

German chancellor Merkel visits Kiev and backs regime

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In her visit to Ukraine Saturday, German chancellor Angela Merkel lined up demonstratively behind the regime in Kiev, which is continuing its bloody offensive against cities in the east and stepping up its campaign against opposition throughout the country. Merkel met with Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, and the mayors of several Ukrainian cities.

On Monday, Poroshenko dissolved the Ukrainian parliament. This followed the banning of the Communist Party of Ukraine's parliamentary faction. Poroshenko set October 26 as the date for new parliamentary elections.

According to presidential spokesman Svyatoslav Tsegolko, the dissolution of parliament was the only "responsible" way to ensure that Poroshenko faced no opposition within the legislature. "The Fifth Column in parliament consists of dozens of so-called people's deputies," Tsegolko wrote on his Facebook page. "But they don't represent the interests of the people who elected them, but the interests of some other people."

Kiev officials again alleged Monday that Russian tank columns had invaded eastern Ukraine, a claim Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov dismissed as "disinformation."

In their meeting, Merkel and Poroshenko assured one other of their mutual solidarity and gratitude. "The territorial integrity and welfare of Ukraine are an essential aim of German policy," Merkel said.

Poroshenko presented Merkel with a bouquet of flowers and declared he was "very grateful" for the commitment of the chancellor, praising Germany as a "powerful friend" and "strong advocate" of Ukraine in the European Union (EU). "I want to emphasise that Mrs. Merkel knows the problems that Ukraine is facing like no other," the Ukrainian president said.

Merkel then spoke with Yatsenyuk about the prospects of an increasing convergence between Ukraine and the EU. The Ukrainian prime minister said he welcomed the involvement of German companies in the country's energy infrastructure.

To advance German business interests in Ukraine, Merkel announced that the German government would guarantee loans worth €500 million. The loans are intended to help attract private investors to the energy and water sectors. In addition, the chancellor promised €25 million in direct assistance for the construction of refugee camps.

The meeting took place just one day before Ukrainian Independence Day, commemorating the separation of the country from the Soviet Union. On Sunday, the government organised a large military parade to demonstrate its commitment to the fight against pro-Russian separatists in the east of the country.

On Independence Square (Maidan) in Kiev, which was cleared of demonstrators a few weeks ago, 1,500 soldiers paraded alongside tanks, missile launchers and other heavy weapons. The military parade was accompanied, however, by protests against the war being waged in the east. "How many must pay with their lives for your festivities?" read one large banner.

In his speech, Poroshenko said the troops on display would be mobilised to fight the separatists in eastern Ukraine. He also announced plans for a massive military upgrade. "By 2017, we will spend more than 40 billion hryvnia [about €2.3 billion] for the renewal of our military technology," the president said.

The government is continuing its offensive against the eastern cities of Donetsk and Lugansk unabated. The number of fatalities among both soldiers and civilians is increasing by the day. At least seven houses were destroyed on Sunday alone in Donetsk.

At the same time, rebel forces are boasting of military successes. They claim to have encircled thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and destroyed dozens of military vehicles.

Against the background of a profound crisis not only on the battle front, but throughout the country, Merkel called Russian president Vladimir Putin on Saturday, urging him to work towards a bilateral ceasefire. In an interview with German television, she reiterated the need for talks, but also warned against a Russian invasion of Ukraine. On Tuesday, Poroshenko and Putin are due to meet in Minsk for face-to-face talks.

Merkel discussed a number of major agenda items, including the decentralisation of Ukraine, trade relations with Russia, and “mutual interdependence in the sphere of gas supplies.” She reiterated that the “territorial integrity of Ukraine” must be assured and rejected Russia’s annexation of Crimea.

At the same time, she said she wanted to find a solution “that does not damage Russia.” She stressed the need to maintain trade relations and spoke of Russia’s importance in solving other international conflicts.

The Ukrainian people should “have the opportunity to choose their own path,” she declared. If the Ukrainians decided to join up with Russia and its Customs Union, the EU would “never make a big conflict out of it,” she added.

This is a deeply cynical statement. When former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich decided in October last year against signing an Association Agreement with the EU and began talks joined the Russian Customs Union instead, the German government supported the opposition and, together with the United States, orchestrated a coup that replaced Yanukovich with a hand-picked pro-Western government that included the fascist Svoboda party.

The German government would not permit any shift by Ukraine away from the EU, and that continues to be its policy. The negotiations with Russia are aimed at ensuring that Moscow accepts the new relations established by the putsch and enabling Germany to increase its influence in Eastern Europe.

Sections of German business have long been urging the government not to escalate its conflict with Russia, but rely instead on Germany’s economic superiority to dominate the country.

This was a factor in the comment this weekend by German vice chancellor Sigmar Gabriel of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), who ruled out the reintegration of Crimea into Ukraine in the near future. “No one currently assumes that the annexation of Crimea by Russia can be reversed quickly,” Gabriel told the newspaper *Bild am Sonntag*.

Merkel’s attempts to secure German interests in negotiations with Russia do not mean the danger of war is receding. This is clear not only from Merkel’s reaffirmation of support for the Kiev regime, but also from an interview she gave in which she stressed that the upcoming NATO summit had to ensure that NATO would be able to respond quickly in the event of a Russian attack on the Baltic States.



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