

Diplomats' Kiev Snipers Phone Conversation Leaked

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A telephone conversation that purportedly took place between the European Union's representative for foreign affairs Catherine Ashton and Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet about sniper-related deaths during demonstrations in Kiev has been leaked.

Russian state-run media quickly reported the tape, which featured the voice of Paet saying that a Ukrainian doctor, Olga Bogomolets, said that police and demonstrators were shot by the same group of snipers.

The Estonian Foreign Ministry confirmed the tape's authenticity on Wednesday, Interfax reported.

Ashton's spokesperson said "we don't comment on leaked phone conversations," RT reported.

Paet also said Bogomolets told him that evidence pointed to the possibility of the snipers being hired by someone from the new government coalition.

"There is now stronger and stronger understanding that behind the snipers, it was not Yanukovich, but it was somebody from the new coalition," Paet said during the conversation.

Videos of people in central Kiev being shot at by snipers appeared on the Internet during the street protest movement's worst week of violence, which ended with ousted Ukrainian president and Kremlin ally Viktor Yanukovich fleeing the capital and pro-Western leaders taking power.

The tape's release comes one day after President Vladimir Putin, who has maintained that the current government in Kiev is illegitimate, had a testy exchange with a reporter in which he said that the snipers may have been provocateurs.

Paet, who visited Ukraine in late February, expressed concern that the news may discredit the current political coalition and Ashton, a British politician who played a key role in pushing for Ukraine to sign an association agreement with the EU that Yanukovich abruptly abandoned in November, supported the idea of further investigation into the snipers.

The 10-minute conversation also features long periods of the diplomats sharing their impressions of the situation after Paet's visit and plans to help establish the new Ukrainian government, gain the trust of Euromaidan activists who participated in the anti-government protests and ease pressure against members of Yanukovich's Party of Regions.

The European Union members' chat was not the first Western diplomatic conversation about the Ukrainian crisis to be leaked. A conversation between U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt was leaked at the beginning of February in which the two officials talked about negotiations between Yanukovich and opposition members and Nuland said, "F*** the EU."

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