibility that "the implementation of these adjusted plans will be associated with the deployment in RVSN of the newest intercontinental ballistic missile RS-26."

"All these plans will be substantiated and taken into account in the new edition of the Russian Military Doctrine, on which the Security Council is working," the source said.

French aviso, U.S. destroyer enter Black Sea

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - Two NATO warships have entered the Black Sea, a source in the Russian Navy Staff told Interfax-AVN on Thursday.

"The French aviso Commandant Birot and the U.S. destroyer Ross passed through Black Sea straits on Wednesday and entered the Black Sea in the evening," he said.

The French Navy's surveillance ship Dupuy de Lome has been present in the Black Sea since August 16. The Montreux Convention, which limits the presence of ships from non-Black Sea countries in the Black Sea waters to 21 days, binds the Dupuy de Lome to leave the Black Sea on September 5.

Naval ships of the United States and other NATO member countries have been practically constantly present in the Black Sea since the beginning of the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

MiG-31 crashes near Armavir, pilots are alive

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - A Mikoyan MiG-31 interceptor aircraft of the Russian Air Force has crashed near Armavir, Krasnodar territory, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Lt. Gen. Igor Konashenkov told Interfax-AVN on Thursday.

"A MiG-31 aircraft crashed 25 kilometers from Armavir at 7:38 a.m. Moscow time on September 4 in the course of a training flight. Both pilots ejected themselves and landed successfully,

they were rapidly found and brought to the base by helicopter. Their life and health are not in danger," Konashenkov said.

He added, "There was no ammunition onboard during the flight."

"There were no casualties or damage on the ground either," the general said.

Russian army to get over 120 Mi helicopters by 2020 - Defense Ministry

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - The Russian Defense Ministry will receive over 120 Mi helicopters, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yury Borisov said in Rostov-on-Don, where he arrived to inspect the execution of some defense procurement agreements at Rosvertol enterprise.

"The plants are stable and have a long-term contract to supply over 120 Mi-28N, Mi-35M and Mi-26 helicopters by 2020," Borisov was quoted as saying in a statement by the Defense Ministry press and information department obtained by Interfax-AVN on Thursday.

Deputy Defense Minister Borisov order to design new military helicopter

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - The Russian Defense Minister has order Rostvertol and Russian Helicopters to design a concept of a promising military helicopter, the Russian Defense Ministry press and information department said in a statement obtained by Interfax-AVN on Thursday.

"I would like proposals, as to what helicopter the Defense Ministry might get by 2026, come namely from you," Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yury Borisov - who arrived in Rostov-on-Don to inspect the execution of some defense procurement agreements at Rostvertol enterprise, which is part of Russian Helicopters holding - was quoted as saying.

Borisov also proposed to draft proposals regarding the state arms program for 2016-2025.

Construction of infrastructure for Mistral ships in Russia not suspended - Navy

ST. PETERSBURG. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - The infrastructural facilities to house Mistral-class helicopter carriers and landing ships, the Vladivostok and the Sevastopol, for Russia's Pacific Fleet and Black Sea Fleet are being constructed according to schedule, a spokesperson with the Russian Navy Main Staff told Interfax-AVN on Thursday.

"We have not received any commands to suspend the construction of sites for the Vladivostok and Sevastopol helicopter carriers. As was planned, the berths will be ready in the Uliss Bay in Vladivostok in a year. Preparatory work has been started also in the Sevastopol Bay, where a berth for the Sevastopol landing ship will be built in place of Berth 9," he said.

Only a cancellation command can stop the training of the helicopter carriers' future crews, he said.

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French President Francois Hollande said on Wednesday that the delivery of the first Mistral-class ship to Russia would be suspended. "There are no proper conditions for delivering the first helicopter carrier to Russia," Hollande said, implying apparently the Ukraine crisis.

The Russian state-controlled arms trader Rosoboronexport and the French company DCNS signed a contract on the construction of the first two Mistral-class helicopter carriers for the Russian Navy in June 2011. Russia's United Shipbuilding Corporation (USC) became a subcontractor of the French shipyard STX France, based in Saint-Nazaire, as part of the deal.

CHECHNYA CAMPAIGN

IS militants threatening Russia will be eliminated - Kadyrov

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov has promised a tough response to Islamic State (IS) terrorists threatening to start a war in the Caucasus.

"I declare with full responsibility that he to whom it occurred to express a threat to Russia and pronounce the name of our country's president Vladimir Putin will be eliminated there where he did it. We will not wait for him to take the wheel of an aircraft, he will go where his terrorist brothers Khattab, Abu Walid and other envoys of the West are rotting," Kadyrov wrote in Instagram on Wednesday.

In Kadyrov's opinion, IS militants "have nothing to do with Islam." "Terrorists from Syria calling themselves the Islamic State have made a childish threat to start a war in Chechnya and the Caucasus. They are saying only what their masters from Western special services are telling them to say. They are open enemies of Muslims of the whole world. Naive people decided to threaten Chechnya and the whole of Russia with two aircraft. They can board 2,000 jets but they won't make it to Russia. All countries controlled by the USA have declared sanctions against Russia but have achieved nothing. And here some dirty criminal has decided to distinguish himself," Kadyrov said.

"Russia has deserving sons ready to fulfil any order, break the neck of any enemy in its den wherever it may be," Kadyrov said.

"The militants in Syria and Iraq are nothing by themselves. I stress that they will end their days under the hot sun in Syria and Iraq and the flames of eternal hell will meet them at the very first moment of death," Kadyrov said.

White balloons launched to remember 334 victims of Beslan terrorist attack

VLADIKAVKAZ. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Three days of events dedicated to the victims of the terrorist attack on School No. 1, including the laying of flowers and the launching of 334 - the number of people killed - white balloons, ended with a minute's silence in Beslan.

Movies about the terrorist attack will be shown in school No. 1 and the traditional 334 candles will be lit.

Secondary school No. 1 in Beslan was captured by a group of terrorists on September 1, 2004. Over 1,200 people - schoolchildren, their parents and teachers - were taken hostage and held without food and water for three days in the school gym, which was packed with explosives. A total of 334 people, including over 180 children, were killed in the terrorist attack.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Russian prosecutors demand ban on websites posting ISIL supporters video appeal

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Russian Prosecutor General's Office has sent a request asking for the restriction of access to the video appeal by the Islamic terrorist group, announcing plans to unleash war in North Caucasus, to the Russian Federal Service for Supervision in Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor), Prosecutor General's spokesperson Marina Gridneva told Interfax.

