

Russia & CIS Military Weekly

Sept 5, 2014

35 (668)

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CORRIDORS OF POWER

Russia demands end to provocations against diplomatic staff in Ukraine

MOSCOW. Aug 29 (Interfax) - Moscow demands an immediate release of the employees from the Russian Embassy in Ukraine held a day earlier, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

"We are calling for an end to provocations with respect to Russian diplomatic institutions in Ukraine and our diplomatic staff. On August 28 another outrageous act was undertaken in Kyiv against the Russian Embassy's security staff, including the ambassador's bodyguard. Despite producing their diplomatic passports, they were held at the exit from a café under a blatantly fictitious pretext: that grenades were ostensibly found on them. We insist on the immediate release of the embassy employees and prevention of any breach of international conventions on diplomatic immunity in the future," the ministry said on its website.

"As regards who is fighting and where, we have repeatedly noted the presence of a large number of volunteers from many foreign countries within the ranks of all the participants in the hostilities. Not once, not even twice, have we raised with our partners the specific facts that have leaked into the media, including the 'work' in Ukraine of retired U.S. special-forces officers, the role of U.S. advisors and instructors in organizing the Ukrainian forces' combat operations. Certainly, there are also Russian volunteers in Ukraine, on both sides of the standoff. However, if the international community only gets excited about this or that symptom of the Ukrainian crisis, this is unlikely to help its resolution," the document said.

The Foreign Ministry urged against yielding to "the temptation to move the discussion away from the main objective, i.e. the need for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and the swift launch of a proper, all-Ukrainian national dialogue." "It was to this that we, and Kyiv, and the European Union, and the United States together put our signatures. We are still committed to these agreements and urge our partners to stop torpedoing their practical implementation," the statement said.

"This is the only way, if the West really cares about the interests not only of the malleable part of Ukraine's political spectrum, but of the whole multicultural Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian state, whose future can and must be secured only through the search for nationwide accord," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

"Russia will be coherently promoting the creation of conditions to move the situation into negotiating territory by boosting confidence between the warring sides, taking concrete steps to de-escalate the situation, and helping the population affected by the humanitarian disaster. This is what the August 29 Address by Russian President Vladimir Putin is aimed at. We are calling on all sides in Ukraine, and all Western partners to show similar good will for an exclusively peaceful resolution of the accumulated problems," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

West violates seriously humanitarian law standards in Ukraine situation - Russian Foreign Ministry

MOSCOW. Aug 29 (Interfax) - Western countries are seriously violating standards of international humanitarian law with regard to the situation with Ukraine, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement posted on its website.

"The West is constantly opposed to actions damaging civilians and demands stopping them in any other conflict - be it in the Middle East, Africa or anywhere else. And only regarding south-eastern Ukraine it is taking the absolute opposite line, seriously violating international humanitarian law standards," the document said.

"It is impossible that our partners do not understand that from the military point of view, the purpose of the militia in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions is to push Ukrainian law enforcers from positions from which they can strike cities using heavy arms, fire multiple rocket launchers and ballistic rockets, killing civilians and destroying people's life support infrastructure," the Foreign Ministry said.

Russia will stay out of major conflicts - Putin

SELIGER, Tver region. Aug 29 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia is reluctant to get drawn into large-scale conflicts but is ready to counter any aggression against itself.

"Russia is far from getting drawn into a large-scale conflict. We neither want, nor are we going to do so. And naturally, we must always be prepared to repel any aggression against Russia," Putin told the Seliger 2014 youth forum on Friday.

"Our partners, no matter what state their countries are in and whatever foreign-policy concept they stick to, must understand that it is better not to mess with us," he said.

"Well, thankfully, I think that no one today is considering starting a large-scale conflict with Russia," Putin said.

Russia to increase its nuclear, defense potential to feel safe - Putin

SELIGER, Tver region. Aug 29 (Interfax) - Russia intends to enhance further its nuclear and defense potential in order to feel safe, not to threaten anybody, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the Seliger youth forum on Friday.

"We continue to enhance this potential and will do this not to threaten someone but to feel safe, to feel calm and to have opportunities to implement plans in economic development and the social sector," Putin said.

Russia is one of the most potent nuclear powers and "these are not words, this is reality," the president said.

"And moreover, we are enhancing our nuclear deterrence forces and we are enhancing our [conventional] armed forces. Indeed, they are becoming more compact and more efficient, indeed they are becoming more modern from the viewpoint of being equipped with contemporary arms," Putin said.

Putin expects recognition of Crimea as part of Russia to take long time

SELIGER, Tver region. Aug 29 (Interfax) - The process of international recognition of Crimea as a Russian region will take a long time, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the Seliger youth forum.

"I think that the issue relating to recognition is that it will be resolved in a long and tedious way. This is strange for me because, indeed, what happened to Serbia and Kosovo shows that when the political will and wish exist, then decisions, which occurred in Kosovo or occurred in Crimea, are recognized very easily," Putin said.

Ukrainian govt should not fear federalization - Putin

SELIGER, Tver region. Aug 29 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin has expressed his bewilderment over the Ukrainian authorities' fears about the possibility of federalisation of the country and said that Russia will be bolstering its own federalization.

"Our Ukrainian partners are so afraid of federalization for some reason. It is their choice, of course, on no account will we meddle. But there are plenty of federal countries in the world," Putin told the Seliger 2014 youth forum on Friday.

"The point is to allow people living in various territories who have significant idiosyncrasies, to allow them to live a full life," the president said.

Federal systems exists in countries such as the United States, Brazil and Germany, he recalled.

Russia will be consolidating its institution of federalism, the president said. "I think we must consolidate federalism in our country," he said.

Russia to defend own interests in Arctic, ready for compromises - Putin

SELIGER, Tver region. Aug 29 (Interfax) - Russia's actions in the Arctic territories will be strictly within international legal frameworks, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

"Many take our activities somewhat cautiously and get scared of these activities. But we have said repeatedly that we will act solely within the international law framework, we have always acted this way and intend to do so in future," Putin said when speaking at the Seliger 2014 youth forum.

The interests of other parties in the Arctic will be taken into account as well, the president said. "Many interested countries are there. We will take the interests of these states into account and pursue acceptable compromises, while defending our own interests of course," he said.

Arctic territories will not be separated into a Russian region, Putin said.

As to the possible status of Arctic territories, "such practice exists in the world and, to a large extent, nothing is preventing us from doing this. But we do not have these sorts of plans for now," the president said.

Reports claiming death of 100 Russian servicemen in Ukraine nonsense - Russian Defense Ministry source

MOSCOW. Aug 29 (Interfax-AVN) - Reports from some Russian and Ukrainian mass media outlets, citing human rights activists Ella Polyakova and Sergei Krivenko and alleging that 100 Russian troops were killed in Ukraine on August 13, are not true, a high-level Russian Defense Ministry source told reporters.

"The nonsense, voiced recently by our 'dedicated fighter for money,' deserves only the serious attention of the Russian psychiatric society," the source said.

The Russian Justice Ministry has officially given the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg organization headed by Polyakova the status of a foreign agent, the high-level source said.

"All statements of representatives of this organization on the alleged mass death of Russian servicemen in Ukraine citing 'own sources' is nothing more than a quotation of reports from the information resources of Ukrainian propagandists. We have seen them too," the source said.

Sanctions can't help achieve political goals - Iranian foreign minister

MOSCOW. Aug 29 (Interfax) - Unilateral Western sanctions have not reduced the scale of Iran's nuclear program, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said.

"The sanctions have not reduced and will not reduce the activity of the Iranian nuclear program," Zarif told a press conference following negotiations with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov.

"At the initial stage, Iran had 200 centrifuges, and now it has 20,000," Zarif said.

The Iranian minister also said he is confident that sanctions can never help achieve political goals.

"They may put pressure on the people of a specific country, but no more than that," he said.

Zarif also said he is confident that "the people of Russia, for example, are ready to take this pressure to protect their lawful rights and they will not go down on their knees."

Zarif also said the Iranian authorities are currently doing everything to resolve all issues relating to the nuclear program.

"Over the past year, we have proved to their world that we are looking to resolve the situation with the Iranian nuclear program, but that does not mean that sanctions can influence our country's will," he said.

Consultations on vital regional issues are organized with U.S., Iran - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Aug 29 (Interfax) - U.S., Iranian, Russian and Chinese officials have discussed the issue of Afghanistan in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"Literally yesterday, consultations on Afghanistan, which had a very serious anti-terrorist component, were held in Moscow. Those consultations involved representatives of Russia, Iran, China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the U.S.," Lavrov told a press conference following a meeting with his Iranian colleague Javad Zarif.

"It means that everything can be organized when it is needed. I am confident that cooperation should also develop on other regional issues, including the fight against terrorism," the minister said.

Lavrov called for Iran to be involved in the resolution of regional issues. "We have had many talks on the importance of ensuring the fully-fledged involvement of Iran in the solution of all regional problems. Our Western partners have periodically set some conditions for Iran's participation in various formats. But I think life will make us overcome such approaches, such bias," he said.

Putin asks not to blame German people for Hitler's misdeeds

SELIGER, Tver region. Aug 29 (Interfax) - The people of Germany must not be held responsible for Hitler's crimes, said Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Today some are still trying to keep the seal of blame on the Germans for everything that was done by Hitler. We must not forget what happened and we must draw conclusions, but the German people must not be held responsible for what Hitler did for the next thousand years," he told the Seliger 2014 youth forum on Friday.

"The attempt to make them (the German people) responsible after the First World War led to the second one," said the Russian president.

European values means suppression of dissent in Ukraine - Putin

SELIGER, Tver region. Aug 29 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin has expressed his disappointment with Ukraine understanding military suppression of dissent as today's European values.

"No matter who says what, we understand that too, we are no fools, we saw these symbolical pies distributed on Maidan, the information support, the political support. Does that mean that the U.S. and European countries are fully involved in this process of regime change, a violent, anti-constitutional regime change?" Putin told the Seliger 2014 youth forum on Friday.

He added: "The part of the country which disagreed with it is being suppressed by brutal military force, using aircraft, artillery, multiple rocket launchers and tanks. If these are today's European values, then I am simply utterly disappointed."

Putin, Poroshenko agree on providing assistance to people in need in Luhansk, Donetsk

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin says Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and he had agreed during their recent meeting on implementing a humanitarian aid plan for Luhansk and Donetsk residents using railroad transport.

"We have agreed that we will implement the plan proposed by President Poroshenko to help people in need in Luhansk and Donetsk and will follow a path he proposed: we will ship food and other essential goods by rail. This was his proposal and I agreed with it," Putin said in an interview with Channel One television, a fragment of which was aired on Friday evening.

The meeting was honest, Putin said.

"In general, it seemed to me the meeting was very good, quite honest. In my point of view, Petro Oleksiyovych is a partner with whom dialogue can be held," the Russian president said.

"Of course, it would be good if everything we agreed upon should be implemented," Putin said.

"It is necessary to provide humanitarian assistance to people who are in the conflict zone now. We talked with President Poroshenko about this as well, and he treats with understanding what Russia is doing. I suppose we should meet the Ukrainian authorities halfway in this regard," Putin said.

Putin said he hoped Poroshenko has heard Moscow's arguments.

Putin and Poroshenko had met one-on-one in Minsk late on August 26, after a meeting between the leaders of the Belarusian-Kazakh-Russian Customs Union member-states, the Ukrainian president, and EU representatives.

Following that meeting, Putin told journalists that agreements had been reached on providing humanitarian aid to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. "We talked about the need to provide humanitarian aid to Donetsk and Luhansk. We agreed on how we will interact," he said.

"We talked about our concerns regarding the humanitarian element," Putin said. "Frankly speaking, President Poroshenko doesn't deny that the situation is difficult. It can't be described other than disastrous," he said.

Anatoly Makarenko, a deputy chief of the Ukrainian State Fiscal Service, had said earlier on Friday that the second Russian humanitarian convoy bound for the east of Ukraine could be sent by rail through the Gukovo checkpoint in the next ten days, provided Russia and Ukraine have agreed all necessary procedures.

"The Russian Foreign Ministry sent a note to the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, notifying us of Russia's preparation of another humanitarian convoy. Russia suggested rail transport as a possibility. So now we are going through all possible options for working with this humanitarian convoy. The main condition set by the Ukrainian State Fiscal Service's customs office is that the recipient should be the Red Cross, as agreed," Makarenko told reporters on Friday.

"For now, we are working on the checkpoint: if it goes by rail, it will be through the Gukovo checkpoint, within 30 kilometers of Izvaryne. We have a group of border guards and customs officers deployed there, and we are ready to have the train cleared by this group. Judging by the dynamic, I think all this will already be in place in the next ten days," Makarenko said.

Putin, Hollande discuss Ukraine in phone conversation - Kremlin press service

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin talked on the phone with French President Francois Hollande on Friday, the Kremlin press service said.

"In the run-up to an EU summit, [Putin and Hollande] had a substantial discussion on the crisis situation in Ukraine and considered options for possibly facilitating a political settlement of the internal Ukrainian conflict," it said.

"Both parties stressed the need to stop bloodshed, overcome a humanitarian disaster, and resolve problems by exclusively peaceful political methods," it said.

Putin and Hollande agreed to continue their contacts in a bilateral and multilateral format, the Kremlin press service said.

Putin, Barroso discuss Minsk meeting outcomes, including gas transport across Ukraine - Kremlin

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin talked on the phone with European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso on August 29, the Kremlin press service reported.

Putin and Barroso "discussed further joint actions related to the outcomes of the Minsk meeting between the leaders of the Customs Union members, the Ukrainian president and European Union representatives, including in the context of the Ukraine-EU association agreement and Russian natural gas transportation across Ukrainian territory," it said.

Moscow not "pushing" Yanukovich anywhere - Putin

SELIGER, Tver region. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Viktor Yanukovich is a former Ukrainian president and Moscow has never pushed him to the presidential position, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the Seliger 2014 youth forum.

"As to former President Viktor Fyodorovich Yanukovich, we did not push and did not advance him anywhere," Putin said when commenting on the opinion that Yanukovich was Moscow's protégé.

"I want you to know this: so that this is known in Russia and in Ukraine, no such thing has ever happened," Putin said.

Russia always supports the existing authorities in any country, the president said.

"We are not like some of our partners. They probably behave more pragmatically in this regard and put eggs in different baskets. And moreover, Americans do this: if authorities are loyal to them somewhere, they always work with the opposition and even incite it a little against the existing authorities, so that even if these authorities are loyal to them, they become even more loyal," Putin said.

Ukraine must stop hostilities, start preparing for winter - Putin

VLADIVOSTOK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - President Vladimir Putin believes that ahead of winter Ukraine should think how its population will survive the cold weather.

"I think nobody thinks of that anymore, except Russia," he said answering a question on Sunday Time TV program about the way people remaining in Southeast Ukraine will live through the cold season.

In Putin's opinion, there are ways to resolve the issue.

"There are ways of helping resolve the issue. Firstly, to immediately stop hostilities and start restoring the necessary infrastructure. To start replenishing reserves, conducting the necessary repair operations and preparing for the cold season," he said.

Ukrainian military used lull related to humanitarian corridor in their own way increasing losses - Putin

VLADIVOSTOK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - President Vladimir Putin has noted that the Ukrainian military used the lull given for withdrawing their servicemen encircled in Donbas in their own interests.

"They [the Ukrainian military] used the lull given to them by the militia for regrouping, pulling up reserves and trying to pull out their servicemen from the encirclements by force," he said in a Sunday interview with Vremya program.

"This arouses mistrust and leads to an increase in the number of casualties," he said.

Putin calls for starting talks on state system in Southeast Ukraine

PETROPAVLOVSK-KAMCHATSKI. Sept 1 (Interfax) - President Vladimir Putin believes that the Ukrainian authorities should start talks on questions of the state system in the southeast of the country.

"Substantive, meaningful talks should be immediately launched not on technical questions but questions of political organization of society and the state system in southeast Ukraine with the purpose of unconditionally guaranteeing the lawful interests of people who live there," he said in an interview with Voskresnoye Vremya (Sunday Time) on Channel 1.

He also stressed the need to immediately stop hostilities and start restoring the infrastructure.

"If someone expects that in situation when towns and villages in southeast Ukraine are shot at point blank, the militia won't react to that in any way but will wait for the promised talks, these are enthralled by illusions," Putin said.

In relation to the support that the West is giving to the Ukrainian authorities the Russian leader advised Western countries to think what European democratic values amount to.

"Supporting a coup d'état, an armed seizure of power and suppression of protesters with armed force. Are these modern European values? I think our colleagues should be reminded of that. About their own ideals," he said.

Russia ready to implement Poroshenko's plan of relief to Luhansk and Donetsk - Putin

PETROPAVLOVSK-KAMCHATSKI. Sept 1 (Interfax) - President Vladimir Putin believes that Russia should meet the leadership of Ukraine half way on the issue of humanitarian aid to people in the zone of the armed conflict.

"We agreed that we will implement the plan of helping people in Luhansk and Donetsk proposed by [Ukrainian] President Petro Poroshenko and take the way he suggested - we will be sending the food and goods by rail," Putin said on Voskresnoye Vremya (Sunday Time) show.

He said it was Poroshenko's suggestion and he agreed with it.

"We talked about that with President Poroshenko, too. He showed understanding for what Russia is doing. I believe that we also should meet the leadership of Ukraine half way on this matter," Putin said.

Parliamentary elections hamper peaceful settlement in eastern Ukraine - Putin

VLADIVOSTOK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - It is impossible to predict how long the military conflict will last in Ukraine, said President Vladimir Putin.

"This largely depends on the political will of the current political leadership," Putin said in an interview with the Voskresnoye Vremya weekly summary television program.

Another problem is that Ukraine is a step away from parliamentary elections, with all participants in the election race willing "to demonstrate how tough they are."

"All want to demonstrate that they are tough girls and boys. Amid this flurry of political rivalry, it's hard to hope that people will arrive who will clearly define their determination to seek peaceful, not military solutions to the problem. We are hoping for the better, nevertheless," Putin said.

Ukraine's early parliamentary elections are slated for October 26.

Putin calls Poroshenko partner with whom dialogue can be conducted

PETROPAVLOVSK-KAMCHATSKI. Sept 1 (Interfax) - President Vladimir Putin believes that his meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko was frank.

"The meeting was very good. It seemed to me that it was quite frank. To my mind, Petro Alexeyevich is a partner with whom dialogue can be conducted," he said in an interview with Sunday Time program on Channel 1.

"Naturally we would want everything that was agreed upon to be carried out into life. We also spoke of the acute situation in Donetsk and Luhansk. Naturally, Russia aspires for the bloodshed to be stopped and stopped as soon as possible. By peaceful means at that, through talks," Putin said.

Putin's "Novorossiya" statement misinterpreted - Kremlin spokesman

CHELYABINSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that when President Vladimir Putin was talking about the necessity for Kyiv to start talks with the militia of Novorossiya, he meant the Ukrainian authorities' inclusive dialogue, not the status of this region.

"Absolutely not. This is perfectly clear from the president's statement. The interpretation is absolutely wrong," Peskov told reporters when asked what Putin meant when he said in his most recent interview that talks were necessary on the status of Novorossiya.

Some media have misinterpreted the president's statement that talks must be started as soon as possible.

"Interpretations are going round that the president meant talks on the state status of eastern Ukraine. A mere reading of the statement shows clearly that this interpretation is wrong. The president was talking about inclusive talks, whose urgency was emphasized quite a long time ago in documents signed in various formats," Peskov said.

Asked whether "Novorossiya" must remain part of Ukraine, and whether Ukraine should deal with its status, Peskov said, "Of course. Ukraine alone can come to terms with Novorossiya and take the interests of the people of Novorossiya into account. Only this way can political settlement be achieved."

"These inclusive talks, talks within Ukraine on its inner set-up, must define relations with the eastern partners and ensure that the interests of the eastern regions, the interests of Novorossiya, be heeded, and also forge a decision on how, to what extent and using which instruments this could be done. That's what was meant here," Peskov said.

Moscow views Poland's ban on Shoigu plane flight as gross violation of intl ethics

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Poland's ban on Russian Defense Ministry Sergei Shoigu's aircraft passage through its airspace is a gross violation of the norms and ethics of international contacts, a high-ranking Russian Foreign Ministry official said.

"Such actions cannot be qualified as other than a gross violation of the norms and ethics of international contacts and, in the context of the celebrations in Slovakia, as a blasphemous trick against the historical memory and merits of those who saved Europe from fascism," Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov told Interfax on Friday.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu led a Russian delegation paying a working visit to Slovakia earlier in the day, where he, along with the Slovak defense minister, took part in the unveiling ceremony of an exhibition in Banska Bystrica dealing with the 70th anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising.

It was reported on Friday evening that Poland did not allow the aircraft carrying the Russian delegation led by Shoigu to pass through its airspace, due to which the plane had to land in Bratislava.

The Russian embassy to Poland reported later that the Polish authorities sanctioned the plane's passage through the country's airspace. "The situation has been settled. Permission for the flight has been obtained. The plane can fly," Valeria Perzhinskaya, a spokesperson for the Russian embassy in Warsaw, told Interfax.

Asked how Poland explained the incident, Perzhinskaya said, "These matters are being analyzed now. We have no comment for the time being."

Moscow alarmed by U.S. planned reconnaissance flights over Syria, invokes intl law

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Moscow is alarmed by the United States' decision to conduct reconnaissance flights over Syria, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said in a commentary on Friday.

"We hope that in its further actions in Syria, Washington will be guided by international law. The law clearly determines that in the event of no consent from a state to military operations in its territory, such permission can only be issued by the UN Security Council," Lukashevich said.

Washington has explained its decision by the need to prevent the Islamic extremist threat to its citizens abroad, he said.

"Moreover, a number of media outlets have interpreted such actions as a preparation for air strikes against the Syrian positions of the terrorist group called the Islamic State," Lukashevich said.

The Russian Foreign Ministry stressed that the problem of terrorism spreading across the Middle East, which is mainly caused by radical militants from the Islamic State operating in Iraq and Syria, is definitely alarming. The resulting regional tensions and instability require urgent measures from the international community.

The Syrian government has already demonstrated serious concern over the consolidation of the positions of radical extremists on its territory, and expressed its readiness to actively cooperate with the international community on this issue, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Lavrov: West must demand that Kyiv stop using heavy arms against its own people

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Brussels and Washington must demand that Kyiv stop using heavy hardware and artillery against its own people, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"We deem it most important that Washington and Brussels make same demands on Kyiv as they do in every other conflict, i.e. to stop using heavy weaponry and aviation against cities, against the civilian population and to not destroy schools and hospitals," Lavrov said in his speech at the MGIMO University on Monday.

Lavrov offers West to converse rather than threaten with sanctions

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Moscow has urged the West to have a dialogue rather than apply indiscriminative sanctions amid the Ukrainian situation, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"Let us sit down and talk instead of threatening with sanctions and stubbornly making absolutely unrealistic demands of the militia laying down arms and letting destroy themselves - this is what the peace plan of Petro Poroshenko is about," Lavrov told students of the MGIMO University.

"We should discuss points of disagreement with our partners. And we expect them to demonstrate the same attitude, not just accuse us of every deadly sin in an indiscriminative manner, but sit down to talk and frankly spill out their claims in a conversation. If this does not happen, we will conclude that criticism is a goal in itself, an excuse for ultimatums, sanctions and the like, and our colleagues in the West are assuring us that this is not what they mean," the minister noted.

Lavrov: Russia wants peaceful settlement in Ukraine, no military intervention

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russia will not intervene in the Ukrainian situation in a military way, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"There will be no military intervention, we call for the exclusively peaceful settlement of this severest crisis, this tragedy," Lavrov told MGIMO University students.

"Everything we are doing aims to demonstrate precisely this political approach," he said.

In the opinion of Lavrov, the Western colleagues are blindly supporting the incumbent Kyiv authorities. "Anything the incumbent Kyiv authorities are saying or doing gains support of the West. Their approach is absolutely not critical, it is biased and selective," the minister pointed out.

Lavrov criticizes West for near-sightedness in not cooperating with Damascus to combat terrorists

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The West's unwillingness to cooperate with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in combating terrorism is counter-productive, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Friday.

"When the leaders of the G8 are saying now, as, for instance, the president of France declared recently, that there can't be any cooperation with the Assad regime in combating terrorism, this directly contravenes his own words in the declaration of the G8 presidents and heads of government," Lavrov said at a press conference following negotiations with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Friday.

"We are ready to cooperate with anyone who doesn't want to make use of combatting terrorism for their own mercenary purposes and who doesn't divide terrorists into good and bad ones or into friends and foes," he said.

"When they say the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Iraq needs to be fought or at least declare their determination to fight it and don't want to fight the same terrorists from the same group in Syria, saying that they won't cooperate with the Syrian government on any matter, including combatting terrorism, this is quite a double standard, and I believe it's obvious to everyone how counterproductive and near-sighted this is," he said.

Russian embassy workers detained in Kyiv freed, return home - Russian Foreign Ministry

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Two workers of the Russian embassy to Ukraine who were detained in Kyiv earlier this week have been freed, the Russian Foreign Ministry reported on Saturday.

"Due to efforts that have been undertaken, two workers of the embassy of the Russian Federation to Ukraine responsible for the foreign mission's security, who were detained in Kyiv, were freed today and have returned to their home country," it said.

Earlier on Saturday, the Russian embassy in Kyiv officially declared the disappearance of Third Secretary Andrei Golovanov and Attache Mikhail Shorin on Ukrainian territory.

"The Interior Ministry department for Kyiv made a statement in which it publicly denied the detention of the two employees of the Russian Embassy in Kyiv by Ukrainian law enforcement bodies. In this connection, the Russian Embassy in Kyiv points out that Ukraine had documentarily acknowledged the fact of the Russian diplomats' detention in a Ukrainian Foreign Ministry note of August 27," the embassy said.

"Considering so contradictory statements by Ukrainian government bodies, the Russian Embassy to Ukraine has to officially declare the disappearance of Third Secretary Golovanov and Attache Shorin on Ukrainian territory," the embassy said.

The Russian embassy workers were detained on August 27. Kyiv said they were held at the city department of the Ukrainian Security Service.

EU pledge not to give military aid to Kyiv good news - Russia's EU envoy

BRUSSELS. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The European Union leaders' statement that no military aid is being contemplated for Kyiv is "a bright ray of light against the dark background of the EU summit".

"Concerning the military aspect, despite Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė's insisted calls, other EU leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, said in sufficiently clear terms that military aid to Kyiv is not being considered. This came like a bright ray of light against a generally bleak background," Chizhov said.

Moscow is ready to work with new EU leadership - ambassador Chizhov

BRUSSELS. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russia is ready to work with the new leaders of the European Council and EU diplomacy - Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Italian Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini - and expects that they will express the collective stance of the European Union, Russian ambassador to the EU Vladimir Chizhov has said.

"As our opinion, appointments to leading posts are their internal affair, of course. We will be working with those whom they have chosen. All these people are well known to us. Clearly each of them has his or her subtleties in political approaches. But we proceed from the belief that they will reflect the collective stance of the European Union," Chizhov said commenting on the appointment of Tusk and Mogherini.

He said there are "no special surprises" in the appointments. "At the second try a balance of all factors was found as if on pharmaceutical scales. This is a balance between old and new members, between big and small countries, between the left and the right, between the North and the South, the West and the East, and finally, which has been important lately, between genders," Chizhov said.

"Naturally, this is not the end of the story," he said. "Firstly, only Mr. Tusk has been finally approved as the President of the European Council. Mogherini together with other would-be commissioners has to be approved by the European Parliament the same as [president elect of the European Commission Jean-Claude] Juncker had to. Juncker as president went through the approval process but he will have to present the entire composition of the European Commission. And they will now be dealing with that," Chizhov said.

He said that in selecting candidates EU leaders also chose a balance concerning the attitude of candidates to Russia. "The fact that they reached such a balance - one doesn't have to be an expert to see that regarding Russia they also chose a balance. And apparently this is not accidental either," he said. "We used to work with Tusk as the prime minister of Poland and with Mogherini as the foreign minister of Italy and worked with Juncker as the prime minister of Luxembourg for a long time," Chizhov recalled.

Lavrov calls illegal EU attempts to limit visa rights of Crimean residents

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has called illegal the attempts of EU countries to limit the travel of Crimean residents.

"This is a question to ask European countries, because their attempts to limit the rights of Russian citizens residing in Crimea are unlawful and are not supported with any international legal document," Lavrov said answering a question how Crimean residents could travel to Europe if they were denied Schengen visas. The question was asked at the MGIMO University on Monday.

This is a violation of the commitment European countries have undertaken under the European Human Rights Convention, Lavrov said. Moscow is aware of the "tricks" of European partners seeking to create artificial impediments to the travel of Russian citizens and "is actively resisting them," Lavrov said.

Investigators should return to plane crash site near Donetsk to study debris - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russia believes investigators should return to the Malaysian plane crash site in the Donetsk region, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"I believe investigators should go back there. Why are they not studying the debris that is lying there? They can be photographed, they can be approached. Experts can probably understand what weapons were used by the nature of the holes in the fuselage, the wings, and the cockpit," Lavrov said while meeting with students of the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations.

"Our attempts to achieve some information, at least publish some interim reports, have so far not lead to anything," the minister said.

"As to the statements that it was done by militia with Russia's assistance, why are they not substantiated by at least one photograph from space? Why are some pictures from Youtube being published instead of that? It's a very dark story" Lavrov said.

Putin blames Kyiv for unwillingness to have substantive political dialogue with eastern Ukraine

YAKUTSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The Kyiv authorities are unwilling to have a substantive political dialogue with southeastern Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

Putin told BBC reporter John Sweeney on Monday he believed that the main reason [for the problem] was the unwillingness of the incumbent Kyiv authorities to maintain a substantive political dialogue with the eastern areas of their country.

As to the militia, Putin said their goal was to move the Ukrainian army away from big cities of the east.

The goal of the militia forces is to move away the armed forces and their artillery and to not let them fire at residential areas, the Russian president said.

Russian Foreign Ministry criticizes Kyiv for not using humanitarian corridors for troops removal

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The Russian Foreign Ministry's envoy on human rights, democracy and supremacy of law Konstantin Dolgov said that "Kyiv's unpreparedness to use humanitarian corridors for removing troops is an indicator of the real 'readiness' of the authorities to save their people's lives."

So much for Kyiv's care for people's right to life! There are no limits for the cynicism and irresponsibility of the authorities who are in charge of the punitive operation," Dolgov said on Twitter.

Russia will take into account its national interests when responding to possible new sanctions - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russia will take into account its national interests in the event of new Western sanctions, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"It [the response] will not involve 'the slamming of the doors or some falsely understood hurts. We will take into account our national interest: protect our economy, protect our social sphere, protect our business and simultaneously draw conclusions from our partner's actions,'" the minister said in the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations on Monday.

Putin hopes that common sense will prevail on issue of sanctions

YAKUTSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said he is hoping that common sense will prevail in the issue of Western sanctions and Russia and its Western partners will not suffer from "mutual jabs."

"I hope common sense will prevail and we will work normally. Neither us nor our partners will suffer from these mutual jabs," Putin said at a meeting on state support of priority investment projects and territories in the Far East.

Lavrov agrees Palestine-Israel negotiations should start with territorial issue

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has called fair the PNA President's appeal for making the territorial issue a cornerstone of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

"We see as fair the appeals of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for concentrating on the size of territories to make up the Palestinian state at the very start of the negotiations," Lavrov told MGIMO University students on Monday.

"Other issues, including the status of Jerusalem and the swap of refugees, will be resolved later," he said.

Unless this fundamental issue is taken into account, "The next round of the negotiations will create an impression that it will change nothing," the minister pointed out.

Lavrov hopes all member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) will continue to support this policy.

Annexation of Palestinian land by Israel will considerably hurt Middle East settlement process - Russian Foreign Ministry

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russia is concerned about Israel's plans to join new land on the Western bank of the Jordan and call for them to be reconsidered.

On August 31, the Israeli authorities announced their intention to join to land sites located on the Western bank of the Jordan, which was occupied in 1967, to Israel. According to media reports, the land, which is located near Bethlehem, has an area of some 400 hectares.

"Moscow was greatly concerned about the information on Israel's plans to annex land on the Palestinian territories. Such unilateral actions may considerably harm the prospects of Palestinian-Israeli settlement, which is known to be based on the principle of the borders of the future Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with approved land swaps," the Russian Foreign Ministry's information and press department said in a commentary.

