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Russia's Lavrov warns of 'fratricidal war' in Ukraine

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Lavrov's remarks were in line with frequent Russian statements placing blame on the United States and EU for the turmoil in Ukraine, where government forces killed dozens of rebels in the eastern Donetsk province on Monday and Tuesday.

"The people (of Ukraine) are in essence being pushed into a the abyss of fratricidal war," Russian news agencies quoted Lavrov as saying at a ministry reception attended by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill.

He did not name any nation but made clear he was blaming the West, saying Ukraine's crisis was caused by "efforts to use the country not as a unifying link between different parts of the Eurasian space, which is its absolutely natural role, but as a watershed between the west and east of the European continent".

Former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich's abrupt decision to shun a proffered free trade and economic support package from the European Union in November sparked protests that led to his ouster in February.

Russia then annexed the Crimea region and pro-Russian separatists seized buildings in several eastern cities, leading to a confrontation with the interim government and aggravating the worst rift between Moscow and the West since the Cold War.

Interfax quoted Lavrov as saying Sunday's presidential election, won by confectionery magnate Petro Poroshenko, "should help foster an end to the punitive operation" - Russia's term for the government operation in eastern Ukraine.

Lavrov said anyone who accuses Russia of imperialism - after it annexed Crimea, where ethnic Russians are in the majority - is mistaken.

"The concept of a Russian world that is advanced by the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church has nothing to do with imperial schemes. It is about preserving spiritual and cultural ties between people," Interfax quoted him as saying.

(editing by Elizabeth Piper)

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