"An appeal has been sent to Roskomnadzor asking for measures to be taken to restrict access to information resources on the internet containing the named address," Gridneva said.

Materials have been sent to the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) investigative department to make a decision on opening a case under the article "threat of carrying out a terrorist attack and public appeals to commit actions aimed at destroying Russia's integrity" due to the video appeal, the spokesperson said.

The video appeal by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Islamist terrorist cell to the Russian president, threatening to carry out terrorist attacks and to unleash war in the North Caucasus in order to "free it" emerged yesterday on the Al Arabiya TV channel and on the internet, Gridneva said.

Meanwhile, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov made a statement earlier on Wednesday, promising to respond harshly to terrorists. "I can say responsibly that the person who thought of voicing a threat to Russia and pronouncing the name of our country's President Vladimir Putin, will be destroyed right where he did it. We will not wait until he sits behind the steering wheel of a jet - he will go where his brothers-terrorist Khattab, Abu Valid and other Western envoys rot," Kadyrov posted on his Instagram account on Wednesday.

Over 200 fake passports seized from Islamic Uzbekistan movement in Moscow - Interior Ministry

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Police have detained individuals from Central Asian countries on suspicion of making fake driving licenses and passports, the Russian Interior Ministry press office told Interfax on Wednesday.

"Employees of the Russian Interior Ministry main criminal investigative department determined an address where foreign citizens - from Central Asian countries - were residing. They were carrying out illegal activities, making fake passports, driving licenses and other documents in Moscow," the press office said in a statement.

Over 200 Russian internal passports, 15 international passports and over 40 passports of foreign countries were seized during searches.

"According to the existing information, the named individuals profess radical Islam and are members of the Islamic Uzbekistan movement, which is banned in Tajikistan," the document said.

A criminal case has been opened and other incidents of illegal activities are being investigated.

ICRC needs comprehensive security guarantees in humanitarian aid delivery to Donbas

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The delivery and escort of Russian humanitarian aid to south-eastern Ukraine depend solely on security guarantees, deputy head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) regional delegation to Russia, Belarus and Moldova Bruno Husquinet said.

He said they could not decide to escort and deliver the humanitarian cargo from Russia until they received security guarantees from all sides to the conflict. Husquinet was speaking at a meeting of the Federation Council's committee on humanitarian aid to people in southeastern Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on August 31 Moscow should meet halfway the Ukrainian administration in the issue of humanitarian aid to the civilian population in the combat zone.

Ukraine reported negotiations with Russia on the possible delivery of humanitarian aid to eastern Ukraine by rail on September 2 but said no concrete agreements had been reached as of yet.

Two killed in helicopter crash in Gelendzhik - Emergency Situations Ministry

ROSTOV-ON-DON. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Two people have been killed and one more injured after an Mi-8 helicopter crashed at the Gelendzhik airport, the Southern regional center of the Russian Emergency Situations Ministry told Interfax on Thursday.

"An Mi-8 helicopter crashed at the Gelendzhik airport while approaching to land. It is known that the helicopter belongs to a commercial company," it said.

The causes of the crash have yet to be determined.

MILITARY AND TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION

Space tourist Sarah Brightman to start training for spaceflight in Jan 2015

ZVYOZDNY GORODOK (Star City, Moscow region). Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - The British singer Sarah Brightman will start training for a tourist flight to the International Space Station (ISS) at the beginning of 2015, Yury Lonchakov, the chief of the Cosmonaut Training Center, told Interfax-AVN on Wednesday.

"She will start training at Zvyozdny Gorodok in January 2015, and so we expect her to come," Lonchakov said.

A training plan for Brightman has already been compiled, Lonchakov said. "I believe her training will be successful," he said.

It was reported earlier that the price for flying into space exceeded \$50 million for the most recent tourists.

It was reported earlier that Brightman was getting ready for a 10-day tourist stay aboard the ISS, for which she is due to set off on October 4, 2015. Brightman is due to start a course at Russia's Cosmonaut Training Center on January 12, 2015. Her fellow travelers will be Russian cosmonaut Sergei Volkov and European Space Agency Astronaut Andreas Mogensen.

Space Adventures is the marketing agent for the organization of Soyuz tourist flights to the ISS.

American Dennis Tito, who went to the ISS in 2001, became the first space tourist. Mark Shuttleworth, who is a dual South African/British citizen, was the second, going to the station in 2002. In 2005, the station hosted one more tourist, American Gregory Olsen. In 2006, the first woman tourist, Iranian-born American Anousheh Ansari, arrived at the ISS. Each of them paid about \$20 million for their trip.

The next tourist was Hungarian-American Charles Simonyi, who visited the ISS in 2007.

Richard Garriott, a dual British/American citizen and NASA Astronaut Owen Garriott's son, made a tourist flight to the ISS in 2008. Garriott paid \$30 million for his childhood dream to come true, having raised the money via his business of video game development, which he abandoned after returning from space.

Charles Somonyi revisited the station in March 2009, making him the only person to have made two tourist space flights.

Canadian billionaire Guy Laliberte, co-founder and chief executive of Cirque de Soleil, traveled to the ISS as the next tourist late in 2009, paying more than \$50 million for his flight.

Russia to get refund, penalties in case of Mistral contract repeal - Military Industrial Commission

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - A possible repeal of the contract for the delivery of Mistral-class helicopter carriers to the Russian Navy will create more problems for France than for Russia, the Russian government's Military Industrial Commission Deputy Chairman Oleg Bochkarev told Interfax-AVN on Thursday.

"If the contract is unilaterally repealed at some point, the Russian side will definitely get its money back. Besides, penalties and forfeits will be paid. And they will get a ship built consistent with the Russian requirements and with the Russian participation," Bochkarev said.

The value of the contract for the delivery of two Mistral-class helicopter carriers has been earlier estimated at 1.2 billion euro.

Whenever a contract is repealed and penalties are demanded, the manufacturer keeps the product and wonders what to do with it, Bochkarev said. It is theoretically possible to sell it to somebody else but it is actually very difficult to find a new buyer because the ship is built by the Russian requirements and Russian equipment is installed onboard.

"Who shall they sell it to, NATO allies? But they have different hardware and different standards. The ship will have to be remodeled. If the contract is suspended, the French side will have a bigger headache than we. We even sympathize with the French shipyard a bit," Bochkarev said.