"We are calling on the Israeli authorities to reconsider the said plans to join 400 hectares of land on the territory of Palestine. We are convinced that goodwill gestures by both sides that are capable of preventing further escalation of tension and creating preconditions for the resumption of the peace talks on all issues relating to the final status of the Palestinian territories on the existing international law foundations would be highly useful in the current atmosphere of conflicts between Palestine and Israel," the document says.

Russian Foreign Ministry calls on EU to look at situation in Ukraine without stereotypes

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russia is hoping that the European Union will be able to begin constructive work to help resolve the crisis in Ukraine.

"We continue to hope that the EU will be able to look at the situation independently, without last century's stereotypes, and begin constructive work to help resolve the conflict in Ukraine," the Russian Foreign Ministry's information and press department said in a commentary released on Monday.

"It is regrettable that the EU Council, in spite of the interests of its members, is following the lead of those countries that are interested in the realization of geopolitical schemes which envision increased confrontation with Russia," the document says.

Russia reserves right to respond to possible EU sanctions - Foreign Ministry

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Moscow is ready to respond to new sanctions if the European Union decides to introduce them, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement posted on its website.

"In the case of new anti-Russian sanctions being introduced, Russia reserves the right to take response measures aimed at defending its legitimate interests," the document said.

"The analysis of yet more 'conclusions' of the European Council of August 30 showed again the inability of EU states to overcome the inertia of reckless support they have for the Kyiv authorities," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

"The hysteria unfolding ahead of the European Council meeting on the mythical 'Russian aggression in Ukraine' has borne its fruit. While resting on absolutely groundless statements on the presence of Russian armed forces in the country and sweepingly laying responsibility for what is happening there on Moscow, Brussels continues to evade acknowledgement of the real causes of the dramatic situation in south-eastern Ukraine, instead of encouraging an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and creating conditions for comprehensive Ukraine-wide national dialogue between the conflicting parties," the statement said.

"At the same time, the virtual lack of assessments of the humanitarian situation in this region of Ukraine - where as a result of the Kyiv authorities' actions, a full-scale humanitarian catastrophe has unfolded and the number of refugees coming to Russia is nearing one million people - is striking," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

Russian-Chinese cooperation is expanding - Chinese officials

US KHATYN (Yakutia). Sept 1 (Interfax) - China is hoping to expand cooperation with Russia and opposes the western sanctions on Russia.

"I want to reiterate that China flatly opposes the U.S. and Western sanctions on Russia, opposes 'colored revolutions,' and opposes attempts to hinder the development of Russia," Chinese State Council Deputy Premier Zhang Gaoli said while meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday.

"We will do our best to ensure everything that you need, our cooperation is expanding considerably, including in the trade in agricultural products," Gaoli said.

Putin, for his part, said: "As to trade and economic restrictions, the damage will eventually fall primarily on those who pursue such policies."

"I hope common sense will prevail and we will all go into normal cooperation mode," he said.

Putin hopes to meet with Xi Jinping in Dushanbe

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin is hoping to meet with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Dushanbe, where the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit will be held.

"President Xi Jinping is looking forward to meeting with you again in Dushanbe," Zhang Gaoli, deputy premier of the Chinese State Council, said during a meeting with Putin, according to a shorthand recording posted on the Kremlin website.

Putin responded by saying: "Give him my best wishes. I am looking forward to this meeting too. We have things to talk about."

The president pointed out the important role of the Chinese president in the construction of the trunk gas pipeline Power of Siberia. "If President Xi Jinping had not personally intervened, I think we would not be standing here now today," Putin said, adding, however, that Zhang Gaoli is a professional energy specialist and a lot depends on him, too.

Foreign ministers of Russia, Syria discuss ways of resuming peace settlement efforts

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Syrian counterpart Walid Mualem have discussed possible formats of the settlement of the conflict in Syria in a phone conversation.

"Sergei Lavrov and Walid Mualem reiterated that there is no military solution to the bloody internal military conflict in Syria and it can only be resolved by political and diplomatic methods," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a report on Monday.

"In this regard, the parties exchanged opinions on the possible formats allowing for the resumption of the efforts to achieve reconciliation in Syria," the report says.

The ministers discussed "the recent events in Syria in the light of the increase of the terrorism threat in the country and in the region as a result of the aggressive actions by militants from the jihadist group Islamic State."

The Syrian foreign minister "confirmed Syria's readiness to coordinate its steps in the sphere of counterterrorism with representatives of the international community in the context of the fulfilment of Resolution 2170 of the UN Security Council," the report says.

Russian, Italian foreign ministers discuss Ukraine crisis

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei and his Italian counterpart Federica Mogherini spoke by telephone on Monday to discuss the Ukrainian crisis "under the angle of the search for optimal ways of its political settlement," the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Monday.

The two ministers also touched upon some pressing international issues.

Lavrov congratulated Mogherini on her nomination for the office of the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Idea on Ukraine's refusal from non-aligned status belongs to "war party" supporters in Kyiv - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The proposal by the Ukrainian government to revoke the non-aligned status of the country shows the attempts of supporters of forceful conflict resolution in south-eastern Ukraine to disrupt the search for ways for political settlement, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a news conference in Moscow on Tuesday.

"I would draw your attention to one very interesting fact - this initiative appeared right after agreements appeared following the meeting in Minsk to find a generally acceptable solution to the current domestic Ukrainian crisis in the framework of the contact group. So, the 'peace party' tried and is still trying to advance a negotiating and political solution on all main issues Ukrainians face now. At the same time, the 'war party' is taking steps which are clearly aimed at disrupting these efforts," Lavrov said.

"To great regret, such moods in favor of enhancing the 'war party' positions in Kyiv are actively being heated up and incited from Washington, some European capitals and more and more often from Brussels and from NATO headquarters, where the North Atlantic Alliance secretary general gives statements with and without cause, which are not in his remit at all," Lavrov said.

"We are aware that serious and responsible politicians in Europe and in the U.S. are opposed to any provocations and realize that the continuing the conflict via militia capitulation is senseless and futureless, realize the necessity of certain, targeted and comprehensive dialogue in order to find a compromise on the future of the Ukrainian state, and we hope that their voice will prevail after all," the Russian minister said.

Attempts to substitute economy with political scandals at G20 summit in Brisbane not serious - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Australia is trying to substitute the economic agenda of the coming G20 summit with political scandal and this is not serious, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a briefing in Moscow.

"They have probably made sure they will not be able to guarantee that they will hold the G20 summit on the economic and financial agenda issues successfully and now they are trying to draw attention away by creating some political scandals, then this is not serious at all," Lavrov said when asked by Interfax to comment on statements by Australian Foreign Minister Julia Bishop that the coming NATO summit in Wales will be used in order to attempt to block the participation of Russian President Vladimir Putin in the G20 summit in Brisbane, Australia in November.

"I have not read such a statement but was not surprised it had been made. I would advise that basic things regarding G20 operations be recalled. It does not concern the fact that Australia decided to call this summit. Australia asked to be granted the right to hold the next summit. It was granted this right but certain obligations come with this right," Lavrov said.

The necessity of assisting the success of discussions within the G20 framework, including the discussion on how to implement the first stage of reforms of the international currency and financial system, is the most important one among these obligations, the minister said.

"The situation in the global economy is far from bright and it is of principle importance to use all opportunities of leading economies united within the G20 in order to improve this situation. But if our Australian colleagues plan to discuss the G20 topics in the framework of the North Atlantic Alliance, this says a lot about their ability to react appropriately to global problems," Lavrov said.

First trilateral meeting of leaders of Russia, China, Mongolia planned at SCO summit in Dushanbe - Ushakov

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The first trilateral meeting of the presidents of Russia, China and Mongolia is planned to be held during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Dushanbe on September 11-12, Russian presidential aide Yury Ushakov told reporters ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Mongolia on September 3.

During this trip, Putin and his Mongolian counterpart Tsakhia Elbegdorj will discuss the upcoming SCO summit, Ushakov said.

"The first trilateral meeting of leaders of Mongolia, China and Russia is planned to be held during this summit and evidently during this meeting it will be decided that this trilateral cooperation is to have a regular character," Ushakov said.

Remarks by U.S. ambassador to OSCE "unacceptable" - ministry

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The United States Department of State must tell the U.S. Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Daniel Baer to change his rhetoric within the Organization, Moscow says.

"It is outrageous that the U.S. diplomat, who has already allowed himself more than once to make odious attacks on Russia, this time went beyond all the acceptable limits of diplomatic decency. Not only were his hollow claims not backed up by concrete facts, they abounded in blatant insults and rudeness against our country," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a commentary posted on its website.

"We hope that the U.S. Department of State will urge its ambassador to change his style of behaviour, which is unbecoming a high-ranking diplomat on the OSCE platform, which must serve not as a rostrum for unfounded and rude attacks but as a place for a mutually-respectful and constructive conversation over the key issues of European security and for working out collective decisions. Otherwise, there will be nothing to talk about with this character," the ministry said.

Kremlin says Barroso quoting Putin inappropriate

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - If European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso indeed quoted Russian President Vladimir Putin at a European Council meeting, this is outside the framework of diplomatic practice, the Kremlin said.

"This is inappropriate and this is outside the framework of the diplomatic practice, if this was done. It appears to me to be simply unworthy a serious political figure," Russian presidential aide Yury Ushakov told Interfax when asked to comment on the report of Italian newspaper La Repubblica saying that at the European Council meeting on August 30 Barroso quoted Putin following the talks with the Russian president on the alleged possibility of seizing Kyiv.

Barroso said that when he asked Putin about Russian troops, who crossed the Ukrainian border, the Russian president switched to threats and said that this was not the issue and that if he wanted he would take Kyiv within two weeks, the newspaper reported.

"Whether these words were said or not, in my viewpoint, this quote given is taken out of context and it had absolutely different sense," Ushakov said regarding the report.

Ushakov: Alleged Russian military presence in Ukraine refuted many times before

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The Kremlin has once again refuted the alleged sending of Russian troops to Ukraine.

"There have been numerous refutations to this effect. Relevant explanations have been given on this matter," Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov told a press briefing in Moscow, referring to media allegations about Russian troops sent to Ukraine.

Lavrov urges Washington "to moderate war party" in Kyiv

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Only the United States is able "to moderate the war party" in Ukraine, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a briefing on Tuesday.

"It is necessary to moderate the war party in Kyiv and in reality only the U.S. can do this," Lavrov said.

"It would be very important to use the U.S. influence and opportunities in general in order to give necessary signals in favor of switching from the attempts to resolve the situation in a military way to political process," Lavrov said.

Idea on Ukraine's refusal from non-aligned status belongs to "war party" supporters in Kyiv - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The proposal of the Ukrainian government to refuse the non-aligned status of the country shows the attempts of supporters of forceful conflict resolution in southeastern Ukraine to disrupt the search of ways for political settlement, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a news conference in Moscow on Tuesday.

"I draw attention to one very interesting fact - this initiative appeared right after agreements appeared following the meeting in Minsk to find a generally acceptable solution of the current domestic Ukrainian crisis in the framework of the contact group. So, 'peace party' tried and is still trying to advance a negotiating and political solution on all main issues Ukrainians face now. At the same time, 'war party' is taking steps, which are clearly aimed at disrupting these efforts," Lavrov said.

Lavrov: Appeals for peace in Ukraine are not enough, accords are required

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Appeals for peace in Ukraine should be replaced with the fulfillment of numerous accords reached earlier, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"I'd welcome not new abstract appeals but calls of authoritative politicians affirming the need to fulfill what has been repeatedly agreed on," Lavrov told a press conference after his meeting with the Tunisian counterpart.

He was asked to comment on a statement by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who said there was no alternative to the peaceful settlement in Ukraine.

"Attempts to resolve the Ukrainian conflict in a military way are unpromising. Numerous appeals of the sort have been made and there will be more, but appeals are not enough. There is a need for agreements and these agreements must be fulfilled," Lavrov underscored.

He repeated there had been numerous agreements made before.

Poroshenko's visit to U.S. to show if Washington interested in political settlement of Ukrainian crisis - Lavrov

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The coming visit of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko to Washington gives a good chance to determine U.S. interest or lack of it in political settlement in Ukraine, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Tuesday.

"It has been declared already that Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko is going to the United States on September 18. And this probably will be a good opportunity to set the record straight as to the U.S. interest or lack of interest in political settlement in Ukraine," Lavrov said.

"The White House has declared already that the U.S. will use the visit to express support to Ukraine in its aspiration for democracy, independence and stability... I hope strongly that Washington will provide support namely to entire Ukraine, not a certain part of the Ukrainian political establishment, which took the course for forceful suppression of a share of own people," Lavrov said.

It is hoped that the U.S. and the European Union will support the process of searching for a compromise in the Ukrainian settlement, which started in Minsk on September 1, Lavrov said.

Moscow calls provocative, shocking Ukrainian defense minister's statement

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The Russian Foreign Ministry has dubbed provocative the recent statement by Ukrainian Defense Minister Valeriy Heletey who announced "the end of the operation aimed to free eastern Ukraine from terrorists" and the beginning of "a great patriotic war, which will have tens of thousands of casualties."

"The appeal of V. Heletey to prepare for another "tens of thousands" of casualties in what he called "a great patriotic war" or actually a new punitive operation in his own country is even more shocking. In doing so he plunges the Ukrainian people into further armed civilian confrontation. It seems the European history has never seen such a blasphemous covering of the wish to hold one's position at any cost before," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a commentary.

"It is hard to believe that such statements can be made by the defense minister of a civilized state," the Russian Foreign Ministry emphasized.

"Otherwise, it is simply unclear how tens of thousands of Ukrainian families could have trusted this official with the lives of their children, brothers and husbands mobilized by the Ukrainian army to wage a fratricidal war in their own country," the commentary runs.

"The degree of adequacy of the Ukrainian defense minister, who has made the aforesaid statement on his Facebook page, is a subject for analysis by non-military specialists," it said.

"The only thing worth mentioning about this text is the appointment of General Staff Chief V. Muzhenko as "the architect of remarkable victories" of the Ukrainian armed forces in the southeast," the commentary said.

Russia rejects French attempts to draw apartheid parallels

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The Russian Foreign Ministry has called 'dubious' the remarks made by French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius who likened the economic sanctions against Russia with those imposed on South Africa during the apartheid period.

"The historical parallels drawn by Fabius in the context of the economic sanctions between the effect on the apartheid regime in South Africa and today's Russia, with its unique experience in building equal relations between the many nations inhabiting our country, look more than dubious," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a commentary on Monday.

"Also bewildering is the condescension shown by Fabius towards the utterly provocative question of a journalist who put Russia and the so-called Islamic State in the same league as the main violators of international law," the commentary said.

Putin tours construction site of Vostochny cosmodrome

UGLEGORSK, Amur region. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin toured on Tuesday the construction site of the Vostochny cosmodrome in the Amur region, the first launch from which is planned to be carried out in 2015.

The president started his tour with the facility for preparing spacecraft, where among other things spacecraft assembly and testing will take place.

Students of construction brigades, who participating in construction work in July-August, met Putin at the entrance to the facility.

"This is a unique case, when it is possible to not just go to an interesting site and see how this is done and to even earn a little bit but to feel own profession and the possible future work right on site and to participate in a tremendous nation-wide project from ground level," Putin told the students.

According to the president, the unique cosmodrome will give Russia the opportunity of independent space launches, at that on all space program aspect. "Taking into account that it is planned to work here on remote space - on Moon and Mars, this is a prospect for decades to come," he said.

After this Russian Deputy Prime Ministry Dmitry Rogozin and Roscosmos head Oleg Ostapenko reported to Putin on the construction progress, all timelines scheduled on putting this facility into service and start of implementing space programs remain in effect, Rogozin said.

This summer a total of about 500 students from 13 Russian regions were engaged in the work, Spetsstroy Rossii Deputy Head Alexander Mordovets told reporters. The average pay was 30,000-35,000 rubles per month and it is planned to involve about 1,000 students in cosmodrome construction next year, he said.

Moscow willing to publicize Putin-Barroso conversation if latter does not object to it within 2 days - diplomat

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Moscow is ready to publicize the transcript and an audio recording of a recent conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and outgoing European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso to eliminate any misunderstandings regarding Western media's reports on its essence, says Russian Permanent Envoy to the European Union Vladimir Chizhov.

"It is known to me that the Russian presidential secretariat has both a written transcript and an audio record of the said telephone conversation and, to eliminate misunderstandings, is ready to fully publicize its contents if you do not let us know of your objections to this within the next two days," Chizhov said in a letter the Russian Foreign Ministry information and press department circulated on Tuesday.

A number of media outlets, including the Italian newspaper La Repubblica, have published comments regarding a telephone conversation between Putin and Barroso, Chizhov said.

"The reports said that you supposedly shared the essence of the conversation with some of your EU colleagues, particularly, attributing words, obviously taken out of context, to the Russian president," Chizhov said in his letter to Barroso.

"The divulgence of confidential conversations of this level goes far beyond the framework of commonly accepted diplomatic practice," Chizhov said.

La Repubblica quoted Barroso as saying that when he asked Putin about Russian troops that had crossed the Ukrainian border, the Russian leader started uttering threats. "In fact, this is not what the problem is. If I want, I'll take Kyiv in two weeks," Barroso reportedly quoted Putin as saying, according to the Italian newspaper.

A Kremlin aide said earlier that, if Barroso did cite Putin at a meeting of the Council of the European Union, this did not fit the framework of diplomatic practice.

"This is incorrect and goes beyond the framework of diplomatic practice, if this was done. In fact, it looks unworthy of a credible political figure to me," Putin's aide Yuri Ushakov told Interfax earlier on Tuesday.

"Whether these words were said or not, in my view, this quote was taken out of context and had an absolutely different meaning," Ushakov said.

Moscow urges West, Middle Eastern states to stop flirting with Islamists

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Moscow is calling on its Western partners to promote UN decisions adopted on Monday concerning the fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

"The international community has firmly spoken against the actions of terrorist organizations in Iraq, Syria, and the region [in general]. What counts most is that these words should be put into practice and our Western and some Middle Eastern partners practically stop flirting with radical Islamic forces and finally listen to Russia's calls to combine efforts to oppose terrorism in Iraq and Syria with the aim of restoring peace in these countries and preventing the further dangerous destabilization of the Middle East," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement available on its website.

"At Iraq's request, supported by Russia, China, the U.S., the United Kingdom, France, and a number of other states, the UN Human Rights Council held a special session [on Monday] to address the disastrous human rights situation in the country," it said.

"During the discussion, the delegations expressed their extreme concern about the dramatic growth in the activities of ISIL terrorists on Iraq's and Syria's territory, monstrous crimes committed by jihadists against women, children, ethnic and religious minorities, and any dissidents. It was mentioned that it was necessary to combine the international community's efforts to organize combat against radicals in the region and to prevent this transnational terrorist group's further expansion," it said.

"Russia emphasized that the outbreak of a terrorist threat in Iraq and the Middle East in general resulted in large part from unlawful forcible intervention in the internal affairs of states from the outside with the aim of attaining mercenary geopolitical ends. Emphasis was placed on the importance of fighting the ISIL and other terrorist groups, not only in Iraq, but also in neighboring Syria where jihadists have been committing atrocities for more than two years and whom the Syrian armed forces have been fighting," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

"The session resulted in the adoption of a resolution strongly denouncing ISIL's crimes, including violence against ethnic and religious minorities, emphasizing the trans-regional nature of this threat, and stressing that the justification, legitimization, and financing of terrorist activities is unacceptable. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has been instructed to send a mission to Iraq to investigate human rights violations on the part of ISIL and other terrorist groups. It is important that the [UN] Human Rights Council supported the UN Security Council's decision aimed at curbing ISIL's evil deeds," it said.

"The fact that the special session has been held and the resolution has been passed is a momentous event," the Foreign Ministry said.

Moscow regrets UK incapable of transparent, unbiased inquiry into Litvinenko's death

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Russian Foreign Ministry has confirmed the Investigative Committee's notification of the British side about its refusal to partake in the new stage of the ongoing inquiry into the death of Alexander Litvinenko and regretted that the British authorities have demonstrated their inability to hold a genuinely transparent and unbiased inquiry into that case.

"We have to state that the new "public investigation" of London will not be "public" at all. No matter what information the British authorities may possess, it is already obvious that the British government will not make it a subject of an open and competitive process involving Russian detectives. It is hard to imagine how such an inquiry can be objective," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said.

"We are more than sorry that after traveling a long way the British authorities have appeared to be unable or at least have no desire to hold a genuinely open, transparent and unbiased inquiry into this case," Lukashevich said in a commentary posted on the Russian Foreign Ministry's website.

He noted that the Russian Investigative Committee "had been a full-fledged participant in that process [since December 2012] and voluntarily assisted the British coroner appointed to investigate that case." The Russian Investigative Committee shared its own investigative materials with the British police and security services and "expected to participate in the London investigation until the end," the ministry spokesman emphasized.

Nevertheless, the British government announced on July 31, 2014, it had an intention to begin "a public inquiry" into that death, he said.

"In fact, this means that relevant materials the British authorities describe as "classified" will be considered at closed-door hearings in London. They will not be accessible either to the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation or to the public," the Russian Foreign Ministry argued.

Russian veterans: Volunteers fighting for just cause in Ukraine

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Russian volunteers fighting in Ukraine have gone there by the call of their heart to help their brothers and to defend people's right to a decent life, Russian veterans' organizations stated.

"Russian volunteers are fighting for a just cause, they are defending their friends, the ideals of justice and freedom, the right of people to a decent life, their own language and the future they will choose themselves," says a joint statement of the Russian Union of Afghan War Veterans, the Union of Russian Paratroopers incorporating public organizations of Airborne Forces veterans, the all-Russia public veterans' organization Combat Brotherhood, and the all-Russia organization Officers of Russia seen by Interfax on Wednesday.

"We cannot be indifferent to this tragedy! Many comrades of ours have followed the call of their hearts and have gone to help their brothers because there is not a single family in Russia without relations, friends or comrades-in-arms in Ukraine," the statement said.

Public resistance is mounting in eastern Ukraine to "the Maidan authorities", which are trying to impose their rule in the country with bombs and shells, the veterans stressed. "A war has been waged on their own people. Hundreds of innocent people - elderly citizens, women and children - are dying in the bombardments," the statement said.

"The voluntary choice of our comrades is a demonstration of their courage and true heroism, military valor and compassion! All of them know they may die. But this is their conscious choice, which exhibits their loyalty to military honor," the veterans stated.

Putin, Poroshenko continue discussing Ukraine crisis in telephone conversation

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Russian President Vladimir Putin talked on the phone with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov said. The two leaders "continued discussions regarding the military and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine," he said.

"The chiefs of state exchanged opinions as to what should be done primarily to stop bloodshed in the southeastern part of the country as soon as possible," Peskov said.

"The presidents' viewpoints on possible ways to overcome the grave and critical situation coincide to a considerable degree," he said.

Moscow insists on Kyiv's impartial inquiry into murder of Stenin, severe punishment of culprits

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Moscow demands a thorough investigation of the death of Russian photographer Andrei Stenin in Ukraine, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

"We insist that Kyiv hold a thorough and unbiased inquiry into the murder of A. Stenin and severely punish the culprits. Russia has lost four journalists in Ukraine within the past few months - this is an unprecedented situation, even compared with other armed conflicts of recent years," says a ministry statement published on its website.

"The unlawful practices hindering journalist activity, including attacks, murders, illegal detentions and abductions of employees of the media unwelcome by the Kyiv authorities, must stop now," the ministry said.

"We are expecting a relevant and resolute influence on Kyiv of the international community, including the United States and European Union countries that care so much about the freedom of speech and media in other countries and regions of the world," it said.

Number of Russians sure of army combat readiness boosts over past year - poll

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Most Russians - 74% - trust their armed forces and have no doubts about their ability to ensure the country's security, while 7% hold the opposite view, as is seen from a poll the Public Opinion Foundation conducted in August.

In an identical poll in 2013, only 49% were confident of the Russian armed forces combat preparedness, while 23% were not.

In explaining their confidence, 21% of the 'optimists' said the Russian armed forces are currently equipped with modern military hardware and possess everything necessary to properly perform their mission, while 'pessimists', on the contrary, say the armed forces have outdated weapons (2%) and lack proper training (2%).

Nearly two thirds of those polled - 64% - are sure that the Russian armed forces' combat readiness is improving (38% a year ago), and only 4% think the opposite (10%), while 12% see no changes (30%).

Asked what should be done to further improve the Russian armed forces combat preparedness, 20% said the state should attach priority to improving their provision with hardware, developing the defense industry, and working on new types of weapons, 8% said it is necessary to increase the servicemen's professionalism, and 7% to improve their financial conditions and social protection.

More than half of Russians - 63% - also believe the armed forces have enough modern weapons and military hardware (43% in 2013), while 21% are sure the armed forces lack modern weapons (35% in 2013). Another 17% were undecided.

As many as 56% of those polled objected to purchasing modern weapons from abroad, even if this is more reasonable considering the price-quality factor (59% in 2013), while 25% hold the opposite view (22% in 2013), and 19% were undecided.

As many as 55% of the respondents also spoke in favor of spending extra budget revenues on civilian needs, while 28% would prefer them to be spent on defense needs.

As concerns the allocation of additional funding for defense purposes, 46% of those polled believe they should be spent on the modernization of military industry enterprises, 35% for the rearmament of the armed forces, 35% for improving the servicemen's conditions, 26% for financing research in the defense area, 24% for servicemen's housing, 16% for increasing their monetary allowance, and 8% their pensions.

Russia's updated military doctrine should stipulate preemptive nuke strike - military official

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax-AVN) - Russia's updated military doctrine should identify the country's main foe and clearly stipulate conditions in which the Russian nuclear deterrence forces can deliver a preemptive strike, Army Gen. Yury Yakubov, a coordinator of the Russian Defense Ministry general inspectors department, told Interfax-AVN on Wednesday.

"This strategic document's primary purpose should be to clearly identify Russia's potential foe, which the 2010 Military Doctrine does not. In my view, our main foe is the U.S. and the North Atlantic alliance," Yakubov said.

It was reported on Tuesday that Russia would amend its military doctrine by the end of 2014, in particular, taking into consideration the events in Ukraine, NATO's enlargement eastwards, and the U.S. plans to deploy its missile defense elements in Europe.

The new document should reflect radical changes that have occurred in the organizational and staff structure of the country's armed forces, including the establishment of the Aerospace Defense Forces, the formation of prompt response forces based on the Airborne Forces and the national defense command center, and some others, Yakubov said.

"In particular, in my view, it is necessary to carefully develop the forms and methods of the Aerospace Defense Forces' functioning in close interaction with the strategic nuclear deterrence forces, the Strategic Rocket Forces, strategic aviation, and the Navy. In doing so, it is necessary to work out conditions in which Russia may deliver a preemptive strike by the Russian nuclear deterrence forces," he said.

"Only a couple of years ago, the leadership of the U.S. and NATO declared at all levels that the North Atlantic alliance and the West in general were not Russia's enemies. And what do we see now? A real information war has been unfolded against us, and our state is purposefully being presented as the West's enemy, with far-reaching ends. And what is the most important is that U.S. and NATO bases are approaching next to our borders. These global changes and challenges, in my view, should be clearly reflected in an updated military doctrine," Yakubov said.

Peskov: Putin, Poroshenko discuss steps to promote ceasefire in southeastern Ukraine

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Kremlin has pointed out that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko did not discuss a ceasefire in Donbas but instead focused on measures to promote that ceasefire.

"This is not the question of a ceasefire agreement. This is the question of the presidents discussing concrete steps to promote a ceasefire between the militia and the Ukrainian forces in the southeast of the country," Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov said in an interview with Kommersant FM.

Russian officials have repeatedly noted that Russia is not a side to the Ukrainian conflict and agreements should be reached between the Ukrainian authorities and the militia.

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

ULAN-BATOR. Sept 3 (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.

Putin expects Kyiv to support progress emerging in relations with Moscow

ULAN-BATOR. Sept 3 (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.

Ukraine should withdraw subdivisions from settlements to stop bloodshed - Putin

ULAN-BATOR. Sept 3 (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 says he and Poroshenko have close views on settlement of situation in Ukraine

ULAN-BATOR. Sept 3 (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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

"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.

Lavrov: Obama's remark on Russia-NATO Founding Act incorrect

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - U.S. President Barack Obama's remark that the 1997 Russia-NATO Founding Act may be amended is not correct politically, as this document was adopted by all members of the Russia-NATO Council and therefore can only be amended collectively, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"As regards the declaration on the intention to make amendments to the Russia-NATO Founding Act, I venture to remind you that this document was developed by all the countries that make up the Russia-NATO Council, and this document can only be amended collectively," Lavrov said at a press conference following negotiations with Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Erlan Abdyldayev.

"And saying that one country has decided to amend a collective document signed by 28 countries is perhaps not quite correct either in legal or political terms," Lavrov said.

"It is possible to unilaterally withdraw from it, but this will concern only a country that makes such a decision for itself," he added.

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 from official Kyiv and militia will come. We have done, are doing 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.

"We will, of course, also be ready to listen to some additional proposals from the members of the Contact Group in the hope that we will eventually work out something in common. As the first step, we will insist on a ceasefire: this is the most important thing now," the minister said.

"This is not the first time - as soon as a ray of hope emerges for switching the situation from forceful resistance to the political settlement sector, the so-called 'war party' becomes active at once," Lavrov also said.

Lavrov, Fabius claim Ukraine ceasefire a priority

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The Russian and French foreign ministers, Sergei Lavrov and Laurent Fabius, spoke by telephone to exchange their views on the need to support the efforts to create conditions for transition to a political resolution in the South-East of Ukraine.

"A hope was expressed that the proposals for the warring sides, formulated by the Russian president on September 3, will help work out a generally-acceptable platform for the productive work of the Contact Group with participation of the Ukrainian sides, the Russian Federation and the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) at the meeting due to be held in Minsk on September 5," the Russian Foreign Ministry said on its website on Thursday.

"The ministers particularly underlined the priority of reaching a ceasefire deal immediately, primarily, the use of heavy weaponry and aviation," the ministry said.

According to both ministers, "at this crucial stage, it is of paramount importance to counter attempts to undermine the first signs of the progress in implementing the approaches that were discussed by the presidents of Russia and Ukraine and to prevent advocates of a military solution to the problems in the South-East of Ukraine from dominating in Kyiv and other capitals."

"Both sides noted the support for the efforts undertaken in recent days, including the Customs Union-Ukraine-European Union meeting held in Minsk on August 26 and the direct contacts between President Putin and President Poroshenko," said the Russian Foreign Ministry, adding that the ministers agreed to continue telephone talks over these issues.

Lavrov, German foreign minister support efforts to ensure agreements between Kyiv, militia in Ukraine

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax) - It is necessary to avoid actions which might undermine the positive tendencies which have emerged between Kyiv and the militia, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier said during a telephone conversation.

The ministers have offered complete support for the efforts made in recent days to ensure agreements between Kyiv and the militia in south-eastern Ukraine on a ceasefire and the non-use of heavy arms and aircraft, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

The significance of direct contacts between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, in order to agree steps which might contribute to bringing the situation to dialogue between Kyiv and south-eastern Ukraine, has been emphasized.

Russia positive about DPR, LPR idea for OSCE to monitor ceasefire in Ukraine - Kelin

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Russia backs the proposal made by the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics to put the OSCE Monitoring Mission in charge of monitoring ceasefire observance, Andrei Kelin, Russian envoy to the OSCE, said.

"We are positive about this idea. It proceeds from seven items of Russian President Vladimir Putin's ceasefire plan, which talks about control over the newly created security zone," Kelin said on Friday.

Kelin said the OSCE observers who are now in Ukraine can monitor the situation without the expansion of their mandate provided appropriate agreements are reached.

"I would like to say that the OSCE mission is already on the territory of Ukraine and its mandate is fairly broad, it involves collection of information on security in the zone of the operation, and therefore the mission's mandate will not have to be changed," Kelin said.

"Monitoring will largely depend on human resources," the diplomat said.

Interfax previously learned some details of the draft peace plan to stabilize the situation in southeastern Ukraine proposed by the administrations of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics.

The text of the draft plan possessed by Interfax says: "to stabilize the situation and stop the bloodshed in the southeast, we are offering a number of measures, primarily, the introduction of a temporary ceasefire regime from 3 p.m. on September 5 by the Ukrainian force structures and the militia of the southeast."

Among other measures in the draft plan is a ban on flights over the self-proclaimed republics from 3 p.m. September 5 by fighter aircraft.

The leaders of the self-proclaimed republics suggest "providing the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) mission with airspace objective monitoring data obtained from Russian systems."

"To conduct international regulation of the ceasefire and monitoring of the situation under the OSCE aegis, and to that end to divide the security zone being created into five sectors, each with a monitoring mission of up to 40 members, and three or four stationary and two or three mobile monitoring posts," the draft said.

The posts will be provided with surveillance, communication and video-recording facilities.

The draft plan also involves the opening of humanitarian corridors to refugees and aid deliveries to the cities and towns in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions by car and by rail from 10 a.m. on September 7.

Observers said that the republics' proposals correlate with the plan to settle the situation in east Ukraine, unveiled by Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ulan Bator on September 3.

DPR PM Zakharchenko to take part in meeting of three-party contact group in Minsk

MINSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic will be represented by its Prime Minister Alexander Zakharchenko in the meeting of the three-party contact group on the situation in Ukraine scheduled to be held in Minsk on Friday, Miroslav Rudenko, a member of the Donetsk People's Republic's Supreme Council, told Interfax.

The meeting participants may approve a decision on a peace settlement based on a ceasefire and exchange of POWs, he said.

"The key items of the final decision that may be discussed in the Minsk negotiations and may be approved by the participants in these negotiations will be the development of a POW exchange mechanism in the format

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'everyone for everyone,' an increase in OSCE monitoring of the military situation, removal by Kyiv of military units from populated areas on the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic and, eventually, the introduction of a ceasefire or truce," Rudenko said.

In the meantime, the Ukrainian military have still not stopped fighting on the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic, he said.

"Khartsyzsk was attacked with a Tochka-U missile yesterday. The missile did not fully explode. A man who was near the place where it exploded was hurt. In the populated area of Shchastya, a National Guard battalion mined an electric power sub-station and promises to blow it up if they have to retreat. Several districts of Donetsk and Makiyivka came under fire. It doesn't look that the Ukrainian military have lowered the degree of aggression at this point," Rudenko said.

Russian envoy Kelin says OSCE starts working on ceasefire monitoring proposals

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The OSCE Secretariat and Chairperson-in-Office are already considering a possible involvement of the OSCE mission in ceasefire monitoring in eastern Ukraine, Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Andrei Kelin said.

"The question was raised in the [OSCE] Permanent Council yesterday. The Swiss chairmanship said it had been drawing up proposals in cooperation with the OSCE Secretariat so that the OSCE mission in Ukraine was able to accomplish this mission [ceasefire control] by the time the fire was ceased and that [service] was required," Kelin told Interfax on Friday.

Both monitors and drones can control the ceasefire, Kelin noted.

"There are two aspects, in all. One is about control by the monitors, who will go on patrolling missions. There is relevant experience but it will be necessary to enlarge the mission's human resources. The second option is the use of unmanned aerial vehicles which the OSCE is also considering," the senior Russian diplomat said.

"Some preparatory work, technical, has been done. But there are still many problems with the use [of the drones], as this is a completely new experience for the OSCE. We shall see if this is possible," Kelin noted.

Contact Group's baseline resolution includes ceasefire, prisoner swap - source

MINSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - A baseline draft of the resolution the Trilateral Contact Group at the Minsk meeting on Friday includes a ceasefire by the sides to the Ukrainian conflict and the "all for all" prisoner swap, a source in the Contact Group reported.

"The initial resolution drawn up yesterday covers two keynote issues, the ceasefire and the prisoner swap. But today's negotiations may supplement the draft resolution with additions presumably related to the pullback of Kyiv forces and enhanced OSCE monitoring. The status of Donbas may be discussed at future negotiations. The future negotiations per se may be also discussed today," the source told Interfax on Friday.

Self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) Supreme Council deputy Miroslav Rudenko told Interfax on Friday, DPR Prime Minister Alexander Zakharchenko would represent the republic at the Minsk meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group.

Rudenko said the sides might agree on the peaceful settlement based on a ceasefire and a prisoner swap. "Reportedly, key provisions of the final statement the Minsk negotiations may discuss and approve will be the elaboration of a mechanism to exchange prisoners in the "all for all" format, stricter OSCE monitoring of the military situation, the pullback of Kyiv forces from populated localities of the DPR and LPR and, finally, a regime of ceasefire or truce," Rudenko said.

Zurabov hopes Trilateral Contact Group signs documents in Minsk

MINSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Mikhail Zurabov expects a number of documents will be signed at the Minsk meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group.

"Hopefully, they will," Zurabov told reporters, answering a question whether any documents may be signed at the meeting.

Zurabov has arrived at the President Hotel in Minsk, an Interfax correspondent reports. The arrival of former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma and representatives of the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk Republics is expected shortly.

OSCE mission in Ukraine may be increased to 500 observers - Russian envoy to OSCE

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The OSCE intends to increase the number of its observers in Ukraine to 500, which may be enough for monitoring a ceasefire observance in eastern Ukraine, in the nearest future, Russian permanent envoy to the OSCE Andrei Kelin said.

"We will begin recruiting in the nearest future. We may increase the mission [in Ukraine] to 500 people," he told Interfax on Friday.

"It will probably be the needed number to be used in the reconnaissance and security zone, if such a zone is established in accordance with the agreements that may be reached [in the contact group meeting in Minsk]," the diplomat said.

The decision to send an OSCE Monitoring Mission to Ukraine was made by the OSCE Permanent Council on March 21. The first observers arrived there on March 25.

In accordance with the mission's mandate, it is composed of 100 people and is stationed in ten Ukrainian cities: Kyiv, Donetsk, Dnepropetrovsk, Chernitsi, Luhansk, Odesa, Lviv, Kharkiv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Kherson.

The mission is working at the request of the Ukrainian authorities and makes weekly reports on its work.

The monitors will be working for six months, but their mandate may be extended if an appropriate request is made by Ukraine.

The purpose of the mission is to study the current situation in the country, tension problems, human rights observance, freedom of travel, etc.

It took two days to approve the mission. There was a lot of debate on Item 6 of the mission's mandate, which states the areas where the monitors will work. The document does not have any mention of the mission's work in Crimea, which has become part of Russia.

Kuchma: we should be talking about halting military action in eastern Ukraine, not ceasefire

MINSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Ukraine's second president Leonid Kuchma has spoken in favor of halting military action in southeastern Ukraine.

"We should be talking about how to halt military action and stop killing each other, not about a truce," Kuchma said before the meeting of the contact group on the peace settlement in Ukraine in Minsk.

"As far as Ukraine is concerned, there are no warnings against signing this document," Kuchma said. "If all parties have the same attitude, we should definitely sign," Kuchma said, responding to a question as to whether any documents will be signed at the meeting.

"If all participants have the same attitude, we will be talking about immediate ceasefire and what needs to be done for it," he said.

"We have come here for peace," Kuchma said.

Stepashin says Obama should give up Nobel Peace Prize

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Sergei Stepashin, chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and former prime minister of Russia, has called on U.S. President Barack Obama to give up his Nobel Peace Prize.

"I believe you should give up the Nobel Peace Prize in order to avoid depreciating this high prize in the eyes of the world community. People holding this prize should be peacemakers, but you, unfortunately, are a real hawk who dresses up as a peacekeeper and can be called the father of the new 'Cold War'," Stepashin said in his letter to Obama (the text of the letter is possessed by Interfax).

Stepashin said that many U.S. citizens consider Obama to be "the worst U.S. president. I fully agree with them," Stepashin said.

Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009 for his "extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples."

Stepashin: U.S., its allies are looking to get Putin out of power, isolate Russia

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Sergei Stepashin, chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and former prime minister of Russia, believes the purpose of the sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its allies on Russia is to get Vladimir Putin out of power and isolate Russia on the international scene.

In his letter to U.S. President Barack Obama, the text of which has been obtained by Interfax, Stepashin said: "It is perfectly obvious that you are preparing grounds to loudly state your main goal: 'Putin should resign!' and 'Isolate Russia.'"

Stepashin called the threats made by Obama to impose new sanctions on Russia and the accusations made against Russia blaming it for the violence in eastern Ukraine "a regular propaganda technology." He also recalled the recent statement made by Obama calling Russia a regional power that poses a threat to its neighbors due to its weakness.

In this regard, Stepashin quoted prominent U.S. politician Zbigniew Brzezinski, who has recently said that the U.S. is a country that has an extremely simplified understanding of the situation in the world, but is confident of its ability to dominate. "I would also add to this that you don't know Russian people and how strong our national spirit is. This spirit cannot be conquered by threats and be put on its needs," Stepashin said in his letter to Obama.

Stepashin said the U.S. president and his advisers "do not correctly estimate the consequences of the negative reaction caused in Russian society in the recent speech [by Obama] in Estonia, in which [Obama] compared Russians to Nazi in WWII and accused Russia of trying to take over lost territories." "By saying that you insulted Russian citizens, insulted the memory of the Soviet troops who liberated Europe from the 'brown plague' and your own American troops who helped defeat fascism," Stepashin said.

Stepashin said these statements are "a consequence of [Obama's] hurt ambitions, which have remained hurt since the Russian president saved the U.S. president from public loss of face in front of the whole world by suggesting the introduction of international control over chemical weapons to prevent military intervention in Syria."

"The Russian president now suggests a peace settlement plan for Ukraine. To you accepting Putin's plan means to lose face publicly again. And you respond by declaring Russia an aggressor," Stepashin said.

Stepashin called on the American leader to "stop, not drive his country into a deadlock and not drag NATO and the European Union along."

"Many Europeans, and also Americans, do not share your policies to isolate Russia and generate a new Cold War," the letter says.

Ukraine Contact Group meeting in Minsk

MINSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The Contact Group has begun a meeting over a peaceful resolution of the crisis in east Ukraine.

The meeting will focus on the introduction of a ceasefire by both parties to the conflict, prisoner exchange in the "all for all" format, and stronger monitoring by the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) of the situation in the region, an Interfax correspondent said.

It is also expected that the meeting attendees could agree a plan for peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The meeting is attended by: Ukraine's second president Leonid Kuchma, Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Mikhail Zurabov, OSCE Special Representative Heidi Tagliavini, leader of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) Alexander Zakharchenko, DPR deputy prime minister Andriy Purgin and leader of the Luhansk People's Republic Alexander Plotnitsky.

Contact Group expected to sign peace plan based on bilateral ceasefire - source

KYIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The Trilateral Contact Group meeting in Minsk on Friday could sign an action plan for peaceful resolution of the situation in the eastern regions of Ukraine, a Ukrainian government source told Interfax on Friday.

"We are expecting a step-by-step plan of what must be done, when and how," he said.

The meeting of the Contact Group which began in Minsk on Friday will focus on proposals for the peace process, he said. "But I would like to stress that Ukraine is not going to cease fire unilaterally. We are talking exclusively about a bilateral ceasefire," the source said.

He also added that the parties must agree a peace plan based on the provisions of the peace plan proposed by Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko.

ARMY

Baltic Fleet's corvette Boikiy destroys 'hostile' submarine with Paket system

KALININGRAD. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - The corvette Boikiy of the Russian Baltic Fleet (BF) has targeted a "hostile" submarine with a Paket antisubmarine weapon system, a BF spokesperson said.

The corvette crew practiced searching and locating the submarine, using the newest antisubmarine weapons, as part of routine drills. A Varshavyanka-class submarine was employed as the submarine of a mock enemy.

The crew successfully conducted the search, classification and tracking of the submarine. Then the submarine was "destroyed" with a Paket small-size antisubmarine weapon system.

The Paket antisubmarine weapon system is designed to destroy submarines and torpedoes within the near-field range of a ship. It is a fundamentally new weapon system for surface ships that is capable of significantly increasing their survivability.

Pacific Fleet's Antarctica research vessel heads to Singapore Strait

VLADIVOSTOK. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - The Antarktida (Antarctica) research vessel of the Russian Navy's Pacific Fleet (PF) has ended its visit to the port of Cam Rahn (Vietnam) and set sail towards the Singapore Strait, PF spokesman 1st Captain Roman Martov told Interfax-AVN on Friday.

"A day earlier the Antarktida ended its visit to the Vietnamese port of Cam Rahn where the Russian sailors carried out the necessary maintenance checks, inspected the vessel and stocked up on water and fuel," Martov said.

Now the vessel is heading towards the Singapore Strait area, the PF spokesman said. There, the PF hydrographers will continue studying marine hydrology and conducting detailed surveying of the seabed relief.

"The results of these studies will be used to further update the existing nautical charts, navigation guides and handbooks," Martov said.

Novosibirsk helicopter pilots learn to counter enemy in unfamiliar area

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - Helicopter pilots from the Novosibirsk air base of the army aviation of the Central Military District (CMD) will practice combat tasks in an unfamiliar area as part of a flying tactical exercise, the CMD said.

"Helicopter pilots will be executing combat tasks in an unfamiliar area, away from their permanent base. Today saw the start of re-deployment of ground support equipment to the Kemerovo region," the CMD said in a statement obtained by Interfax-AVN on Friday.

Squadrons of Mil helicopters - Mi-8, Mi-8AMTSh and Mi-24 - will practice aerial reconnaissance, aerial battle, targeting aircraft and ground vehicles of an enemy, and will operate as team during joint maneuvers and bomb runs, the statement said.

Furthermore, helicopter crews at the Yurginsky training site will destroy targets of a mock enemy, using 33-millimeter GSh-30 cannons and PKT machine guns, as well as unguided air rockets.

"In all, the flying tactical exercise involves over 20 helicopters. The exercise will last two weeks," the statement said.

Artillery school steps up intensity of live-fire training

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - Cadets from the Inter-Regional Training Center of Rocket Troops and Artillery (Saratov) are to use up over 20,000 shells and mines during live-fire drills, according to the Central Military District (CMD).

"The quantity of ammunition used for training junior rocket and artillery specialists has increased 4.5 times in comparison with the previous training period," the CMD said in a statement obtained by Interfax-AVN on Friday.

The Center trains for the following artillery specialties: operators of self-propelled artillery launchers, gun and mortar commanders, artillery reconnaissance specialists, gun data computers and others.

Russian Navy chief attends laying-down of small missile ship "Ingushetia"

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - The Russian Navy Commander-in-chief, Admiral Viktor Chirkov, has attended the laying-down of the Project 21631 small missile ship "Ingushetia" due to be built for the Black Sea Fleet, according to the Russian Defense Ministry.

"At the Zelenodolsk Gorky Plant, Admiral Viktor Chirkov, together with Ingushetia leader Yunus-bek Yevkurov and Tatarstan Prime Minister Ildar Khalikov, attended the laying-down ceremony for the latest small missile ship of the Project 21631. Following the order by the Navy commander-in-chief, the ship has been assigned the name 'Ingushetia'," the spokesperson told Interfax on Friday.

"Ingushetia" will enter service in the Black Sea Fleet under a program for priority renewal of its ships, the defense ministry's spokesperson said. The near-term plan involves delivery of six such ships for the Fleet.

Project 21631 small missile ships are multirole "river-sea" class ships. They are armed with brand new missiles, artillery and anti-sabotage weapons and fitted with modern radioelectronic-weapon systems. The Navy Central Command is planning to use these ships to provide safety in the maritime economic zone.

Two Project 21631 ships - the head ship "Grad Sviyazhsk" and the first serially-produced ship "Uglich" - have already passed the whole set of trials and are now in service in the Caspian Flotilla. The third small missile ship, "Veliky Ustyug," is currently undergoing trials.

The Zelenodolsk Gorky Plant continues building four more ships under this project: "Zelyony Dol," "Serpukhov," "Vyshny Volochek" and "Orekhovo-Zuyevo."

BF tanker Kola joins frigate Yaroslav Mudry in Mediterranean Sea

KALIINGRAD. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - The tanker Kola of the Russian Baltic Fleet (BF) will be supplying material resources for the frigate Yaroslav Mudry heading to the coast of Somalia, a BF spokesperson said.

"At the designated point in the Mediterranean Sea, the Yaroslav Mudry met with the tanker Kola which will be providing the frigate with fuel, water and food during the long journey," the BF spokesperson said.

Very soon the two ships will be sailing through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea, the spokesperson said. Then the frigate and the tanker will set sail towards the Gulf of Aden where the Yaroslav Mudry will embark on a mission providing security for civilian navigation.

The frigate's material part and weapons systems are functioning properly, the spokesperson said. The sailors are conducting necessary routine maintenance checks and other preventative measures on the ship's systems. The personnel are well and ready for the mission.

The frigate Yaroslav Mudry left the BF central naval base Baltiysk on August 9, 2014. The ship has since sailed over 5,000 nautical miles and visited the Spanish enclave port of Ceuta on the Mediterranean coast of Africa and the port of Valletta in Malta.

Russian military base in Tajikistan gets radio reconnaissance equipment

DUSHANBE. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - Russia's 201st military base, located in Tajikistan, has been provided with radio reconnaissance and jamming equipment, spokesman for the Central Military District Col. Yaroslav Roshchupkin told Interfax on Monday.

"The radio-electronic warfare units of the 201st military base have received a multirole radio reconnaissance and jamming system Infauna, as well as a Leer-2 mobile technical monitoring, electronic emulation and electronic countermeasures system," he said.

The Infauna system will be deployed on a BTR-80 armored personnel carrier.

The Infauna electronic warfare vehicle is intended to protect military hardware and personnel from mines and explosives, means of optical and radio-communication, and from smart weapons," the spokesman said.

The Leer-2 is a jamming system capable of imitating electronic weapon systems and monitoring the electromagnetic environment during combat training.

The 201st military base is Russia's largest military facility outside its territory. It has about 6,000 personnel accommodated near Dushanbe, Kurgan-Tyube and Kulyab. Under an agreement signed in October 2012, the 201st military base will remain in Tajikistan until 2042 at the earliest.

Paratroopers captured in Ukraine in satisfactory condition - commander

RYAZAN. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The condition of the Russian paratroopers who were captured in Ukraine earlier and handed over to Russia last Sunday, can be described as satisfactory, Russian Airborne Troops Commander-in-chief Vladimir Shamanov said during a visit to the Ryazan Airborne School on Monday.

"At nine o'clock yesterday we flew them to army hospitals in Moscow. They underwent preliminary checks and the work will continue today," Shamanov said.

The driver mechanic, who was moved to the military-medical academy earlier and shows signs of suffering damage to the respiratory system, has undergone a medical examination and has been prescribed a course of medical treatment; his life and health are not in danger, the commander added.

It was reported that on August 25 the Russian military servicemen crossed the unmarked, unequipped section of the Russian-Ukrainian border and were held by Ukrainian security agents. On August 29, Russian president Vladimir Putin said that an agreement had been reached with Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko over the repatriation of the Russian military servicemen.

Moskva missile cruiser to head for Mediterranean shortly

ST. PETERSBURG. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - The Russian Black Sea Fleet flagship, missile cruiser Moskva, will shortly head for the Mediterranean, a source in the Navy Staff told Interfax-AVN on Tuesday.

"The Moskva cruiser under the command of Guard Capt. 1st Rank Sergei Tronev will soon go on a Mediterranean mission. The ship will lead the Navy task force deployed in that sea. The Moskva will also take part in the Russian Week on the Greek Ionian Islands," he said.

The flagship will spend over two months on the mission and will return to Sevastopol in early November. The crew will accomplish a number of exercises and visit Greek ports in that period.

The cruiser was the flagship of the Russian task force permanently deployed in the Mediterranean a year ago, during the exacerbation of the military-political crisis in Syria.

Russian Defense Ministry ready to support ESA missions with Rokot launches - commander

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - The Russian Defense Ministry is ready to support European Space Agency (ESA) missions with light LV Rokot launches, Aerospace Defense Forces Commander Lt. Gen. Alexander Golovko said.

"Roscosmos and the ESA possess a prerogative of Rokot launches consistent with the international cooperation program. If they take this risk, we can do the launches," Golovko told Interfax-AVN on Tuesday.

He added that several Rokot rockets would be launched in Defense Ministry missions.

"As to the Defense Ministry, we have planned four Rokot missions. The hardware is available and one rocket is ready to take off," Golovko said.

ESA officials said earlier they intended to have two or three Rokot missions.

"Seeking to lessen the dependence on imported component parts, the Russian Defense Ministry is set to stop using light LV Rokot in 2016," Golovko said in late August during a visit of Russian Defense Minister Gen. of the Army Sergei Shoigu to the Plesetsk space center.

"At present Rokot rockets are launched in the interest of the Defense Ministry and within the framework of the federal space program and the international cooperation program. Four launches have been planned in the interest of the Defense Ministry, including three in 2015 and one in 2016. In a future period the Defense Ministry will accomplish its tasks with light LV Soyuz-2.1v and Angara," the Aerospace Defense Forces commander told the defense minister.

"Thereby we will not depend on imports in the matter of light launch vehicles," Shoigu said.

Rokot is a derivative from decommissioned two-stage intercontinental ballistic missiles RS-18 (NATO reporting name Stiletto). It has a takeoff mass of 107.5 tonnes and delivers payloads of up to two tonnes to low near-Earth orbits. The rocket has three stages, two of them from RS-18 and third is Briz-KM whose control system is made by the Kharkiv Khartron plant.

Cargo delivered to Arctic bases of Russian Pacific Fleet

VLADIVOSTOK. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - Cargo has been delivered to the Wrangel Island and the Otto Schmidt Cape to support the deployment of permanent Arctic bases of the Russian Pacific Fleet, fleet spokesman Capt. 1st Rank Roman Martov told Interfax-AVN on Tuesday.

"The Valery Vasilyev vessel has unloaded its cargo and departed for Arkhangelsk. Cargo will be unloaded from the Capitan Starostin, Gennady Tsygankov and Johann Mahmastal ships within days. In all, approximately 3,000 tonnes of cargo of various purposes will be brought to the shore," Martov said.

He said the unloading was being done under complicated conditions on a swampy terrain. A 35-tonne crane is unloading dry-cargo ships without mooring, which is unprecedented under such circumstances.

The Navy flag was hoisted at the Pacific Fleet base on the Wrangel Island in the Arctic Ocean on August 20 by the crew of the Marshal Gelovani research ship on a hydrographic mission.

"Symbolically, the flag which attributed the island to the Soviet Union was raised 90 years ago, on August 20, 2014. Since then the Wrangel Island has been regarded as a Russian territory," Martov said.

Shoigu: Another 180 aircraft to be delivered to Russian Armed Forces by yearend

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The Russian Armed Forces will be supplied with at least 230 brand new planes and helicopters this year, Russian Defense Minister Gen. of the Army Sergei Shoigu said.

"As you know, the Armed Forces are being rapidly supplied with modern aircraft. This year alone military units will be supplied with more than 230 aircraft," he said at a Defense Ministry conference on Tuesday.

Fifty aircraft have already been supplied, and another 180 will be delivered to the Armed Forces before the end of this year, Shoigu said.

He emphasized the importance of better learning of the new aircraft and their safe operation.

Sibiryakov research vessel ready for journey to Monaco

KALININGRAD. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - The 33rd ship-repairing plant based in Baltiysk (a United Shipbuilding Corporation company) is completing the repairing and preparation of the Sibiryakov research vessel for sailing to Monaco.

The planned repair is part of a government defense order, the plant's spokesperson said. The Sibiryakov has already undergone sea trials and had all its nodes and mechanisms tested, the plant's spokesperson said.

Now the plant is completing the repairs and preparing the Sibiryakov to a passage to Kronshtadt. There the crew will have to conduct final preparations for their long journey.

This September, the vessel is to deliver a delegation of Russian hydrographers from Kronshtadt to the Principality of Monaco which will be hosting the 5th Extraordinary International Hydrographic Conference on October 6 - 10.

The vessel's itinerary lies across the Baltic, Northern and Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, through the Danish straits, the English Channel and Gibraltar. While en route, the hydrographers will conduct a number of oceanographic studies.

The hydrographers will conduct the route survey of the seabed, study the newly found depth differences posing navigation dangers, make photo- and video recordings of navigation aids in various parts of the Baltic and Northern Seas.

This will be a second journey by the Sibiryakov research vessel to Monaco. In 2000, the vessel carried a Russian delegation to this port for attending a conference which focused on navigation safety and oceanographic studies in the 21st century.

Russian servicemen coming back from China upon end of SCO Peace Mission 2014 exercises

KHABAROVSK. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Trains carrying servicemen and hardware of the Eastern Military District, who have taken part in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Peace Mission 2014 exercises, are returning to Russia from the Zhurihe range (China).

"The military trains will depart from the range to Russia today when the required documents are processed and [the trains] are loaded at a rail station," Eastern Military District spokesman Alexander Gordeyev told Interfax on Tuesday.

"The Russian military contingent is expected to return from China to its permanent bases by September 4," Gordeyev said.

A combined air force of the Eastern Military District - four Sukhoi Su-25 attack aircraft and eight Mil Mi-8AMTSh helicopters - has arrived in the district airbase in the Primorsky territory. They covered a distance of about 2,000 kilometers on the way back from China.

More than 900 servicemen, about 130 combat and general-purpose vehicles and twelve aircraft were sent to China to take part in the Peace Mission 2014 exercises.

Baltic Fleet's research vessel starts second part of world cruise

KALININGRAD. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - The Baltic Fleet's research vessel, the Admiral Vladimirsky, has departed from the Northern Fleet's home base Severomorsk, starting a cruise along the Northern Sea Route, the Baltic Fleet's press service reported.

It will call at Dikson on the Taimyr Peninsula, Russia's northern-most locality and the first stop-over in the second stretch of its world cruise, during which it will call at the ports of Tiksi, Pevek and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky.

The crew is expected to conduct a set of studies, examine the sea bed, test new radio-navigation receiver indicators in the upper latitudes, monitor the ice situation and specify the coordinates of the navigation systems and of the position of the islands' coastline and the seas of the Arctic Ocean.

The ship had remained in Severomorsk since August 27 where the crew had an opportunity to have a rest and to replenish the stocks of water and food.

The Admiral Vladimirsky left Kronshtadt on August 18 on a journey across the Baltic, Northern and Barents seas; the water area of the Northern Sea Route, the Bering Sea and the northern part of the Pacific Ocean. It will pass through the Panama Canal, enter the Atlantic Ocean, cross it and further sail via the English Channel, the southern part of the North Sea and the Danish Straits to the Baltic Sea, ending its world cruise.

Twenty-five military hospitals, clinics to have been built, reconstructed in 2014

ST. PETERSBURG. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - The Russian Defense Ministry attaches serious importance to the development of military medicine and has scored major successes, Deputy Defense Minister Ruslan Tsalikov said on Monday.

"We correctly outlined ways to develop military medicine from the start. First, we must improve the logistics supplies, introduce advanced medical technologies and deal with the problem of medical personnel," he told first-year students of the Military-Medical Academy in a traditional lecture marking the beginning of the academic year.

He said a canteen for 2,000 visitors has been commissioned at the Military Medical Academy, a hostel has been built for 1,900 students and a pharmacy, now under reconstruction, will be commissioned soon. "Twenty-three of the academy's facilities are undergoing overall repairs, the reconstruction of a versatile clinic has got underway and a center of practical skills has been opened," Tsalikov said.

The construction and reconstruction of 25 military medical facilities across Russia will be completed in 2014, he said.

Military clinics and hospitals are being fitted out with advanced equipment, with over 300 pieces of advanced medical systems to arrive at military hospitals in 2014 alone, including tomography scanners, dental equipment, and functional diagnosing and endoscopic equipment. "The academy's clinics have received new

equipment for the blood service, hemolysis and detoxication, as well as anesthetic and resuscitation equipment," he said.

The Defense Ministry has scored successes in solving the problem of medical personnel, he also said. "A new department will open at the academy this year to train field doctors. An agreement has been reached, under which civil medical universities will train specialists for military-medical service. Military doctors are called to serve in the armed forces from the reserve," Tsalikov said.

Airborne forces of Russia, Belarus practicing in southern Russia

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax-AVN) - Russia-Belarus battalion tactical exercises with landing operations and live fire practice are being held near Novorossiysk, Russian Airborne Forces spokesman Maj. Irina Kruglova told Interfax-AVN on Wednesday.

"A unit of the Special Operation Forces is taking part in the exercises on behalf of Belarus, and Russia is represented by an air assault battalion of the 7th Guard Air Assault Division. Division Commander Col. Roman Breus supervises the training," Kruglova said.

Brand new Russian parachutes were used by foreign servicemen for the first time ever in the format of international exercises in the Krasnooktyabrskaya drop zone on Wednesday, she added.

"A platoon of Belarusian paratroopers, 20 men, successfully jumped from Ilyushin Il-76 planes together with a Russian Airborne Forces unit. They used the D-10 parachute system," Kruglova said.

In addition to 250 servicemen, the planes airdropped military cargo.

"The activity and live fire exercises of the Belarusian airmobile units and the air assault unit of the Russian Airborne Forces will take place at the Rayevsky range in the Krasnodar territory until September 5," Kruglova concluded.

The allies supported by frontline aviation (Sukhoi Su-24M and Su-25) and artillery (Nona-S systems) will practice cohesion, interaction under complex conditions using newest communication systems, seizure of a mountain pass, water crossing by armored vehicles and organization of defense on an unfamiliar terrain.

The exercises are regulated with the 2014 international activity plan of the Russian Defense Ministry, Kruglova said.

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

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (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."

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 policies 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.

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.

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.

Gen. Baluyevsky: New Russian military doctrine to have no provisions on preventive nuke strike, potential enemy

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - The updated Russian military doctrine will not designate a potential enemy and conditions of a preventive nuclear strike against it; such information is available in classified directives, former Russian General Staff Chief Gen. of the Army Yuri Baluyevsky, who co-authored the 2010 military doctrine of Russia, told Interfax-AVN on Friday.

"The state military doctrine is a system of formal opinions on the provision of military security and defense. And these formal opinions are itemized and specified in classified plans, which are regularly updated. For instance, there is a defense plan of the Russian Federation. And I believe or, actually, I know for sure that it contains everything: [information] about our potential enemies, our partners, the nuclear deterrence system and the use of the strategic nuclear forces in a special period," Baluyevsky said.

Nowadays the nuclear deterrence system cannot be a panacea for new threats and challenges, he stressed. "Speaking of nuclear weapons, some goals cannot be achieved with strikes by strategic nuclear forces. Here is a simple example: the Soviet Union also had a powerful nuclear shield but it was unable to save our country from the breakup," the general said.

"I am confident that, alongside nuclear deterrence, we need a system of non-nuclear deterrence. And this provision must be included in the updated edition of the military doctrine," Baluyevsky said.

He added that the Russian military doctrine endorsed in February 2010 was still up-to-date. "I am positive that the existent military doctrine is still up-to-date, but I am also positive there is a need to adjust a number of its provisions amid the situation in Ukraine, the NATO enlargement, missile defense in Europe and so on and so forth, but these adjustments should not be hasty, especially pertaining to nuclear weapons," the general said.

As he was answering a question about component parts of the non-nuclear deterrence system against the backdrop of new threats and challenges, Baluyevsky said, "This is a whole system of non-military measures aimed to foster national security."

"As known, the non-nuclear deterrence system includes not only military measures of the state but also military-political, research and development, military-technological and other measures of the state aimed to implement non-nuclear plans in the protection of national interests," the general explained.

Gen. Baluyevsky: New Russian military doctrine needs to cover internal threats

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - Internal factors present a serious threat to the security of Russia alongside the external, and they must be included in the new edition of the Russian military doctrine, former Russian General Staff Chief Gen. of the Army Yuri Baluyevsky, a co-author of the 2010 military doctrine, said.

"Take, for example, the history of our country, Russia, the Soviet Union. It is well known that the attempts to conquer our people in a direct confrontation, with the use force, have failed for centuries. Yet the attempts to blow up the state from the inside, by indirect actions, remain rather dangerous," Baluyevsky told Interfax-AVN on Friday.

"In my opinion, this should also be mentioned in the new edition of the military doctrine," the general stressed.

It became known this week that Russia will adjust its military doctrine by the end of this year due to the Ukrainian events, NATO's eastward enlargement and the U.S. plans to deploy its military facilities in Europe.

Gen. Baluyevsky: Inexpedient to open Russian military bases abroad amid NATO enlargement

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - The deployment of Russian military bases in foreign countries is inexpedient, former Russian General Staff Chief Gen. of the Army Yuri Baluyevsky, a co-author of the 2010 military doctrine, said.

"We have sufficient quantities of precision guided armaments, which can be used efficiently from the Russian territory in any direction, the West, the East, the South and the North," Baluyevsky told Interfax-AVN on Friday.

