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Pro-Russia separatists press forward with their secession from Ukraine

Проросійські сепаратисти наполегливо прагнуть до відокремлення від України

Підтримувані Росією сепаратисти продовжують будувати придуману ними нову державу, відірвану від України: вони провели «інавгурацію» бойовика, нібито обраного прем'єр-міністром самопроголошеної Донецької народної республіки.

Олександр Захарченко переміг на сумнівних виборах, набравши більш ніж 70% голосів, як заявила виборча комісія сепаратистського регіону, що працювала без реєстрації виборців, проводила опитування в присутності озброєних бойовиків і доставляла урни для голосування жителям сіл, які, побоюючись потрапити під артилерійський вогонь, не з'явилися на вибори. Колишній офіцер радянської армії Ігор Плотницький очолив сусідню Луганську народну республіку, через день після того, як він закликав інші незадоволені регіони України відокремитися і приєднатися до нової держави – Новоросії. Наслідки сепаратистських виборів та будівництва квазідержави на окупованій сепаратистами території відразу ж стали очевидні. Український президент Петро Порошенко заявив, що він відкликає пропозицію дати більшу автономію східним регіонам.

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Mstyslav Chernov / Associated Press

Ukrainian secessionist leader Alexander Zakharchenko is sworn in as prime minister of the so-called People's Republic of Donetsk on Nov. 4.

Russia-backed separatists pressed on Tuesday with the building of their envisioned new state wrested from Ukrainian territory with the inauguration of a gunman purportedly elected prime minister of the proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk.

Alexander Zakharchenko won the dubious election held Sunday with more than 70% of the vote, according to the breakaway region's election committee, which operated without a voter registry, conducted polling in the presence of armed fighters and carried ballot boxes to villagers who were reluctant to brave artillery fire to vote.

The elections for government leaders and local assemblies for the Donetsk and Luhansk regions were widely condemned as illegal and a threat to an all-but-dead cease-fire that has

tamped down some of the fighting in eastern Ukraine. In the two months since the Sept. 5 truce was signed by Russia, Ukraine and the separatists, at least 400 people have died, bringing the death toll from the conflict to at least 4,000 since April.

Zakharchenko was sworn in at the heavily guarded Music and Dance Theater in Donetsk, Russia's Tass news agency reported from the city once home to a million residents. The 38-year-old normally attired in camouflage wore a sash bearing the red, blue and black colors of his declared republic draped over a pinstriped suit.

Soviet army veteran Igor Plotnitsky also took office on Tuesday to lead the neighboring People's Republic of Luhansk, a day after he appealed to other disgruntled regions of Ukraine to secede and join the emerging new state of Novorossiia. The territory stretching from the Russian border across the Black Sea coast of southern Ukraine has resurrected the name applied to it when czarist Russia conquered it in the late 18th century.

"I feel joy for my own people, which finally found, I think, faith," Plotnitsky told journalists after the inauguration ceremony, Russia's RIA Novosti news agency reported. "It should not be failed now. We will do everything that we said we would accomplish."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel reiterated her displeasure over the separatists' defiance in holding the elections, which were denounced as destabilizing by the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Merkel said she still held out hope for a negotiated end to the Ukraine crisis. But she said the separatists' disregard for the international community's judgment that the votes were illegal showed "how difficult it is even to maintain agreements that have been made" -- a reference to the battered cease-fire.

The consequences of the separatists' elections and purported state-building in their occupied territory were immediately clear. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said Tuesday that he was revoking an offer to grant greater autonomy to the eastern regions that would have allowed them to maintain the social and economic ties with Russia that have prevailed throughout Ukraine's 23 years of independence because of the close integration of their industry with that of Russia.