French President Francois Hollande announced on Wednesday evening they had decided to suspend the delivery of the first Mistral-class helicopter carrier to Russia. Hollande said conditions were not right for the delivery of the first helicopter carrier to Moscow.

Experts estimate the value of forfeit and penalties for the non-delivery of the Mistral-class helicopter carrier at up to 3 billion euro.

Russia's Rosoboronexport and France's DCNS signed a contract for the construction of two Mistral-class helicopter carriers in June 2011. The United Shipbuilding Corporation (UAC) engaged in the deal as a subcontractor of the STX France shipyard in Saint Nazaire.

The first Mistral-class helicopter carrier Vladivostok is undergoing sea trials at the STX facility in Saint Nazaire, which is also building the bow of the second ship.

The Vladivostok was launched on October 15, 2013. Its delivery to the Russian Navy was scheduled for fall 2014 and it was supposed to be armed at a Russian shipyard.

This is a phased project. The ship's stern was built by the Baltiyskiy Zavod and carried to Saint Nazaire where it was attached to the bow built by STX France.

The Mistral-class helicopter carrier is 199 meters long and 32 meters wide. Its height at the flight deck is 27 meters, its draught is 6.42 meters and it has a displacement of 22,600 tonnes. The vessel can move at 18.5 knots. Its crew is 177 people, and it can take aboard 481 passengers.

Military Industrial Commission: Mistral contract uninterrupted as of yet

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - Russia has not received any documents from France regarding a possible repeal of the contract for the delivery of Mistral-class helicopter carriers to the Russian Navy, the Russian government's Military Industrial Commission Deputy Chairman Oleg Bochkarev told Interfax-AVN on Thursday.

"The Russian side has not received any official documents regarding the possible non-delivery of Mistral-class helicopter carriers from France. Works related to this contract continue. Our people are working there and crews are being trained. Russia fully honors its commitments under this contract," Bochkarev said.

Following a statement of French President Francois Hollande that halted the delivery of the first Mistral-class helicopter carrier to Russia, there was a supplementary reaction of the French authorities which indicated that a decision to repeal the contract might not be final, he said.

"We should be working calmly and waiting for a possible change in the situation. So far, the work on this project proceeds as planned. We should do credit to Russian and French shipbuilders whose quality of work is very high. It is difficult for me to comment on political statements but I am confident that friendship between the people of Russia and France will prevail," Bochkarev said.

In his words, a repeal of the Mistral contract will be absolutely not critical for the Russian system of weaponry.

"The Mistral contract was a normal gesture of international military-technological cooperation on which France had been insisting. It was not our initiative. They offered Russia to buy helicopter carriers and we accepted that deal," Bochkarev said.

Earlier reports said over 400 Russian sailors had arrived in France to be trained to control the Mistral-class helicopter carrier. The crews of the Vladivostok and the Sevastopol are based onboard the Smolny training ship in Saint Nazaire. The Vladivostok has performed a number of sea trials. STX France was supposed to deliver it to the Russian Navy this fall and it was due to head for St. Petersburg afterwards.

Earlier the Mistral crews had been trained by French specialists for three months at the N.G. Kuznetsov Navy Academy base.

NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES

Decisions to enhance NATO eastern wing expected from Alliance summit - Estonian president

TALLINN. Sept 4 (Interfax) - It is hoped that decisions will be made at the coming NATO summit in Wales to enhance the Alliance's eastern wing, Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves said at a news conference joint with U.S. President Barack Obama in Tallinn on Wednesday.

Due to Russia's actions regarding Ukraine, NATO is facing a new situation in the security sector, Ilves said.

Russia should acknowledge that it is a conflict party, the Estonian president said.

Tallinn expects that the NATO summit will declare its readiness to enhance the eastern wing, he said.

Ilves said he was grateful to the United States for sending U.S. soldiers to Estonia and for its contribution to the security of the Baltic region.

U.S. to deploy Air Force units at Estonian airbase - Obama

TALLINN/WASHINGTON. Sept 4 (Interfax) - U.S. President Barack Obama announced on Wednesday that the U.S. was ready to deploy its Air Force units at an airbase in Estonia.

Speaking at a joint press conference with Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves in Tallinn on Wednesday, Obama announced a new initiative to bolster the U.S. military presence in Europe, including in the Baltic countries.

"Today I can announce that this initiative will include additional Air Force units and aircraft for training exercises here, in the Nordic Baltic region, and we agree with our Estonian allies that an ideal location to host and support these exercises would be Amari Airbase here in Estonia," Obama said at the press conference.

Obama suggests 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act should be adjusted

TALLINN. Sept 4 (Interfax) - U.S. President Barack Obama has suggested that the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act could be adjusted.

Speaking at a press conference with Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves in Tallinn on Wednesday, Obama said that, if some of the act's provisions do not work because of Russia's actions threatening security, something needs to be changed.

After the document was concluded in 1997, "The circumstances have clearly changed and this will be a topic for discussion in Wales," Obama said, referring to an upcoming NATO summit.

"Beyond the issue of that particular document, our top priority has been to make sure that there's no ambiguity when it comes to our Article Five commitments to our NATO allies," he said.

"Given the changed landscape, not only do we need to make sure the rotations [of U.S. troops] are effective and designed to current threats, but more broadly NATO needs to look at their defensive capabilities as a whole," he said.

Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty stipulates the creation of a collective defense system in case of armed aggression against one of the member-states.

DPR sees no obstacles to handover of Ukrainian military's bodies to relatives

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The administration of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic will not obstruct the handover of Ukrainian military men's bodies to their relatives.

"All bodies, including those from the Ukrainian military, are in morgues. I don't see any problem with handing them over to the relatives," Andrei Purgin, first deputy prime minister of the Donetsk People's Republic, told Interfax on Wednesday.

Purgin said the issue of the handover of the bodies is a responsibility of the Donetsk People's Republic's Interior Ministry. "It is difficult to come up with a specific mechanism for handing over the bodies. The Interior Ministry is generally working on it, but if relatives make requests, there should be no problem," Purgin said.

DPR says ready to stop combat actions if Ukrainian troops withdraw

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Militia of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) said it was ready to stop combat operations if Kyiv withdrew troops from settlements.

"If Kyiv withdraws troops from settlements, or even better, from the DPR territory, then no sense will exist for resolving the conflict with force and then, of course, we will not carry out combat operations," DPR militia leaders, DPR Supreme Council deputy Miroslav Rudenko told Interfax.

It is possible to exchange captives under the "all for all" scheme without preliminary conditions, Rudenko said.

"This issue was discussed for a long time at the contact group consultations, where we are represented by DPR First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Purgin. If all agreements are complied with, such an exchange is quite possible," Rudenko said.

Ukraine plans to become NATO special partner before end of the year

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers is hoping to receive special partner status and become a key ally of NATO before the end of this year.

This goal is stated in the Cabinet of Ministers' action plan entitled Rebuilding the Country, which was posted on the Ukrainian government website on Wednesday.

The Ukrainian government is also hoping to receive military-technical assistance from the G7, the European Union, and NATO before the end of this year.

Furthermore, the government's plan envisages the completion of the project Stina to build a reliable fortified border between Ukraine and Russia within six months.

The Cabinet of Ministers is hoping that a government bill abolishing Ukraine's non-allied status and restoring its Euro-Atlantic integration policies will be adopted in September.

The plan also envisions the receipt of practical assistance to ensure Ukraine's security from the countries of the Budapest Memorandum (Russia, the U.S., and the UK) before the end of September.

Ukrainian authorities say Russian journalist Stenin not accredited to work in combat area

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Russian photo journalist of Russia Today agency Andrei Stenin had not received accreditation to work in the area of the army operation in eastern Ukraine, Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council information and analytical center spokesman Andriy Lysenko said at a briefing on Wednesday.

"We report that he entered Ukraine via the Boryspil airport on May 14, 2014 and was not accredited to work in the counter-terrorism operation area," Lysenko said.

Criminal proceedings were started over the disappearance of Stenin in early August, Lysenko said.

Stenin died in south-eastern Ukraine at the Snizhne-Dmytrivka highway when the Ukrainian army opened fire on a convoy of refugees, Russian Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin told Interfax earlier.

Stenin, who had been working in eastern Ukraine, went missing in early August and up until now his fate had been unknown.

Bodies of 87 Ukrainian troops killed near Ilovaisk taken to Zaporizhia in past two days - deputy military commissioner

ZAPORIZHIA-IVANO-FRANKIVSK. Sept 4 (Interfax-Ukraine) - The bodies of 87 Ukrainian soldiers killed near Ilovaisk, mostly members of volunteer battalions, have been taken to the Zaporizhia forensic morgue in the past two days, Mykhailo Lohvinov, deputy military commissioner of the Zaporizhia region, said.

"The bodies of 87 soldiers have arrived in the past two days. They were from various military units - volunteer battalions and our 93rd separate mechanized brigade and the 51st mechanized brigade. But mainly volunteers," Lohvinov told Interfax-Ukraine on Wednesday.

The bodies are currently being identified and experts are working to determine the causes of their deaths.

The Ukrainian Interior Ministry's public relations sector of the department for the Ivano-Frankovsk region later reported that eight members of the special task patrol battalion Ivano-Frankovsk had been killed near Ilovaisk.

"The names of three privates from the special task patrol battalion are known. The bodies of five soldiers who were killed as the motorcade was leaving Ilovaisk are yet to be identified," the police said.

The source said fifty volunteer members of the special task police battalion Ivano-Frankovsk had left for the military operation zone in eastern Ukraine in early August and 33 of them had returned to Ivano-Frankovsk on Monday and Tuesday. According to the police, five of them had been wounded two had been taken prisoner.

Militia claims destroying Ukrainian armored vehicles convoys outside Luhansk

LUHANSK. Sept 4 (Interfax) - During clashes in the city of Lutuhyne outside Luhansk, the militia of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) managed to destroy several convoys of Ukrainian armored vehicles, the militia headquarters said.

"Very heavy fighting took place in the area and there is a lot of destruction in the residential districts and civilian houses have been damaged. The militia managed to destroy a very large convoy of the opponent's armored vehicles, which included BTR, BMP and trucks for personnel of Ukrainian military, we are not aware of the exact amount of equipment destroyed," the Luhansk militia headquarters told Interfax on Wednesday.

According to information from the LPR, "the militia failed to capture a single piece of equipment, all of it was destroyed."

Interfax does not possess confirmation of this information from other sources.

DPR leadership promises ceasefire if Kyiv takes same action

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Militia will stop combat operations if Kyiv goes for a unilateral ceasefire, First Deputy Prime Minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) Andrei Purgin said.

"A ceasefire is not a truce. If Kyiv goes for a unilateral ceasefire, we will be forced to do the same," Purgin told Interfax.

Purgin intends to participate in the meeting of the contact group for peaceful settlement in eastern Ukraine, which is planned in Minsk on September 5.

"The agenda issues are the same - the issue of a ceasefire, issues of prisoner exchange and the issue of withdrawing Ukrainian troops from DPR territory," Purgin said.

DPR claims it doesn't intend to go beyond Donbas or claim other Ukrainian territories

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The militia of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) is not planning to expand its offensive to neighboring regions of Ukraine, DPR Vice Premier Andrei Purgin has told Interfax.

"We are not claiming Ukrainian territories [neighboring on DPR]," he said.

Purgin added that the wall planned for construction on the border between Ukraine and Russia will not be built in DPR territories bordering Russia.

"We won't have any wall. In general, the announcement about its construction is extremely strange. It looks like Ukrainian politicians are rivaling [each other] in their creative efforts," he said.

Yatsenyuk regards Putin's plan as move to freeze conflict in East Ukraine

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk has called the plan of settling the situation in East Ukraine proposed by President Vladimir Putin a move to freeze the contact, the department of information and PR relations of the Ukrainian government secretariat announced on Wednesday.

"The plan is an attempt of eyewashing the international community ahead of the NATO summit and an attempt to escape unavoidable EU resolutions on a new wave of sanctions against Russia," the department quotes Yatsenyuk as saying.

"All previous understandings reached with Russia - in Geneva, Normandy, Berlin, Minsk - were either simply ignored or violated by the Russian regime," he said.

Yatsenyuk said that in his opinion the best plan for Eastern Ukraine would have one plank providing for the withdrawal of Russian troops and militia from there. "And then there would be peace in Ukraine," he said.

Yatsenyuk accused Moscow of attempts to destroy Ukraine and restore the USSR and added: "We are looking forward to the decisions of NATO and the EU open stopping the aggressor."

