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Neil Buckley in London, Roman Olearchyk in Kiev and Kathrin Hille in Moscow

Ukraine president calls for disputed poll to be annulled

Президент України закликав анулювати спірне голосування

Президент України Петро Порошенко заявив, що проситиме парламент України скасувати закон, що дає більше автономії окремим східним регіонам після того як вони провели невизнані вибори, які перекреслили двох-місячну угоду про припинення вогню, що висить на волосині. Його заява прозвучала на фоні попередження генерального секретаря

НАТО, що російські війська знову наближуються до кордонів України і Москва продовжує навчати повстанців на сході країни і забезпечувати "обладнання та підтримку". На екстреному засіданні Ради національної безпеки України, пан Порошенко заявив, що армії України буде відправлено підкріплення, аби захиститися від можливих майбутніх посягань, повстанців, підтримуваних російськими військами, на східні міста Харків, Маріуполь і Дніпропетровськ.

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President Petro Poroshenko said he would ask Ukraine's parliament to cancel a law giving more autonomy to breakaway eastern regions after they held unrecognised elections that left a two-month-old ceasefire agreement hanging by a thread.

His announcement came as Nato's secretary-general warned that Russian troops were again moving closer to Ukraine's border, and said Moscow continued to train rebels in the country's east and provide "equipment and support".

Addressing an emergency meeting of Ukraine's national security council late on Tuesday, Mr Poroshenko said Ukraine's army was sending reinforcements to defend against potential future advances by Russian-backed rebels on the eastern cities of Kharkiv, Mariupol and Dnipropetrovsk.

He insisted Sunday's controversial polls in the rebel-held regions of Donetsk and Lugansk should be annulled. But the president said Ukraine would stick to the September 5 Minsk ceasefire agreement.

"I remain a proponent of the peace plan... but this does not mean Ukraine will not be prepared for [a] decisive course of action in the event of a pessimistic, negative scenario," he said.

Sunday's elections in Donetsk and Lugansk have posed the biggest challenge yet to the fragile Minsk ceasefire. They also threaten to reinforce a partition of Ukraine, leaving parts of its two easternmost regions beyond Kiev's control.

The west sharply criticised the polls, and UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon on Tuesday called them "unfortunate and counterproductive". But Russia acknowledged the will of the regions' inhabitants – though stopping short of explicitly recognising the elections – and said the polls had produced leaders who could now negotiate with Kiev.

The Minsk agreement called for early elections to be held in the breakaway eastern regions under Ukrainian law. It also called for a law granting "special status" and more autonomy to those regions – which Mr Poroshenko pushed through Ukraine's parliament in September.

But the greater autonomy was only set to take effect after local officials and lawmakers were elected in a proposed December vote, under Ukrainian law and recognised internationally. Instead, the two regions organised elections under their own auspices.

Olexiy Haran, a political-scientist at Kyiv Mohyla University, said the president had little choice but to withdraw the special status law.

"Poroshenko offered a colossal compromise when he offered this autonomy and regional elections through the peace agreement," Mr Haran said, noting it had hurt Mr Poroshenko's party in Ukraine's October 26 parliamentary elections. "But now it would be fiction to proceed with it."

The president said there could be no negotiations with leaders Kiev regarded as illegitimate.

But he also sought to take the moral high ground, noting Ukraine was continuing to supply heat and power to the breakaway regions, though "not receiving a single kopeck" in payment.

Tim Ash, emerging market economist at Standard Bank, suggested Mr Poroshenko's message was aimed in part at the EU and US.

"I think there is a hope in Kiev that the west does something to force Moscow to begin to comply with the Minsk protocol," he said.

In depth

Crisis in Ukraine



Pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine have escalated the political turmoil that threatens to tear the country apart

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US and EU officials have said they are unlikely to impose more sanctions on Russia after Sunday's elections, but may do so if Moscow continues not to comply with Minsk provisions.

In Moscow, officials insisted the Russian government's response to the polls was an attempt to contain the crisis. Grigory Karasin, deputy foreign minister, said Moscow believed the election had given Russia-friendly leaders in the two regions a "mandate to negotiate with the central Ukrainian authorities" and urged dialogue between the rebel leaders and Kiev.

A Russian foreign policy official rejected western criticism, arguing that Moscow could have gone much further if it intended to fuel tension. "It needs to be noted that there was no mention of an official recognition of the election," the official said. "It also needs to be noted that we back a political solution and have offered our support in achieving it."