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Political Solution to Crimea May No Longer Be Possible, Human Rights Watchdog Says

Політичне рішення в Криму, ймовірно, більше неможливо, стверджує правозахисна організація

Глава європейської правозахисної організації заявив, що не знайшов жодних доказів того, що російськомовне населення в Україні знаходиться під загрозою, спростувавши виправдання Москвою свого вторгнення до Криму, - пишуть Харрієт Торрі і Бертран Бенуа в статті. Проте, Турбйорн Ягланд, генсек Ради Європи - головної правозахисної організації континенту, застеріг, що ймовірність того, що російські війська покинуть Крим, досить мала, - підкреслює видання. Ягланд, колишній прем'єр-міністр Норвегії, який також очолює Норвезький Нобелівський комітет, заявив, що Рада Європи незабаром направить в Україну спостерігачів, які стежитимуть за ситуацією з національними меншинами", - йдеться в статті. Використовувати захист нацменшин як привід для військового вторгнення - це "складний і небезпечний шлях, приречений на невдачу", зазначив генсек Ради Європи.

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304704504579433342796364988?KEYWORDS=Russia&mg=reno64-wsj>



Ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich on Tuesday delivered a defiant statement in which he denounced upcoming elections in Ukraine as illegal and illegitimate, and blamed recent violence and instability on the current government.

BERLIN—The head of Europe's human-rights watchdog said Tuesday that he saw no evidence that the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine is under threat, dismissing Moscow's justification for its intervention in Crimea.

However, Thorbjorn Jagland, secretary-general of the Council of Europe—the Continent's main human-rights body—warned that the chances of Russian troops leaving the restive Ukrainian region are slim.

"Actually I don't know whether this is possible now," he said in an interview. "We hope for a political solution but I don't know whether this is possible."

The comments echo the fading hopes across the West for a swift resolution to the standoff in Crimea. Any longer-term settlement, Mr. Jagland said, would require new institutions in Ukraine, where he said power is far too centralized in Kiev.

The Council of Europe has emerged as one of the few institutions in the region with broad enough legitimacy to help engineer a settlement. Russia and Ukraine count among its 47 member states, are bound by its convention and have continued to support the council's work since the outbreak of the crisis.

Mr. Jagland, a former Norwegian prime minister who also chairs the Norwegian Nobel Committee, said in Kiev on Monday that the organization would shortly send observers to monitor the treatment of minorities across Ukraine.

The Strasbourg, France-based organization is also reviewing the legality of a planned referendum in Crimea on joining Russia, advising Kiev on institutional reforms and investigating the death of protesters in clashes in the capital last month.

Much of the council's legitimacy derives from its strict legal approach and the fact that it eschews political judgment, Mr. Jagland said. On that basis, he made it clear there was no justification for Russia's intervention in Crimea. "We don't actually see any signs of real threat to the minorities or the Russian majorities [in Ukraine]," he said.

Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, justified this month's decision by the Russian parliament to authorize the deployment of forces into Ukraine by claiming there were threats to the Russian-speaking population following the ouster of Viktor Yanukovich, the Kremlin-backed Ukrainian president, last month.

Troops in unmarked uniforms, apparently Russian special forces, rolled into Crimea early this month and cut it off from the rest of Ukraine. The newly installed regional authorities then announced they would hold a referendum Sunday on joining the Russian Federation and passed laws to incorporate Crimea into Russia.

Using the protection of minorities as a pretext for military intervention is "a difficult and dangerous path to go down," Mr. Jagland said, given the intricate ethnic mosaic in much of Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

"Whatever happens in Crimea, it's important to clarify what the legal grounds are for it," he said. Any decision by part of an independent state to join a neighboring country, he said, would be "a very serious thing. We have seen it before, what this can lead to. And when it's based on ethnicity, it's always very dangerous."

However, he also warned the new government in Kiev of its legal responsibilities to protect minorities and fight extremism, saying that it would put its legitimacy at risk if it tampered with the rule of law.

European leaders have threatened Russia with sanctions in a bid to pressure Mr. Putin, so far unsuccessfully, into establishing a "contact group" to negotiate directly with Ukraine, the U.S. and European governments.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whom Mr. Jagland met in Berlin on Tuesday, and her foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, have been among the main supporters of the Council of Europe as an honest broker and as a possible member of the contact group.

Russia doesn't recognize Ukraine's interim government, saying its leaders toppled Mr. Yanukovich in an illegal coup. Kiev and its Western allies say both Crimea's occupation and its

planned referendum on joining Russia breach international law, the Ukrainian constitution and bilateral treaties.

The Council of Europe is guiding Ukraine's government on forming a new constitution and investigating the violent confrontation in Kiev that pitched anti-Yanukovich protesters against riot police in late February and left more than 80 people dead and hundreds wounded. The council's advisory panel on constitutional matters, known as the Venice Commission, will issue opinions on the legality of the referendum and a recent Russian law that would allow it to annex the territory in the coming days.

Mr. Jagland blamed Ukraine's flawed institutions, corruption, weak law enforcement and biased judiciary for undermining public faith in the authorities, leading to recurrent unrest, including the movement that precipitated Mr. Yanukovich's fall.

"What Ukraine needs now is a new constitution that has to clarify the distribution of power between the different institutions in the country," he said, adding that the council had been working on a law giving more power to the regional and local authorities for some time. "The country is too centralized."

He criticized an attempt by the new government, led by Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, to undo a law--allowing Russian to be used as an official first language in parts of the country--as a "very, very unfortunate" move that "gave a very wrong signal, particularly to the Russian population."

On Wednesday, the Council of Europe will vote on sending observers to Ukraine to assess the protection of minorities, a vote that needs a two-thirds majority. Representatives from the Vienna-based Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have so far been unsuccessful in crossing border checkpoints into the Crimean peninsula.

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