"I do not favor the deployment of our bases outside of Russia," Baluyevsky said, answering a question whether Russia should deploy its bases outside of the national territory in retaliation against the spread of the U.S. and NATO infrastructure towards Russian borders.

"Our country has a unique location and, in my opinion, there is no pressing need to open expensive bases outside of the country, which will be destroyed within hours in the case of a military emergency," the general stressed.

Large landing ship Yamal enters Black Sea

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - Another planned rotation of the Russian Navy's task force permanently deployed in the Mediterranean has been accomplished, a source in the Navy Staff told Interfax-AVN on Friday.

"The Black Sea large landing ship Yamal passed northward through Black Sea straits on Friday morning and entered the Black Sea," he said.

Large landing ships attached to the Russian Navy's task force in the Mediterranean regularly visit Russian Black Sea ports, including Novorossiysk, to replenish their reserves. This is at least the seventh Mediterranean voyage of the Yamal in 2014.

Naval ships of the United States and other NATO member countries have been present in the Black Sea on an almost constant basis since the beginning of the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

Baltic Fleet frigate Yaroslav Mudry begins anti-piracy mission in Gulf of Aden

KALININGRAD. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - The Baltic Fleet frigate Yaroslav Mudry goes on mission to support safe shipping of civilian vessels in pirate-infested waters, the fleet press service reports.

The Yaroslav Mudry and the tanker Kola passed through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait on Friday and reached the Gulf of Aden in the Arabian Sea. The frigate is carrying a marine unit trained to fight sea pirates.

The mission of the frigate and the tanker will last for several months. The Kola will provide the frigate with fuel, water and food.

This is the first voyage of the Yaroslav Mudry to the Horn of Africa area. It has previously been on mission only to the Mediterranean.

The Yaroslav Mudry departed from the Baltic Fleet main base on August 9. Since then the ship has covered a distance of over 5,000 nautical miles and visited the Spanish exclave of Ceuta on the Mediterranean coast of Africa and the Maltese port of Valetta.

In an earlier period the Baltic Fleet had sent the frigate Neustrashimy on three anti-piracy missions off the Horn of Africa, in 2008, 2010 and 2013. The Neustrashimy was the first ship of the Russian Navy to keep Russian and foreign vessels safe off the Somali coastline.

CHECHNYA CAMPAIGN

Mine clearing robot destroys over 50 landmines in Chechnya in three weeks

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - Military engineers clear away mines from farmland and forests in Chechnya, using the Uran-6 mine clearing robot, the Southern Military District said in a statement received by Interfax-AVN.

"Since this work began on July 23 mines have been cleared away from an area of about 80,000 square meters, and more than 50 explosive devices, mostly landmines, artillery shells and grenades for GP-25 shoulder-held launchers, have been destroyed," the statement says.

"The robot either blows the ammunition up, or destroys it physically.

The Uran-6 is a self-propelled remote-controlled mine clearing robot which can contain five mine clearing devices depending on the task assigned. It also has four video cameras which provide a panoramic view of the terrain.

No breakdowns, or malfunctions have been reported since the mine clearing robot was used for the first time. "The developers gained valuable experience in real combat conditions, which they will use to upgrade the current system and to develop new," the statement says.

Suspected militant shot and killed in Dagestan

MAKHACHKALA. Sept 3 (Interfax) - A suspected militant was killed in Semender, Makhachkala's Kirovsky district, on Tuesday in his armed resistance to the police, a source in the Dagestani law enforcement authorities told Interfax.

The police stopped a Lada Priora car for examination on Kavkazskaya Street at approximately 5:30 p.m., the source said. "Instead of presenting his id the driver opened gunfire. He was killed in the shootout. There were no police casualties," the source said.

An investigative team is working on the scene. A Makarov handgun has been seized.

Militant killed in Dagestan identified as assailant of police officers - NAC

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - A militant in Dagestan wanted for attacks against police officers has been killed, the National Antiterrorism Committee (NAC) information center told Interfax on Wednesday.

"The militant has been tentatively identified as Rajab Mustafayev, born in 1978, an accomplice to the Kadar and Makhachkala gangs. Mustafayev was involved in the attack on officers of the Russian Interior Ministry in the Republic of Dagestan, staged in the town of Semender in July 2009," the center said.

NAC added that the militant was killed in Semender in the Kirovsky district of Makhachkala. The police stopped a Lada Priora car to check the driver's identification. The driver disobeyed the police order, opened fire and was killed in the shootout.

A handgun, cartridges and two grenades were collected from the shootout site and sent to a laboratory.

"There were no police or civilian casualties," NAC said.

Counterterrorism operation launched in Makhachkala Kirovsky district

MAKHACHKALA. Sept 3 (Interfax) - A counterterrorism operation regime was put into place in an administrative territory of the Makhachkala Kirovsky district at 10:15 a.m., a source in the Dagestani operative staff told Interfax.

"Measures are being taken to find and neutralize members of illegal armed units and their abettors," he said.

A counterterrorism operation regime declared in the Tsumadinsky district earlier was called off on Wednesday, the source added.

Dagestani police probing murder of five hunters

MAKHACHKALA. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The bodies of five murdered men have been found in a forest near the Shamkhal neighborhood in the Makhachkala Kirovsky district, a source in the Dagestani department of the Russian Investigative Committee told Interfax.

"A VAZ-2107 vehicle pierced with bullets has been found. There was a body inside the car and another four bodies near it. All the victims were younger than 35. Reportedly, they were hunters," he said.

In the opinion of the police, the hunters might have been killed by militants hiding in that forest.

A counterterrorism operation regime was put into place in the Makhachkala Kirovsky district at 10:15 a.m.

Major case investigators are examining the crime scene and a criminal inquiry is pending.

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. Naïve 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.

Counterterrorism operation launched in Dagestani village

MAKHACHKALA. Sept 5 (Interfax) - A counterterrorism operation regime was put into place in the village of Kichi-Gamri in the Sergokali district of Dagestan on Friday, a source in the Dagestani Operative Staff told Interfax.

"The operation aims to neutralize members of illegal armed units," the source said.

In turn, a source in the Dagestani law enforcement authorities said a group of militants had been trapped on the village outskirts.

"They refused to surrender and engaged in a clash," the source said.

Federal judge's killer liquidated in Dagestan

MAKHACHKALA. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The active phase of a special operation in the village of Kichi-Gamri in the Sergokali district of Dagestan is over now as a suspected killer of a federal judge has been killed in a shootout, a source in the Dagestani law enforcement authorities told Interfax.

"The trapped militant offered armed resistance and was killed. He has been identified as Murad Gadzhiyev, suspected of killing federal judge Akhmed Radzhabov in Izberbash in March 2013," he said.

Interfax has yet to obtain an official confirmation to this report.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Reports claiming death of 100 Russian servicemen in Ukraine nonsense - Russian Defense Ministry source

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - Reports from some Russian and Ukrainian mass media outlets, citing human rights activists Ella Polyakova and Sergei Krivenko and alleging that 100 Russian troops were killed in Ukraine on August 13, are not true, a high-level Russian Defense Ministry source told reporters.

"The nonsense, voiced recently by our 'dedicated fighter for money,' deserves only the serious attention of the Russian psychiatric society," the source said.

The Russian Justice Ministry has officially given the Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg organization headed by Polyakova the status of a foreign agent, the high-level source said.

"All statements of representatives of this organization on the alleged mass death of Russian servicemen in Ukraine citing 'own sources' is nothing more than a quotation of reports from the information resources of Ukrainian propagandists. We have seen them too," the source said.

Ukrainian Savchenko contests her mental evaluation order

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The defense lawyers for Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko, who is charged in Russia with being an accomplice in the killing of Russian journalists, has contested an order requiring her to undergo a mental evaluation.

"Today, the defense lawyers have contested the investigators' order requiring a comprehensive mental evaluation in accordance with Article 124 of the Russian Code of Criminal Procedure by filing complaints to Investigative Committee Director [Alexander] Bastrykin and Russian Prosecutor General [Yury] Chaika," Nikolai Polozov, a lawyer for the pilot, said on Facebook.

According to earlier reports, Savchenko is being transferred to Moscow for this evaluation. "Nadezhda will be transferred to Moscow to undergo a mental evaluation in the Serbsky Institute in the nearest future," lawyer Mark Feygin told Interfax.

Last week, the Voronezh Sovetsky District Court extended Savchenko's detention until October 30.

It was reported earlier that Savchenko, a 31-year-old navigator, was fighting with the Aidar volunteer battalion in eastern Ukraine when she was captured by illegal armed units in June near the town of Shchastya, a suburb of Luhansk. It was said on July 8 that she was being held at the Voronezh pre-trial detention facility in Russia.

Earlier, the Russian Investigative Committee claimed that Savchenko had crossed the border without documents under the guise of a refugee and was detained later for identification, after which it turned out that she was suspected of playing some role in the killing of Russian TV journalists Igor Kornelyuk and Anton Voloshin near Luhansk. On July 9, Russia indicted her for complicity in murder.

Court arrests Moscow property of Ukrainian oligarch Kolomoisky - Markin

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Upon the request of investigators court has placed under arrest property of Ukrainian businessman Ihor Kolomoisky accused in Russia under the case on using banned war means and methods.

In particular, an office building in Moscow has been arrested, Russian Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin told Interfax on Tuesday. The building belongs to Elite Holding and Kolomoisky is its co-founder.

"Based on the court rulings received, search was held in the named building and during it documents significant for the criminal case were found and seized. Besides, upon the court ruling on the request of investigators this estate was placed under arrest banning Elite Holding carrying out any regulatory power over it," Markin said.

The arrest is introduced "in order to terminate financing of terrorist activities and other criminal actions regarding peaceful population of southeastern Ukraine," he said.

"The Investigative Committee continues the work to determine other assets of Ihor Kolomoisky, including in Crimea," Markin said.

Moscow's Basmany Court sanctioned earlier to arrest in absentia Kolomoisky, who is on the international wanted list. The Ukrainian businessman is accused in staging a number of crimes - murders, using banned war means and methods, impeding professional duties of reporters and kidnapping (the Russian Criminal Code Article 33 Part 3, Article 105 Part 2, Article 33 Part 3, Article 356 Part 1, Article 144 Part 3, and Article 126 Part 3).

According to the information of SPARK-Interfax, Kolomoisky owns 25% of Elite Holding.

The main business of the company is leasing non-residential real estate. Elite Holding is registered at Povarskaya Street in central Moscow.

FSKN says record quantities of Afghan heroin impounded in Russia in 2014

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Record quantities of Afghan heroin have been impounded in Russia this year, Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN) Director Viktor Ivanov said.

"Concerning drug production in Afghanistan, 2.5 tonnes of heroin has been seized since the beginning of this year. In fact, we have seized record quantities of heroin this year," Ivanov told a press conference on Tuesday.

He said it was necessary to aim at the liquidation of drug production in Afghanistan.

"However, the task of eliminating drug production in Afghanistan has not been set anywhere, either at the Security Council or at the UN," the FSKN chief added.

Annual drug turnover amounts to 2 trillion rubles, 1 bln drug-related crimes committed - Russian drug control chief

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Drug addicts commit about one billion crimes a year and drug turnover in Russia amounts to 2 trillion rubles a year, Russian Federal Drug Control Service Chief Viktor Ivanov said at a news conference on Tuesday.

"Every drug user decreases funds of economically active population by taking away money and these funds come into criminal turnover. This criminal turnover in Russia amounts to 2 trillion rubles a year. This is an assessment figure and it can be even higher," Ivanov said.

According to Ivanov, drug addicts commit a huge number of offences - "this is about one billion crimes a year."

Russia has 8 million drug users and 4 million of them are drug addicts. "And 1.5 million of them are those, who use Afghani heroin and about 2.5 million take synthetic drugs and marijuana," Ivanov said.

"We have 2 million crimes investigated every year and I am talking about one billion. This is not because someone is hiding something but because drug addicts, taking money away, commit crimes, whose nature has not been determined yet. These are minor offenses but they create tremendous criminal background," he said.

FSKN: Drug transit via Ukraine on rise

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN) Director Viktor Ivanov has stated a growth in drug transit via Ukraine.

"I know nothing about a large transshipment point but it is a fact that transit via Ukraine has been growing," he said at a press conference on Tuesday answering a question whether Ukraine could become a large drug transshipping point against the backdrop of the current events.

"I may recall the Iraqi situation in this connection. As we know, the situation in Iraq turned extremely complicated after the end of the military operation - there have been constant explosions and murders, the economy is falling and the authorities are weakening. One of the results is a huge flow of Afghan heroin across Iraq," he said.

"Destabilized states present lesser risks to drug mules, drug trafficking," the FSKN chief continued.

In his words, the Federal Drug Control Service had been closely cooperating with Kyiv before the Ukrainian events.

"We have held a number of large operations," Ivanov said.

Now there is a methadone flow from Ukraine into Russia, he added. "You see, Ukraine is taking a replacement therapy," he said.

"We have seen a similar situation in Crimea. Ninety percent of methadone is not given to [drug] users but goes to the secondary market. The volume of methadone in Russia has grown several times. Methadone is a drug and the replacement therapy meant to give it to such a category of users who are unable to fight their drug addiction," he said.

Network of drug traffickers covering 15 regions liquidated - Russian drug control chief

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Trafficking of over 20 tonnes smoking blends was prevented during a strategic anti-drug operation of the Russian Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN), FSKN Chief Viktor Ivanov said.

"Last week the basic stage of the strategic anti-drug operation of the FSKN ended and thanks to it the process of creating a drug cartel engaged in selling synthetic drugs in 15 Russian regions was prevented," Ivanov said at a news conference on Tuesday.

Eleven criminals, organizers and administrators of the regional drug trafficking network were arrested, he said.

"Besides, it was managed to seize about 70 kg concentrate, from which over 20 tonnes smoking blends could be made," Ivanov said.

Police official detained in St. Pete on suspicion of storing 36 kilos of heroin

ST. PETERSBURG. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Members of a drug police force have uncovered an organized criminal group engaged in the distribution of drugs in St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region, to which a police lieutenant-colonel belonged, the regional department of the Federal Drug Control Service reported.

"Two active members of the group were detained in the course of a search operation last week. About 1 kilo of heroin has been seized from illegal circulation," it said.

The policemen also identified another member of this group suspected of marketing the drugs as a lieutenant-colonel from the St. Petersburg Interior Ministry transit department, who arranged the marketing of such drugs as heroin, methadone, and China white. He was detained in the city's Nevsky district last Friday.

Federal Drug Control Service officials discovered and confiscated over 36 kilos of heroin, about 0.5 kilos of China white, and about 80 grams of methadone during a search in a rented apartment at 14 Solidarnost Street.

The group's monthly drug turnover could reach dozens of kilos of heroin and about 1-3 kilos of China white, it said.

A criminal case has been opened. All those detained have been arrested pending trial.

Operational measures have been taken to determine the channel through which the drugs were supplied.

Reporter Stenin dies in Ukrainian attack on refugee convoy - Investigative Committee

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Rossiya Segodnya news agency photographer Andrei Stenin died on the Snizhne-Dmytrivka road in southeastern Ukraine in the Ukrainian army's attack on a refugee convoy, Russian Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin told Interfax.

"Detectives have discovered circumstances of the journalist's death: A. Stenin was on a field trip to Snizhne, Ukraine, on August 5," the spokesman said. In his words, Stenin was driving a Renault Logan within a refugee convoy along the Snizhne-Dmytrivka road on August 6.

"The convoy was protected by six militiamen," Markin added.

A BMP-2 armored personnel carrier and a tank of the Ukrainian army, presumably, the 79th airmobile brigade, opened fire for effect northwest of Dmytrivka, he said.

The militia managed to transfer the bodies of five persons found in a destroyed Renault Logan on the Snizhne-Dmytrivka road to Russian investigators only on August 27. "The remains were examined by Russian experts who said some of them belonged to Andrei Stenin," Markin said.

Speaking of circumstances of the journalist's death, Markin said over ten civilian vehicles were destroyed in that attack.

"Several persons managed to escape and hide in a belt of trees along the road," he added.

Ukrainian military commanders visited the attack site on the next day, Markin said.

"They not only examined the destroyed cars and the bodies but also, according to eyewitnesses, took belongings from the destroyed cars into their own vehicles and searched the bodies. After they had left the location of the destroyed cars and the bodies, it was put under Grad rocket launcher fire," the Investigative Committee spokesman said.

"In the course of the criminal inquiry, detectives intend to discover all circumstances of the death of Andrei Stenin and to identify the concrete culprits liable to criminal prosecution," Markin said.

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 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 belonged to a commercial company," it said.

The causes of the crash have yet to be determined.

A regional security source had told Interfax earlier that the Mi-8 helicopter, which earlier participated in demonstration flights during an air show in Gelendzhik, caught fire while landing at the city airport.

The helicopter belonged to the Panh airline, he said.

DEFENCE INDUSTRY

GLONASS to draft legal framework for ERA-GLONASS system

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - GLONASS, a nonprofit partnership, has signed a government contract with the Russian Ministry of Transport for developing a legal framework to ensure the functioning of the ERA-GLONASS State Automated Information System, the partnership's spokesperson said.

"Under the signed contract, the GLONASS nonprofit partnership will prepare an analytical report and proposals concerning the structure and content of the draft regulatory documents required for the operation of the system," the partnership said in a statement obtained by Interfax-AVN on Friday.

The documents will regulate the creation and functioning of the system, set out the rules for operating emergency call devices, interaction between ERA-GLONASS and other information systems, contain hardware, software and linguistic requirements for operating the system, and stipulate how to enter various data into the system, the statement said.

"The ERA-GLONASS system is due to be launched on January 1, 2015," the statement said.

Foton-M bio spacecraft lands in Orenburg rgn

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - The Foton-M4 research spacecraft carrying geckos, fruit flies, microorganisms and seeds of higher plants is back to the Earth, a source in the Federal Space Agency (Roscosmos) told Interfax-AVN.

"The spacecraft has landed," he said.

The landing took place in the Orenburg region.

The "bio-tourists" will be urgently taken by plane to the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medical and Biological Problems. Five geckos went on the space mission but scientists believe their number may be bigger now and expect to see the fourth generation of insects in fruit fly test tubes.

The spacecraft launched on July 19 was supposed to spend two months in orbit but a state commission decided it should land prematurely because contact with it was lost twice during the mission. There was a brief disruption of telemetry about a week ago.

The threat of a complete loss of the bio-satellite emerged immediately after the launch. First of all, the spacecraft failed to reach a circular orbit of about 500 kilometers but instead took an elliptical orbit with a perigee of 252 kilometers and an apogee of 551 kilometers. Secondly, contact with the spacecraft was lost

for practically a week, which endangered the lives of geckos, insects and biomaterials - it was impossible to land the spacecraft in an automatic manner.

Foton-M was designed for staging macro-gravity experiments in the field of zero gravity physics, testing engineering solutions for the production of semiconductors and bio-medical preparations with improved properties, and making biological and biotechnological research.

Irkut to build over 40 aircraft for Russian Air Force in 2014

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - The Irkutsk Aviation Plant (part of Irkut Corporation) will build over 20 Sukhoi Su-30SM fighters and 22 Yakovlev Yak-130 fighter trainers for the Russian Air Force (AF) before the end of 2014, AF spokesman Col. Igor Klimov told reporters on Friday.

"Today the Russian Air Force is receiving another batch of aircraft built under a government defense contract. The Irkutsk Aviation Plant is handing over three Su-30SM multirole fighters and three Yak-130 trainer fighters. Over 20 Su-30SMs and 22 Yak-130s will be built in Irkutsk for the Russian Defense Ministry before the end of this year," the officer said.

The Acting Commander-in-chief of the Russian Air Force, Maj. Gen. Sergei Dronov, toured the production facilities and congratulated the staff on the company's 80th anniversary.

"Brand new aircraft made in Irkutsk have been entering service in the Russian Air Force since 2012. Mass production of these aircraft is the result of work between two companies which merged into the Irkut Corporation: the renowned Yakovlev Design Bureau and the Irkutsk Aviation Plant," Dronov said.

Vostochny to have at least three launch complexes by 2030

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - Launch sites to accommodate light and medium-lift Soyuz-2 rockets, heavy-lift Amur and a hitherto unnamed super-heavy-lift will be constructed at the Vostochny space center in the Amur region, says a draft federal space program for 2016-2025 the Federal Space Agency (Roscosmos) has presented for the government's consideration.

The federal space program stipulates the construction of a Soyuz-2 launch site for 1a, 1b and 1v modifications, which will put payloads of up to 8.4 tonnes into low orbits and 4.6 tonnes into Sun-synchronous orbits.

It will also house a launch site for heavy-lift Amur rockets, which will take unmanned spacecraft of up to 25 tonnes and next-generation manned cargo spaceships of over 20 tonnes to low orbits and up to 5.2-tonne payloads to geostationary orbits.

The DM upper stage designed and manufactured by the Energia Corporation will be modernized and adjusted to the Amur LV's needs in the delivery of 2.73 tonnes of payloads to geostationary orbits at an initial stage and their later increase to 3.3 tonnes.

The same rocket will have an oxygen-hydrogen upper stage, which will propel payloads of up to 5.2-tonne to geostationary orbits.

The bulk of necessary work will be done to support the super-heavy-lift rocket, which will take next-generation of manned spaceships to the Moon and heavy automated spacecraft to geostationary orbits, asteroids and other celestial bodies.

The launch site and the super-heavy-lift rocket with a carrying capacity of 80 tonnes or more will be constructed before 2025 to guarantee Russia's access to outer space.

The draft federal space program noted that those and other plans might still be adjusted to the real capacities of the federal budget.

The initial automated mission from Vostochny is planned for 2015 and the first manned launch is due in 2018.

Hypothermia kills biosatellite geckos - source

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - Hypothermia has killed geckos, test subjects traveling aboard the Foton-M4 research spacecraft, a source in the commission, which controlled the landing and evacuation of the spacecraft's scientific payload, told Interfax-AVN.

"Tentative information shows that geckos have frozen to death. Most probably, thermal regulation equipment in the animals' compartment broke down," he said.

The geckos could have died at any stage of the flight and it is impossible to tell the time of death by their mummies, the source said, adding that reports alleging the gecko deaths happened about a week ago were wrong.

The source noted that the spacecraft's failure to reach the final orbit was not the cause of the animals' death.

At the same time, the researchers have a reason to be happy: the Foton-M instruments studying the possibility of life brought to the Earth from the outer space are intact, he said. The objects, which looked like rocks with multiple cavities, were installed on the spacecraft's surface and passed through the Earth atmosphere unharmed.

"In contrast to a similar experiment staged by the Bion spacecraft, the scientific instruments mounted on the spacecraft's surface were unharmed and successfully removed," the source said.

The scientists corrected mistakes of the Bion experiment in which some of the scientific instruments melted in dense layers of the atmosphere, the source said.

First Soyuz-2 rocket could be launched no earlier than late December 2015

TOMSK. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - The first Soyuz-2 carrier rocket with a Volga upper stage could be launched from the Vostochny cosmodrome no earlier than late December 2015, according to the state purchases website.

The federal space agency Roscosmos is now selecting a contractor to do the research and development part of the work to create the Soyuz-2 rocket system at the Vostochny cosmodrome," the technical assignment says.

The bid instruction says that the transportation of the rocket system's components must begin in May 2015 and end on December 25 2015. The first launch therefore cannot be carried out earlier than late December.

Meanwhile, a source in the space rocket industry told Interfax-AVN that the construction of the Vostochny cosmodrome is six months behind schedule, therefore the launch is likely to take place no earlier than the middle of 2016.

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said in February that the first launch of the Soyuz-2 rocket from the Vostochny cosmodrome must be carried out in December 2015, and the manned flight of the Angara rocket from the second launch pad in 2018.

Roscosmos estimates Vostochny super-heavy-lift project cost at 200 bln rub

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - The Federal Space Agency (Roscosmos) has requested over 200 billion rubles for the development of a super-heavy-lift rocket to be launched from the Vostochny space center, says a draft federal space program for 2016-2025 presented for the government's consideration.

"The experimental development of a super-heavy-lift launch vehicle, which will be able to transport payloads of at least 80 tonnes of low near-Earth orbits and at least 20 tonnes to near-Moon polar orbits with a manned spaceship booster, will be completed in 2025," the document states.

Roscosmos has also asked for 151.6 billion rubles to construct a super-heavy-lift rocket launch site at the Vostochny space center.

The draft federal program provides the possibility of enlarging power capacities of the super-heavy-lift rocket with an oxygen and hydrogen booster unit. The experimental development of this booster will start in 2021. Roscosmos estimates the cost of its development and initial testing at 60.5 billion rubles.

Russian Defense Ministry ready to support ESA missions with Rokot launches - commander

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - The Russian Defense Ministry is ready to support European Space Agency (ESA) missions with light LV Rokot launches, Aerospace Defense Forces Commander Lt. Gen. Alexander Golovko said.

"Roscosmos and the ESA possess a prerogative of Rokot launches consistent with the international cooperation program. If they take this risk, we can do the launches," Golovko told Interfax-AVN on Tuesday.

He added that several Rokot rockets would be launched in Defense Ministry missions.

"As to the Defense Ministry, we have planned four Rokot missions. The hardware is available and one rocket is ready to take off," Golovko said.

ESA officials said earlier they intended to have two or three Rokot missions.

"Seeking to lessen the dependence on imported component parts, the Russian Defense Ministry is set to stop using light LV Rokot in 2016," Golovko said in late August during a visit of Russian Defense Minister Gen. of the Army Sergei Shoigu to the Plesetsk space center.

"At present Rokot rockets are launched in the interest of the Defense Ministry and within the framework of the federal space program and the international cooperation program. Four launches have been planned in the interest of the Defense Ministry, including three in 2015 and one in 2016. In a future period the Defense Ministry will accomplish its tasks with light LV Soyuz-2.1v and Angara," the Aerospace Defense Forces commander told the defense minister.

"Thereby we will not depend on imports in the matter of light launch vehicles," Shoigu said.

Rokot is a derivative from decommissioned two-stage intercontinental ballistic missiles RS-18 (NATO reporting name Stiletto). It has a takeoff mass of 107.5 tonnes and delivers payloads of up to two tonnes to low near-Earth orbits. The rocket has three stages, two of them from RS-18 and third is Briz-KM whose control system is made by the Kharkiv Khartron plant.

Army innovation center's tests disrupted due to import-substitution problems - source

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - The state testing of the new-generation Combat Training Center for the Ground and Airborne Forces in Mulino, Nizhny Novgorod region, scheduled for September 1, did not take place, a source in the Russian defense industry told Interfax-AVN on Tuesday.

"The state tests of the Combat Training Center were due to begin yesterday, September 1. That did not happen, not least because of problems that arose during the construction of the Mulino center relating to import-substitution, primarily the replacement of German laser firearm and target simulators with Russian equivalents," the source said.

He recalled that after the EU imposed sanctions against Russia over the events in Ukraine, the German Economic Ministry revoked Rheinmetall's license to supply the necessary equipment for the Russian Defense Ministry's combat training center in Mulino.

"Today there is no reason to count on Rheinmetall returning to the implementation of this contract," the source said.

Today "it is even difficult to tell the date that the state tests will begin for the Center, which should be up and running by December 1, 2014," he said.

Submarine Severodvinsk successfully completes missile-firing exercise

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax-AVN) - The nuclear submarine Severodvinsk has completed a missile-firing exercise at sea as part of trial operation, the Sevmash press service has reported.

"Missiles were fired from the submarine Severodvinsk as part of the vessel's trial operation. We are working on determining whether the nuclear submarine meets the tasks that were set when it was designed and built. I want to congratulate everyone involved in the construction and tests of the submarine. The tests have confirmed the high efficiency of the nuclear submarine and its weapons," Rear Admiral Konstantin Kabantsov, deputy commander of the Northern fleet submarine force, who led the exercise, was quoted as saying in a report obtained by Interfax-AVN.

Launch of new satellite for GLONASS system delayed - source

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax-AVN) - Launch of the Glonass-K new generation navigation spacecraft had been postponed at least until December, a source in the Russian federal space agency Roscosmos told Interfax-AVN.

"The launch has been delayed at least until December," the source said.

It is not in the short-term launch plan, though it had previously been announced for October 28, the source said.

MILITARY AND TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION

Schedule of Fregat-powered missions to be adjusted - source

MOSCOW. Aug 29 (Interfax-AVN) - The launches of two satellites with Soyuz-2 rockets powered by Fregat upper stages from the Plesetsk space center in the Arkhangelsk region due this September and October are likely to be delayed until a later period, a source in the Russian rocket and space industry told Interfax-AVN.

"The recent launch of two European Galileo navigation satellites with a Russian Soyuz-ST carrying the Fregat upper stage was a failure. The inquiry is in progress. Hence, the schedule of Fregat-powered missions will be adjusted," he said.

A number of additional tests will be run on Fregat systems after the European Space Agency (ESA) commission ends its deliberations involving Russian specialists and that will extend the period of preparations for next missions, the source said.

A military satellite was supposed to blast off from the Plesetsk space center in late September on board a Soyuz-2 rocket with a Fregat upper stage, and the delivery of a next-generation Glonass-K satellite into orbit was scheduled for October 28, he noted.

"The launch of these two satellites will be done in a later period," he said.

As reported earlier, a tentative analysis of telemetry proves that the Fregat-MT upper stage's control system had worked normally in the August 22 launch of two European Galileo navigation satellites from the Kourou space center in French Guiana.

"The telemetry analysis has yet to be completed but the available data gives grounds to say there will be no claims against the control system," a source told Interfax-AVN.

The Academician Pilyugin Scientific-Production Center of Automatics and Instrument-Making, which was in charge of the control system, tested the relevant software on immediately after the unsuccessful positioning of the satellites.

"According to the deciphered telemetry, there had been no abnormalities in the operation of the control system prior to the separation of the satellites," the source said.

"There are some questions about the operation of the low-thrust propulsion system and control instruments. Specialists are not ruling out the possibility that short-term disruptions to their operation may have been the result of some external impacts. The evaluation of every possible cause, including the detachment of thermal insulation panels from the upper stage's surface, continues. But no final conclusions have been drawn as of yet," the source pointed out.

Russia's Soyuz-ST-B launch vehicle coupled with the Fregat-MT upper stage and two European satellites blasted off from Kourou on August 22. It was said at that first the mission had been successful but later reports said the satellites had been put into incorrect orbits. A commission of the European Space Agency (ESA) and Arianespace assisted by Russian specialists is looking into the causes of the failure.

SCO ends its largest ever drills

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - The armed forces of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states have completed a joint antiterrorist exercise, Peaceful Mission 2014, at the Zhurihe training base (China), according to the Russian Defense Ministry.

"Peaceful Mission 2014 has become the largest joint military exercise of the SCO members' armed forces in the history of the organization. The exercise involved over 7,000 troops and nearly 500 pieces of various types of military hardware," the ministry said in a press statement obtained by Interfax-AVN on Friday.

More than 70 soldiers, sergeants and officers received medals from the defense ministries of Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

Russian inspectors to go on Open Skies mission in Germany

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - A Russian inspection team traveling by an Antonov An-30B observation aircraft will carry out an Open Skies mission in Germany, acting head of the Russian National Nuclear Threat Reduction Center Ruslan Shishin told Interfax-AVN.

"The observation flight will be performed consistent with the Open Skies Treaty on September 1-5 from the Cologne-Bonn airfield to a maximum distance of 1,300 kilometers," he said.

The Russian observation plane will fly along the route approved by the host country and Italian specialists will stay aboard to control the use of monitoring equipment and the compliance with the Treaty provisions.

The observation flight aims to foster openness and transparency in the military activity of Treaty member states and to strengthen security with confidence building measures.

This is the 26th Open Skies mission of Russia in 2014.

The Open Skies Treaty was adopted in 1992 and ratified by more than 30 member states in 1995. Its main task is to assist in the verification of current and future arms control agreements and to expand the possibility of crisis prevention and settlement within the OSCE framework. Aerial inspections are done to check the credibility of declared armaments and positions of member countries' forces.

Russia, Germany to continue cooperation on research reactor operation

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Russia and Germany on Monday signed another intergovernmental agreement on cooperation on the operation of research reactors.

"The agreement develops the many years of cooperation, which envisions technical and commercial aspects of the interaction between the two countries," the Russian Foreign Ministry's information and press department said in its report.

Airborne forces of Russia, Belarus practicing in southern Russia

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax-AVN) - Russia-Belarus battalion tactical exercises with landing operations and live fire practice are being held near Novorossiysk, Russian Airborne Forces spokesman Maj. Irina Kruglova told Interfax-AVN on Wednesday.

"A unit of the Special Operation Forces is taking part in the exercises on behalf of Belarus, and Russia is represented by an air assault battalion of the 7th Guard Air Assault Division. Division Commander Col. Roman Breus supervises the training," Kruglova said.

Brand new Russian parachutes were used by foreign servicemen for the first time ever in the format of international exercises in the Krasnooktyabrskaya drop zone on Wednesday, she added.

"A platoon of Belarusian paratroopers, 20 men, successfully jumped from Ilyushin Il-76 planes together with a Russian Airborne Forces unit. They used the D-10 parachute system," Kruglova said.

In addition to 250 servicemen, the planes airdropped military cargo.

"The activity and live fire exercises of the Belarusian airmobile units and the air assault unit of the Russian Airborne Forces will take place at the Rayevsky range in the Krasnodar territory until September 5," Kruglova concluded.

S-400, Buk systems engaged in Russian-Indian exercises in southern Russia

ASHULUK, Astrakhan region. Sept 3 (Interfax-AVN) - Live fire exercises of S-400 and Buk-M1 air defense missile system crews are underway at the Ashuluk range in the Astrakhan region in southern Russia as an element of the Russian-Indian exercises Aviandra 2014, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman for the Air Force Col. Igor Klimov said.

"Russian-Indian crews are practicing the deterrence of a simulated enemy attack with launches of S-400, S-300PM, Buk-M1 and Pantsir-S1 missile systems," Klimov told reporters.

In his words, air defense missile shooting supported by aviation is an important part of the active phase of the Russian-Indian exercises underway at the Pogonovo range in the Voronezh region and the Ashuluk range in the Astrakhan region.

The first stage of the exercises will end in Russia on September 5. The second stage is supposed to begin in India on November 10.

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

ZVYOZDNY GORODOK (Star City, Moscow region). Sept 3 (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.

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, 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.

French President Francois Hollande was reported as saying 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.

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.

The first of the two Mistral-class vessels being built by France for the Russian Navy is currently undergoing sea trials at the STX shipyard in Saint-Nazaire. The bow of the second vessel is being built there as well.

The Vladivostok was launched on October 15, 2013. It was to be transferred to the Russian Navy in the fall of 2014, after which it should be armed with weapons at one of Russia's shipbuilding facilities.

The helicopter carrier was built in stages. Its stern was manufactured at the Baltiysky Plant of the United Shipbuilding Corporation and connected to the bow built by STX France in Saint-Nazaire.

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 carry 481 passengers on board.

Crew of first Russian Mistral-class helicopter carrier readies ship for another sea trial

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - The political announcements about two Mistral-class Landing Platform Docks (LPDs) built by France for the Russian Navy have so far had no effect on the training of the 400 Russian sailors currently in French town of Saint-Nazaire, who will make up the crews of the Vladivostok and Sevastopol LPDs, one of the Russian sailors told Interfax-AVN by phone on Thursday.

"Currently, the Vladivostok LPD-1 is undergoing sea trials and being simultaneously used for training the two crews. Its next sea trial is due on September 10," the source said.

"Work is going in the atmosphere of full harmony with the French team specialists," he said.

"If politicians do not meddle entirely, the French will be handing over the LPD-1 to the Navy somewhere around November. Then it must sail, under the St. Andrew's flag, to St. Petersburg, to the Severnaya Verf shipyard to be fitted with Russian armament systems," the source said.

As for the Sevastopol LPD-2, it is currently being completed by up to 400 French workers. Its handover to the Russian Navy is scheduled for the 2015 fall.

The crews of the two Russian LPDs arrived at the STX France shipyard in Saint-Nazaire in late June on board the Smolny training ship currently used as floating barracks.

A day earlier French President Francois Holland announced the decision to suspend the supply of the first Mistral helicopter carrier to Russia. The decision was made after Hollande's meeting with the French defense committee which concluded that there are insufficient conditions for the supply of the first helicopter carrier to Russia.

Russian shipbuilders to get additional orders if France refuses to supply Mistral - Kanshin

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - France's refusal to honor the signed agreement on Mistral helicopter carrier will encourage Russian shipbuilders to create thousands more jobs, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Defense Ministry's Public Council Alexander Kanshin told Interfax-AVN on Thursday.

"I am certain that that most of our military sailors and shipbuilders met yesterday's announcement by the French president about the impossibility of supplying the first Mistral helicopter carrier to Russia with a sigh of relief, if not joy: now we can only count on ourselves," said Kanshin, who also chairs the International Advisory Committee of the Organizations Reserve Officers.

France's refusal to honor its contractual obligations will be yet another motivation for the Navy and United Ship to start domestic manufacturing of such ships, Kanshin said.

"Everyone knows well that the Mistral-class carriers were effectively imposed on us out of political considerations. Both military sailors and shipbuilders said on many levels, on many occasions that our shipyards can build this type of helicopter carriers without foreigners, and in this particular instance, the French. So we can thank the French president for the decisions which have by no means upset us," Kanshin said.

The money spent for the construction of the French Mistral-class carriers can now be used to build our own helicopter carriers, he said. "I am sure that with the money our country will reclaim under the unfulfilled contract, plus the fine, we will be able to build the same class of helicopter carriers within a short period of time and won't even need to 'adjust' them to Russian armaments and our combat helicopters," Kanshin said.

Peruvian defense minister affirms trust-based relations with Russia

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - Peru has been familiar with Russian military hardware since the 1970s, Peruvian Defense Minister Pedro Cateriano Bellido told his Russian counterpart Gen. of the Army Sergei Shoigu on Wednesday.

"Peru and Russia have a trust-based relationship in the defense sphere. We have strengthened our relations in two years which have passed since your visit to Peru," he told the Russian colleague.

"The Peruvian government has decided to buy 24 Russian helicopters. This is a very important buy because it will contribute to the ongoing fight against terrorism," Cateriano said.

The Peruvian minister also recalled "the joint commitment to open a technical center in Peru for servicing Russian helicopters."

Shoigu: Russia, Peru have big military-technological cooperation plans

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - Contacts between the Russian and Peruvian defense ministries have been very positive and productive, Russian Defense Minister Gen. of the Army Sergei Shoigu told his Peruvian colleague Pedro Cateriano Bellido on Wednesday.

"We have big plans and, hopefully, they will soon be put into practice with our mutual desire and consent," the Russian minister said.

"A lot has been done in the fields of defense and military-technological cooperation in recent years," Shoigu said.

He said he expected the visit of the Peruvian minister "to promote further development of bilateral cooperation, our relations."

"Our relationship started a rather long time ago, in the 1970s," Shoigu said. "I am pleased to say that it is now acquiring new dynamics."

"We are maintaining permanent contacts in various areas. We meet personally and we speak on the phone. One way or another, all these contacts are aimed to develop defense and military-technological cooperation," Shoigu said.

"This is the question of further personnel training here, in Russia, and in Peru, new agreements and projects, and the strict fulfillment of contracts which have been signed earlier and are being fulfilled," he said.

Peru has traditionally been a major buyer of Russian weapons in Latin America.

About a hundred Soviet and Russian helicopters have been supplied to Peru since the end of the 1970s. The Peruvian army has been operating Russia's Mil Mi-8/17 and Mi-24/35 helicopters for long.

In July 2010 the Peruvian Armed Forces procured eight Russian helicopters (six military transport Mi-171Sh and two Mi-35P attack vehicles), and the delivery was accomplished in October 2011.

The Peruvian media said the national law enforcement authorities would possess 38 Mi-171Sh military transport helicopters in 2015. Peru has recently ordered eight helicopters of the type to supplement the batch of 24 vehicles ordered in December 2013. The December 2013 order value stood at \$528 million.

The delivery of the additional batch will begin in the second half of 2014 and the contract will be fully executed in 2015.

A regional center is supposed to open in Peru in 2016 to service Russian helicopters. It will be owned by the Peruvian Defense Ministry.

Earlier Peru was supplied with Mikoyan MiG-29 fighters and Sukhoi Su-25 attack aircraft. Negotiations are underway to modernize the second batch of fighters into MiG-29SM. A proposal on the repairs and modernization of Su-25 attack aircraft has been presented to Peru.

A possible delivery of T-90S tanks and KAMAZ army trucks to Peru is being negotiated. Russia has intended to bid at Peruvian tenders for short- and intermediate-range air defense systems.

As of 2013, Russian military schools were training 68 servicemen from Peru.

NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES

Kyiv denies NATO arms supplies to Ukraine

BRUSSELS. Aug 29 (Interfax) - NATO members are not supplying weapons to Kyiv, Ukraine's permanent representative to NATO Ihor Dolgov said in Brussels on Friday.

"Not one NATO member is supplying weapons to Ukraine," he told reporters after an extraordinary meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the NATO headquarters in Brussels on Friday.

Officials in Kyiv understand that NATO will not be able to conduct a military intervention in Ukraine, he said. "We are not considering this option. What we need is more help, including military help. It is clear that NATO cannot provide Ukraine with troops, nor are we expecting that from its member states," said the Ukrainian representative.

"We are capable of defending ourselves, but we do need help to stop the aggression," he said.

Nearly 800 soldiers killed in east Ukraine - official

KYIV. Aug 29 (Interfax) - A total of 789 military service members have been killed in the military operation in eastern Ukraine, including ten in the past 24 hours, said Andriy Lysenko, spokesman for the National Security and Defense Council.

"Ten Ukrainian servicemen have been killed and 30 injured in the past 24 hours," he told Interfax on Friday.

In all, 789 soldiers have been killed and 2,789 injured since the operation began, Lysenko added.

Ukraine plans to step back onto path towards NATO membership - PM Yatsenyuk

KYIV. Aug 29 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian cabinet has submitted a bill repealing the country's non-bloc status to the Verkhovna Rada.

"In accordance with the decision adopted by the National Security and Defense Council, the government of Ukraine has submitted a bill that repeals the Ukrainian state's non-bloc status and re-establishes Ukraine's course towards membership in NATO to parliament for consideration," Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk said at a government session on Friday.

Yatsenyuk said the law will help Ukraine make decisions on membership in any other economic, political or military unions that do not contradict Ukraine's main goal, which is EU membership.

After the law is adopted, Ukraine will be banned from membership in the Customs, Eurasian and other unions that are essentially nothing else than "the Soviet Union named after the Russian Federation."

"We are calling on the president of Ukraine to class this law as an urgent one as the National Security and Defense Council has decided and we encourage the Ukrainian parliament to debate it immediately," Yatsenyuk said.

Earlier this week, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed a decree dissolving the Ukrainian parliament and scheduling the extraordinary parliamentary elections for October 26. The powers of the current parliament will end on the day when the elected parliamentarians will meet for the first plenary session.

The new session of the current Ukrainian parliament will open on September 2.

The European and Euro-Atlantic integration policies were announced in 2005 after Viktor Yanukovich came to power in Ukraine. The key event in Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration was the 2006 NATO Budapest summit, where Kyiv hoped to receive a NATO membership Action Plan. However, the NATO countries did not give the NATO membership Action Plan to Ukraine, saying the country's population was not ready for that.

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.

The law, which is still in effect, provides that the main principle of Ukraine's foreign policy is "the observance by Ukraine of the non-bloc policies, which means non-membership of Ukraine in any military-political unions, priority of participation in the improvement and development of the European collective security system, further constructive cooperation with NATO and other military-political blocs on all issues that present mutual interest."

Both army, adversary report gains in east Ukraine

KYIV. Aug 29 (Interfax) - Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council spokesman Andriy Lysenko told reporters on Friday that Ukrainian government forces have killed 26 members of paramilitary groups during the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

At the same time, he would not say where and when the fighting had taken place, saying only that the Ukrainian side consisted of border guards and National Guard units.

In all, instances of fighting have been registered 35 times in eastern Ukraine throughout the day, Lysenko said. He claimed, in particular, that as a result of a skirmish near the village of Patrioticheskoye, the enemy had been forced to retreat towards Novoazovsk but after that the enemy had fired Grad rockets at two villages, Bezmyannoye and Samsonovo, for 50 minutes.

Furthermore, Ukrainian border guards fired at a column of militiamen on the crossing between Uspenka, Lysychye and Kalyniv, he said. As a result, a Kamaz truck with ammunition, and several more vehicles had been destroyed.

But then the Ukrainian border guards came under mortar fire; there are no losses on the Ukrainian side, Lysenko said.

For their part, the command of "the army of Novorossiya" said earlier on Friday that the Ukrainian army had lost more than 90 in killed and injured during fighting in the past 24 hours.

"The enemy lost a total of up to 95 in dead and injured personnel on all areas of the front. We have destroyed five tanks, over 20 armored vehicles, seven weapons and mortar launchers, and two BM-21 multiple rocket launchers," the Novorossiya army representative told reporters.

DPR claims surrender of some Ukrainian units deployed in Donetsk airport

DONETSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The militia of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) claimed that a number of Ukrainian units stationed at the Donetsk airport raised the white flag and left the airport area on Sunday evening.

"True, some units decided to surrender. Their number is scarce so far, tentative reports say these are two incomplete platoons. Those who chose not to surrender continued to hold the airport grounds," a source in the DPR defense agency told Interfax.

Interfax has yet to obtain a confirmation to this report from other sources.

The source also reported the ongoing hostilities in the air terminal area. Artillery fire can be heard there. The hostilities on that ground started in May. More than 1,000 servicemen are stationed there at present, according to various sources.

Kyiv says over 50 soldiers break siege near Ilovaik

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Another 54 soldiers of volunteer battalions have broken the siege near Ilovaik, Donetsk region, Anton Herashchenko, advisor to the Ukrainian interior minister, wrote on Facebook.

"Good news from Semyon Semenchenko! Another 39 fighters of the Donbas battalion have broken the siege near Ilovaik! There are four girls amongst them. The siege has also been broken by eleven soldiers of the Svityaz battalion and four soldiers of the Dnepr-1 battalion," Herashchenko wrote.

In turn, Donbas battalion commander Semyon Semenchenko wrote on Facebook, "We have just picked up a reconnaissance platoon that broke the siege together with its commander. Another unit of 39 persons has broken the siege on its own. It includes four female fighters of the Donbas [battalion]."

Meanwhile, a representative of the Army of Novorossiya staff said on Sunday the militia had transferred over 200 captured army and National Guard servicemen to the Ukrainian side.

"On the night of August 30, the militia maintained the ceasefire regime in which 223 captured Army and National Guard servicemen were transferred to the Ukrainian side," the staff spokesman told Interfax.

He also said at the DPR army "prevented an attempt of the National Guard to take away heavy materiel from the siege zone in violation of the earlier agreements."

"Brief fighting near the urban-type settlement of Starobeshevo resulted in the destruction of two tanks and two armored personnel carriers, the capture of six tanks with full ammo loads and the disarmament of 198 servicemen," he said.

Ukrainian militia claims to have shot down 4 attack planes

DONETSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The militia fighting Ukrainian government forces in eastern Ukraine claims to have shot down four Ukrainian Su-25 attack planes on Friday.

"In an attempt to deliver an airstrike upon DPR [the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic] army positions near Novokaterynivka, two Ukrainian Su-25 attack planes were shot down with MANPADS. In addition, a militia air defense battery shot down two more Su-25s with MANPADS near the communities of Voikove and Merezhky," a spokesman for the so-called Novorossiia Army told journalists on Friday.

He said 65 Ukrainian government troops had been killed and injured.

The militia had fully liberated Kirovsk, Slovyanoserbksk, and Krymske as of 8:00 p.m. Moscow time Friday, he said.

Militia forces are also holding positions in the area of the communities of Shcherbak, Rosa Luxemburg, and Novoazovsk, he said.

A Ukrainian National Guard unit, including two battalions reinforced by tanks, attempted to break out of encirclement near Osykove on Friday. However, firing rockets and artillery guns, the militia forces managed to stop and disperse the column, the Novorossiia Army spokesman said.

Interfax could not immediately obtain confirmation of this information from alternative sources.

LPR militia alleges having taken control of Luhansk airport

LUHANSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The militia of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic alleges to have taken control of the Luhansk airport where Ukrainian servicemen were trapped in June.

"We have managed to take control of the airport. This is an extremely important and strategic site, we have been fighting for it for a long time and we have finally taken it," a Luhansk militiaman told Interfax on Sunday.

"The airport has sustained multiple destructions in the course of the hostilities, and more detailed information will be provided later," he said.

Interfax has yet to obtain a confirmation to this report from the Kyiv authorities.

Ukrainian Cabinet endorses bill on non-aligned status renouncement

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian Cabinet of ministers endorsed a bill on the renouncement of Ukraine's non-aligned status and resuming its course toward Euro-Atlantic integration at a Friday session.

The bill on amending some Ukrainian laws regarding sovereignty and the protection of Ukraine's territorial integrity concerns the laws On the Foundations of Domestic and Foreign Policy and On the Foundations of the National Security of Ukraine.

In particular, the Cabinet has proposed amending Article 11 of the law On the Foundations of Domestic and Foreign Policy concerning the country's non-aligned status and adding an article to it concerning Ukraine's desire to integrate with NATO.

The Cabinet also proposed amending the article of the law on the Foundation of National Security of Ukraine concerning the country's desire to join the European Union by adding a provision on its intention also to integrate with the Euro-Atlantic security environment.

An explanatory note to the document says that the bill's purpose is to set up an additional mechanism for ensuring Ukraine's sovereignty and protecting its territorial integrity and economic and political independence.

The government is convinced that the adoption of this legislation would enable Ukraine to efficiently pursue its course of European integration amid potential and real threats to its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

It was reported earlier that at a Cabinet meeting on Friday Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk had declared that the Cabinet was submitting legislation renouncing Ukraine's non-aligned status to the parliament.

Ukrainian volunteer battalion cedes two Luhansk region communities to militia

LUHANSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The so-called territorial defense volunteer battalion Aidar fighting alongside the Ukrainian government forces has ceded the villages of Khryashchuvate and Novosvitlivka near Luhansk to the militia, says its commander Serhiy Melnychuk.

"The Aidar battalion has retreated from Khryashchuvate and Novosvitlivka because of the enemy's overwhelming manpower superiority," Melnychuk said in a video posted on Youtube on Friday.

The militia of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) declared earlier that they had taken control of Novosvitlivka. "Novosvitlivka has been attacked and liberated. A mortar and its crew were destroyed in a battle. Four mortars, an ammunition depot, and a lot of firearms have been seized," the Novorossiia news agency said in a statement.

Georgian prosecutors to search for Saakashvili via Interpol notice

TBILISI. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The Georgian Prosecutor General's Office has started the procedure for declaring Georgian ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili an international fugitive.

At the current stage, Saakashvili is wanted nationwide, but parallel procedures have begun to declare him an international fugitive via "the Red Notice," prosecution officials told reporters on Saturday.

Earlier the Tbilisi City Court issued an in absentia order for pre-trial detention of Saakashvili who is currently not in Georgia.

Militia claim to have occupied coastal village near Mariupol

DONETSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Militiamen claim that they bypassed Mariupol from the north and reached the Azov Sea coast, having occupied the village of Yalta located twenty kilometers southwest of Mariupol.

"On the Mariupol line, DPR (Donetsk People's Republic) army units performed a maneuver and bypassed Mariupol from the north before establishing control over a part of the road between Mangush and Osipenko, and then made a decisive move towards the coast of the Azov Sea and occupied the populated area of Yalta," a Novorossiia Army representative told reporters on Saturday evening.

He also said that on the Donetsk line, the Ukrainian military command has been evacuating personnel, using 53 vehicles, since 3 p.m. under the conditions of the ceasefire regime provided by the DPR army.

According to the Novorossiia Army, in the past 24 hours the Ukrainian grouping lost up to 70 personnel, including dead and injured, as well as two tanks, six fighting armored vehicles, a BM-21 "Grad" system and two cannon weapons, the source said, without reporting losses in the Novorossiia Army.

Other sources were not immediately available to confirm this report.

Over 100 Ukrainian troops surrender in Donetsk region - militia

DONETSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - An encircled group of the Ukrainian military has surrendered weapons near the village of Starobeshevo south of Donetsk, according to senior militiamen operating in southeastern Ukraine.

"The Ukrainian military went out in the Starobeshevo area. More than a hundred people handed over their weapons to us and surrendered. They have been sent to places of detention and are being checked for involvement in war crimes. Those injured received medical aid," military sources in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic told Interfax on Saturday.

Preliminary reports suggest that this group of the Ukrainian troops has accepted the offer of voluntary arms surrender made by DPR prime minister Alexander Zakharchenko a day earlier.

Zakharchenko's car comes under fire in Donetsk; no one injured

DONETSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - A car which carried the prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), Alexander Zakharchenko, came under fire in the DPR capital on Saturday.

"Alexander Zakharchenko is alive and well. A shot was fired at his vehicle. We are pursuing all possible lines of inquiry into the incident," DPR Security Council member Sergei Kavtaradze told Interfax on Saturday.

Meanwhile, DPR first deputy prime minister Andrei Purgin said it is premature to suspect an attempt on Zakharchenko's life. "The prime minister's car was in fact in the fire zone, but he himself was not injured. It is too soon to call it an attempt on life. First we need to clarify all circumstances, how the car got there," he told Interfax.

Kyiv doesn't ask West to send troops but expects military-technological aid - Poroshenko

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Ukraine expects the international community to provide it with military-technological assistance rather than foreign military personnel, says Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

"We don't expect that soldiers from other countries will be fighting in Ukraine to protect its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of our borders," Poroshenko said at a news conference following a meeting with European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso in Brussels on Saturday.

At the same time, Ukraine expects "military-technological assistance from the international community," Poroshenko said.

"Military-technological cooperation, cooperation in exchanging intelligence, and other aspects are certainly a subject of both bilateral consultations, which are taking place in Brussels today, and the president's position at the NATO summit to take place in early September," he said.

Ukraine also expects assistance in the form of non-lethal weapons and equipment, and the EU has expressed its willingness to provide such assistance, Poroshenko said.

Donbas militia: Only disarmed Ukrainian troops let out of encirclement

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The leadership of the self-proclaimed Donbas militia has denied reports by certain media outlets claiming that some Ukrainian army units were let out of an entrapment near Ilovaisk, the Donetsk region, with weapons and armor.

"This is another absurd report from the Ukrainian military," Vladimir Kononov, the defense minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), said on Saturday.

The militia was willing to provide a humanitarian corridor for the encircled units only on condition of their disarmament, but the Kyiv authorities and the military command did not confirm that they accepted this proposal, he said.

"This morning, a number of armed units of the Ukrainian army started some movement to get out of encirclement, some on board armored vehicles and others on foot, having previously destroyed their hardware. These activities have nothing to do with a humanitarian corridor," Kononov said, adding that the militia fought these units.

A number of Ukrainian army commanders willing to spare the lives of their men decided on their own to leave the entrapment without weapons, Kononov said.

"The matter implies several hundred people," Kononov said, adding that Ukrainian military servicemen deciding to leave the encirclement after laying down their arms can do so through a humanitarian corridor.

Ukrainian troops remain encircled in 3 communities in Donbas - commander

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Groups of Ukrainian government forces remained encircled by the militia in Novokaterynivka, Starobesheve, and Krasnopillya in the Donetsk region as of Saturday morning, Semen Semenchenko, the commander of the Donbas volunteer territorial defense battalion, reported via Facebook on Saturday.

"Here is the situation: three entrapments. Novokaterynivka, Starobesheve and Krasnopillya. [The battalion] Donbas and remnants of units that have not surrendered are in the latter village," Semenchenko said.

"It's so far unknown where the group commander and all battalion commanders are," he said.

Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council spokesman Andriy Lysenko said on Friday that the government forces and volunteer units fighting alongside them were not going to surrender.

However, Semenchenko said on Saturday morning that President Petro Poroshenko had informed him of an agreement on taking Ukrainian troops out of encirclement in Ilovaisk.

Donbas militia claims to have killed, wounded up to 30 Ukrainian troops overnight

DONETSK. Sept1 (Interfax) - The so-called Novorussia Army opposing the Ukrainian government forces in the eastern part of the country claims to have killed and wounded up to 30 Ukrainian troops and taken two populated areas last night.

"The militia forces were engaged in active fighting in the area of the communities of Illiriya, Krasny Luch, and Rodakove from Friday to Saturday. Fashchivka and Chornukhyne in the Luhansk region were fully liberated in the course of the fighting," a Novorussia Army spokesperson told journalists.

Militia forces also repelled four attacks by government forces near the communities of Shcherbak, Rosa Luxemburg, and Novoazovsk, he said.

"The enemy's overall losses overnight and early in the morning on August 30 amounted to 30 people, including those killed and wounded, plus four mortars, and four wheeled vehicles," he said.

Interfax could not immediately obtain confirmation of this information from alternative sources.

Anna News reporter wounded in Donetsk region

DONETSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Anna News military correspondent Igor Nadyrshin was wounded in a gunfire attack in the village of Starobeshevo in Ukraine' Donetsk region on Saturday.

Nadyrshin told Interfax on Sunday that that he was in Starobeshevo to film a report on the aftermath of the fighting. He was with the Donetsk republic's militia when shots were fired.

"I sustained a hip and hand injuries, and lost a finger. The commander was seriously wounded on the shoulder," the journalist said.

"We were ambushed. It could be provocation," he said.

Nadyrshin also said that he was wearing civilian clothes - jeans and a blue shirt - and was holding a camera. The militia fighters' weapons were slung, not in a ready position," he also said.

The reporter's life is not in danger and he is being observed by doctors. Following recovery he wants to resume his work.

Commanders of 2 battalions get out encirclement near Ilovaysk - Ukrainian minister

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Commanders of Mirotvorets and Dnepr-1 battalions Andriy Teteruk and Yuriy Bereza with their men have got out of the encirclement near Ilovaysk in Donetsk region, Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov announced on Sunday on Facebook.

Earlier he said that 28 men from Interior Ministry battalions Mirotvorets, Kherson and Dnepr-1 had reached the lines of the Ukrainian military.

Meanwhile, on Sunday morning a spokesman for the headquarters of the so-called Army of Novorossia announced that the militia had turned over 200 captured army and National Guard servicemen to the Ukrainian side.

"The ceasefire mode was observed by the militia force during the night of September 30 during which 223 captured servicemen and National Guards were turned over to the Ukrainian side," he said to Interfax on Sunday.

During the night a formation of the army of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) "averted an attempt of the National Guard to withdraw heavy weaponry from the area in violation of previous understandings," he said.

"A hit-and-run battle in the area of Starobeshevo resulted in the destruction of two tanks and two personnel carriers, the capture of six tanks with full munitions packages and the disarming of 198 servicemen," the spokesman said.

Kyiv reports elimination of militia formation near Petrovske in Luhansk region

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - In the past 24 hours the Ukrainian military destroyed some 100 members of the militia of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, press officer of the military operation Leonid Matyukhin has announced.

"In the past 24 hours we destroyed three BM-21 Grad artillery systems, one armored personnel carrier, one reconnaissance vehicle, one Kamaz truck and about 100 militants," a Sunday morning posting on the Facebook account of the press center of the military operation says.

The press officer stated that the fire of the Ukrainian military eliminated a militia formation in the outskirts of Petrovske in Luhansk region.

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

Matyukhin also reported the shelling of Ukrainian military positions near Lutugino, Andriivka, Mala Ivanivka and Fashchivka.

"Luhansk airport came under artillery fire four times," he added.

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"A hit-and-run battle in the area of Starobeshevo resulted in the destruction of two tanks and two personnel carriers, the capture of six tanks with full munitions packages and the disarming of 198 servicemen," the spokesman said.

"The total losses of the enemy in all directions [Donetsk, Luhansk, Mariupol] during the night amounted to five tanks, eight armored vehicles, over 120 men killed and wounded and the capture of six tanks," he said.

Donbas militia turns over 223 captives to Ukrainian side

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Interfax does not have official confirmation of this information from other sources.

DPR says will seek recognition of independence at consultations in Minsk

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Consultations of the contact group of peaceful settlement in eastern Ukraine will begin in Minsk Monday afternoon, Andrei Purgin, first deputy prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's republic, told Interfax.

"The consultations are due to begin at noon. This is the first time they will be held in such a format in Minsk. Our position is unchanged: we intend to seek recognition of our independence," Purgin said.

The consultations are also expected to address traditional issues, he said. "We also plan to discuss the issue of prisoner exchange and temporary truce," he said.

Militia say have assumed control over some cities in Donbas

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The militia have established control over several populated areas in the Donetsk region, the agency Novorossia reported on Monday.

"The Novorossia army has liberated Novoamvrosiyevskoye, Blagodatnoye, Semyonovskoye, Artyomovka, Mnogopolye, Metalist, Tretyaki, Kobzari, Zelyonoye, Shirokoye, Pavlogradskoye, and Grabskoye," the agency said in a report posted on its website.

The report also states that the commander of the first company of the battalion Azov was killed in the fighting near Amvrovovka.

The militia also reported an artillery attack on the city of Yenakiyev by the Ukrainian army around 10:45 a.m. According to the militia, "some buildings have been damaged."

Interfax has no confirmation of this information from Ukrainian sources.

Militia say have downed another Su-27 plane

DONETSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The militia handed over to Ukraine the bodies of 35 troops and 402 POWs, of which 72 are wounded, as of 10:00 a.m. on September 1, the press service for the Novorossia army told Interfax.

"The air defense forces have also shot down a Su-27 plane, which had breached the ceasefire agreements, in the area of the populated area of Mereshki," the press service said.

The source said the Ukrainian army had used cluster bombs which are prohibited by international conventions, in the artillery attack on the Luhansk airport.

Last night, the militia damaged two Ukrainian helicopters at a field aerodrome and destroyed two armored vehicles and two ammunition warehouses, the press service said. "Up to 100 Ukrainian troops were killed and wounded and 13 troops were taken prisoner," the source said.

Interfax has no confirmation of this information from Ukrainian sources.

All participants in contact group on Ukraine arrive in Minsk - Belarusian Foreign Ministry

MINSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The Belarusian Foreign Ministry has confirmed that all participants in the contact group Ukraine-Russia-OSCE have arrived in Minsk. The ministry did not specify the names of the representatives.

"The meeting of the three-party contact group (Ukraine-OSCE-Russia) on the settlement of the situation in eastern Ukraine is expected to begin at 2:00 p.m. Minsk time. All negotiation participants have arrived in Minsk," the press service for the Belarusian Foreign Ministry told Interfax on Monday.

According to earlier reports, Russia will most likely be represented, like in the previous such meeting, by [Russian] Ambassador to Ukraine Mikhail Zurabov and Ukraine will be represented by Ukraine's former president Leonid Kuchma. The self proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic will most likely be represented by Andrei Purgin, first deputy prime minister of the Donetsk People's Republic.

The meeting of the contact group in Minsk will be held in the Dipservice Hall (Reception Hall) in central Minsk.

Seven Ukrainian troops killed in eastern Ukraine in past 24 hours

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Seven Ukrainian troops were killed and 25 were wounded in the area of the military operation in the past 24 hours, Andriy Lysenko, spokesman for the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council, told a briefing in Kyiv.

Ukrainian troops confirms withdrawal from Luhansk airport

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - On the order of their commanders, Ukrainian servicemen have left Luhansk airport, Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council information and analytical center spokesman Andriy Lysenko said at a briefing in Kyiv on Monday.

"In the Luhansk direction Ukrainian servicemen have received the order and have withdrawn from the Luhansk airport and Heorhiyevka settlement, which is at the Luhansk - Krasny Luch - Snizhne highway, in an orderly manner," Lysenko said.

A large concentration of hostile forces has been registered near Lutuhyno and near the city of Shchastya on the northern bank of the Seversky Donets River, Lysenko said.

Militia of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) claimed on August 31 to have control over Luhansk airport, which Ukrainian troops had held since June.

"We have managed to take control of the airport. It is a very important strategic point, we have fought for it for a long time, and we have managed to take it," a representative of the Luhansk People's militia told Interfax on August 31.

According to the representative, "a lot of destruction has occurred as a result of clashes at the airport."

DPR, LPR reps to demand special status of territories, halt of military op in Minsk meeting

MOSCOW. Sept 1 (Interfax) - In the negotiations of the contact group on the settlement of the situation in Ukraine, representatives of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic will demand that Kyiv recognize the special status of the territories of the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic and halt the military operation in order to hold free elections of the heads and deputies of these republics.

Representatives of the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic told Interfax that the administrations of the republics have formed their negotiation positions for the contact group meetings involving representatives of Kyiv, Russia and the OSCE.

"In accordance with the spirit and letter of the Geneva agreements, the president, the government and the parliament of Ukraine should adopt legislative acts guaranteeing the immediate overcoming of the consequences of the humanitarian catastrophe, recognition by Ukraine of the special status of the territories controlled by the people's republics, the creation of conditions - primarily the halt of the anti-terrorist operation 'for free elections of the heads and deputies of all levels of the people's republics, based on the principles of independent people's governance without the right of early cancellation of mandates,'" representatives of the self-proclaimed republics said.

The self-proclaimed republics will also demand a special public order protection regime on their territories, "including by special military units, and also the appointment of prosecutors and judges."

The self-proclaimed republics will seek the right to use the Russian language at the official level.

Furthermore, the republics will demand an "unconditional amnesty for political prisoners and militia, and also political figures, parliamentarians, government officials, and officials from other structures of the people's republics."

The self-proclaimed republics will demand the rebuilding of housing, utility lines, transport and industrial infrastructure, and a special foreign economic activity regulations, "bearing in mind the need for further economic integration with Russia and the Customs Union."

The leaders of the self-proclaimed republics said conditions should be created to ensure the return of refugees and a joint commission should be set up to work on the treatment of peaceful conflict resolution and Donbas reconstruction.

"If the said legislative guarantees are adopted, with guarantees from the EU and Russia, the people's republics, for their part, guarantee to make maximum efforts to maintain peace and preserve the unified economic, cultural and political space of Ukraine and the entire Russian-Ukrainian civilization space," representatives of the republics said.

Simultaneously with the adoption by Ukraine of such legislative acts, the administrations of the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic also promise to adopt appropriate legislative acts to ensure the realization of the goals stated above.

For further negotiations, the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic suggest that the Ukrainian president and government "appoint an official representative or representatives in the negotiations with the people's republics from the state civil service."

"At the first stage, the people's republics can delegate to representatives of public organizations whom they trust a mandate to negotiate on their behalf, stating the representatives of the Ukrainian president and government," Interfax was told.

"At the second stage, by the agreement of the parties, negotiations can be conducted directly between official representatives of the Ukrainian president and government and official representatives of the People's Republics," the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic said.

Representatives of the self-proclaimed republics also said they will conduct negotiations "only together" and will not reach any separate agreements.

The next consultations of the contact group on the settlement of the situation in Ukraine are scheduled to be held in Minsk on September 1.

Meeting of contact group on Ukraine begins in Minsk, held behind closed doors

MINSK. Sept 1 (Interfax) - A meeting of the trilateral contact group for resolving the situation in Ukraine began in Minsk on Monday, an Interfax correspondent reported.

First Deputy Prime Minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) Andrei Purgin and a leader of Luhansk militia Alexei Karyakin participate in the talks.

Just as at the meeting held earlier, Russia is represented by Russian Ambassador in Kyiv Mikhail Zurabov and Ukraine - by former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma.

The meeting is being held behind closed doors and journalists were asked to leave the Dipservice Hall building.

Purgin said he did not expect a considerable breakthrough on resolving the situation in Ukraine. "This is an initial stage. We do not expect a considerable breakthrough today," Purgin told reporters in Minsk prior to the meeting.

Purgin said he "arrived with proposals in order to find contact points and to stop the war and casualties." The initial proposals for the consultative negotiating process will "include eight to nine points," Purgin said.

"An exchange of proposals will take place today and we will try to find contact points," he said.

Almost 700 Ukrainian military taken prisoner in Donbas in past few days - head of prisoner exchange center

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - A total of 680 Ukrainian troops were taken prisoner in the fighting in Donbas in the past few days, Colonel-General in Reserve Volodymyr Ruban, the head of the prisoner exchange center, said on Monday, according to Channel 5 television.

Ruban said the information on the number of Ukrainians taken prisoner near Ilovaysk is secret. "I can't discuss it while the operation continues," he said.

Ruban also said at "680 Ukrainian POWs are being taken to Donetsk and feeding them is becoming a problem."

Ruban said the Dnepropetrovsk region is preparing a humanitarian train to take food to Donetsk to feed the Ukrainian POWs.

Kyiv seeks urgent consultations with Budapest Memorandum signatories

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Ukraine has asked the member states of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum (the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia) to conduct consultations, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin said.

"We asked the signatories of the Budapest Memorandum about immediate consultations. Certainly, Russia does not want this," Klimkin told a press conference held jointly with Norway's Foreign Minister Borge Brende in Kyiv on Monday.

At the same time, he stressed that Ukraine is willing to use all existing formats for talks aimed at preventing further hostilities and ensuring that "this response is not just visible but also productive."

The Budapest Memorandum signed by the U.S., UK, Russia and Ukraine in 1994, involves security guarantees for Ukraine.

Ukrainian defense minister opposes chief of General Staff's resignation

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax-AVN) - Ukraine's Defense Minister Valeriy Heletey has rejected calls for the chief of the Army's General Staff, Viktor Muzhenko, to resign over the Ukrainian army's recent failures in the military campaign in the east of the country.

Ukraine needs "total consolidation of all available forces" and calls for the chief of General Staff to be sacked are "a Russian provocation," Heletey wrote on his Facebook page on Monday.

Staff reshuffles should aim to reinforce, not weaken the army, he said. "The past week saw the removal of six commanding officers. They were replaced with young commanders who had proved their combat capability," Heletey said.

About 30 Ukrainian troops captured near Ilovaisk released - prisoner exchange center

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - About 30 captured Ukrainian army servicemen have been freed near Ilovaisk, Donetsk region, said Res. Col. Gen. Volodymyr Ruban, the head of a prisoner exchange center.

"The Defense Ministry, Ukraine's Security Service (...) and our Center are working on the military, and specifically Ilovaisk. To date, we have managed to free up to 30 people, including 16 whose release was facilitated by female singer Ruslana," he said on the Ukraine television channel on Monday evening.

There are still 680 captives in the Donetsk area, who represent various disparate detachments, Ruban said. At the moment there is a food problem, and Dnipropetrovsk is preparing humanitarian aid "to feed our captured soldiers in Donetsk," he said.

Ruban said earlier that 680 servicemen had been captured. However, with regard with the captives near Ilovaisk he did not provide any figures, saying he could not discuss that "until the operation is over and the captives are reclaimed," he said.

Eight border guards rescued, two missing after shelling in Sea of Azov - Ukraine Border Service

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian State Border Service said eight Ukrainian crewmembers were rescued and the search for two others is continuing following the shelling of two Mariupol coastguard service motor boats, the Grif and the Kalkan.

"The Grif and the Kalkan were shelled at 3:10 p.m. on August 31 three miles off the coast near the populated area of Bezymyanne. The shelling sparked off a fire aboard the Grif, which sank," the border service's press service said.

Other coastguard boats were dispatched to rescue the crews of the attacked boats, as a result of which eight crewmembers were rescued. Seven of them had been wounded. The search for two other crewmembers is continuing.

Earlier reports said seven border guards were wounded and two were missing.

Contact group talks in Minsk could continue on Sept 5

MINSK. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Continuation of the consultations of the trilateral contact group for settling the situation in Ukraine is planned on September 5 in Minsk, First Deputy Prime Minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) Andrei Purgin said.

"We have handed each other documents and we will study them, consultations may continue on September 5," Purgin told reporters in Minsk on Monday following four-hour talks of the contact group including Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

"We will actively discuss Ukraine's proposals, which are big, and we will study and discuss them," Purgin said. The parties have "taken time out," he said.

Representatives of both parties need to realize which of the proposals are "possible for discussion, and which are unacceptable," Purgin said.

When asked by reporters which of nine points voiced by the militia representatives Purgin considered to be of principle, the DPR deputy prime minister said: "We do not want to bring them for wide discussion for now, the work will continue."

Purgin said he noted several directions, including the issue of captives.

Militias claim to have destroyed Ukrainian army bridgehead near Luhansk

LUHANSK. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Militiamen from the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) have occupied the village of Vesylaya Gora after destroying the last bridgehead used by the Ukrainian troops advancing on Luhansk.

"During the fierce fighting the LPR militia forces ousted the Ukrainian military from the populated area of Vesylaya Gora. Thus, the last bridgehead in the Luhansk offensive has been destroyed," an LPR militia spokesman told Interfax on Monday.

Vesylaya Gora, which is located in the Slavyanoserbkiy District, is "a key position as it allows control over the bridge across the Siverskyi Donets (river) near the town of Schastya on the Luhansk-Starobelsk motorway," he said.

Schastya has the Luhansk thermal-power plant, the largest source of electricity in the region.

Ukrainian officials have yet to comment on this information.

State Border Service: 54 border guards die in eastern Ukraine

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Fifty-four Ukrainian border guards have died in the army operation in eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian State Border Service reported.

"The hostilities in eastern Ukraine have killed 54 border guards," the service said in a report posted on its website.

The service noted the data was valid as of September 1.

NSDC: Kyiv may alter format of army operation in eastern Ukraine

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian authorities are considering a possible change of the format of the army operation in eastern Ukraine, National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) Information Analysis Center speaker Andriy Lysenko said.

"We are aware of the situation and a decision on further reconfiguration of the ATO [army operation] format is pending. Some say this is a wrong format because we are no longer dealing with the terrorists, but a decision to change the format has yet to be made," Lysenko said in a program aired by the ICTV channel on Monday evening.

"I think we will hear about broader solutions shortly, among them solutions concerning personnel matters," he added.

Lysenko also said the Ukrainian army was preparing for defensive operations in the south.

"Speaking of the southern sector, troops have been rapidly redeployed there and reinforcements have been sent. For instance, we have formed an outpost in Mariupol equipped with engineering fortifications and mine fields. We already possess forces in the southern sector to deter a more powerful attack," he said.

Moreover, a large number of volunteers are ready to engage in combat upon first order, Lysenko said, adding that Mariupol alone has 5,000 volunteers.

NSDC: Poroshenko, faction leaders decide to not declare martial law

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) confirmed President Petro Poroshenko and parliament faction leaders had decided to not declare a martial law in Ukraine.

"True, it was decided at the meeting with faction leaders to not impose a martial law," NSDC Information Analysis Center speaker Andriy Lysenko said in a program aired by the ICTV channel on Monday night.

"The General Staff is holding a conference this very second to plan further actions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and law enforcement authorities," he stressed.

Ukrainian forces consolidate themselves near Ilovaisk - Kyiv

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Ukrainian forces have entrenched themselves between the town of Komsomolsk and the village of Razdolne in the Starobeshevsky district of the Donetsk region, spokesman for the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Andriy Lysenko said at a press briefing on Monday.

He said this helped provide cover for and help Ukrainian units coming out of encirclement near Ilovaisk in the Donetsk region.

The Novorossiia news agency reported earlier on Monday that the militia had seized control over several populated areas in the Donetsk region.

"The armed forces of Novorossiia have liberated the villages of Blahodatne, Semyonovske, Artyomove, Mnogopolye, Metallist, Tretiyaky, Kobazari, Shyroke, Pavlohradske and Hrabske," the news agency said.

Armenian president joins Karabakh Independence Day celebrations

YEREVAN. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic celebrates its Independence Day on Tuesday, September 2.

Armenian President Serzh Sargsian is paying a working visit to Stepanakert on this occasion.

A congratulatory message by the Armenian president says, "The historic choice of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh has become an irreversible reality."

"With support from the entire Armenian community and, in the first turn, thanks to your unbending will, super-human efforts and dedication, and great sacrifices, you have created and developed your statehood. The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic can proudly stand amongst countries possessing the advantage of good organization, a powerful army and solid state structures," the presidential press service quoted Sargsian's message as saying to Interfax.

Ukrainian troops pushed out of firing position near Donetsk - eyewitnesses

DONETSK. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Ukrainian government forces have left the village of Yelenovka, from where they were firing Grad rockets at the Kirovskiy, Petrovskiy and Budyonovskiy districts of Donetsk, an Interfax correspondent reported from the scene.

After a long fight, the Ukrainian military retreated towards Volnovakha.

Local residents told Interfax that the fighting outside Yelenovka lasted for several hours.

"The fight went on for a long time, then militiamen started firing artillery. Something exploded hard on the Ukrainian positions and the fight went somewhat quiet. Then we went to have a look what's there and saw that the soldiers were already gone," said one of the eyewitnesses. He said they left behind a lot of field rations and personal belongings.

Control over the Ukrainian army checkpoint in Yelenovka has been seized by militias from the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic.

Information about losses on both sides is being verified.

15 servicemen die in east Ukraine in past 24 hours - National Security Defense Council

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - In the past 24 hours Ukrainian troops have lost 15 servicemen and other 49 troops have been injured in eastern Ukraine, Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council information and analytical center spokesman Andriy Lysenko said at a briefing in Kyiv on Tuesday.

"In the past 24 hours we have lost 15 servicemen and 49 have been injured," Lysenko said.

FM: South Korea donates \$500,000 humanitarian aid to Kyiv

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - South Korea has donated \$500,000 humanitarian aid to Ukraine, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin said.

"[South] Korea has made a \$500,000 humanitarian contribution," he tweeted on Monday evening.

The minister said the humanitarian aid would reach Ukraine via the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

NSDC: Details of Ukrainian POWs' release negotiations not disclosed to make negotiations successful

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Negotiations on the release of captured Ukrainian servicemen are being held formally and through unofficial channels, the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) said.

"As to Gen. Ruban [Reserve Col. Gen. Volodymyr Ruban, head of the POW exchange center], I spoke to him before this program. Indeed, a number was mentioned, 680 captured Ukrainian servicemen. He told me he had been given a list of 200 captured servicemen. And he was promised more. The conversation was held with Alexander Zakharchenko [Prime Minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic]," NSDC Information Analysis Center speaker Andriy Lysenko said in the program aired by the ICTV channel on Monday evening.

"Currently, the POW-related work is being done formally by a special unit of the Ukrainian Security Service and unofficially by Volodymyr Ruban," he said.

The NSDC speaker said Ruban told him what conditions the militia had set for releasing the Ukrainian servicemen.

"They are ready to let [the prisoners] go but on the condition they will not return to the front. There are also other conditions and they are now being debated," Lysenko said, referring to the POW exchange center head.

"The information is not disclosed in order to make the negotiations successful and to ensure security of the prisoners," he said.

The NSDC speaker stressed the importance of integrated efforts of the official and unofficial negotiators.

The Ukrainian Armed Forces General Staff is considering the launch of guerrilla operations but this is not a current priority, Lysenko added.

"Guerrilla operations are a part of the General Staff's mobilization plans. There are certain commanders of guerrilla units, they know their people who will join these units," he continued.

It is possible to start guerrilla operations in the woods, in the Chernihiv and Zhytomyr regions. "But the war is now in progress in eastern Ukraine," Lysenko pointed out.

Getting non-NATO ally status to allow Ukraine enhancing security - Poroshenko

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said he was grateful to the United States for the initiative to grant his country the status of major non-NATO ally.

"This will allow us getting new opportunities from cooperation with the U.S. and enhancing own security," Poroshenko said at a meeting with U.S. Senator Robert Menendez in Kyiv on September 1, the presidential press office said.

During his visit to the U.S. in second half of September Poroshenko intends to raise the issue concerning the recognition of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) as terrorist organizations, the press office said.

Self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic: Direct dialogue with Kyiv impossible

MOSCOW. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The leadership of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) insists on its independence from Ukraine and dismisses any idea of direct negotiations with the Ukrainian leadership.

"We certainly don't see ourselves as an entity within Ukraine. All other options can be considered and discussed," DPR First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Purgin told Interfax.

Consultations ongoing within the contact group for Ukraine should lead to a ceasefire between the conflicting parties, but the DPR views any direct dialogue with Kyiv as unacceptable, Purgin said.

"Direct dialogue is still impossible for us. Only through mediators. We've started a process that should eventually lead to a truce, but it's so far been impossible to reach an agreement on a truce and on not holding captives," he said.

Ukraine could get military, technical assistance from certain EU states - Foreign Minister Klimkin

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Ukraine is holding talks with certain EU countries regarding military and technical assistance, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin said at a briefing in Kyiv on Tuesday.

"We are holding intensive consultations with our friends and partners and such decisions could be implemented bilaterally," Klimkin said.

Military and technical cooperation with EU countries is carried out mostly bilaterally, the minister said. "This is not so much an EU remit, as it is within the framework of bilateral formats. It is of crucial importance for us that EU countries and not only EU ones help us to develop the capabilities of our Armed Forces and security sector in general and to defend Ukraine," he said.

Ukraine is working to enhance the quality and mutual compatibility of Ukrainian Armed Forces with NATO forces and the Ukrainian issue will be one of the key topics at the coming NATO summit to be held in Wales, Klimkin said.

"The North Atlantic Alliance now clearly understands the challenges which have emerged in front of us due to acts of aggression by Russia against Ukraine and is looking for responses to these challenges on its own from the viewpoint of the most effective protection of its members and from the viewpoint of helping its friends and partners, most importantly Ukraine," Klimkin said.

Ukraine can become major non-NATO ally in 2014 - minister

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Ukraine could be assigned the status of the United States' major non-NATO ally (MNNA) as early as this year, said Justice Minister Pavlo Petrenko.

"Given the conditions our country is currently in, we have a prospect of obtaining the status of a U.S. ally fairly quickly. I think this will happen as early as this year," the minister said at an event held on the occasion of Notaries' Day on Tuesday.

The MNNA status will enable Ukraine to significantly broaden its military-technical cooperation and obtain a mechanism for buying necessary weapons, Petrenko said.

"The procedure for granting the U.S. ally status has been launched. But I personally think: this is an interim stage for granting Ukraine full membership in the North-Atlantic Alliance," Petrenko said.

Poroshenko signs law on manning professional army, draft simplification

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko has approved amendments to the law "On military duty and military service" and the law "On the principles of preventing and countering corruption," concerning the manning of a professional army and simplifying army conscription during a crisis.

Law N1634-VII facilitates the transition of the Ukrainian Armed Forces to enlisting personnel on a contractual basis, the president's press office said on Tuesday.

The law also simplifies the procedure and reduces the time required for drafting citizens into military service in the event of a critical situation that poses a threat to Ukraine's national security, and for announcing a decision to conduct mobilization and/or impose martial law.

Svoboda faction wants Ukrainian Insurgent Army's birthday to be marked Oct 14

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Leader of the Svoboda parliamentary faction Oleh Tyahnybok has urged that on October 14, which marks the birthday of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the parliament should proclaim that members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, led by Bandera, and soldiers of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army were fighters for Ukraine's state independence.

"On October 14, we will mark the day of the restoration of the history of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. It must become a day of our Ukrainian victory. On this day we must come here and vote for the proclamation of members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army as fighters for Ukraine's state independence," Tyahnybok told the Ukrainian parliament on Tuesday.

The Ukrainian Insurgent Army was the armed wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, led by Bandera. In 1943-44 it fought against Soviet partisans, the Polish underground Army Ludowa and Army Krajowa and the German occupation administration, and was active in the Ukrainian-Polish conflict.

After the reinstatement of the Soviet system in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army started fighting against the Red Army, against Soviet law enforcement and special services, Soviet officials, activists of collective farming and intellectuals.

It was formally disbanded on September 1949, but its individual groups continued operating until the start of 1956.

Right Sector denies reports of death of its leader Yarosh

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Ukraine's ultra-radical Right Sector party has dismissed Twitter reports about the death of its leader, Dmytro Yarosh, near Ilovaisk, Donetsk region.

"If it is about Twitter and about (Yarosh's) death, then it is untrue ... Consider this an official statement from Right Sector: our guide is alive and well and on the frontline," Right Sector spokesman Artyom Skoropadskiy told Interfax on Tuesday.

Earlier on Tuesday morning, a tweet signed as Pan Yarosh (identifier: ru_yarosh) and with Yarosh's photo on the avatar reported the death of the account holder near Ilovaisk.

Donbas militia claims to have taken control of Donetsk-Mariupol motorway

DONETSK. Sept 2 (Interfax) - Militia units in Donbas claim to have taken control of the Donetsk-Mariupol motor road and a number of other roads leading to Mariupol, the second largest city in the Donetsk region, the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) militia headquarters reported on Tuesday.

"Militia forces fully control the Donetsk-Mariupol road in the south, although the village of Manhush remains under Ukrainian government forces' control. All roads connecting Mariupol with other cities are fully under the militia forces' control, which constitutes the so-called Mariupol entrapment. Only the Azov and Shakhtarsk territorial defense battalions and some Interior Forces troops remain in Mariupol now," it said.

Witnesses said exchanges of fire have been heard on the outskirts of Mariupol over the past several nights. Ukrainian army units are continuing to reinforce their positions at the entrances to the city, mining the approaches to it and installing antitank obstacles.

Kyiv reveals issues discussed by Contact Group in Minsk

KYIV. Sept 2 (Interfax) - The latest meeting of the Contact Group in Minsk on September 1 focused on the proposals on how to resolve the key issues relating to the situation in eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said.

"(Judging) by the information that we have from the participants of the Trilateral Contact Group, yesterday's meeting focused on several most important issues: a bilateral ceasefire, border control, release of hostages and the provision of safety during humanitarian aid deliveries to eastern Ukraine. The parties exchanged their views on the resolution of these issues," Foreign Ministry spokesman Yevhen Perebyinis said at a briefing on Tuesday.

The Contact Group agreed to continue consultations in the very near future, he added.

Ukrainian Rada exempts defense products from customs duties, VAT

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada has amended the national Customs Code and Tax Code to simplify imports of defense products.

Bill No. 4555a amending the Customs Code regarding the simplification of imports of defense products was supported on Tuesday by 234 Ukrainian parliamentarians.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Petro Mekhed said in presenting the bill at the parliamentary session on Tuesday that the amendments proposed by the government would cut the expenditures involved in imports of defense products to the Ukrainian customs territory.

In voting for the legislation, the parliamentarians took into account amendments proposed by Batkivshchyna faction member Serhiy Teryokhin, who suggested that the Customs Code indicate codes of groups of

defense products exempted from customs duties and that these duties be lifted not for a certain period of time, be it a special period, an emergency situation, or the antiterrorist operation, but in general.

The Rada also supported bill No. 4556a-1 amending the Tax Code regarding the simplification of imports of defense products.

Teryokhin, the author of the legislation, said the amendments envisioned codes of groups of defense products exempted from VAT, which would apply to both imported and domestically-manufactured defense products.

DPR, LPR representatives must demonstrate political will - minister

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Trilateral Contact Group is ready to continue work and is expecting representatives from the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) to show political will, said Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin.

"I spoke to the participants in these consultations, both from the Ukrainian side, and from the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe). They are set to continue them and ready to work in earnest. The question now is that representatives from the so-called LPR and DPR are also ready to work in earnest, and this requires the relevant political will," Klimkin told reporters on Tuesday, commenting on the results of the talks held by the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk on September 1.

The minister praised the very fact of these consultations held in Minsk, as it had been difficult to organize this round of talks because of the DPR's and LPR's reluctance to take part in them, he said

"Yesterday's discussion focused on a number of issues relating to the need to release hostages and to address issues relating to ceasefire preconditions," said the Ukrainian foreign minister.

It was reported that on September 1 Minsk hosted consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group over the Ukrainian crisis.

DPR deputy Prime Minister Andriy Purgin said after the meeting that the Group is planning to continue consultations in Minsk on September 5.

"We have exchanged documentation and will study it. Consultations might continue on September 5," Purgin told reporters.

"There will be an active discussion, Ukraine has big proposals, we will study and discuss them," the DPR representative said. The parties have "taken a time out," he said.

Representatives from both sides must understand which of the proposals "can be discussed and which are unacceptable," he said.

Ukrainian prosecutors probing several cases related to fighting near Ilovaisk

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office says all those responsible for violating the law in events near Ilovaisk, the Donetsk region, including high-ranking armed forces commanders, will be prosecuted.

"Criminal proceedings are opened into each war crime against individuals who committed it. Criminal proceedings are opened into the death of each serviceman; in particular, if only troops, [low-ranking commanders] or possibly the top command were guilty in [the events] near Ilovaisk, all this will be analyzed and considered and personnel decisions will be made. As concerns criminal liability, if the law was broken, they will certainly be held criminally liable," Prosecutor General's Office spokesman Yury Boichenko said at a news conference in Kyiv on Tuesday.

A number of criminal cases concerning the events near Ilovaisk are being investigated now, he said.

"There were various actions there; for instance, some people left their location. For instance, there is a criminal case concerning desertion of the Prykarpattya battalion," Boichenko said.

Over 300 servicemen refused to perform their military duties in a combat situation in the military operation area on August 26, left their positions and headed for their permanent base in the Ivano-Frankivsk region, he said.

Ukrainian army reinforcing approaches to Mariupol - NSDC

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The reinforcement of roadblocks on the Mariupol perimeter is almost over now, Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) Information Analysis Center speaker Andriy Lysenko said on Tuesday.

Lysenko said all the roadblocks surrounding Mariupol were being reinforced.

A second line of defense will soon be built 15-20 kilometers away from the city, he added.

Hostilities resume in Donetsk airport zone

DONETSK. Sept 3 (Interfax) - A rocket launcher volley was fired at the Donetsk airport zone from the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) positions at 9:30 p.m. local time on Tuesday. Shooting can be heard there now, an Interfax correspondent reports from the site.

"For a long period of time our groups have been disturbing the enemy, which consolidated its defense on the airport premises. The rocket launcher volley and the shooting can indicate the beginning of a new storm. The storm will be kept secret until the very last moment. After all, this is a strategic facility, which is rather important for us and the enemy," the DPR defense department said.

It said the operation would be difficult due to a vast network of the airport's underground passages. The DPR military are confident that the enemy has taken that circumstance into consideration and has thoroughly prepared for the storm.

The Ukrainian army took control of the airport in early May. Since then the airport has been transformed into a fortress, the DPR defense department said.

Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) Information Analysis Center speaker Andriy Lysenko claimed at a press briefing on Tuesday that the Ukrainian army retained control of the Donetsk airport.

Speaking of the Luhansk airport, Lysenko said, "After our troops had left the Luhansk airport, our sappers blew up the runway and made its use impossible."

Hundred National Guard soldiers leave Luhansk airport thru "green corridor" - LPR head

LUHANSK. Sept 3 (Interfax) - About a hundred Ukrainian National Guard soldiers have left the Luhansk airport through "a green corridor" provided by the militia, head of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic Igor Plotnitsky said.

"They [the Ukrainian servicemen] asked for a truce, "a green corridor" for the evacuation of their remaining forces, and this process is taking place now. We decided in principle that a senseless murder on our part and on their part will not do any good," Plotnitsky said in a LifeneWS television program aired on Tuesday.

"There are not many people left there, slightly more than a hundred, and there used to be around 300 of them. They have sent their vehicles and we permit them to leave our territory after an examination," he said.

The LPR head said also that the frontline stretched out from Yuvileine to Alchevsk after the militia had taken control of the Luhansk airport.

UDAR, Svoboda parliamentary factions in Ukraine oppose talks between govt envoys, militia

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The parliamentary factions of the UDAR and Svoboda parties at the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada categorically oppose negotiations between Ukrainian officials and the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR).

It was reported earlier that the demands that DPR and LPR planned to put forward at a meeting of the contact group for Ukraine in Minsk on September 1 included the appointment of a Ukrainian presidential and government official for negotiating with representatives of the self-proclaimed republics.

"I haven't seen this statement. We don't cooperate with terrorist organizations," Iryna Herashchenko, a member of the UDAR party and presidential envoy for settling the situation in Donbas, said when asked whether a Ukrainian government official could be engaged in direct consultations with the DPR and LPR.

Oleh Tyahnybok, the leader of the Svoboda faction, said at a news conference in Kyiv on Tuesday, "I would like to warn the president and the diplomatic corps against holding negotiations or sitting at the negotiating

table with representatives of the so-called DPR and LPR." He argued that this could be interpreted as the legal recognition of these organizations.

Rada Deputy Chairman Ruslan Koshulynsky of the Svoboda faction said when asked whether a Ukrainian presidential and government official could take part in consultations with DPR and LPR representatives that this was impossible.

Georgia stepping up procedures to formally declare ex-President Saakashvili internationally wanted

TBILISI. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office made a statement on Tuesday concerning reports that former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili was held for some time on the Greek island of Samos, confirming that he was under the local police's supervision for several hours.

"The Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office received a message from a Georgian law enforcement agency on September 1, from which we learned that Mikheil Saakashvili was taken under control by local police when he tried to enter Georgian territory," Georgian Chief Prosecutor's Office spokesman Irakly Chilingarishvili told journalists.

Greece was informed that Georgian authorities had started procedures to put the ex-Georgian president on the international wanted list through Interpol, he said.

"Greece asked us to confirm this information immediately. We forwarded the relevant confirmation, but, considering that the Red Notice had not been formally circulated in relation to Saakashvili, the Greek law enforcement had to free him several hours later," Chilingarishvili said.

A package of documents for declaring Saakashvili internationally wanted has already been sent to Interpol, Chilingarishvili said. "We have information that Interpol has accepted our request for consideration, but it's unknown so far when a decision is going to be made. We can't tell Interpol when it should make a decision," he said.

Georgian media reported citing the Georgian ambassador in Athens that Greek police had held a yacht carrying Saakashvili for four hours near Samos but then released it.

Saakashvili has been declared wanted in Georgia. The Tbilisi City Court had ruled earlier that Saakashvili, who is currently outside Georgia, be taken into custody pending trial.

Uzbek force structures hold drills on border with Afghanistan

TASHKENT. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The force structures of Uzbekistan have practiced guarding and defending crucial assets in the country's south bordering Afghanistan.

Army, police and emergency forces, as well as border guard units from Uzbekistan's National Security Service conducted joint drills in the Termez garrison (southern Uzbekistan, on the border with Afghanistan) during which they practiced guarding and defending critical assets, a source in the country's force structures told Interfax on Tuesday.

Overall, the servicemen's performance during the drills was rated as good, the source said.

Rada allows govt officials to collect donations for military operation in eastern Ukraine

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada has passed legislation enabling public officials to collect charity funds "to improve the country's defensive capability."

The bill amending Article 7 of the Ukrainian law On Charity Activities and Charity Organizations concerning charity donations was passed by 238 out of the 315 lawmakers who signed in a parliamentary session on Tuesday.

The current version of the law forbids public officials or civil servants as well as individuals acting on their behalf to publicly collect charity donations.

Poroshenko, Putin agree on lasting ceasefire in Donbas - Ukrainian presidential press service

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin have agreed on a lasting ceasefire in Donbas in a telephone conversation, the Ukrainian presidential website reported on Wednesday.

"The conversation resulted in an agreement on a lasting ceasefire in Donbas. Mutual understanding was achieved regarding steps that would promote the establishment of peace," it said.

Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov had reported a telephone conversation between Putin and Poroshenko earlier on Wednesday, saying that the two leaders "continued discussions regarding the military and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine."

"The chiefs of state exchanged opinions as to what should be done primarily to stop bloodshed in the southeastern part of the country as soon as possible. The presidents' viewpoints on possible ways to overcome the grave and critical situation coincide to a considerable degree," he said.

Kyiv updates report by saying Poroshenko, Putin agree on "ceasefire regime" in Donbas

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian presidential press service has updated its previous report on agreements reached between Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin, saying that the two actually agreed on a ceasefire regime in Donbas rather than on a lasting ceasefire, as was reported before.

"The conversation resulted in an agreement on a ceasefire regime in Donbas. Mutual understanding was achieved regarding steps that would promote the establishment of peace," the updated statement on the Ukrainian presidential website says.

The previous report posted on the Ukrainian presidential website said: "The conversation resulted in an agreement on a lasting ceasefire in Donbas. Mutual understanding was achieved regarding steps that would promote the establishment of peace."

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Militia ready for political resolution of conflict with Kyiv if Ukrainian army really ceases fire

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Donbas militia leader, deputy of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic Supreme Council Miroslav Rudenko said it was possible to shift from armed confrontation to a political resolution of their conflict with Kyiv if the ceasefire agreement was honored.

"If the Ukrainian side keeps its ceasefire promises, we will be ready to settle the issue in a political manner," Rudenko said on Wednesday, answering a question from Interfax.

He welcomed the ceasefire agreement but said his optimism was cautious.

"Unless this is another political trick of Kyiv, similar with the one we have seen this summer, and they really decide to cease fire, it will help shift the process to a political channel. Definitely, we can only welcome that," Rudenko told Interfax.

