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By Julian E. Barnes

ET NATO Head Renews Calls on Russia to Remove Forces From Ukraine

Jens Stoltenberg said Putin confirmed assertions about Russian forces in the country.

*Глава НАТО знову закликає Росію вивести війська з України
Йенс Столтенберг заявив, що Путін підтвердив наявність російських сил в
країні*

Генсек Північноатлантичного альянсу Йенс Столтенберг сказав, що Росія несе особливу відповідальність за виведення своїх військ за умовами мирної угоди, укладенню якого альянс сприяв у лютому". Журналіст нагадує, що на прес-конференції, що пройшла в Москві 18 грудня, Путін визнав присутність на Україні "людей, які займаються вирішенням певних питань, в тому числі у військовій сфері". "Він сьогодні сказав майже те ж саме, що ми твердили весь цей час, - заявив Столтенберг. - Він сказав, що російський персонал знаходиться на сході України і займається військовою діяльністю. Ми зазвичай називаємо таких людей солдатами".

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-head-renews-calls-on-russia-to-remove-forces-from-ukraine-14503682>

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NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg at the alliance headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, earlier this month. Photo: Reuters

BRUSSELS—NATO's top civilian official renewed calls on Russia to remove troops from eastern Ukraine, citing President Vladimir Putin's admission on Thursday that it had personnel in the region.

Jens Stoltenberg, secretary-general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, said Russia had a special responsibility to withdraw its forces under the terms of the peace deal it helped broker in February.

At a news conference in Moscow, Mr. Putin appeared to confirm some military involvement in neighboring Ukraine.

"We never said there aren't people there who are solving certain issues in the military sphere, but that doesn't mean that regular Russian troops are there," he said. "Feel the difference."

Mr. Stoltenberg said the terms used by Mr. Putin were just another word for soldiers.

"What he said today is basically the same as we have stated all along," Mr. Stoltenberg said. "He has said Russia has personnel in eastern Ukraine and these personnel, they have conducted military activities. That is what we normally call soldiers."

Mr. Stoltenberg said violations of the cease-fire in Ukraine by Russian-backed separatists have increased.

"There is a real risk of a resumption of violence," he said. "Ukraine still does not have full control of its borders. Russia still has not withdrawn all its troops or equipment."

In a meeting Thursday with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Mr. Stoltenberg pushed him to continue with efforts to fight corruption and improve governance.

A day earlier, Ukraine reached a tentative deal with European Union leaders on visa-free travel. Mr. Poroshenko's meetings in Brussels over the past two days have come at a critical time for Kiev.

Fractures within Ukraine's governing coalition have grown worse in recent weeks. U.S. and European officials have said they are worried that the divisions will slow the Ukrainian government's ability to fight corruption and institute institutional overhauls.

Some U.S. and NATO alliance officials also worry that progress toward a peaceful resolution to the conflict with Russian-backed separatists is stalling. Violence and fighting continue in eastern Ukraine despite the cease-fire.

Mr. Poroshenko said he was working to keep the coalition together and continue anticorruption efforts.

"I will do my best to keep the country together...to decisively continue the reforms that are vitally important," he said.

While Russian-provided heavy weaponry has been withdrawn from the front lines of the civil war in eastern Ukraine, many of the other provisions of the agreement signed last February in Belarus remain unfulfilled.

The agreement was designed to restore peace in Ukraine, by returning control of the country's borders to the central government while giving the eastern region a measure of autonomy.

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