

Kiev Demands OSCE Meeting to Discuss Security Crisis

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Tensions remain high in Europe. Ukraine demanded a meeting of OSCE members, including Russia, within forty-eight hours in order to discuss the current security crisis on the continent. The Ukrainian request is nothing more than the result of Western hysteria about a possible Russian invasion plan against Kiev. The potential meeting could be either a productive way to ease tensions or a useless dialogue that further escalates the crisis, all depending on how NATO members deal with Russia during the talks.

The Ukrainian government demanded this Sunday, February 13, a meeting within the next 48 hours with Russia and all member countries of the Vienna Document of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The reason for the summit would be the lack of response from Moscow to Kiev’s ultimatum, made the previous Friday, to provide in detail data about Russian military activities on the western border. The deadline for the response was this Sunday and, as no response was given, Kiev decided to demand a meeting.

The ultimatum given by Ukraine to Russia had been “justified” in the terms of the Vienna Document. According to Kiev’s argument, Moscow should provide accurate and detailed data on all its activities on the western border (mainly in Crimea) as a way of preventing a worsening of tensions and ensuring that there is no plan of invasion or war. For this reason, Moscow’s lack of response has been seen as a violation of European security standards, which prompted the Ukrainian government to convene the meeting.

These were some of the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba’s words about the case:

“Russia failed to respond to our request under the Vienna Document. Consequently, we take the next step. We request a meeting with Russia and all participating states within 48 hours to discuss its reinforcement and redeployment along our border and in temporarily occupied Crimea. If Russia is serious when it talks about the indivisibility of security in the OSCE space, it must fulfill its commitment to military transparency in order to de-escalate tensions and enhance security for all”.

It is interesting to note how “occupied Crimea” is a common term in the speeches of Ukrainian authorities, who insist on considering Crimea as part of Kiev’s national territory. This is an important point to understand how Russian movements of troops in Crimea are interpreted as incursions against the Ukrainian territory, even though Crimea is legally considered part of Russia since the 2014 intervention. When Kiev demands information from the Russian government about its activities in Crimea it is simply demanding that Moscow provide data about its military activities in the interior of its own territory, which is inconvenient and does not justify any ultimatum or call for summit. Kiev sees Crimea as part of Ukraine and tries to monitor it, but this is not the material reality and there is no such right for the Ukrainian government to monitor the region.

It is not the duty of any government to provide details of its military activities to another government. Such an obligation, if not guaranteed by international agreement, would be a clear violation of state sovereignty. Russia has the right to maintain its military maneuvers in Crimea and other parts of its western border, as well as on its sovereign Black Sea coast. And it is also the Russian government’s right to keep certain details of these activities confidential, even more so in the face of a rival government and in a situation of tension and insecurity like the current one. OSCE membership does not oblige Russia to provide its military data to Ukraine, it only obliges Moscow to cooperate for peace on European soil – and this has already been done since the moment that the Russian government assured that there will be no invasion against Ukraine under any circumstances.

The problem, however, is that the OSCE itself also seems to be embracing anti-Russian paranoia. As European countries adopt the NATO discourse, the OSCE is consequently “contaminated” by this type of mentality. Russia is a member of the organization, but it is a minority party if compared to pro-Western states – and this situation becomes a problem as NATO fuels the security crisis. Recently, the OSCE decided to relocate all the members of its observation mission in Eastern Ukraine, alleging concerns about the beginning of a possible conflict, which reveals the lack of intra-institutional trust, considering that Russia, which is a member of the organization, guarantees that such a war will not happen.

In any case, if all OSCE members agree to arrange a meeting, this could be a positive opportunity to ease tensions. This would require pro-NATO European governments to agree to talk diplomatically and with mutual trust with Moscow. As Russia will guarantee that there will be no war, it will be up to the West to believe and decline its attempts to operate “preventive” military maneuvers, demilitarizing Eastern Europe – which, consequently, will generate a retreat of Russian troops on the western border.

On the other hand, if European states insist on anti-Russian paranoia, there will be no possibility of bilateral dialogue, maintaining the status quo: NATO militarizes Eastern Europe and, in response, Russia militarizes the western portion of its territory, without any sides start a conflict, but keeping the current atmosphere of tensions and fear – and unfortunately this is the most likely scenario.

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