

Pro-Russian Protesters Seize City Council in Coastal Ukrainian City

By [Christopher Brennan](#)

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Social network photos show a barricade in front of the Mariupol city council. **Egor Zinin**

Pro-Russian separatists have taken control of the city council in Mariupol amid rising tensions in eastern Ukraine, news reports said Sunday.

Separatists took control of the Mariupol government offices after a rally in favor of creating an independent country in , Reuters reported, citing a journalist at the local newspaper Priazovsky Worker.

Unidentified men had broken into the city council on Sunday afternoon and people began constructing a barricade in front of the building, the local site 0629.com.ua reported.

Mariupol, Ukraine's 10th largest city with a population of around 480,000, is located on the southern coast of the Donetsk region, which has seen increasing separatist activity calling for independence from Ukrainian authorities in Kiev and union with Russia.

Protesters reportedly waved Russian flags in front of the Mariupol city council building, where a sign was hung that read "Donetsk People's Republic." Protesters announced the dissolution of the city council, 0629 reported, adding that they plan to hold a session of newly chosen "deputies" selected from those present with higher legal and economic education.

Unidentified men also took control of prosecutor's office, police department and city council early Sunday morning in the Donetsk region city of Yenakievo, the local news website Ostrov reported. The Russian and separatist Donetsk republic flags had reportedly been raised over the buildings.

An anonymous source told Ostrov that the prosecutors building, reportedly taken at around 3 a.m., was later released.

A city of around 85,000 people outside of the region capital Donetsk, Yenakievo is about 100 kilometers from Slovyansk, which is now reportedly under the control of pro-Russian separatists. Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov said Sunday on his Facebook page that one Ukrainian special forces officer had been killed and at least five had been injured in an "anti-terrorist" operation against separatist forces.

An unidentified "supporter of federalization" told Russian state-run news agency RIA Novosti that one separatist soldier had been killed and two others wounded in the skirmish. The unidentified soldier also said that two pro-Kiev forces had been killed, adding that they were from the Ukrainian ultranationalist group Right Sector.

Contact the author at c.brennan@imedia.ru Follow him on Twitter for updates — [@CKozalBrennan](https://twitter.com/CKozalBrennan) and [@MoscowTimes](https://twitter.com/MoscowTimes)

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