

Ukrainian army prepares siege of Donetsk

Christoph Dreier
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After the Ukrainian armed forces brought the city of Slavjansk under their control on Saturday, the new defence minister, Valeri Gelety, said that the offensive against the two major cities of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine would continue. The army's brutal strategy threatens thousands of civilian casualties.

Gelety ruled out a peaceful resolution of the conflict, demanding the surrender of the pro-Russian separatists, who for the past three months have controlled the major cities in the east of the country.

"Now negotiations are only possible if the fighters lay down their weapons permanently," the defence minister said. With this, Gelety cancelled an agreement that he had concluded last Wednesday along with the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Russia, and which had foreseen holding negotiations without preconditions on a bilateral ceasefire.

On Saturday, the pro-Russian militias had left Slavyansk, which had been besieged since early May, and retreated to Donetsk, some 60 kilometres away. A spokesman for the security forces recently announced that the city of Konstantinovka was now under the control of the armed forces.

The situation in these cities is unbearable, due to the weeks-long siege. In Slavyansk, water, gas and electricity supplies collapsed long ago, due to bombing and shelling by the army. Many buildings have been destroyed.

Because Kiev stopped all payments to the city, many public services have ground to a halt. Only 45,000 of the 116,000 residents remained in the city. Those who had the opportunity to do so fled before the Kiev regime forces attacked.

Many videos, photos and reports from the city show the devastating damage caused by the bombardment. Tatiana Lokschina of Human Rights Watch reports numerous civilian casualties caused by the bombings by the Ukrainian Air Force.

Now, the Kiev regime's forces are moving against the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk, which have already been the target of attacks for weeks. With 1 million and 400,000 inhabitants, respectively, they are significantly larger than Slavjansk.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko announced his intention to "surround" Donetsk and Luhansk. "The strategic plan of President Petro Poroshenko foresees the complete blockade of these places until the capitulation of the bandits," said the deputy head of the Security Council, Mikhail Koval, on Sunday.

Although government officials declared they would allow the city to be supplied with food, the experience of Slavyansk shows that such promises have no credibility. There, the siege quickly led to a lack of food and medical provisions and a humanitarian catastrophe.

The Ukrainian army has been transformed into a brutal intervention force. The United States has provided the government of Ukraine \$23 million for this project since March of this year. In particular, the fascist militia who played a leading role in the Maidan protests in Kiev at the beginning of the year were deployed by the government alongside and within regular army units.

In the spring, when the pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine started occupying government buildings and airports, many soldiers refused to fight them. They themselves had little sympathy for the regime in Kiev and refused to fire on Ukrainian civilians. Now, however, Ukrainian officials and the Western press openly boast that the Kiev regime has succeeded in forming military units capable of carrying out mass killings against the population.

"They have overcome that psychological barrier in which the military were afraid to shoot living people," Mykola Sungurovskyi of the Razumkov Center think tank told the *New York Times*, "not simply to shoot

living people, but their own people.”

Over the last week, Poroshenko appointed hard-liner Valeri Geletey as the new defence minister, and also replaced the Army chief of staff. On Tuesday, to prepare for the siege of the city of Donetsk, he replaced the head of the operation in eastern Ukraine with Vassily Grizak.

The approach is fully supported by the United States. At a press conference on Monday, a spokesman for the State Department expressed support for the air strikes on the cities of eastern Ukraine. “The government of Ukraine is defending the country of Ukraine and I think they have every right to do that,” he said in response to a question.

Following a telephone conversation with French President François Hollande on Tuesday, President Barack Obama said both leaders had agreed to tighten sanctions against Russia if it did not immediately take steps to reduce tensions in eastern Ukraine. They called on Russia to end its “destabilising activities” and reduce its military presence on the border with Ukraine.

The European Union (EU) reportedly decided at a meeting at the diplomatic level on Monday to expand the list of Russian citizens who face bans on entry and having their bank accounts frozen. A decision on the matter is expected on Wednesday.

During his visit to Mongolia, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said there could be no military solution to the conflict. “This necessary step to calm the situation must be made,” the foreign minister said. He insisted on the observance of the agreements made on Wednesday to hold talks without preconditions.

Representatives of the Russian government reacted cautiously to the military offensive by the Kiev government. “It is senseless to keep calling for an end to the shelling of civilian facilities by Kiev,” the Russian Foreign Ministry declared impotently on Monday. “In face of this, we hope that the EU member states condemn the criminal policies of the Kiev government in an appropriate manner.”

The brutality with which the Kiev regime is proceeding against the insurgents is not only directed against the separatists in the east of the country. Discontent with the government is growing in the working class throughout the country.

In recent weeks, the price of fuel has risen by 150

percent as price subsidies have been slashed; rents too are rising sharply. The Association Agreement with the EU has further exacerbated the situation.

At a preparatory meeting for an international donors’ conference in Brussels, European Commissioner Stefan Füle stated that he expected further austerity measures from Ukraine if the country wanted to receive the promised aid.

“Any further grants will be subject to the ongoing reform efforts,” Füle said. Of the promised \$17 billion, Kiev has so far received only \$3.2 billion.



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