
Donetsk militias complete lighter arms withdrawal from frontline with Kiev forces

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The removal of this type of weaponry from the southeastern outskirts of Gorlovka *"is the final point, after which the withdrawal... may be considered complete,"* a spokesman for the DRN General Staff told RIA-Novosti.

OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), Joint Center for Control and Coordination members and DNR military representatives, including Deputy Head of General Staff Eduard Basurin, have moved to Gorlovka to confirm the withdrawal.

On the weekend, the Donetsk militias said that they withdrew more than 40 tanks and 80 infantry fighting vehicles from the contact line.

The authorities of the neighboring self-proclaimed Lugansk People's Republic (LNR) also said they had pulled back all weapons of less than 100mm caliber from the front line to a distance of at least 3km, with the exception of an area around the village of Schastie.

The eastern Ukrainian rebels decided to withdraw lighter weapons unilaterally as an act of good will in hope that Kiev would follow their example.

[E. Ukraine rebels withdraw lighter weapons from front line](#)

But the Ukrainian authorities refuse to believe the rebel claims, presidential administration spokesman Andrey Lysenko said, calling the announcements of lighter weapons withdrawal by the rebels a *"cynical lie."*

Lysenko claims that the DNR militias continue to use mortar and artillery against the government troops and that *"the international observers didn't confirm the withdrawal of weaponry."*

Deputy Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine Alexander Hug told RT that SMM had seen weapons being withdrawn from the front line in eastern Ukraine on Monday.

"What we see at the moment is a movement of military hardware away from the contact line," Hug said.

In order to *"an actual verification of a withdrawal,"* the monitors need *"to be provided with additional baseline information, in order to be sure that weapons are not just being moved around, but are actually withdrawn, and remain withdrawn,"* he added.'

[We see movement of military hardware away from contact line' – OSCE](#)

The rebels on their part blamed Kiev for increasing its military presence near the engagement line and intensification of shelling of rebel held territories.

"The situation in Donetsk People's Republic remains difficult. The intensity of the shelling by the Ukrainian side during the past 24 hours increased and amounted to 53 ceasefire violations," the DNR Defense Ministry said, adding that one militiaman and one civilian were killed.

According to Basurin, the relocation of additional Kiev forces towards the contact line *"once again demonstrates the unwillingness of the Ukrainian authorities to settle the conflict in a peaceful manner. Everything is being done to disrupt the new stage of the contact group talks in Minsk and the withdrawal of arms of caliber less than 100mm from the line of engagement by DNR."*

At least 6,500 people were killed during the over a year of fighting between the Kiev forces and rebels in Donetsk and Lugansk Regions – collectively known as Donbass - which refused to recognize the new coup-imposed authorities in the capital.

The level of violence in eastern Ukraine decreased after the sides signed a peace treaty, which envisaged ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weaponry and prisoner exchange, on February 12 in Minsk, Belarus.

Another round of talks of the contact group, involving DNR, LNR, Ukrainian, Russian and OSCE representatives, is to take place in the Belarusian capital on Tuesday.