



Russia has transformed Black Sea military landscape, say foreign affairs MEPs

[05-05-2015 - 14:38]

If Russia does not apply the Minsk ceasefire deals in full and return Crimea to Ukraine, the EU should step up sanctions and consider the possibility of providing Ukraine with defensive arms, say Foreign Affairs Committee MEPs in a resolution voted on Monday. Returning Crimea is vital to the EU's long-run cooperation with Russia and EU countries must also step up their own defence capabilities, says the text, which looks at Black Sea Basin military changes since Russia illegally annexed Crimea.

MEPs "firmly support the non-recognition" by the EU of Russia's annexation of the Crimea and Sevastopol, and ask once again EU member states to speak with one united voice on EU relations with Russia.

If Russia's destabilisation of eastern Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea continue, the EU should step up sanctions against it and consider the possibility of providing Ukraine with defensive arms and other defence help to Ukraine, they say.

The committee reiterates that the EU's relations with Russia should in general be "cooperative rather than confrontational" in the long run, but says this can happen only after Russia "fully and unconditionally" implements the Minsk ceasefire agreements, and returns Crimea to Ukraine. NATO should give its eastern members a "strong strategic reassurance", suggests the text.

MEPs also voice concern that Crimean Tatars have been persecuted since the Russian occupation began, and urge Russia to stop harassing their executive body, the Mejlis.

Change in Black Sea strategic landscape...

Foreign Affairs Committee MEPs stress that Russia's forcible annexation of Crimea and military developments in the Black Sea Basin are challenging Europe's security architecture.

"Through the strategic military developments, including heavy rearmament of Crimea, Russia is in practice creating another launching pad, of the proportions of Kaliningrad, this time in the Black sea. In one year the defensive force which existed there has been transformed into a strike force comprising all three services, which is a very powerful instrument with which Russia can threaten Central Europe, the Balkans, Southern Europe and also Eastern Mediterranean and even the Middle East", said rapporteur Ioan Mircea Pascu (S&D, RO).

MEPs are concerned about the intensified Russian pressure over the EU's eastern border, including on Romania, Poland and Baltic States.

They also note that if Russia were to establish a land corridor linking it with the Crimea along the western shore of the Azov Sea (Mariupol) and attempt to create another from Crimea to Transnistria, this could leave Ukraine completely cut off from the sea.

... calls for new security responses

Press release

Europe's security architecture "is based on post-Cold war norms", say MEPs, stressing the need to beef up the EU's Security, Maritime Security, and Black Sea Strategies, and Neighbourhood Policy, give priority to the Black Sea region and strengthen security cooperation with Black Sea coastal partner states.

MEPs stress that the EU must cooperate with NATO and the USA to ensure security in the area.

Next Steps

The non-legislative resolution will be put to a plenary vote at Parliament's June I session (tbc).

Links

- Committee on Foreign Affairs: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/afet/home.html>
- Committee on Security and Defence:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/sede/home.html;jsessionid=6375E53ADCC5877DBEF0F1199FBA9C91.node2>
- Audiovisual material: extracts from vote and statement by rapporteur Pascu:
<http://audiovisual.europarl.europa.eu/Assetdetail.aspx?ref=1102579>

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