
EU AND RUSSIA AT LOGGERHEADS OVER UKRAINE SEPARATIST PASSPORTS

- 21.02.2017

EurActiv (21 February 2017)

Russia said yesterday (20 February) that President Vladimir Putin's decision to recognise passports issued by separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine complied with international law, after the move drew criticism from France, Germany and the European Union.

The decision will enable residents of the conflict-hit region to travel, work or study in Russia.

On 18 February, Putin ordered the Russian government to recognise identity documents, diplomas, birth and marriage certificates and vehicle registration plates issued in the separatist-held regions of Donetsk and Lugansk in east Ukraine.

The Kremlin said the legislation would be in place until a political settlement of the situation in these regions was reached. The peace deal brokered by Berlin and Paris between Kyiv, Moscow and the Russia-backed rebels in Minsk in 2015 has long been stalled.

The Russian Federation is working, first and foremost, on humanitarian grounds, the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement on its website.

The order fully complies with international law, which does not prohibit the recognition of documents needed to implement the rights and freedoms granted by the authorities which are not internationally recognised.

The Ukrainian government has denounced Putin's decision and says the order violates the Minsk peace process, criticisms echoed by France, Germany and the EU.

A German government spokesman said the move was a stark contradiction to all that was agreed in Minsk.

Linkevičius: Not all in the EU are reading Minsk in the same way

Some member states are reading the Minsk agreements literally and believe there could be decentralisation in eastern Ukraine before the situation on the ground improves, the Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius, told EurActiv.com in an exclusive interview.

An EU spokeswoman said the Russian decree was not in keeping with the spirit of the Minsk agreements and that the bloc would not recognise documents by the self-proclaimed rebel authorities in east Ukraine.

The EU remains unwavering in its support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and unity,

she said.

Fighting has recently escalated in the conflict between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, refocusing global attention on a simmering conflict that has strained relations between Russia and the West.

Military situation in eastern Ukraine worsens

The foreign ministry of Ukraine expressed deep concern Monday night (30 January) over the intensification of the Russian-terrorist forces in Donbas. Other reports, however, speak of a creeping offensive of Ukrainian forces in an attempt to create new facts on the ground.

The February 2015 Minsk peace agreement locked the two sides into a stalemate which has been broken periodically by sharp resurgences in fighting that Kyiv and the Kremlin accuse each other of instigating.

The foreign ministers of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine met on Saturday in Munich and agreed to use their influence to implement a ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons from Monday in eastern Ukraine.

The EU, as well as the United States, slapped sanctions on Russia over its annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula in March, 2014, and the rebellion in east Ukraine that started the following month.

BACKGROUND

The leaders of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine (the so-called Normandy format) gave their support to a deal to end fighting in eastern Ukraine, following 17-hour long negotiations in the Belarussian capital Minsk on 12 February.

The four leaders committed to respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, according to a joint declaration.

Western leaders are closely observing the implementation of the Minsk agreement.

On 2 March 2015, European leaders said that they agreed that the OSCE needed a broader role as observers of the ceasefire, and weapons removal.

On 2 October 2015, the leaders of the Normandy format admitted that it would take time to organise elections in Ukraine that respect international standards and as a result, the so-called Minsk peace process would run into next year.

Kaynak/Source: