

Fighting continues in eastern Ukraine

By Jason Melanovski
15 November 2016

Cease-fire violations in eastern Ukraine have been consistently increasing in the recent period, according to monitors with the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE). On November 8 alone, the organization reported that “1,450 explosions and almost 200 projectiles (including 122 that were rocket-assisted)” were recorded in the Donetsk province, the center of a pro-Russian separatist movement. Cease-fire violations have continued in neighboring Luhansk province as well. Several Ukrainian soldiers were killed while fighting in Donetsk in October, said the country’s minister of Defense.

Earlier in the month, separatist leader Arseny Pavlov was assassinated in eastern Ukraine after a bomb was set off in the hallway of a building in which he resided in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic. Pavlov led Sparta Battalion, which had been fighting the NATO-backed Kiev-forces since 2014.

Pavlov had survived several previous attempts on his life, including in June of 2016, when a car bomb exploded as he was leaving a trauma center. A Russian citizen by birth, Pavlov was infamous for a recording released in April 2015 in which he bragged about killing 15 prisoners of war from Ukrainian government forces.

His assassination has escalated tensions in the region, where a peace accord known as Minsk II is supposed to be in effect. The head of the Donetsk People’s Republic, Alexander Zakharchenko, told reporters, “As I understand, [Ukrainian President] Petro Poroshenko violated the ceasefire and declared war on us.” The Ukrainian government claims that Pavlov was killed by those within his inner-circle or a rival separatist militia over control of the black market in separatist-controlled areas.

The assassination took place just as both the Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic

were preparing to hold local elections. The contests, which were scheduled to take place on November 6, have been denounced by Kiev as “illegal” and a violation of the Minsk II protocols. They were ultimately halted by DPR leader Alexander Zakharchenko a week prior to their scheduled date, most likely under pressure from Russia.

The Kiev regime’s opposition to any sort of democratic local elections in eastern Ukraine stems from its fear that they would cement the region’s status as an independent entity. The issue of the elections was a main point of conflict in talks between Poroshenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin, who met in Berlin along with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande for over five hours last week.

During the talks Poroshenko reportedly shouted angrily at Putin over Putin’s insistence that the elections go ahead on November 6. No serious agreements to end the war were made, and further talks are scheduled to be held later in November. A “roadmap” for peace in Ukraine is planned to be released by the end of this month.

Meanwhile, social and economic conditions in the rest of the country continue to deteriorate. The country’s \$17.5 billion worth of loan agreements with the IMF have entailed the imposition of a harsh regime of austerity and severe price hikes for essential items such as gas, electricity, water and food. As a result, 24.3 percent of the country now lives in poverty according to the UN Development Program. Over 5 million Ukrainians must rely on state subsidies to pay their heating bills, subsidies which will continue to be cut as the country tries to meet IMF-stipulated budget limits.

Facing these conditions, tens of thousands of Ukrainians throughout the country are choosing to uproot their lives and leave. In addition to the already

1.7 million displaced by the war, over 100,000 Ukrainians left the country between January and August of this year.

Recent polling by the research group Rating showed that 30 percent of Ukrainians want to leave the country permanently to live abroad and 40 percent want to leave for work. Among the main groups wishing to leave the country include “residents from western and central regions, men, young people, and those with a level of education and income.”

The main reasons for wishing to leave the country are firstly “hope for better living conditions” and secondly to “secure a better future for their children.”

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