As to the possible militia ceasefire, he said, "It is the purpose of the consultations to shift this process from the military channel to political. The purpose of our referendum was not the fighting."

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Kyiv approves 2014 plan of cooperation with NATO

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian government has approved the 2014 national program of Ukraine-NATO cooperation, the government press service said.

The government accepted a draft decree of the Ukrainian president "On the Approval of the Annual National Program of Ukraine-NATO Cooperation in 2014" at its meeting, the press service reported.

The draft program was updated by the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry in collaboration with the commission for Ukraine-NATO partnership with due account of the situation in southeastern Ukraine. NATO suggested additional mechanisms to bolster cooperation with Ukraine in all spheres and enlarged allocations for practically every ongoing cooperation program.

Militia clearing Donetsk airport of Ukrainian army

DONETSK. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The militia claims it is trying to take control of the Donetsk airport premises and to clear it from entrenched Ukrainian army servicemen.

"The [airport] clearing is underway. We cannot say we have full control as of yet; there are still clashes with the enemy on the [airport] premises. The special nature of the facility, which has underground levels, passages and numerous fortified sites - after all, they spent more than a month there and had the possibility and time to entrench - makes the process more complicated," a source in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) staff told Interfax.

Earlier reports said the battle for the airport began last night.

Interfax has yet to obtain information about fighting in the Donetsk airport from Ukrainian sources.

South Ossetia set to join Russia-Abkhazia security network - newspaper

MOSCOW. Sept 3 (Interfax) - South Ossetia is negotiating with Abkhazia its affiliation to the new Russia-Abkhazia Treaty of Amity and Mutual Assistance, which pledges the deployment of an integrated security network before the end of this year, the newspaper Izvestia said.

"We have been discussing lately the possibility of a treaty with Russia with the Abkhazian side on South Ossetian affiliation to the integrated security network. It is so far unknown whether the treaty can be trilateral or the republic signs separate agreements with Russia and Abkhazia but our efforts continue," South Ossetian Ambassador in Abkhazia Oleg Botsiyev told the newspaper.

He said the terms of South Ossetia's affiliation would differ from the terms laid down by Russia and Abkhazia.

"The content is just being discussed but it will obviously have a military element, in the first turn, and spell our conditions of the economic and information security of our region," Botsiyev said.

Abkhazia confirmed the negotiations. Abkhaz Vice-President Vitaly Gabnia said they were speaking about a powerful bloc "by the example of NATO and as its opponent."

Eastern Ukrainian militia mistrust Poroshenko ceasefire declaration

DONETSK. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Oleh Tsaryov, the chairman of the common legislature of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), is skeptical about the Ukrainian presidential press service's declaration on reaching agreements on a ceasefire in Donbas.

"This is not the first time that the Ukrainian authorities declare halting of combat activities. The previous such truce resulted in the regrouping of the Ukrainian security forces and the blockade of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Slovyansk," Tsaryov told Interfax on Wednesday.

"We have always supported peace processes for settling the conflict. This step could be considered a prelude to peace talks. But our demands remain the same as before: the full withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from the DPR and LPR territory. It is only after that that we are prepared to hold negotiations," he said.

A DPR Defense Ministry spokesperson said Ukrainian president's decision has no effect on the Donbas, Azov and other volunteer battalions financed by "oligarchs."

"The territorial defense battalions do not report to the president," he said.

New Ukrainian defense doctrine should designate Russia as principal threat - Yatsenyuk

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - A new Ukrainian defense doctrine should designate Russia as a state threatening Ukraine's territorial integrity, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk said.

"Ukraine needs a new defense doctrine clearly determining who the aggressor is and who is a threat. A new defense doctrine should designate Russia as an aggressor state and the principal and only country that threatens Ukraine's territorial integrity and national security," Yatsenyuk said at a government meeting on Wednesday.

Ukrainian premier declares launch of Project Stena on border with Russia

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian authorities are about to launch Project Stena on the border with Russia, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk said.

"We are launching Project Stena. A real state border will be constructed between Ukraine and the Russian Federation," Yatsenyuk said at a government meeting on Wednesday.

He did not say exactly how the project would be fulfilled.

Ukraine wants special status in relations with NATO - Yatsenyuk

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Kyiv is seeking special status in its relations with NATO, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk said.

"I would like to note specially before a NATO summit that our goal is to receive a special status [in relations] between Ukraine and NATO," Yatsenyuk said in opening a government meeting in Kyiv on Wednesday.

"NATO should grant Ukraine special status of special partner number one," Yatsenyuk said.

Ukraine also expects the United States to grant Ukraine key ally status, he said.

"As for NATO, the best decision would be the adoption of a decision on Ukraine's membership of NATO," Yatsenyuk said, admitting that it would be difficult to obtain consent to this from some NATO member-states.

Armenian, Azeri presidents may meet during NATO summit in Wales - newspaper

YEREVAN. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan and Azeri President Ilham Aliyev may meet to address the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict this week, the Armenian newspaper Aikakan Zhamanak reported on Wednesday.

"Our sources report that Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan agreed to meet with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev in the capital of Wales, Cardiff, during the NATO summit this week," the newspaper said.

The idea of such a meeting belongs to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, it said.

The Armenian presidential office refrained from commenting on the report.

"The press service will inform you of all of the president's meetings timely and properly," Armenian presidential press secretary Armen Sagatelian told Interfax.

The last time the Armenian and Azeri leaders met was in Sochi on August 10.

Ukraine plans new sanctions, new lawsuits against Russia - Yatsenyuk

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian government and parliament have endorsed a bill on imposing sectoral sanctions on Russia, and the government is determined to file new lawsuits against Russia, Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk said.

"The imposition of sanctions is among our goals. The government has approved this bill. We have adopted it, despite a not very easy situation at the parliament. It is necessary now to sign this bill into law and make a decision on imposing sanctions on Russia," Yatsenyuk said at a government meeting on Wednesday.

"In addition, new lawsuits will be filed against Russia [...] to make up for all the damage that Russia has inflicted on the Ukrainian state," he added.

Luhansk deprived of electricity, water and phone service for month - City Council

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Power to Luhansk was cut off precisely a month ago. The city has been deprived of electricity, tap water and communication services throughout this period, says a report posted on the Luhansk City Council website.

"New residential buildings and socially significant sites report damage daily amid the incessant firing at the regional center," the report said.

The town of Shchastya in the Luhansk Zhovten district was attacked last night, local residents said. People in Shchastya woke up to the cannonade this morning and saw that residential buildings and other city infrastructure elements had been damaged.

"The hostilities and bombardments go on in the regional center. Eyewitnesses have reported damage done to residential buildings on Ochakivska and Lyneva Streets and in the Yuzhny and Haevogo neighborhoods. Some residential buildings were impacted in Yuvileine and a number of other districts," the report said.

Mini-bus service was working in Luhansk in the morning and people went out to buy food.

The absence of tap water remains a serious problem of the regional center. There is a natural flow of tap water on the lower stories of some houses.

There is still no supply of food, medicine or fuel to the city. People have run out of money and salaries, pensions and social allowances have not been paid for a long time, the City Council said.

Ukraine is becoming less dependent on Russia - Yatsenyuk

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - Ukraine is becoming less dependent on Russia every day, Ukraine's Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk said.

"Ukraine's export is being diversified because the EU has opened its market to Ukrainian goods and we have increased the export to the EU by \$1.3 billion while simultaneously reducing our trade with Russia by \$2.5 billion. We are becoming less and less dependent on Russia. We shouldn't be afraid of that," he said opening a government session on Wednesday.

Yatsenyuk believes this situation has enabled Ukraine to re-orient its economy and energy "from dependence on Russia to independence together with the EU."

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

TALLINN. Sept 3 (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 3 (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 3 (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.

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

KYIV. Sept 3 (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.

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.

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.

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 ceasefire 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Militia resumes attempts to take Donetsk airport - report

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The militia of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) has resumed attempts to assault the Donetsk airport, Kostyantyn Knyryk, the head of the Southeastern Front information center, told Interfax on Thursday.

"Militia fighters today resumed firing at the airport, which is still under the Ukrainian military forces' control," Knyryk said.

Despite attempts being made to arrange a truce in eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian government forces resumed the shelling of Donetsk and its suburbs on Thursday morning, Knyryk said.

"Explosions were heard in the Petrovsky district of Donetsk starting at 5:45 a.m. Moscow time. Residents of the community of Trudovske descended to basements because of heavy explosions. Artillery fire covered Bryketa and Shchypachyov Streets. Fighting was under way in Maryinka all night, and Grad [multiple rocket launcher] firing was heard in the center of Horlivka at about 5:00 a.m., coming presumably from the Stroitel neighborhood. A power substation in the village of Kindrativka has been damaged, and there is no power supply there," he said.

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.

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.

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.

Estonia to insist at NATO summit on permanent presence of allied forces on its territory

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

"The Russian aggression in Ukraine has refocused NATO's attention on its keynote purpose, collective defense," the Estonian government press service cited Roivas to Interfax as saying on Wednesday.

"It is important for Estonia to keep the presence of allies on land, in the sea and in the air in order to increase the speed of NATO forces' response and to bring the NATO defense plans into correspondence with the changed security circumstances," the delegation head pointed out.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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).

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.

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.

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.

Poroshenko ready to give ceasefire order if Contact Group agrees peace plan

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko has not ruled out that the Contact Group could reach a decision over a bilateral ceasefire in eastern Ukraine as a result of its talks in Minsk this Friday.

"Tomorrow, at 2 p.m., if this is confirmed, if the meeting takes place, I will give instructions to senior members of the General Staff about a bilateral ceasefire, and we hope that the implementation of the peace plan will begin tomorrow," Poroshenko said at the NATO summit in Newport, Wales, on Thursday.

Ukraine wants peace, he reiterated. "Ukraine has never wanted a war, it is tired of the war and will do all it can to bring peace to its land," he said.

The first step towards peace is a ceasefire, as well as decisive action that will facilitate disarmament, nationwide dialogue and the making of relevant legislation aimed at bringing stability to the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, Poroshenko added.

DPR officials are ready to discuss stage-by-stage peace plan in Minsk

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Andrei Purgin, first deputy prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, said the administration of the Donetsk People's Republic will consider the possibility of a stage-by-stage peace plan if such a plan is proposed at the meeting of the contract group in Minsk on Friday.

"We are ready to discuss the agenda, the issues to be discussed, including the adoption of a stage-by-stage peace plan, if such a plan is proposed. However, I don't know anything about this plan," Purgin told Interfax.

Responding to a question about the militia's readiness for a ceasefire in response to a unilateral ceasefire by Kyiv, Purgin said: "Let's see how they will observe their ceasefire. If they really do cease fire, we may cease fire."

Some media earlier reported that the next round of the contract group consultations on Ukraine in Minsk may address a stage-by-stage settlement plan on Petro Poroshenko's initiative.

It was also reported that the Ukrainian military may begin a ceasefire from 3:00 p.m. on Friday.

DPR militia storm Mariupol - source

MOSCOW. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Militia of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) started an active phase of the operation seeking control over Mariupol, a DPR government source told Interfax on Thursday.

"Active operations have started in the southern direction. The purpose of these actions is to establish control over the city of Mariupol. The operation is being carried out using military methods," the source said.

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

Explosions can be heard in Mariupol in the Donetsk region and Mariupol militia headquarters is explaining them as being the result of fighting taking place on the outskirts of city, the city portal 0629 reported earlier.

"Several tanks have started from Novoazovsk and military is stopping a small breakthrough," the statement said.

Fighting is under way near the village of Bezymennoye "but these are not forces able to have a breakthrough," the militia headquarters said at 1.45 p.m. citing Azov battalion. "This is actually flexing muscles, this is actually battle reconnaissance," Azov said.

Water supply to Donetsk stopped over accident at filtering station - DPR

DONETSK. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The termination of water supply to most districts of Donetsk was caused by a grid failure at the filtering station, Donetskgorvodokanal (Donetsk municipal water channel) utility enterprise posted a statement on its website.

"As a result of military action, Verkhne-Kalmiusska filtering station has not had power supply since 8 p.m. Due to this, water supply to Donetsk has been stopped temporarily. The opportunity to store water exists until 9 p.m. More detailed information is being specified and will be announced additionally," the document said.

According to supporters of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), the disruption of the filtering station work might be caused by Ukrainian sabotage group because when the accident occurred, military action was not taking place in this area.

It had been reported earlier, citing the Donetsk city council website, that the Verkhne-Kalmiusska filtering station lost power on Wednesday evening following an artillery strike. Water is not being supplied to Donetsk and the city water supply centers have stopped operating.

Rada may gather for extraordinary session to pass martial law resolution - Batkivshchyna deputy

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Ukrainian parliamentarian Andriy Senchenko of the Batkivshchyna faction believes the Verkhovna Rada will gather for an extraordinary plenary session to pass a resolution appealing to President Petro Poroshenko to introduce martial law.

Senchenko told journalists following a closed parliamentary session on Thursday that a draft resolution dealing with the matter was not voted for on Thursday, as Rada Chairman Oleksandr Turchynov had persuaded parliamentarians not to do so, considering that there was still a chance for "a peaceful solution."

"But if it turns out that a peaceful solution is not visible again, perhaps we will have to gather an extraordinary parliamentary session and make this decision," he said.

Ukrainian battalion encircled near Debaltsevo - DPR headquarters

DONETSK. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The headquarters of the Donetsk People's Republic's militia reported on Thursday that another Ukrainian battalion had been encircled.

"The militia encircled the battalion Kyiska Rus in the area of Debaltsevo. We don't know yet how many troops are encircled because such battalions can have fifty members or more," the Defense Ministry of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic told Interfax on Thursday.

"The Ukrainian authorities have confirmed that the unit has been encircled. There is currently no exact information on the number of troops and equipment encircled near Debaltsevo," the Defense Ministry said.

Interfax currently has no official confirmation of the information on the Ukrainian troops encircled near Debaltsevo.

Armed Afghan held with 30 kg of drugs on Uzbek border

TASHKENT. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Military servicemen from the Uzbekistan Border Guard Authority have foiled an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of narcotics from Afghanistan, a spokesperson for the republic's National Security Service Committee for National Border Protection told Interfax on Thursday.

"An Afghan national was held as he tried to cross the national border illegally with nearly 30 kilograms of raw opium," the spokesperson said.

Apart from the drugs, his hand luggage also contained a PM pistol and ammunition, the spokesperson said.

A criminal case has been opened over the incident; the inquiry is underway.

According to the National Information Analytical Center for Drug Control, in 2013 Uzbekistan registered 7,680 crimes related to the illicit drug trade. The past year saw a total of 2,326 kilograms of illegal drugs seized and 111 foreigners, including 26 Afghans, arrested in connection with drug-related crimes.

Ukrainians divided over Poroshenko's Donbas policy - poll

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Thirty-eight per cent of Ukrainians believe that President Petro Poroshenko is pursuing a strong policy for resolving the crisis in the east of the country; 43% hold the opposite point of view, according to the findings of a poll conducted by GfK Ukraine, which were unveiled by its Director Gleb Vyshlinsky at a press conference in Kyiv on Thursday.

According to the poll's findings, thirteen per cent said the head of state's policy to settle the situation in Donbas is strong; 25%, rather strong; and 23% described Poroshenko's actions as rather weak, 18% as weak and 21% could not answer.

The current political situation in Ukraine was rated as stable by less than 1%; rather stable by 2%; 7% said it is equally stable and unstable; 18% rather unstable, and 70% said that it is unstable.

Fifty-six percent of the respondents rated Ukraine's current economic situation as very bad, 32% as bad, 10% as mediocre, 1% as good, and less than 1% said it is very good.

The poll was conducted on August 14 - 25, 2014 among 2,000 people aged above 18 by personal interviewing at home. The poll covered all Kyiv-controlled regions across Ukraine, as well as the city of Makiyivka in the Donetsk region. The margin of error: 2.2%.

Militia claims destruction of Ukrainian military camp in Luhansk region

LUHANSK. Sept 4 (Interfax) - Overnight into Thursday, militia of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) destroyed a Ukrainian battalion camp, the LPR militia headquarters told Interfax on Thursday.

"As a result of multiple rocket launcher strikes, the base camp of the 12th Kyiv territorial defense battalion was destroyed overnight into September 4 in the LPR's Dmytrivka," the LPR militia headquarters said.

"The exact number of dead and injured is unknown, a considerable amount of equipment was destroyed, the opponent has two out of five armored vehicles left," the headquarters said.

Interfax does not possess comments from Ukrainian troops with regard to this information.

Meanwhile, head of the Kyiv-based Information Resistance group Dmytro Tymchuk said earlier on Thursday that fighting took place last night and mentioned strikes near Dmytrivka among other things.

"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 posted on Facebook on Thursday morning.

Kyiv claims repelling first storming of Mariupol

KYIV. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian military have repelled the enemy's advance on Mariupol, said Oleksandr Danilyuk, an Advisor to the Ukrainian Defense Minister.

"The units of the Ukrainian Armed Forces have repelled the enemy's advance on Mariupol, having destroyed several pieces of hostile armor and personnel," he wrote on his Facebook page on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the shelling of Ukrainian positions continues, Danilyuk said.

LPR, DPR propose ceasefire, no-fly zone from 3 p.m. Sept 5 - draft peace plan

DONETSK/LUHANSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The leaders of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics have proposed their draft of a peace plan for stabilizing the situation in south-eastern Ukraine, involving a temporary ceasefire between the warring sides and a number of other measures.

"To stabilize the situation and stop the bloodshed in the southeast, we are offering a number of measures, primarily, the introduction of a temporary ceasefire regime from 3 p.m. on September 5 by the Ukrainian force structures and the militia of the southeast," the republics' representatives told Interfax on Thursday.

Among other measures in the draft plan is a ban on warplane flights over the self-proclaimed republics from 3 p.m. September 5.

The leaders of the self-proclaimed republics suggest "providing the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) mission with airspace objective monitoring data obtained from Russian systems."

"To conduct international regulation of the ceasefire and monitoring of the situation under the OSCE aegis, and to that end to divide the security zone being created into five sectors, each with a monitoring mission of up to 40 members, and three or four stationary and two or three mobile monitoring posts," the draft said.

The posts will be provided with surveillance, communication and video-recording facilities.

The draft plan also involves the opening of humanitarian corridors to refugees and aid deliveries to the cities and towns in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions by car and by rail from 10 a.m. on September 7.

Observers said that the republics' proposals correlate with the plan to settle the situation in east Ukraine, unveiled by Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ulan Bator on September 3.

NATO setting up four trust funds for Ukraine - Poroshenko

KYIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The North Atlantic Alliance announced at the Wales summit the establishment of four trust funds to support Ukraine, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said.

"I would like to thank all member countries for their strong backing, including financial support, they have declared today with the commitment to create four trust funds," he said after a sitting of the Ukraine-NATO Commission in Newport, Wales, on Thursday.

The funds "are dedicated to important security dimensions: improved logistics, the system of command, improved communications and cyber security of Ukraine," Poroshenko said.

The Ukrainian chief of state added that some countries had agreed to help medical treatment and rehabilitation of injured Ukrainian soldiers and some others had committed to deliver medical equipment and drugs to Ukraine.

"As you can see, the area of our bilateral cooperation with [NATO] member states is extremely broad," the president said.

Poroshenko: NATO states may bilaterally supply Ukraine with precision guidance weapons

KYIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - NATO member countries may supply precision guidance weapons to Ukraine on a bilateral basis, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said.

"Practically every state has affirmed the outcome of bilateral consultations on the assistance to Ukraine. First and foremost, this is the question of assistance in military-technical cooperation, both non-lethal and lethal weapons, including precision guidance arms," he said after a sitting of the Ukraine-NATO Commission in Newport, Wales, on Thursday.

Poroshenko: Ukraine to decide on possible entry into NATO after reforms are done

KYIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Ukraine will raise the question of accession to NATO upon the completion of relevant reforms, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said.

"When the country meets every membership criterion, the people of Ukraine will decide when and how this accession will be accomplished," he said at a joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen after a sitting of the Ukraine-NATO Commission in Wales on Thursday.

Most intense bombardment heard in Ukraine last weekend - OSCE observer in Rostov region

DONETSK (Rostov region). Sept 5 (Interfax) - Shooting, blasts and artillery explosions were heard at various distances from the Donetsk border checkpoint at different times of day all through the past week, Paul Picard, the head of the OSCE mission in the Rostov region, told reporters on Thursday.

Picard said artillery explosions were especially intense north of the city of Krasnodon over the past weekend and OSCE observers heard and felt very loud artillery explosions in the late hours of August 30 and in the early hours of August 31. He said those were the loudest explosions since the arrival of the OSCE observers in Russia on July 30.

Members of volunteer battalions demand better weapons

KYIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Supporters and opponents of the military operation in eastern Ukraine conducted a picket in front of the Ukrainian presidential administration on Thursday.

Representatives of the battalions Aidar and Donbas demand better weapons, an Interfax correspondent has reported. "We demand heavy weapons from the president," Mykola Lysenko, a member of Aidar, told reporters.

Lysenko said the troops cannot fight the militia's tanks using only guns. "The day before yesterday, we received 34 tanks, but they could not leave their storage facilities," Lysenko said.

Furthermore, representatives of the 8th Afghan hundred of the Dnieper battalion are calling on the country's administration to make the process of negotiations with Russia more transparent. "We need to understand what is happening to make the right decision, to get weapons or conduct negotiations," one of the troops said.

The protesters also got into a verbal conflict with a group of women who demanded that the military operation in Donbas be halted.

According to the Interfax correspondent's estimations, the picket had no more than twenty participants.

Militia besieging Donetsk airport

DONETSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The Donbas militia said on Thursday evening that forces of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) continue to besiege Donetsk Airport.

It was announced a day earlier that the airport was surrounded by a double circle of militia fighters.

"We continue fighting against the Ukrainian forces holed up inside the airport. We have information that there are foreign mercenaries there. Our proposals for them to surrender have been rejected (by the Ukrainian military)," the DPR defense ministry told Interfax.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian government forces carried out an artillery strike against the Kyivsky district of Donetsk.

The munitions exploded near a private residential area and the Youth Palace in the central part of the city, an Interfax correspondent reported from the scene. The attack presumably came from the Ukrainian army positions in the airport area.

Paramedics and emergency teams have travelled to the scene. Reports of destruction and casualties are being verified.

The Ukrainian military have yet to comment on the situation at the airport.

Ukrainian fortified position in deadly artillery attack

KYIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The Commander of Ukraine's Azov special-forces battalion, Andriy Biletskyi, said that on Thursday the enemy had destroyed the battalion's and the border guards' fortified position near Mariupol.

The strike came from the Novoazovsk area, Biletskyi said, citing data from the Azov battalion's Facebook page.

The attack killed some of the Ukrainian fighters, he said, blaming the Ukrainian command for failing to provide the battalion with supporting fire.

"We thank the generals who promised precision artillery fire but did nothing. All of our meagre hardware has been destroyed (...) We are working under dense fire thanks to traitor insiders," the commander said.

A source in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) told Interfax earlier that DPR militias had begun an active phase of the operation to seize control over Mariupol.

For his part, Oleksandr Danilyuk, an Advisor to the Ukrainian Defense Minister, said that the Ukrainian military had repelled the enemy's advance on Mariupol.

Luhansk region residents tell OSCE monitors at border about serious humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine - report

DONETSK, Rostov region. Sept 5 (Interfax) - When talking to Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) monitors, people crossing the Russian-Ukrainian border have described the situation in the bordering Luhansk region of Ukraine as very serious, the weekly report of OSCE monitors in the Rostov region said on Thursday.

Teams of OSCE monitors have repeatedly received information on large-scale destruction following artillery fire, which has led to termination of water, food and power supplies, the report said. Apparently, no access to power has existed for over five weeks in some regions, including Luhansk, the document said.

Civilians who stop to talk to monitors often ask the OSCE to stop the conflict and to write down and pass on their testimonies so that people are aware of what is happening in Ukraine.

According to the report, between August 28 and September 4 OSCE representatives in the Rostov region noted an increase in the flow of young men and women wearing military-type clothing, who crossed the border in both directions but were not armed. In particular, mission monitors saw people in T-shirts saying Novorossiia or the Luhansk People's Republic with relevant flags, sometimes flags were on the windshields of civilian cars.

Throughout the week OSCE monitors registered increasing number of young people in military-type clothing passing through the Donetsk checkpoint in both directions - to Russia and to Ukraine. The report said. Some people returning to Russia were obviously injured, they had bandages or were using crutches, and ambulances moved those seriously injured, the document said.

The team of OSCE monitors on one occasion saw eight young men in military-type clothing carrying heavy stretchers with boxes, they stopped every 3-50 meters to rest and border service representatives checked the boxes with metal detectors, the report said. When monitors asked border guards what was in the boxes, they were told it was food, the document said.

Monitors communicate regularly with supporters of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and LPR in eastern Ukraine. Some of them had honest discussions with OSCE representatives, while other distrusted the organization.

Some supporters of the self-proclaimed republics explained at the Donetsk and Gukovo border posts in the Rostov region that they did not have the right to cross the border with arms, however there were places in Ukraine where they get weapons, ammunition and equipment, the report said. Prior to the return, they hand in weapons and other military equipment and go to Russia, the document said.

Fire opened on Donetsk suburb

DONETSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The populated area of Yelenovka, located in a Donetsk suburb, which is controlled by the militia of the Donetsk People's Republic, was attacked on Thursday afternoon, an Interfax correspondent has reported.

Dozens of locals have sustained shrapnel wounds and three civilians are believed dead.

"We didn't even realize what happened. The explosion was in the air. And everything started falling down on us. Three or four streets, buildings are damaged by shrapnel everywhere," a Yelenovka resident told Interfax.

According to eyewitnesses, the attack came from the city of Dokuchayevsk. Ambulances are now taking the wounded to hospitals.

There is currently no exact information on the casualties and the type of munition that exploded in the air.

REN TV crew comes under attack in Donetsk - channel website

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - A REN TV crew came under Ukrainian army gunfire on Thursday, the channel website reported in the early hours of Friday.

"A channel journalist has seen with his own eyes that the army does not intend to cease fire in spite of the attempts to bring truce," the report said.

Kyiv claims repelling first storming of Mariupol

KYIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian military have repelled the enemy's advance on Mariupol, said Oleksandr Danilyuk, an Advisor to the Ukrainian Defense Minister.

"The units of the Ukrainian Armed Forces have repelled the enemy's advance on Mariupol, having destroyed several pieces of hostile armor and personnel," he wrote on his Facebook page on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the shelling of Ukrainian positions continues, Danilyuk said.

The press center for the Ukrainian military operation wrote on its Facebook page that about two hours earlier, the Ukrainian army positions had come under fire near the village of Bezimenne. The enemy's firing positions were set up on the grounds of the Utyos resort center, the press center said.

The enemy's armored vehicles are marked with white circles, the press center also said.

For his part, Deputy Governor of the Donetsk region Kostiantyn Batozskyi wrote on his Facebook page that the Ukrainian forces had repelled the first militia attack in the suburb of Mariupol and destroyed four tanks.

"Forces from the border troops and the Azov special battalion have repelled a reconnaissance attempt undertaken by the enemy around the Novoazovsk area. Four enemy tanks have been destroyed," Batozskyi said.

A source told Interfax earlier that militia in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic had launched the active phase of the operation aimed at seizing control of Mariupol.

Hundreds of thousands of Donetsk residents remain without water

DONETSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Ukrainian forces continue firing artillery at power lines supplying electricity to the main water-supply system in Donetsk - the Upper Kalmius filter station.

The continuous shelling has prevented efforts to repair the damage.

"The shelling has been continual. Now the task is to neutralize the enemy's firing positions so the repair teams can start their work," a source in the headquarters of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) told Interfax on Thursday.

Several hundred thousands of residents remain without water. The militia has teamed up with utility workers and organized deliveries of technical water into parts of Donetsk.

The Donetsk city council said earlier that hot water is only supplied to hospitals and a nursing home for the elderly and disabled.

U.S. Marine Corps commandant visits Georgia

TBILISI. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili has welcomed the Commandant of the United States Marine Corps Gen. James Amos, who arrived in Tbilisi on Thursday, the prime minister's press office said on Thursday.

The meeting focused on the prospects for a deeper U.S.-Georgian defense cooperation, as well regional security issues in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, the press office said.

"The parties expressed their hope that the current NATO summit in Wales would offer Georgia 'an enhanced cooperation package' aimed at raising Georgia's defensive capabilities," the press release said.

The prime minister said that the U.S. is Georgia's main strategic partner, and thanked Gen. Amos for the firm U.S. support for the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

The two officials also mentioned the forthcoming visit to Georgia by U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel that will be "yet another proof of support by the U.S. as a friendly country," the statement said.

S. Ossetia intends to integrate with Russia but not willing to breed false expectations - Tibilov

TSKHINVAL. Sept 5 (Interfax) - South Ossetia intends to increase the level of integration with Russia and not going to make a "populist show" of it, South Ossetian President Leonid Tibilov told reporters on Thursday.

"We will not breed speculations and false expectations but will do this calmly and steadily but in persistently assertive manner," Tibilov said.

According to the president, public interest in the prospects of developing the S. Ossetian-Russian relations is clear amid mass media reports, which have emerged in recent days, about South Ossetia possibly joining the single security circuit of Russia and Abkhazia.

At the same time, it is necessary "to concentrate on every-day practical work for the benefit of the nation without going into extended and distracting arguments regarding the state and legal status of the republic," Tibilov said.

S. Ossetian Ambassador to Abkhazia Oleg Botsiyev has been summoned to the Foreign Ministry of South Ossetia for consultations following statements that the possibility of concluding an agreement with Russia on S. Ossetia joining the single security circuit is currently being worked out with Abkhazia, the South Ossetian Foreign Ministry said in a statement earlier.

The issue of establishing a common security circuit is expected to be a provision in a new treaty between Russia and Abkhazia. The document is expected to be signed by the end of the year. Mass media outlets reported, citing Botsiyev and Abkhazian Vice President Vitaly Gabnia, that South Ossetia will join the common security circuit with Russia and Abkhazia.

NATO-Georgia joint training center to open in Georgia - Georgian defense minister

TBILISI. Sept 5 (Interfax) - A joint NATO-Georgia training center will open in Georgia, Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Alasania, who is taking part in the NATO summit in Wales, told reporters on Thursday after the meeting between the Georgian delegation led by Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

Alasania said the package of "reinforced cooperation" between NATO and Georgia, which envisages the creation of this center, has practically been approved by all NATO members.

"NATO and NATO partners' military units will be trained at the center," the minister said.

Alasania also said a group of NATO military experts will be sent to Georgia to work on the cooperation package with Georgia.

The minister also said NATO has given its consent to an increase in the purchase by Georgia and the supply of defensive weapons "so that Georgia can have the resources to defend itself in the event of aggression."

Georgian Foreign Minister Maia Pandzhikidze, for her part, told reporters "this package contains something that will greatly increase Georgia's defense potential and will bring Georgia closer to meeting NATO standards and conduct integration in NATO."

The minister said Georgia is represented at the summit in the 28 plus 4 format, which she said means that "these four countries, including Georgia, are the closest to NATO and that means that these four countries will be the first to be affected by the NATO expansion policy at the next summit."

Georgia to send infantry to NATO, partners' training in Ukraine

TBILISI. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Georgia will take part in the annual international Rapid Trident training exercise that will take place near Lviv, Ukraine, on September 13-27, the Georgian Defense Ministry has reported.

The training will involve the NATO countries and the countries participating in the Partnership for Peace (PPF) format.

The Defense Ministry said the Georgian a company of the first infantry brigade will participate in the training exercise.

"Along with the Georgian troops, training will involve some 1,000 troops from 15 countries, including 200 U.S. troops and troops from Ukraine, Azerbaijan, the UK, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Spain," the ministry said.

According to the ministry, the training exercise is aimed at practicing joint actions by the multi-national brigade against illegal armed groups.

Militia claims at least 50 Ukrainian casualties near Mariupol

DONETSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian army lost at least 50 men killed and wounded in the fighting near Mariupol on Thursday, the Novorossiya army staff claims.

"Battlefield casualties, both dead and wounded, exceeded 50 men in the Mariupol sector over the past day," the army staff told Interfax.

The staff added that three National Guard soldiers had been captured.

The militia destroyed one mortar, four armored personnel carriers, eleven vehicles and a fuel and lubricant warehouse near Mariupol, the staff said.

According to the Novorossiya army staff, the Ukrainian army focused on the strengthening of its positions and the enlargement of the number of roadblocks and strongholds on the northeastern and northern outskirts of Mariupol.

