

conference.

Shoigu told Hagel that Russian troops are arrayed along the border only for military exercises, Kirby said. Russian troops won't cross the border into Ukraine and "would take no aggressive action," Kirby said Hagel was told.

"It was a lengthy call, lasting about an hour, and I think it's fair to say that at times it was direct," Kirby said of the exchange.

NATO Allies

Obama said that while in Europe, he will reinforce the U.S. commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the defense of any member that comes under attack. Those allies include several on the front lines of the confrontation, such as former Soviet satellite states Poland and Lithuania, which got visits by Vice President Joe Biden earlier this week.

Obama has emphasized that there are no plans to confront Russia militarily.

"We do not need to trigger an actual war with Russia," Obama said in an interview with St. Louis television station KSDK recorded at the White House yesterday. "The Ukrainians don't want that, nobody would want that."

In his remarks today, Obama again urged the U.S. Congress to finish work on an aid package for Ukraine, which includes \$1 billion in loan guarantees.

The aid has been tied up by opposition from House Republicans to a provision that would transfer funds to boost the U.S. share at the International Monetary Fund. The administration argues that the funding would help the IMF assist Ukraine.

"Expressions of support are not enough," Obama said. "We need action."

Loan Guarantee

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, yesterday proposed adding 1 billion euros (\$1.4 billion) to a previously approved 610 million euros in budget support for Ukraine. The European aid would accompany an IMF package that's being negotiated.

"The most urgent thing to do is to make all our efforts to sustain a credible, stable, viable, democratic, prosperous Ukraine," the commission's president, Jose Barroso, said today. EU leaders will also sign the political provisions of a trade accord with Ukraine tomorrow.

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