
STEP TO FACILITATE WORK AND TRAVEL COULD HEIGHTEN TENSIONS AMID SHAKY CEASEFIRE

-

20.02.2017

FT, 19 EB 2017

Russia has moved to recognise documents issued in separatist-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine, a step which could heighten tension with Kiev just as efforts are underway to reinforce a shaky ceasefire in the region.

According to an order by president Vladimir Putin published by the Kremlin on Saturday, Moscow will temporarily recognise identification documents, education and qualification documents, birth, marriage, divorce, name change and death certificates as well as car licence plates issued in the parts of the Donbass region that are not under the control of the Ukrainian government.

Some Ukrainian officials decried Moscows move as abandonment of the existing ceasefire framework, the so-called Minsk process. This step by the Kremlin completely destroys the Minsk process and is equal to Russias statement about an exit from that, Russian news agency Interfax quoted Oleksandr Turchynov, secretary of Ukraines National Security and Defence Council, as saying. Russias step could also be read as moving towards recognition of the self-declared peoples republics in the separatist areas.

Russian politicians called the Kremlins decision a humanitarian move. They said it was aimed at facilitating travel and allowing Donbass residents to work and study in Russia.

It is important to understand that this decision has a strict temporary limit □ until the implementation of the Minsk agreements, said Konstantin Kosachev, head of the foreign relations committee in the upper house of parliament. He added that Ukrainian President Petro Pososhenko could end this situation by speeding up the implementation of [Ukraines] responsibilities under the Minsk agreements.

Mr Putins order came as the foreign ministers of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany met in Munich to try to salvage the badly-shaken Minsk Agreement, the peace deal agreed in February 2015.

Although the deals provisions for a political solution to the conflict and a restoration of full Ukrainian government control over its eastern border have never been met, it had helped lower the level of violence until recently. But last month, fighting flared to the worst levels in more than a year, an escalation foreign observers believe reflects attempts by Russia and Ukraine, respectively, to gain the attention and support of the new US government in the conflict.

European diplomats in Moscow said while Ukraines army had moved weapons prior to the escalation, it had not crossed the line of control separating both sides. Two diplomats said Russian

and Russia-backed fighters in the separatist territories had provoked their Ukrainian adversaries, and the Ukrainian side had reacted forcefully.

This week, contact groups involving representatives of the fighting parties surprised observers by agreeing new efforts to stop the violence. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said following the four-way ministerial meeting in Munich that a ceasefire had been agreed for Monday. On February 20 the ceasefire regime will start and withdrawal of heavy military hardware will also start, Russian newswires quoted him as saying in Munich.

German foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel said all parties would use their influence to implement the agreement from the contact group meeting. We must to achieve a ceasefire from February 20 and do what has been agreed for a long time but never happened: To remove heavy weapons from the area, to secure them and allow the special monitoring mission of the [Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe] OSCE to control where they are, he said in a statement.

Kaynak/Source: