

Financial Times. – 16.04.2014

By Roman Olearchyk in Kiev, Andrew Jack in Kramatorsk and Neil Buckley in London

Pro-Russian militia refuse to back down

Проросійські формування відмовляються відступати

Наступного дня після початку спеціальних операцій у Східній Україні та взяття під контроль ключового аеропорту, проросійські сили не показують ніяких ознак відступу, посилюючи заклопотаність з приводу кризи напередодні міжнародного саміту. Міністри закордонних справ України, Росії, США та ЄС мають зустрітися у спробі розрядити кризу. Проросійськими сепаратистами захоплені будівлі у 10 великих і малих містах Східної України. Україна і західні країни звинуватили Росію в організації сепаратистських акцій. Москва заперечує.

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/c4f8d282-c4c0-11e3-9aeb-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2z2ab0ncX>



©Andrew Jack

A day after Kiev launched special operations in eastern Ukraine retaking control of a key airport, pro-Russian forces were showing no signs of retreat, heightening concerns over the crisis ahead of Thursday's international summit.

The FT witnessed five armoured personnel carriers and a small tank together carrying about 100 militia with Russian flags, cheered on by hundreds of local people in the centre of Kramatorsk on Wednesday morning. Two military helicopters flew over the town, where local men calling for a referendum had occupied the city administration on Saturday.

The sightings follow Kiev's move late on Tuesday to dislodge pro-Russian forces from at least two cities, with the acting president, Oleksandr Turchynov, saying troops had retaken Kramatorsk airport. State security bodies said operations were under way both there and in the nearby town of Slavyansk.

Unidentified armed militants had seized the mayors office in Donetsk, a large regional capital where pro-Russian separatists nearly two weeks ago seized the a regional government building, news agencies reported on Wednesday. It was not immediately clear whether the group was allied with separatists that have in past days seized about 10 regional government buildings in eastern Ukrainian cities.

Meanwhile, prime minister Arseniy Yatseniuk told the cabinet that a newly-formed "constitutional commission" would swiftly draft constitutional changes delegating more governing power from Kiev's central government to regional legislatures and administrations.

Mr Yatseniuk also accused Russia of committing an “international crime” by employing armed “diversion units” in eastern Ukraine with the aim of “destroying Ukrainian independence”.

“Russia is fighting terrorists” in the Caucasus, “but when Ukraine is defending its citizens then it’s not a fight against terrorism but crushing of protests,” Mr Yatseniuk said. “I understand that the Russian Federation has come up with a new export along with oil and gas ... It seems that Russia has come up with a new export commodity – terrorism,” Mr Yatseniuk added.

A senior Russian official on Tuesday had warned that Moscow was “deeply concerned” by Russian media reports of casualties in the operations.

Gunfire was reportedly heard at the airport, and Russia’s RIA-Novosti news agency reported that four militants had been killed and two injured, though the report could not immediately be confirmed. Ukraine’s interior ministry said the airport had been retaken without any casualties.

Citing the report, however, Konstantin Dolgov, the Russian foreign ministry’s human rights representative, was quoted as saying: “To all appearances, events [in Ukraine] are beginning to develop under the worst-case scenario.” Earlier, Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev claimed Ukraine was close to “civil war”.

The comments from Moscow heightened concerns that any bloodshed resulting from attempts by the Kiev authorities to retake control of eastern Ukrainian cities could prompt direct military intervention by Russia.

Vladimir Putin, Russian president, told Ban Ki-Moon, UN secretary-general, in a phone conversation that “the Russian side expects a clear condemnation from the UN and the international community of these anti-constitutional actions”, the Kremlin said.

However, the US took a sharply different line. The US “agreed that the use of force is not a preferred option”, according to White House spokesman Jay Carney. But he added: “That said, the Ukrainian government has a responsibility to provide law and order, and these provocations in eastern Ukraine are creating a situation in which the government has to respond. Ukraine has proceeded with great caution, has for days now been offering amnesty, dialogue, has been trying to resolve these conflicts peacefully.”

Later on Tuesday German Chancellor Angela Merkel called Mr Putin to discuss the situation in Ukraine. Berlin said she and the Russian president had “different assessments of events” in Ukraine. The main focus of the call had been preparations for a planned meeting of senior diplomats from Russia, Ukraine, the US and the EU in Geneva on Thursday.

The foreign ministers are due to meet in an attempt to defuse the crisis.

But Sergei Lavrov, Russian foreign minister, warned on Tuesday that “if force is used in southeastern Ukraine, [the] chances of holding this meeting in Geneva would be undermined”.

Russia’s stock market fell sharply in late trading as news of the Ukrainian operations broke. The Micex index closed down 2.5 per cent at 1,311.01.

Events on Tuesday emphasised the sensitivity of the situation for Kiev’s fragile new government, faced with the task of restoring its authority after separatist takeovers in the east without provoking further Russian intervention.

Eyewitnesses said soldiers, helicopters and some military vehicles were being deployed outside Slavyansk, where armed men took control of a police station and local administration building on Saturday. Airborne troops landed in two military helicopters at Kramatorsk, Reuters news agency reported.

Previous ultimatums issued by Kiev to pro-Russian separatists to abandon buildings they had seized in about 10 towns and cities in mostly Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine had been followed by little action.

But Mr Turchynov announced earlier on Tuesday an “antiterrorist” operation was under way in the east, which he insisted would be “phased, responsible and balanced”.

Kiev also said it was ready to open dialogue with pro-Russian groups in the east – a move that Mr Lavrov said was “certainly a step in the right direction, albeit very belated”.

Ukraine and western capitals have accused Russia of orchestrating the separatist protests in eastern Ukraine, which Moscow has denied. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Nato secretary-general, told reporters on Tuesday he could not comment on what intelligence the military alliance had on Russian involvement.

“But I think from what is visible, it is very clear that Russia’s hand is deeply engaged in this,” he said.