On Wednesday in Ulan-Bator President Vladimir Putin announced a seven-plank plan of stopping the bloodshed and stabilizing the situation in southeast Ukraine.

Putin thinks that final understandings between the government in Kyiv and representatives of southeast Ukraine could be reached and recorded during the meeting of the contact group slated for September 5.

Yatsenyuk's comments were the first official reaction of Kyiv to Putin's plan.

Tymoshenko: Putin's plan for Ukraine is about turning it into Transdnistria

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Yulia Tymoshenko, the leader of the Batkivshchyna party, views Russian President Vladimir Putin's plan to stop bloodshed and stabilize the situation in Donbas as an attempt to turn Ukraine into an entity analogous to the unrecognized Transdnistria republic.

"Putin's plan is about turning Ukraine into Transdnistria," Tymoshenko said on Twitter on Thursday.

Putin aired his plan for resolving the Ukraine crisis in Ulan Bator on Wednesday.

"First, stop active offensive operations by the armed forces and armed units of the militia of southeastern Ukraine in the Donetsk and Luhansk directions," Putin told journalists.

"Second, withdraw armed units of Ukrainian security forces to a distance making it impossible for artillery and any multiple rocket launchers to shell populated areas," he said.

"Third, envision comprehensive and impartial international control of the compliance with cease-fire conditions and the monitoring of the situation created this way in the security area," Putin said.

"Fourth, rule out the application of combat aircraft against civilians and settlements in the conflict zone. Then organize the exchange of persons held forcibly based on the 'all for all' formula, without any preconditions," Putin said.

"Sixth, open humanitarian corridors for refugees and the delivery of humanitarian cargo to cities and other settlements in Donbas, that is, the Donetsk and Luhansk regions," he said.

"And finally, seventh, ensure the possibility of sending repair crews to affected Donbas settlements to restore social and vital infrastructure facilities and providing them with assistance," Putin said.

He suggested that final agreements between the Kyiv authorities and representatives of southeastern Ukraine could be reached and formalized at a contact group meeting on September 5.

Poroshenko hopes for start of Donbas settlement talks on Sept 5

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko counts on the beginning of talks on a peaceful settlement in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the framework of the trilateral contact group (Russia, Ukraine, OSCE) already on September 5.

"Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko hopes that on Friday the trilateral contact group will start talks on the process of peaceful settlement of the situation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and also that real steps to restore peace will be made," the presidential press service reports.

Donetsk City Council: Water supply halted, shell hits residential building at night

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Donetsk spent the night without the hostilities but people across the city heard the heavy gun cannonade at 4:30 a.m. on Thursday.

A shell hit a residential building at 14, Obskyi Side-Street in the Kyivskiyi district overnight, the City Council reported on its website.

Tap water supply was halted as of 9:30 a.m. after the Upper Kalmius water filtering station was left without electricity. Repairmen cannot restore power supply because of the hostilities.

Meanwhile, power line repairs continue in the Petrovskiyi, Kyivskiyi, Kirovskiyi and Kuibyshevskiyi districts and the town of Mospyno.

Trolley service was resumed on route 8 connecting the Donetsk center to residential areas in the east of the city on September 3. "Public transportation service is good," the City Council said.

Georgia pins great expectations on upcoming NATO summit in Wales - foreign minister

TBILISI. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Georgia is pinning great expectations on the upcoming NATO summit in Wales, Georgian Foreign Minister Maia Panjikidze told journalists before the Georgian delegation's departure on Wednesday.

"We are going to the NATO summit with great expectations. In addition to a very specific package, we also hope for a very serious message from NATO indicating that Georgia is approaching the alliance," Panjikidze said.

Georgian Defense Minister Irakly Alasania said the NATO summit will concentrate on elevating "military opportunities."

"The entire summit will concentrate on elevating military opportunities of both the NATO member-states and Georgia in this case and also on our Defense Ministry's reform and the reinforcement of our armed forces," Alasania said.

Some steps are also planned for Georgia to have the appropriate resources to defend itself, he said.

"It is also expected that significant success achieved by Georgia in terms of building democracy will be documented, and this will be formulated in a declaration. That is, a great step will be made toward NATO," he said.

Georgian State Minister for Integration in European and Euro-Atlantic Institutions Alexi Petriashvili said the package the alliance has offered to Georgia includes "important elements."

"Georgia will receive a package envisioning very important elements at the NATO summit. First of all this concerns a military training center, joint NATO exercises on Georgian territory, and improvement of the Georgian armed forces' compatibility with NATO's military potential," Petriashvili said.

Petriashvili said this all is extremely important in the context of speeding up Georgia's accession to NATO.

The Georgian delegation at the summit in Wales scheduled for September 4-5 will be led by President Giorgi Margvelashvili.

Georgian parliament asks NATO for speedy accession

TBILISI. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Georgian parliament on Wednesday passed a resolution on Ukraine, a provision of which calls on NATO to accelerate the process of admitting Georgia into the alliance.

The parliament "is calling on NATO and the European Union to adopt effective measures to guarantee the security of both Georgia and Moldova as well as Ukraine and with this purpose, accelerating their integration into the alliance," the document says.

The resolution on Ukraine says that "Russia is violating the principles and norms of international law." "There is an apparent prospect of further escalation of tension and large-scale armed confrontation between two states which poses an apparent threat to regional as well as international peace and stability," the document says.

Proceeding from this, the Georgian parliament "expresses solidarity with the government and people of Ukraine and confirms clear support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine," the document says.

The parliament "condemns aggression against sovereign Ukraine, which not only contradicts the norms and principles of international law, but makes the escalation of hostilities irreversible, which will have disastrous consequences for all-European security."

In addition, the Georgian parliament "calls on the Russian Federation to give up attempts to resolve any political differences by force, and supports the efforts of the international community as well as the leadership of Ukraine aimed at settling the crisis through talks."

The draft resolution was prepared by the parliamentary majority and 81 deputies voted for it, while the minority abstained from voting. The minority had compiled its own draft resolution but the majority refused to discuss it.

Poroshenko tells Merkel he hopes for peace plan fulfillment

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has welcomed the Russian readiness to implement the peace plan for eastern Ukraine and hopes the plan will lay the foundation of September 5 consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group.

