



Russia Sets Donbas 'Liberation' as an 'Unconditional Priority' To End War

Description

RUSSIA: Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Kiev must allow the people of eastern Ukraine to hold a referendum.

After three months of war, talks between Kiev and Moscow have stalled for over a month. On Sunday, Russia's top diplomat conveyed some of the Kremlin's demands to end the conflict. However, Moscow claims Ukrainian government officials are making [contradicting](#) statements, preventing diplomacy from progressing.

In an interview with France's TF1 television channel, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said taking control of the Donbas was an "[unconditional priority](#)," and the people of eastern Ukraine should be free to hold a vote to decide their future.

"The liberation of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, recognized by the Russian Federation as independent states, is an unconditional priority." He added that the people of eastern Ukraine "must decide for themselves."

Russia has backed the Donbas republics – Donetsk and Luhansk – since they broke with Kiev in 2014. In recent weeks, Russia has focused its military operations on seizing eastern Ukraine, including the Donbas. Moscow's forces have made slow gains and [now control 95% of Luhansk](#).

It's unclear if Kiev would agree to cede any territory to end the war. President Volodymyr Zelensky has suggested [multiple times](#) he could surrender Ukrainian [territory](#). However, those statements are repeatedly contradicted by Zelensky or high-level Ukrainian officials.

On Sunday, Zelensky told CNN's [Fareed Zakaria](#) his country would reclaim all of Ukraine's Donbas. "When Ukraine says it will be fighting to regain its territories it lost, it means Ukraine will be fighting until it gets all its territory back. It doesn't mean anything else," he said.

The Kremlin blames the lack of consistency within the Ukrainian government for the stalled talks. "The Ukrainian leadership constantly makes contradictory statements. This does not allow us to fully

understand what the Ukrainian side wants,” the spokesperson for the Russian government [said Friday](#).

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