

Eastern European states demand stronger action against Russia

Markus Salzmann
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Eastern European governments have fully supported the right-wing US and EU-led coup in Ukraine and are now demanding intensified military action against Russia. In particular, the Baltic states and Poland are calling for an intensified military presence by NATO and a massive upgrade of the Western military presence on the border with Russia.

At a special summit of the EU held in early March, Lithuania's President Dalia Grybauskaitė criticised Europe for what she regarded as its tardy response to the crisis. "Europe still does not understand what is taking place," she said. "We must realize that Russia is dangerous."

After the vote in Crimea for unification with Russia, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia all convened their National Security Councils. They condemned the policies of Moscow and accused Western powers of responding "too cautiously," "too cowardly" and "too slowly."

Latvia has terminated its military cooperation with Russia. At the request of all three Baltic states the United States has stationed additional fighter jets to secure the Baltic airspace at the Zokniai military airfield in Lithuania.

The Polish President Bronisław Komorowski criticised the Russian intervention in Ukraine and called for "consultations under Article 4 of the NATO Treaty." Such consultations are permitted when any member considers "the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the parties threatened." Russia had undoubtedly violated international law, Komorowski said.

According to Reuters, the Warsaw government has accelerated its construction of a missile defence shield. Jacek Sonta, spokesman of the Polish Defence Ministry, announced on Thursday that the conclusion

of contracts for the construction of the system would take place in the next few weeks, and not in June as originally planned.

Poland has been a member of NATO since 1999 and has a 500-kilometre border with Ukraine. The Pentagon has moved F-16 combat aircraft and 200 members of its air force from its base in Aviano, Italy to Poland. According to American sources the aim of the move is, among other things, to practice joint manoeuvres with the Polish Air Force.

The US has also strengthened its presence in Lithuania by stationing an additional six F-15CI fighters.

US Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes has asked European NATO powers to step up their military presence in the region and Denmark has already responded. Danish Foreign Minister Martin Lidegaard announced last week the stationing of six F-16 fighter aircraft in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. They will commence patrols on May 1, he said.

A spokeswoman for the German Defence Ministry declared that as soon as political agreement had been reached, "The German air force could participate in air surveillance and training flights under Air Policing policy with AWACS machines over the Baltic states, as well as Romania and Poland. According to *Der Spiegel*, the Defence Ministry is willing to provide six aircraft for increased air surveillance over the Baltic states.

Other Eastern European countries also support the Western-led confrontation with Russia. The Social Democrat-led government in Prague condemned the "creeping occupation" of the Crimea as an act of aggression. Government officials said Russia's actions recall the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968. The Russian ambassador was summoned to the Foreign Office and the National Security Council also

convened.

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico criticized the Russian “breach of international law” and repeatedly stressed that his country would endorse all EU measures against Russia. Slovakia also participated in an OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) inspection team in Ukraine.

The Bulgarian President Rosen Plevneliev condemned Russia and its “use of military force for the occupation of foreign territories.”

The Romanian government has declared its readiness to support all of the proposed EU sanctions against Russia. The government has signed a treaty on joint military cooperation with the right-wing transitional government in Kiev. With the express support of the regime, NATO conducts regular reconnaissance flights from Romanian airbases.

Romania is directly involved in the conflict over Transnistria. In 1990 this narrow, 200-kilometre-long strip of land on the east bank of the river Dniester broke away from Moldova, when the latter decided on independence from the Soviet Union on the initiative of right-wing, chauvinist forces. In particular, industrial workers in the east of the country opposed the break up. Two-thirds of industrial production in Moldova is concentrated in Transnistria, which has a predominately Russian population.

By the spring of 1992, the conflict had developed into a full-scale war in which over a thousand people lost their lives. Since then Transnistria has remained de facto independent, but is not recognized by international law. It is under the protection of Russian troops, while Moldova maintains close relations with Romania.

In the wake of the Crimean crisis the Transnistrian conflict has worsened once again. Western powers and the governments of Ukraine and Moldova have accused Russia of planning to annex Transnistria. The chairman of the US Intelligence Committee, Mike Rogers, recently declared that Putin’s next goal was the Republic of Moldova.

For its part, Russia has accused the governments of Moldova and Ukraine of imposing a blockade with US and the European Union on Transnistria, which is clamped between the former two countries. According to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Russian television: “With their outrageous actions they are

trying to put Tiraspol in a hopeless situation. They are in breach of obligations to the residents of Transnistria allowing freedom of movement and unhindered economic activity.” he said.

During his recent official visit to Washington, Moldovan Prime Minister Iurie Leanca was assured of US support. President Barack Obama told him: “I sympathize with you—you have my support” and stressed that the US would leave no stone unturned in efforts to stabilize the situation in the region. At the same time, US Secretary of State John Kerry promised the Moldovan government economic aid.



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