"President Poroshenko told the German Chancellor he hoped the joint action plan could be the foundation of consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group, which would convene in Minsk on September 5," the Ukrainian president's press service said following his telephone consultations with German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Poroshenko added he expected all sides would implement the proposals concerning the ceasefire regime in the east.

"President Poroshenko believes that the action plan should contain mutual commitments regarding the bilateral ceasefire regime, its monitoring and verification by the OSCE, the pullout of all foreign forces from the Ukrainian territory, the creation of a buffer border zone and the release of all hostages," the press service said.

In addition, Poroshenko and Merkel coordinated their positions in view of the NATO summit in Newport, Wales, on September 4-5.

Artillery fire intensity declines in eastern Ukraine

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Tensions remained in the combat zone in eastern Ukraine as of Wednesday night but the artillery fire intensity had declined, Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) Information Analysis Center speaker Andrei Lysenko said.

"We have been witnessing a decline in fire intensity, including the intensity of use of the artillery and other weapons," Lysenko said at a press briefing in Kyiv on Wednesday.

He said the Ukrainian forces continued to organize the firing positions and were prepared to fulfill the orders from their command.

OSCE monitors register gunfire towards Ukraine at Russian-Ukrainian border

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) monitors registered towards Ukraine from Russian territory for the first time gunfire near the Donetsk checkpoint, the OSCE monitoring mission has said.

In past weeks artillery explosions were registered only in westerly and northerly directions [from the Donetsk checkpoint], however during the past week, the monitoring mission registered fire from small- and large-caliber weapons from eastern and south-eastern territories bordering Ukraine for the first time, the monitoring mission said in a report for August 27-September 3.

Furthermore, OSCE monitors noted especially intense artillery fire towards Krasnodon. Overnight from August 30 into August 31 dozens very loud explosions were registered by members of the monitoring mission from westerly and north-westerly directions, the document said.

Meanwhile, it has been reported that Russia has been registering missiles from Ukraine hitting the Russian border area for a long time. In particular, according to reports from representatives of the Russian authorities, Russian customs post and settlements have repeatedly come under fire, in particular Donetsk in Russia's Rostov region has come under artillery fire.

Ukrainian territorial battalion commander suspected of desertion arrested

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Vitaly Komar, the commander of the Prykarpattya territorial defense battalion, has been arrested for two months for desertion, the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office reported on Thursday.

"The battalion commander has been informed of being suspected of committing criminal offences covered by Ukrainian Criminal Code Article 409 Part 3 (refusal to perform military duties in a combat situation), Article 426 Part 1 (inaction of a military authority), and Article 402 Part 2 (disobedience)," the Prosecutor General's Office said.

Military prosecutors from the Southern Region of Ukraine are conducting a pretrial criminal investigation in relation to servicemen from the Prykarpattya battalion suspected of leaving their positions in a security operation area without permission.

A court granted a request by an investigator from the Southern Region military prosecution service and sanctioned the commander's arrest for two months.

The pretrial investigation is continuing.

Militia says Ukrainian army leaving some villages near Starobilsk

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The militia of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) claims the Ukrainian army has been retreating from the Starobilsk area.

"Starobilsk residents say there is a massive departure of Ukrainian servicemen from populated localities around the city. There is a number of military groups left in some populated areas," Southeastern Front information center head Konstantin Knyrik told Interfax.

The militia also reported the overnight repositioning of Ukrainian military hardware in the Luhansk region.

"Ukrainian military convoys started their journey from the side of Luhansk to Svatovo at 3:30 a.m. Moscow time. A convoy of approximately 100 Ural and KrAZ trucks crossed Starobilsk at about 7 a.m. Moscow time. They were also headed for Svatovo," Knyrik said.

Fighting for Donetsk airport resumes

DONETSK. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The trench war for the Donetsk airport resumed on Wednesday evening. Defensive Ukrainian forces are actively using the artillery, the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) said.

"This is a trench war. And no significant progress has been made as of yet," a source in the DPR defense department told Interfax.

Militia forces are trying to suppress the enemy's fire nests. Submachine gun bursts and explosions can be heard near the airport, an Interfax correspondent reported from the site.

The airport clearing operation started again in the early morning hours of Wednesday and the gunfire temporarily subsided in the afternoon. The DPR staff claimed the Donetsk airport was being defended by both the Ukrainian army and foreign mercenaries.

Luhansk militia claims to have taken several localities under control

LUHANSK/KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The militia of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) claims to have taken several localities under control through fighting last night.

"The Southeast Army forces have knocked Ukrainian troops out of Krasny Yar, Stukalova Balka and Shyshkove in the Luhansk direction. Retreating toward the communities of Vesela Hora and Shchastya, the enemy units are abandoning crippled hardware and the badly wounded. The militias have destroyed five trucks, three off-road vehicles, and 17 Ukrainian servicemen," the LPR militia reported in a daily bulletin.

The militia also fired artillery upon Ukrainian army positions near the village of Peredilske, destroying one armored personnel carrier and two automobiles, the report says. Twelve Ukrainian servicemen were killed and injured as well, it says.

Meanwhile, Dmytro Tymchuk, the head of the Information Resistance group based in Kyiv, reports fighting near Donetsk, Horlivka, Stukalova Balka, Starobesheve, and Amvrosiyivka. He said the militia was especially active in the Stanytsya Luhanska district of the Luhansk region.

"The Ukrainian forces' positions were shelled with mortars and BM-21 Grad multiple rocket launchers near Debaltseve, Mykytyne, Fashchivka, Krasna Talivka, and Plotyna. BM-30 Smerch multiple rocket launchers shelled the antiterrorist operation forces near Vesela Hora, Dmytrivka, Pobeda, and Valuiske. The government forces' positions near Pobeda were shelled three times," Tymchuk reported on Facebook on Thursday morning.

He claimed that up to 100 militiamen were killed overnight.

Bill imposing martial law in Luhansk, Donetsk arrives in Ukrainian parliament

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - A draft appeal by the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada to the president to impose martial law on the Luhansk and Donetsk regions has been registered on the Rada website.

The bill's authors are Batkivshchyna faction leader Serhiy Sobolev and Svoboda faction leader Oleh Tyahnybok, it said.

NSDC: Almost 840 Ukrainian servicemen die, over 3,000 wounded in hostilities

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The hostilities in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine have killed 837 Ukrainian servicemen and injured another 3,044, Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) Information Analysis Center speaker Andrei Lysenko said.

