

Moscow Wants NATO to Explain Military Build-up in Europe



MOSCOW, April 3 (RHC), -- Russia expected NATO to explain how the bloc's recent military build-up corresponded with existing bilateral agreements, the government said Thursday.

"We expect not just an answer, but an answer that will fully correspond with the agreed rules," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters following his talks with visiting Kazakhstan counterpart, Yerlan Idrisov.

Russia and NATO had agreed that no excessive military presence was allowed on the territory of Eastern European countries. Earlier this week, the United States said it had sent six F-15 fighters to patrol the Baltic, deployed a dozen F-16s to Poland and dispatched a guided-missile destroyer to the Black Sea.

Moscow would thoroughly monitor the presence of NATO warships in the Black Sea to ensure they did not exceed the agreed terms of staying in that area, Lavrov said.

"We have noticed that the U.S. warships lately extended their stay several times," Interfax news agency quoted Lavrov as saying.

Meanwhile, the diplomat advised Ukraine and the West not to inflate an issue of Russian military exercises in the southern Rostov region. He said there were no restrictions on Russian troop movements within Russian territory.

"If one introduces a term 'de-escalation', the rhetoric must be de-escalated in the first instance. Now, the rhetoric goes beyond reasonable limits. Those who do it have seriously departed from reality," Lavrov said. On Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in a phone conversation with Lavrov reiterated the objective of de-escalating the crisis in Ukraine, including through direct engagement between Ukrainian and Russian officials, and the return of Russian troops to their barracks.

Earlier this week, the supreme allied commander in Europe, U.S. Air Force General Philip Breedlove, claimed that up to 40,000 Russian troops were stationed near the Ukrainian border.

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