



European Parliament calls on Russia to withdraw military forces from Ukraine

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Russia must immediately withdraw all its military forces from Ukrainian territory, say MEPs in a resolution passed on Thursday. They condemn its "act of aggression in invading Crimea" as a breach of international law, declare Crimea's plans to hold a referendum on its accession to Russia to be illegal and warn that Russia's actions pose a threat to the security of the EU.

The resolution firmly condemns Russia's "act of aggression in invading Crimea" and calls for the immediate withdrawal of all military forces "present illegally on Ukrainian territory". Russia was in "clear breach" of international law, as set out in the UN Charter, the OSCE Helsinki Act, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum and other conventions, and was "posing a threat to the security of the EU", it says.

Crimean referendum illegal

MEPs denounce the referendum to be held this Sunday in Crimea on its accession to Russia, and the decision of its self-proclaimed authorities to declare independence on 11 March 2014, as "illegitimate and illegal". According to Ukraine's constitution, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea may only hold referendums on local matters and not on modifying Ukraine's internationally-recognised borders, notes the text.

Russian accusations unfounded

The text rejects Russia's stated objective of protecting Crimea's Russian speakers as "completely unfounded", given that they did not suffer "any discrimination whatsoever". It also strongly condemns the "defamation of protesters against Yanukovich's policy as 'fascists' by Russian propaganda".

Protection of minorities

MEPs nonetheless call on the Ukrainian government to protect the rights of national minorities, including Russian-speaking Ukrainians and ask for a new wide-ranging language regime supporting all minority languages. To this end, they welcome decision by Ukraine's acting President to veto a bill that would have downgraded the right to use minority languages in Ukraine.

EU action

Parliament stresses the need for the EU and its member states to speak to Russia with one voice and support the right of a united Ukraine to determine its future freely.

MEPs salute the EU Council decision of 6 March to suspend visa liberalization and partnership talks with Russia and say that in the event of Russian annexation of Crimea the EU should quickly impose an arms and dual-use technology embargo, restrictions on visas, an asset freeze and measures against Russian companies, particularly in the energy sector, in full compliance with EU law.

While MEPs applaud the EU's decision to provide Ukraine with a €11 billion aid package, sign the political chapters of association agreement and enact immediate customs tariff cuts for EU imports of Ukrainian goods, they also call upon it to speed up visa liberalisation with Ukraine and meanwhile introduce "temporary, very simple, low-cost visa procedures at EU and member state level" for Ukrainian citizens.

Finally, MEPs conclude that parliamentary cooperation between the European Parliament

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and the Russian State Duma and the Federation Council "cannot be conducted along the lines of 'business as usual'".

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