"As of September 4, throughout the ATO period 837 Ukrainian servicemen have died and 3,044 have been injured," he said at a press briefing on Thursday.

He said the information about casualties had been verified and confirmed but it would be updated further after the end of the operation in Ilovaik.

The Ukrainian authorities launched the army operation in eastern Ukraine in the middle of this April after mass protests of Ukrainian federalization supporters.

Azeri citizen detained for fighting in Syria

BAKU. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Azeri police have detained a citizen of Azerbaijan who fought for the militants in Syria, the local media said.

The resident of Baku born in 1988 who had spent nine months fighting in Syria was apprehended in the Ganja airport in western Azerbaijan where he had arrived from Turkey, it said.

The suspect was charged under article 279 of the Azeri Criminal Code (formation of an armed unit or group not permitted by legislation).

Two hundred and fifty people looking for cesium container in Kazakhstan

AKTAU. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The search for a cesium-137 container lost in the Mangistau region of Kazakhstan has been futile for now.

About 250 persons carrying metal detectors and 45 vehicles are searching for the container, regional emergency situations department deputy head Kazhimukhan Kospayev said at a press conference in Aktau, the administrative center of the region, on Thursday.

Presumably, the container might have fallen off a KAMAZ truck in the steppe, 275 kilometers from Aktau, and "the road is very bad there, there is a thick layer of dust mixed with sand everywhere," he said.

"The regulations compelled the driver and the security guard to stop the car and check on the cargo every two hours. The truck was equipped with a GPS device and its travel was fully controlled," Kospayev said.

He added the department did not rule out the container might have been lost somewhere else.

"We are eyeing another theory - the capsule might have been lost somewhere else. Just in case, we have involved the Atyrau region in our search, they are also looking for [the container]," he continued.

Earlier reports said a cesium-137 container with a height of 30 centimeters, a diameter of 20 centimeters and a weight of about 50-60 kilograms fell off a KAMAZ truck on the Sai-Otes-Shetpe road on August 28.

Regional emergency services, including the police, the emergency situations department and the army, are searching for the dangerous cargo, and the authorities of the Mangistau region have promised a reward of 1.5 million tenge (the current exchange rate is 182 tenge to the dollar) to the person who finds the cesium container.

Poroshenko meeting Obama, Merkel, Hollande, Cameron, Renzi in Newport

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama, French President Francois Hollande, British Prime Minister David Cameron, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Newport, Wales, on Thursday, Ukrainian presidential press secretary Svyatoslav Tseholko said.

"Unique 5+1 format at NATO summit," Tseholko said on Twitter, attaching a picture of the multilateral meeting.

"The U.S., the UK, Germany, France, and Italy support Ukraine's territorial integrity," Tseholko said.

The NATO summit will take place in Newport on September 4-5. Poroshenko will take part in some of its events.

Witnesses report blasts, shooting near Mariupol

DONETSK. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Fighting started at the approaches toward the eastern part of Mariupol on Thursday, witnesses say.

"Explosions and large-caliber gun bursts are heard clearly. Being in the eastern neighborhood, it could be assumed that the fighting is under way in the Novoazovsk area," a witness told Interfax.

The self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) Defense Ministry said a group of Ukrainian military servicemen is trying to break out of the city. "Fighting is currently under way near the community of Bezimenne. Some of the Ukrainian security servicemen are trying to break out of the encirclement around Mariupol. The exact number and composition of the forces assaulting the militia positions has yet to be clarified," the DPR headquarters said.

Interfax could not immediately obtain information on the matter from the official Ukrainian authorities.

The militia headquarters had reported on Wednesday that "the militia forces have established control over the main roads leading to the city, cutting Ukrainian security forces off from main supply routes."

"Mariupol is currently within operative encirclement. We've managed to accomplish this task. The city's assault is not under consideration so far, as there are some other tasks that need to be completed. Everything should be consistent," a DPR Defense Ministry source told Interfax.

It was reported earlier that the Ukrainian government forces in Mariupol were actively preparing a defense. Preliminary reports indicated that units of territorial defense battalions, National Guard, and Interior Forces were in the city.

Estonia, U.S. see eye to eye on security - U.S. president, Estonian PM

TALLINN. Sept 4 (Interfax) - U.S. President Barack Obama and Estonian Prime Minister Taavi Roivas spoke of the similarity of the approaches of their countries to security issues at a meeting in Tallinn on Wednesday, Interfax was told at the press service of the Estonian government.

Obama confirmed his country's commitment to defending its NATO allies.

He expressed gratitude to Estonia for its attitude to national defense and international security and named it an example to other allies for its contribution to defense spending.

Estonia is one of the few NATO countries to fulfil the alliance's criteria of spending no less than 2% of the GDP on defense.

Prime Minister Roivas welcomed the decision to set up an air force training center of the United States, Baltic and Nordic countries in Amari near Tallinn.

"This is an important decision for our state defense, and it increases the presence of our allies in Estonia," Roivas said.

"U.S. support for our region is extremely important and deserves gratitude, especially in the current unpredictable security situation," he said.

The two sides also discussed energy security issues and possibilities of cooperation in this sphere between the U.S. and Europe.

They also contemplated the future of NATO and the upcoming summit of the alliance in Wales.

During NATO summit Estonia to insist on permanent presence of allies' troops on its territory

TALLINN. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Estonian delegation will seek an agreement on the permanent presence of allied troops on its territory at the coming NATO summit to be held in Wales on September 4-5, Estonian Prime Minister Taavi Roivas said.

Russia's aggression in Ukraine has returned the main attention of NATO again to its fundamental goals, or collective security, Roivas was quoted as saying by the Estonian government press office to Interfax on Wednesday.

It is important for Estonia that the current presence of allies on land, sea and air continues in order to increase the response speed of NATO forces and so that NATO brings its defense plans in accordance with the changed security environment, Roivas said.

Estonia supports Obama's proposal to set up Air Force training center near Tallinn

TALLINN. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Estonia supports U.S. President Barack Obama's proposal to set up an Air Force training center at Amari air base near Tallinn.

"It is very important that the United States is constantly contributing directly to in the security of our region and intends to supplement this, for example, with air defense," Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet told Interfax through the press service of his ministry.

"Amari air base is quite a suitable place," he said commenting on the proposals made by Obama in Tallinn on Wednesday to reinforce regional air forces and set up a training center for that in Amari.