In turn, the Ukrainian National Guard press service alleged on Friday the army had destroyed a convoy of the militia armor, which had broken the defense from Bezymenne in the Novoazovsk district of the Donetsk region into Shyrokyne, 20 kilometers east of Mariupol.

The convoy consisted of up to five tanks, three self-propelled howitzers, a Grad rocket launcher, mortars and other heavy weapons, the National Guard said.

The convoy broke the defense on Thursday afternoon, it said.

The Kyiv-based Information Resistance Group reported the ongoing militia offensive in the Luhansk region. The Ukrainian positions and roadblocks have been attacked in Stanitsa Luhanska, Luhanske, Nikishine and Stukalova Balka.

"Multiple reconnaissance-by-fire operations in the Mariupol area demonstrate the enemy's wish to explore the Ukrainian army positions in view of its future offensive," Information Resistance Group leader Dmytro Tymchuk wrote on Facebook on Friday morning.

Ukrainian forces attacked an enemy camp near Vesele last night. Three 122-mm D-30 howitzers were destroyed. The fighting continues near Debaltseve, he said.

Three Donetsk districts under fire on Thursday evening - city council

KYIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The Donetsk micro districts Gladovka and Oktyabrsky came under artillery fire around 5:30 p.m. and firefighters are now working there, the press service for the city council said.

"The scale of the damage is being determined. Information on the casualties is being determined," the report says.

According to the city council, the situation in the city remained extremely tense as of 7:00 p.m.

At the same time, the work to restore electrical power supply to the Verkhne-Kalmiusskaya filtration station has been completed and the station resumed operation at 6:15 p.m. It will take two days to restore water to Donetsk.

City Council: No threat of attack on Mariupol

KYIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - There is no threat of attack on Mariupol, the Mariupol military operation press center and the City Council reported as of 9 p.m. on September 4.

"Up to five heavy combat vehicles and enemy troops tried to break through the defense from the village of Bezymenne towards the village of Shyrokyne in the afternoon of September 4. The enemy took positions near Shyrokyne and opened fire at the Ukrainian army," the report said.

The attack was deterred and the militia suffered fatalities, it noted.

People in the Mariupol left-bank residential areas heard the artillery cannonade coming from the combat zone. The enemy did not approach Mariupol. Its military hardware was destroyed, the report said.

"Reconnaissance operations have been constant to study the regional situation. There is no threat of an attack on the city of Mariupol," the military operation staff and the Mariupol City Council stated.

Military action continues in eastern Ukraine - DPR militia

DONETSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The headquarters of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic reported on Friday that fighting continued on all tracks in eastern Ukraine in the past 24 hours.

Specifically, the Donetsk Kyivsky district came under mortar fire, as a result of which dozens of residential buildings were damaged and civilians were hurt.

According to the headquarters, fighting continues in the area of the airport, from where the Ukrainian military attacked the militia.

"Our positions came under fire several times in the past night. Active fighting is now going on in the area of Mariupol and the militia are encircling the enemy's group in the Debaltsevo area," the militia headquarters said.

"According to operative information, a Ukrainian military column is now moving from the populated area of Staroignatyevka in the direction of the Donetsk People's Republic's troop positions. According to eyewitnesses, it is composed of over 20 armored vehicles, including tanks," the headquarters reported.

In the meantime, the Ukrainian battalion Kyiv-2 has denied information that the militia have encircled Debaltsevo in a report posted on Facebook, saying they have received support from Artyomovsk.

Important documents on situation in Ukraine may be signed in Minsk on Friday - Belarusian ambassador in Kyiv

KHARKIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Belarusian Ambassador to Ukraine Valentin Velichko said very important documents may be signed at the meeting of the three-party contact group on the situation in eastern Ukraine in Minsk on Friday.

"I think the talks conducted in Minsk, Belarus, will yield very good results in the nearest future and peace will be established. The three-party group will meet today and there is every reason to believe that very important documents will be signed," Velichko said at the international economic forum Investment. Innovations. Kharkiv initiated held in Kharkiv on Friday.

The ambassador said Belarus has given shelter to over 26,000 citizens of Ukraine who had left Ukraine due to the events in Donbas.

Velichko said proper living conditions have been provided for these people, adding that he is hoping they have left Ukraine temporarily and will be able to return.

Five civilians killed in Donetsk last night - city council

KYIV. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Three districts of Donetsk came under artillery fire in the past 24 hours and five civilians were killed, the press service for the Donetsk city council has reported.

In particular, shells damaged the roof of a residential building and destroyed a garage and a summer kitchen in the city's Petrosky district.

Two residential buildings were damaged in an artillery attack in the city's Kyubyshevsky district. The children's section of Hospital №21 was also damaged. A shell hit the front part of the building. The hospital personnel were not hurt and there were no patients in the hospital at the time of the accident, the report says.

Four apartment buildings were damaged in the Kyivsky district.

Five civilians (two in the Kyubyshevsky district and three in the Kyivsky district) were killed in the artillery attack. Nine people sustained fragmentation wounds.

The situation in the city remained tense as of 10.00 a.m. (11:00 a.m. Moscow time). The city's public transport and infrastructure are working normally, the city council says.

Fighting near Mariupol has no affect on everyday life - eyewitness

MOSCOW/MARIUPOL. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Fighting between Ukrainian troops and the militia on the outskirts of Mariupol has no affect on everyday life in the city, with shops open and people sunbathing, eyewitnesses told Interfax.

"Grad and Uragan systems are being used on both sides, Vostochny and Volodarsky. The systems used on the Volodarsky side are most likely Uragan or Smerch because 6-8 shots are fired from them at once. On Sartan, Grad systems are being used, there were even photos of them being taken there. It's all the Ukrainian army, the DPR people have not brought anything here yet," Mariupol journalist Mykola Lesogor told Interfax in a phone conversation.

"What is actually happening is that all these fortifications around Mariupol are being attacked, and the DPR troops have not entered the city yet and they are not going to," Lesogor said.

Lesogor said there are no military in the city, but the sound of weapons firing shots is heard everywhere in Mariupol. "There are no armed people and there have not been any armed people in the city, they are all on the outskirts, in bases and checkpoints where this war is now going on, where the shooting and bombing is taking place. These explosions are heard in the city because the bombing is very serious. People are filming it from apartment buildings," Lesogor said.

At the same time, life in Mariupol is going on normally, Lesogor said. "The situation in the city is calm and nothing special is happening. Buses are working, shops and the market are open, city residents go to factories to work. People are resting on beaches, sunbathing," Lesogor said.

Responding to a question as to whether there is panic among local residents, he said: "All alarmists have left a long time ago."

The militia of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic earlier announced the beginning of an active phase of the operation aiming to assume control over Mariupol.

DPR claims first militia groups enter Mariupol

DONETSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The advance groups of militias from the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) on Friday advanced deep into Mariupol, a source in the DPR defense ministry told Interfax on Friday..

"The first subversive groups, including with armor, are already in Mariupol," the source said.

Neither DPR officials, nor the Ukrainian military were immediately available to comment on this information.

Militia alleges success in fighting near Luhansk

LUHANSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) militia alleges it has destroyed Ukrainian military hardware and captured Ukrainian soldiers.

"The Southeast Army artillery has destroyed two armored personnel carriers, four vehicles and a fuel and lubricants storage in the vicinity of Vasylevka and Shchastya. The casualties stood at 23 men killed and wounded," a source in the LPR staff told Interfax on Friday.

The source also claimed the destruction of a mobile Ukrainian group operating in the settlement of Fashchevka. "A mortar crew, an armored personnel carrier and an Ural truck were destroyed. The enemy lost 14 men killed and wounded," the source continued.

"A cross-country vehicle and a mortar were seized in a clash with a mobile mortar crew near Shyshkove. One Ukrainian serviceman was killed and three surrendered and were taken prisoner," he said.

The militia reported the ongoing search and liquidation of Ukrainian sabotage and reconnaissance groups in the area of Tsvitni-Pisky, Svetle and Lyman.

Interfax has yet to obtain a confirmation to this report from Ukrainian sources.

TROUBLE SPOTS

Tiraspol proposes returning to shuttle diplomacy in Transdniestria talks

TIRASPOL. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Nina Stanski, the foreign minister of Transdniestria, has proposed returning to shuttle diplomacy in settling the problem of the breakaway region, which was used in 2006-2010, when no official meetings were held in the 5+2 format.

"Over the history of the negotiating process, in its difficult periods, shuttle diplomacy has proven efficient more than once. Our proposal is based on the conviction that the meetings of all 5+2 participants in Tiraspol and Chisinau would be significantly more useful than a meeting in Vienna," Stanski said at a meeting with Radojko Bogojevic, the special representative of the OSCE chairperson-in-office for the Transdniestrian settlement process, in Tiraspol on Friday.

Transdniestria remains firmly committed to settling all disagreements and differences only peacefully and at the negotiating table, which is evident, in particular, from the fact that Tiraspol has proposed nearly 50 ideas for the negotiations in the past 2.5 years, she said.

"We are full of energy to continue constructive work. We are open to negotiations and expect 5+2 participants in the Transdniestrian capital, Tiraspol, in the near future," she said.

Bogojevic visited Tiraspol on Friday, which has been his fifth visit there in 2014. All of these visits but the first one were related to 5+2 negotiations on the Moldovan-Transdniestrian settlement, in which Moldova and Transdniestria take part as the negotiating parties, Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediators, and the U.S. and the EU as observers.

The next 5+2 meeting is scheduled for September 11-12 in Vienna. However, Transdniestria's opinion aired by Stanski at the meeting is that the Vienna round would be futile.

"I regret that, since our last meeting, not only has the situation not improved but it has also significantly deteriorated. More and more problems are emerging, instead of concentrating on looking for decisions that we planned to make within the 5+2 format. I'll admit frankly that Moldova is pursuing its special tactic this way. We see such tactic as dangerous to negotiations," she said.

Meetings in the 5+2 format have been postponed twice in 2014. The first time this happened because Chisinau dragged out the process of abrogating excise duties on imports of raw materials for Transdniestrian enterprises and the second because of the initiation of a number of criminal cases in Moldova against some Transdniestrian officials, including members and heads of expert working groups from the breakaway region. Since then, this list has been extended and now includes Transdniestrian Prime Minister Tatiana Turanskaia.

OSCE calls for preserving 5+2 format for negotiations on Transdniestria

CHISINAU. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Radojko Bogojevic, the special representative of the OSCE chairperson-in-office for the Transdniestrian settlement process, calls for continuing negotiations on settling the conflict in the 5+2 format.

"The holding of the upcoming 5+2 talks would send a positive signal on the prospects of reducing tensions," the OSCE quoted Bogojevic as saying following negotiations he held in Chisinau and Tiraspol on Thursday and Friday, during which he met with Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration and Moldovan chief negotiator Eugen Carpov, Transdniestrian Foreign Minister and chief negotiator Nina Stanski, and members of the diplomatic corps accredited in Moldova.

"Despite any political developments related to Ukraine, we trust that these won't significantly affect the substance, course or the agenda in the planned upcoming 5+2 negotiations and we hope that all sides in the process will show a constructive approach," Bogojevic said.

The next round of the 5+2 talks on Transdniestria is scheduled for September 11-12 in Vienna, pending final confirmation from all participants, he said.

"Bogojevic emphasized the importance of frequent contacts and encouraged the two chief negotiators to make as much progress as possible on a number of issues currently on the table that would have tangible positive impact on the lives of people on both sides of the Dniestr/Nistru," it said.

"Among the key topics discussed in the meetings were the Moldovan-administered Latin-script schools, economic cooperation, criminal cases against Transdniestrian officials by Moldovan law-enforcement bodies and freedom of movement issues," it said.

The 5+2 negotiations scheduled for September 11-12 in Vienna have been jeopardized as the potential negotiators have still not confirmed their participation. Transdniestrian Foreign Minister Stanski said on Friday that Transdniestria favored more intensive "shuttle diplomacy" in looking for ways to settle the conflict and believes that a meeting of all participants in the 5+2 talks in Tiraspol or Chisinau would be much more useful than in Vienna.

The OSCE representative proposed that two rounds of negotiations could be held, one in Vienna in September, as planned, and the other in Tiraspol or Chisinau in October. Stanski promised to inform Transdniestrian leader Eugen Sevciuc of this proposal.

This year has seen two rounds of negotiations on Transdniestria, although, according to the rules of procedure, such talks should be held once every two months. The first round took place in February and the second in June, both in Vienna, although it was originally planned that the parties would meet in Chisinau or Tiraspol. The April and July rounds were disrupted for various reasons because of disagreements between the parties.

Armenia launches terrorism inquiry into Azeri attacks

YEREVAN. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The Armenian Investigative Committee has launched a criminal inquiry on the charge of "international terrorism" into the shelling by the Azeri Armed Forces of the border area villages in Armenia's Tavush region in June-August 2014.

"Documentary evidence shows that the shelling was conducted from large-caliber grenade launchers and self-propelled anti-aircraft weapons from combat positions of the Azeri Armed Forces, thus leading to explosions and fire in the border area villages in the Tavush region of Armenia, and that it aimed to destroy or injure people, destroy or damage roads, communications, property, crop areas of the Armenian populated areas," Armenian Investigative Committee spokeswoman Sona Truzian told reporters.

The criminal inquiry has been launched on the charge of "international terrorism" and sent to the Armenian National Security Service, she said.

Armenia trying to give religious coloring to Karabakh conflict - Azeri official

BAKU. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Mubariz Gurbanly, the head of the State Committee on Liaisons with Religious Structures, has expressed concerns that Armenia is trying to give the Karabakh conflict a religious coloring.

"Armenia is trying to present this conflict between our countries as a religious one. Yerevan is doing this to distract the world community from the true reasons for the occupation of the Azeri territories. However, it's not a religious war. Thousands of representatives of the Armenian minority now live in Azerbaijan and no one is bothering them," Gurbanly told a press conference held at the Council of Europe event on the religious dimension of inter-cultural dialogue, held in Baku.

Gurbanly said values of tolerance prevail in Azerbaijan, in comparison with other countries of the world.

Hollande, Sargsian, Aliyev to discuss Karabakh

YEREVAN. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The presidents of Armenia and France, Serzh Sargsian and Francois Hollande, respectively, discussed the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement process in Newport (the United Kingdom) on Thursday.

The two leaders also mentioned the upcoming trilateral meeting of the French, Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents, which was proposed by France, the Armenian president's press office told Interfax on Thursday.

Also, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry will be meeting with the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents in Wales on Thursday. The meeting will be held on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Wales, the U.S. Department of State said on its website.

U.S. Sec of State asks Armenia, Azerbaijan to mitigate Karabakh tensions

YEREVAN. Sept 5 (Interfax) - U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is ready to assist in the Karabakh peace process.

Kerry had a trilateral meeting with Armenian President Serzh Sargsian and Azeri President Ilham Aliyev in Newport, the UK, to discuss the Karabakh settlement prospects, the Armenian presidential press service told Interfax.

"The sides presented positions maintained by their countries in the negotiations. State Secretary Kerry said there was no alternative to the peaceful resolution of the problem and called on the sides to find mechanisms for mitigating conflict tensions and building confidence," the press service said.

"J. Kerry also pointed to the importance of further negotiations in the format of the OSCE Minsk Group chairmen and expressed the readiness to assist in the search for peaceful settlement ways. The U.S. State Secretary emphasized that the political will of the sides was vital for the peace process," the press service continued.

The U.S. secretary of state met with the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan on Thursday morning.

Armenian president expects NATO resolution based on OSCE Minsk Group's stance

YEREVAN. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - Armenian President Serzh Sargsian expects the NATO summit in Wales to avoid one-sided approaches in its resolution on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the presidential press service said on Thursday.

"A document related to the security of my people and peace in our region will be approved here tomorrow. There are two options: either they accept the vocabulary of the only ad hoc structure settling the Karabakh conflict, the OSCE Minsk Group, or again there will be lobbying by another member country wishing to save the face of our neighbor, a dictator, in the eyes of its own people, which, I can assure you, will do no good," the Armenian president said at a meeting of the chiefs of state and government involved in the ISAF mission.

"Either the common sense and the striving for peace will win or there will be another silent encouragement of deepening xenophobia, militant rhetoric and future provocations, which lead to human casualties, easily prompted by Azerbaijan which does not value the lives of its own soldiers and is inspired by such papers," Sargsian said.

Traditionally, NATO summit resolutions regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict mention the principle of territorial integrity while the OSCE Minsk Group proposes to resolve the conflict on the principles of territorial integrity, the right of nations to self-determination and the non-use of force.

BORDER

Situation at Russian-Ukrainian border in Crimea calm - acting head of Crimean administration

SIMFEROPOL. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The Russian-Ukrainian border in Crimea is operating in a routine mode, and allegations heard in Kyiv that there have been some tensions there are untrue, acting head of the Crimean administration Sergei Aksyonov said.

"This is absolute lies. Perhaps they are throwing eggs there and believe this is an exchange of fire. The border is operating in a calm and normal manner. Goods are crossing it in both directions. The Crimeans who have signed contracts with Ukrainian businesses are honoring their obligations, and nobody is putting any obstacles," Aksyonov told journalists in Simferopol on Saturday.

Dud shell found near village in Rostov rgn, close to Ukrainian border

ROSTOV-ON-DON. Sept 1 (Interfax) - A dud shell and the warhead of another projectile fired from the Ukrainian territory have been discovered in the Kuibyshevsky district of the Rostov region, a source in the regional emergency situations department told Interfax on Monday.

"A dud shell was found on Sunday in the field, 200 meters from the Ukrainian border and one kilometer from the village of Primiussky. A warhead was discovered on the same day, 450 meters from the Russian-Ukrainian border and four kilometers from the village of Primiussky," the source said.

The places where the shells had been discovered were cordoned off and sappers were called for, he said.

Two Ukrainian coastal guards still missing after Azov Sea attack

KYIV. Sept 1 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian State Border Guard Service has confirmed the shelling of two coastal guard boats near Mariupol, as a result of which seven border guards were injured and another two have gone missing.

"As a result of the shelling of two of our border guard boats opposite the populated area of Bezimenne (not far from Mariupol) two border guards have gone missing, the search for them continues, and seven sustained various injuries," Ukrainian State Border Guard Service spokesman Oleh Slobodyan said on the 112.Ukraine television channel on Monday.

One border guard was severely injured, two sustained medium-severity injuries, and four have minor injuries, he said.

The boat was targeted with a small-arms weapon, Slobodyan said.

Specialists are working to establish where the attack came from and what kind of weapon exactly was used.

For his part, National Security and Defense Council spokesman Andriy Lysenko said at a briefing in Kyiv on Monday that as a result of the shelling of the Ukrainian border guard boats from the Mariupol maritime guard detachment last Sunday, one boat had been sunk, eight sailors were rescued, the search for another two continues.

"At 3:10 p.m. yesterday, a strike was carried out using guided rocket launchers from the area around Bezimenne against the Mariupol maritime guard detachment consisting of the Grif and Kalkan motor boats. The boats had been patrolling within three miles of the coast. A fire broke out on the Grif boat, causing it to sink. Other maritime guard boats came to the crew's rescue, thanks to which eight sailors have been rescued, seven of them with burns and injuries. The search for two other border guards continues," Lysenko said.

Earlier, Ukrainian media outlets reported the shelling of a coastal guard boat of the Ukrainian State Border Guard Service in the Azov Sea on Sunday afternoon. Eyewitnesses posted pictures on the Internet, showing the craft out at sea, wrapped in thick black smoke.

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.

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

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.

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.

Ukraine refugee field camps in Rostov region to be closed on Sept 5

DONETSK (Rostov region). Sept 5 (Interfax) - All temporary accommodation facilities for refugees from Ukraine in the Rostov region will be closed on Friday, the information policies department of the region's government reported on Thursday.

"We have now begun dismantling the field camps. Refugees from Ukraine are being taken from the Rostov region to other regions of Russia. The people who arrive from Ukraine as refugees will go to the Russian regions of their choice," the department said.

No more than 300 refugees from Ukraine are now in the three field camps in the Rostov region, the authorities said.

The information policies department of the Rostov region's government said the region's field camps will be closed due to the coming cold weather.

Lukashenko signs decree on Belarus-Russia border development

MINSK. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a decree on September 4 to declare a border territory within the limits of administrative territorial units along the Belarus-Russia frontier, a source in the presidential press service told Interfax on Friday.

The document adjusts the decree issued by the president on March 9, 2009, he said.

"The document will create conditions for the Border Service to accomplish tasks and functions within these territories and organize appropriate interaction with the Russian border authorities aimed to detect and stop illegal migration transit, drug trafficking and illegal border crossing by goods and material values," source in the presidential press service said.

Refugee camp in Matveyevo-Kurgan, Rostov region, continues working

ROSTOV-ON-DON. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Two temporary accommodation facilities for refugees in Russia's Rostov region will be closed and one, located in the Matveyevo-Kurgan district, will continue working, the press service for the Southern Regional Center of the Russian Emergency Situations Ministry reported on Friday.

"Because the flow of refugees from Ukraine has decreased, a decision has been made to conserve the temporary accommodation facilities in Donetsk and Novoshakhtinsk and the field camp in the Matveyevo-Kurgan district of the Rostov region will continue working," the report says.

The 130 people who are living in the temporary accommodation facilities that are being closed will be temporarily transferred to the camp in the Matveyevo-Kurgan district.

FOREIGN MILITARY REVIEW

Beijing aims to enhance cooperation with Moscow, ready to withstand any test

US KHATYN, Yakutia. Sept 1 (Interfax) - China will develop relations with Russia regardless of changes in the international situation, Chinese Vice Premier of State Council Zhang Gaoli said.

However the international situation changes, we will withstand any tests with you and will make every effort in order to develop comprehensive, stable, long-term and reliable relations of universal strategic partnership, Zhang Gaoli said, speaking at a ceremony marking the start of construction of the first section of the Force of Siberia pipeline.

According to Zhang Gaoli, Russia and China will develop major strategic projects, including an eastern gas cooperation route.

May these projects be beneficial for the development of both countries and for both nations, Zhang Gaoli said.

NATO has no intention of severing cooperation agreement with Russia - Rasmussen

BRUSSELS. Sept 1 (Interfax) - NATO intends to follow the provisions of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said in Brussels on Monday.

Rasmussen said NATO is abiding by the NATO-Russia Founding Act, which was signed in 1997, and all measures taken by NATO are in line with it. However, he said NATO sees that Russia is violating its fundamental principles and is calling on Russia to observe the document.

NATO can't interfere in decisions by member countries on supply of weapons to Russia - Rasmussen

BRUSSELS. Sept 1 (Interfax) - Decisions on the supply of weapons to Russia are made by every NATO country independently and NATO cannot interfere in such decisions, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said.

Such decisions are made solely at the level of every member country and NATO cannot interfere in such national issues as the supply of military equipment, Rasmussen told a press conference in Brussels, responding to a journalist's question as to whether he believes the sale by this or that NATO country of weapons, specifically helicopter carriers, to Russia it is a good idea.

New NATO action plan will become response to Russia's actions - Rasmussen

BRUSSELS. Sept 1 (Interfax) - NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said he believes the NATO summit scheduled to be held in Wales on September 4-5 will become one of the most important summits in the history of the Alliance as it will be held during numerous crises.

Rasmussen told a briefing in Brussels that direct intervention by Russia in the events in Ukraine has caused a major crisis in eastern Ukraine. In this regard, he said that the protection of the population and territories of NATO countries remains a key priority of NATO.

Rasmussen said NATO will come up with a combat preparedness action plan, which will become a response to Russia's aggression and will enable the allies to respond to all security challenges, no matter where they arise.

This plan will ensure the presence of the needed resources and equipment at the needed time and will make NATO's presence in the east more visible, Rasmussen said.

Rasmussen also said the summit is expected to involve a meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko to discuss the priorities of reforms and decisions on specific steps to help Ukraine.

It's hard to say when Ukraine can join NATO - Rasmussen

BRUSSELS. Sept 1 (Interfax-AVN) - Ukraine can only raise the question about cooperation with NATO after parliamentary elections and if the new parliament approves the bill abolishing the non-allied status of Ukraine, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said on Monday.

Rasmussen said he would expect Ukraine to raise the question in the NATO-Ukraine Commission, if the new parliament of Ukraine changes the legislation on the non-allied status of Ukraine, and the foundations for further cooperation between NATO and Ukraine will be developed on that basis. He added that it is difficult to say when it could happen.

Rasmussen reiterated that Ukraine will have to meet a number of criteria to enter NATO, and it will take a long time to meet those criteria.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk told a government meeting on Friday that the Cabinet of Ministers is submitting a bill abolishing Ukraine's non-allied status to the parliament.

"In accordance with a decision made by the National Security and Defense Council, the government of Ukraine is submitting a bill abolishing the non-allied status of the Ukrainian state and restoring Ukraine's course towards NATO membership to the parliament," he said.

Parliamentary elections are scheduled to be held in Ukraine on October 26.

German ambassador: Relations between Berlin, Moscow have good future

KAZAN. Sept 2 (Interfax) - German Ambassador to Russia Rudiger Von Fritsch said it is important to enhance the traditions and potential uniting Germany and Russia at times of unfavorable political climate.

"We have lost a lot of trust. We in Germany often ask ourselves what way we will opt for in the future. In such periods, it is extremely important to use and strengthen the traditions and potential which unite our countries. There is no alternative to a good and fruitful future between Germany and Russia, between Germany and the Republic of Tatarstan," the German ambassador said while opening the German-Russian Institute of New Technologies in Kazan on Tuesday.

"We are pooling our forces together. We maintain very strong economic ties, as well as ties in science, which can be seen from the project we are launching today," he said, adding that this is being done at a time of a very unfavorable political climate.

President of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov agreed that the project is being launched at a time of trials, "but this will pass. Regarding us, we will have a leading Russian-German engineering university here in Tatarstan," he said.

The new institute is integrated within the Tupolev Kazan National Research Technical University. It offers graduate and post-graduate courses and is based on cooperation between the Tupolev University and the Technical University in Ilmenau, Germany and the Otto-von-Guericke University in Magdeburg.

NATO declines comment on Australian foreign minister's proposal on blocking Putin's participation in G20 summit

BRUSSELS. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The NATO headquarters has declined comments on Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop's intention to use the NATO summit in Wales scheduled for September 4-5 to obtain consent from the G20 countries to prevent Russia from participating in the upcoming G20 summit in Brisbane in November.

NATO cannot give comments on statements having no relation to its activities, as the alliance as an organization is not part of the G20 format, a NATO spokesperson told Interfax on Tuesday.

The G20 includes Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union. The G20 countries account for 90% of global GDP.

The NATO members participating in the G20 include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States, but delegations of some other G20 members, i.e. Australia, Japan, South Korea and the EU, have also been invited to the NATO summit.

Bishop said in an interview published in The Australian Financial Review that Iraq, Syria, and the Ukraine crisis would be the main issues on the agenda of the NATO summit in Cardiff. She said the Russian leader's non-participation in the upcoming G20 summit in Brisbane would be addressed at the NATO meeting and could be in its focus.

Head of U.S. Senate armed services' committee arrives in Ukraine

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The chairman of the United States Senate Committee on Armed Services, Carl Milton Levin, arrived in Kyiv on Tuesday.

The U.S. senator's arrival in Ukraine was announced on Twitter by U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt.

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry has not made any formal statement about the visit by the influential senator to Ukraine.

According to open sources, in his letter to U.S. President Barack Obama on July 22, the Democratic senator suggested recognizing the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics as terrorist organizations and imposing broad sanctions against Russia.

UN Refugee Agency: Approx. 260,000 displaced inside Ukraine during conflict

KYIV. Sept 3 (Interfax) - The UN Refugee Agency has reported an increasing number of people displaced inside Ukraine because of the armed conflict.

"The number of people displaced inside Ukraine had more than doubled in the past four weeks. UNHCR estimates that 260,000 people were displaced as of Monday, compared to 117,000 in the first week of August," says an agency press release seen by Interfax.

"Most of the displaced - 94 per cent - are from eastern Ukraine and are remaining in the Donetsk, Kharkiv and Kyiv regions. UNHCR believes the actual number of people displaced is higher as many are staying with families and friends and choose not to register with the authorities," it said.

"The number of those using three corridors set-up by the Ukrainian authorities to flee conflict areas is decreasing, mainly due to recent incidents when civilians have lost their lives in attacks. Reportedly 6,000 people have left through these corridors since the end of July," the agency reported.

"Meanwhile the number of Ukrainians seeking refugee status or asylum in the Russian Federation increased by almost 66,000 during August. According to the Federal Migration Service, more than 121,000 Ukrainians have applied for refugee status or temporary asylum since January 1," it said.

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.

Total chief sees no point in Western sanctions, calls for constructive dialogue with Russia

BERLIN. Sept 4 (Interfax) - The head of the French oil company Total, Christophe de Marjerie, has urged Western countries to forgo their sanctions policy against Russia and start a constructive dialogue with Moscow over the situation in Ukraine.

"What I am calling for is not the protection of Russian interests but only a greater understanding. Sanctions are a path to stalemate. We need a constructive dialogue because we (Western countries and Russia) are economically dependent on one another," he said in an interview with Germany's Süddeutsche Zeitung newspaper.

"We must not let ourselves be convinced that Russia is our enemy, given that energy supplies to us are largely dependent precisely on that country. We should not believe the caricature about 'good' pro-western Ukrainians and 'bad' pro-Russian Ukrainians," de Marjerie added.

NATO-Russia Founding Act cannot be repealed - German defense minister

BERLIN. Sept 5 (Interfax) - German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen on Thursday called for the NATO-Russia Founding Act to remain effective.

"These general provisions on security are important for us, and we do not intend to repeal them, she told the German television channel ZDF.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, too, confirmed a day earlier there will be no change to the NATO-Russia Act. Nevertheless, the NATO summit will consider the Baltic States' calls for the alliance to strengthen its eastern wing, the chancellor said.

The two-day NATO summit attended by heads of state and government from the 28 member states opened in Newport, Wales, earlier on Thursday.

Estonia signs rapid reaction force agreement

TALLINN. Sept 5 (Interfax) - Estonian Defense Minister Sven Mikser and his colleagues from the United Kingdom, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands have signed in Wales a statement of intent to create a rapid reaction force, the so-called "joint expeditionary force".

The Estonian Defense Ministry press service said on Friday the sides would negotiate the place of deployment of joint expeditionary force structures. The size of the new force and the Estonian contribution will be considered this fall.

"The joint expeditionary force will give Estonia a very good opportunity to carry on close cooperation with the United Kingdom and other allies, our comrades-in-arms in the ISAF operation in southern Afghanistan," Mikser said.

"The joint expeditionary force is also a concrete step to bolster the NATO rapid reaction force," he added.

The joint expeditionary force will incorporate ground, seaborne and airborne units. It will hold military operations to defend allies and react to natural calamities and humanitarian crises, the Defense Ministry said.

The United Kingdom initiated the project and invited Estonia, Denmark, Norway, Latvia, Lithuania and the Netherlands, with which it had earlier cooperated in international operations, to join in.

New U.S. ambassador Tefft arrives in Moscow

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The new U.S. Ambassador to Russia has arrived in Moscow, the U.S. embassy in Russia told Interfax.

New U.S. ambassador Tefft claims to be glad to be back in Russia

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The new ambassador of the United States to Russia, John Tefft, is looking forward to speaking to Russia from all layers of society, according to a post on the U.S. Embassy's Twitter account.

In 1996-1999, Tefft served as U.S. deputy ambassador in Moscow.

Ukraine not banning defense companies from working with Russia if products shipped to third-party countries

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax) - The Ukrainian government is not banning defense companies from working together with Russia if the products are produced for shipment to third-party countries, Motor Sich CEO Vyacheslav Boguslayev told journalists at the Hidroaviasalon 2014 exhibition in Gelendzhik Friday.

"Ukraine has no bans against the shipment of products for Russia to carry out its contracts. There is a ban on products that are used for military purposes," he added.

French reconnaissance ship Dupuy de Lome leaves Black Sea

MOSCOW. Sept 5 (Interfax-AVN) - The French Navy's reconnaissance ship Dupuy de Lome has ended its 21-day mission in the Black Sea and entered the zone of the Black Sea straits, a source in the Russian Navy Central Headquarters told Interfax-AVN on Friday.

"On Friday, the Dupuy de Lome left the Black Sea. It has now entered the zone of the Black Sea straits and heading towards the Mediterranean Sea," the source said.

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