

Beat: Politics

NATO, Ukraine condemn Russian military build-up in Crimea

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USPA News - The foreign ministers of 28 NATO member states and Ukraine have condemned Russia's military build-up on the Crimean peninsula, adding that Russia's plans for further military build-up on the Black Sea threatens the stability of the region as a whole. "We condemn Russia's military build-up in Crimea, as well as the worsening human rights situation on the Crimean peninsula," the ministers said in a joint statement on Tuesday after a meeting in Brussels.

"We call on Russia to reverse its illegal and illegitimate self-declared `annexation` of Crimea, which we do not and will not recognize, and to respect the rights of the local population." The group of ministers also expressed concerns over Russia's plan to deploy a squadron of 30 military jets to Crimea, which NATO officials fear could be used by Russia to exert control over the entire Black Sea. "We are concerned with Russia's stated plans for further military build-up on the Black Sea, which will potentially have further implications on the stability of the region," they said. The foreign ministers further condemned what it called Russia's "deliberate destabilization" of the region, citing Russia's alleged provision of tanks, advanced air defense systems and other heavy weapons to pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Russian relations with the European Union and other Western governments have significantly deteriorated since Crimea, which is internationally recognized as an autonomous republic of Ukraine, was occupied by Russian forces earlier this year. The region was later annexed by the Russian Federation after residents of Crimea voted to join Russia in a disputed referendum. Russia has received intense criticism from much of the international community for its role in the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, which is now focused in Ukraine's east, where separatists have declared independence in an effort to also join Russia. More than 4,317 people have been killed in fighting in eastern Ukraine since April, according to UN figures.

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