He said that the U.S. is "a very close ally" for Estonia and Obama's visit ahead of the NATO summit in Wales proves that. "The same as the presence of the U.S. military in Estonia," he added.

"Security issues are now most important but Estonia has arranged cooperation with the United States perfectly in several other spheres too - the protection of human rights, electronic government, the development of democracy in the world and also cyber security," Paet said.

A total of 181 populated areas are without power in Donetsk region

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Energy services have not been able to restore power to 181 populated areas of the Donetsk region due to the continuing military action, the press service for the energy holding DTEK reported.

"It's a new record for blackouts since the beginning of the military action in eastern Ukraine. Some 150 energy specialists and up to fifty vehicles work in the Donetsk region daily, but energy services cannot get to some power lines and sub-stations because of the military action," the company says.

According to DTEK, 2,000 residential buildings in the village of Karlivka, Maryinsky district, have been without power since May 23 (for 100 days).

Furthermore, 3,000 residents of the villages of Zorka, Kozhevni, Tarany, Dubrovka, Latyshevo, and Dmytrovka in the Shakhtarsk district have been without power for 65 days and 600 residents of the village Veseloye, Yasunovakaya region, have been without power for 45 days.

Most populated areas remain without power in the Amvrosiyevsky (52), Starobeshevsky (43), and Shakhtarsk districts of the Donetsk region,

DTEK was created in 2005 to manage the energy assets of SKM Group (Donetsk) owned by Rinat Akhmetov. DTEK manages the group's enterprises, which compose a vertically integrated coal extraction and enrichment and electrical power production and sale chain.

BORDER

Five shells from Ukraine hit Rostov rgn

ROSTOV-ON-DON. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Russian border guards recorded five explosions, which presumably were fired from the Ukrainian side, two kilometers from the village of Kherson in the Millerovo district in the Rostov region on Thursday, the press service of the Federal Security Service's Rostov region border department said.

"Craters have been found up to 100 meters from the state border, one of them 50 meters from the Voloshino checkpoint which is under construction," it said.

There were no casualties amongst the civilian population and border guards.

In addition, the hostilities in Ukraine sparked a fire in the direct proximity to the state border and the flames spread into the Russian territory. Border guards started to extinguish the fire before the firemen arrived. The blaze has now been confined by Emergency Situations Ministry workers, a department spokesman said.

OSCE mission reports growing traffic from Russia into Ukraine

DONETSK (Rostov region). Sept 4 (Interfax) - The OSCE mission stationed in the Rostov region noticed significant changes in passenger traffic across the Russian-Ukrainian border on August 28 - September 4, mission head Paul Picard told reporters on Thursday.

He said the traffic is mostly heading for Ukraine since August 28. The average daily net influx stood at 429 arrivals and departures via the Donetsk and Gukovo checkpoints in the past week. A total of 3,857 persons returned to Ukraine through both checkpoints in that period, Picard said.

The OSCE mission in the Rostov region affirmed insignificant passenger and motor traffic during the night and a steady growth in the number of people wishing to cross the border from dawn to noon.

The mission said in its weekly report that most vehicles crossing the Russian-Ukrainian border had license plates issued in the Luhansk region.

Ukrainian shell explodes near Russian checkpoint in Rostov region

ROSTOV-ON-DON. Sept 4 (Interfax) - A shell fired from Ukraine has exploded near the checkpoint Voloshino, Mirrovskaya customs (Rostov region of Russia), which has not been put into operation yet, Rayan Farukshin, an official with the Southern Operative Customs, told Interfax.

"A clash occurred near the state border on the Ukrainian side in the early hours of Thursday. A munition exploded on the roadside, not far from the new checkpoint Voloshino," he said on Thursday.

The explosion did not cause any casualties or destruction, he said.

Farukshin recalled that the motorway bridge of the checkpoint Voloshino, which is under construction, is located 200 meters from the Ukrainian post. The checkpoint was expected to replace the current checkpoint and be a permanent checkpoint.

The customs post Voloshino is now working normally, but officials from the Ukrainian checkpoint Krasna Talovka are not working with private individuals and road vehicles.

The other checkpoints on the Russian-Ukrainian border of the Southern Customs Department are working normally.

Group of Ukrainian refugees, half of them preschool children, crosses into Rostov region

ROSTOV-ON-DON. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Kuibyshevo post of the Taganrog customs cleared another organized group of 55 Ukrainian citizens on Wednesday, Southern Customs Department spokesman Rayan Farukshin told Interfax on Thursday.

"The group consisted of 22 preschool children, including a wheelchair person, and their parents who reached the border from populated areas in the Donetsk region by bus," he said.

Russian customs officers provided the refugees with drinking water and sent them to a shelter deployed by the Russian Emergency Situations Ministry near Matveyev Kurgan.

FOREIGN MILITARY REVIEW

OSCE media freedom rep calls for careful probe into photojournalist Stenin's death in Ukraine

BRUSSELS. Sept 4 (Interfax) - OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic says she is appalled by the death of Russian photojournalist Andrei Stenin in eastern Ukraine and calls for a speedy investigation into it.

"Stenin's death is a gruesome reminder of the ongoing and alarming situation concerning journalists' safety in the conflict in eastern Ukraine," Mijatovic said in a statement available on the OSCE website on Wednesday.

"I call on Ukrainian authorities to investigate all killings and attacks on members of the media in Ukraine, and to do so swiftly and thoroughly," Mijatovic said.

Russian Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin had told Interfax earlier on Wednesday that Stenin, a photojournalist from the government-financed news agency Rossiya Segodnya, had been killed when Ukrainian government forces shelled an automobile convoy carrying refugees on the Snizhne-Dmytrivka motor road in south-eastern Ukraine.

Stenin went missing in early August and his fate had been unknown until recently.

NATO countries welcome steps on settlement in Ukraine

NEWPORT, Wales. Sept 4 (Interfax) - NATO countries expect a political solution for the Ukrainian crisis to be found, a high-level NATO official said on Wednesday when commenting on the plan of Russian President Vladimir Putin on settlement in Ukraine.

NATO welcomes any attempts of political resolution of the Ukrainian crisis but first certain steps are needed to de-escalate, the NATO high-level official said at a briefing in the NATO summit press office in Newport.

Russia should withdraw its servicemen from Ukraine and troops concentrated near the Ukrainian border, stop supporting separatists and cease the flow of arms and militants from its territory to Ukraine, the official said.

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