

According to Moscow, Russian Troops Never Have Crossed the Border with Ukraine

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MOSCOW – Russian troops have never crossed the border with Ukraine, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich told reporters Thursday.

“I state it openly and officially that there was no troop movement through the [Ukrainian] border and certainly no Russian military presence on the territory of Ukraine,” he said.

On Wednesday, NATO said it had observed columns of Russian tanks, artillery and combat troops entering Ukraine over the past two days, while the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on Tuesday said it had seen a convoy of 43 unmarked military trucks moving toward eastern Ukraine. However, both organizations failed to present any facts to support the claim.

Lukashevich added that “we are currently looking into what the OSCE wrote in their report.”

As for NATO allegations, the spokesman said that such claims are mainly driven by the alliance’s desire to justify boosting its military presence near the Russian border.

Relations between Russia and NATO have been strained since the alliance accused Russia of meddling in Ukraine’s internal conflict, a claim Moscow has denied. NATO has also repeatedly said that Russia has been sending troops to Ukraine and supporting eastern Ukrainian militia. However, when leaders of the alliance have been asked to provide evidence to support their statements, they have failed to do so.

In April, NATO ended all practical cooperation with Russia over Ukraine, only maintaining contacts at ambassadorial and higher levels.

Resumption of Hostilities in Southeast Ukraine Must Be Prevented: Moscow

The resumption of military action in southeastern Ukraine would be a disaster and must be prevented, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said Thursday.

“The scenario [of renewed hostilities] must be prevented,” he told reporters, adding that “it would be catastrophic from the point of view of the Ukrainian situation and on a wider regional level.”

Lukashevich stressed that Russia is urging the international community to stop Kiev from planning the resumption of full-scale military action.

The official also pointed out that the Minsk agreements remain the basis for the political reconciliation of the Ukrainian internal conflict.

On Wednesday, Ukrainian Defense Minister Stepan Poltorak said the country was redeploying its military in Donbas in case of “unforeseeable actions by separatists.”

Last week, the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic claimed that Kiev had deployed tanks to the outskirts of Donetsk. However, Ukrainian authorities said that pro-independence fighters painted their military hardware in Ukrainian Army colors in order to compromise Kiev.

Ukraine Crisis Negotiations Ineffective Without Donetsk, Luhansk Participation

Negotiations in any format on settling the Ukrainian crisis without the participation of the eastern Ukrainian republics of Donetsk and Luhansk are ineffective, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said Thursday.

“In regard to the situation in southeastern Ukraine, hope for a peaceful settlement of the Ukrainian crisis without taking into consideration the opinion of the residents from that region, again, we believe to be completely ineffective. Any negotiations without the direct participation of the conflicting parties cannot be effective,” he said at a press briefing.

On November 9, the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics held elections for the heads of local governments and representatives of legislative bodies. Following the vote, the Ukrainian president said that Ukraine would not recognize the results of the elections and announced his plans to submit an abolition of the law granting special status to the regions to Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council.

The law on self-administration in parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions was passed by the Ukrainian parliament on September 16, following the September 5 ceasefire agreement between Kiev and the independence supporters. According to the deal, Kiev was obliged to ensure early local elections in the two regions.

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