

Hungary claims OSCE agreed to Zakarpattia monitoring mission **Ukraine**

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Analyst: "The conventional wisdom is that the Hungarian government has been manipulating these ethnic tensions to boost its poll ratings ahead of the parliamentary elections to be held on April 8."

KYIV, Mar 12, 2018 — Concorde Capital informed its clients today that Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto said on March 10 that the OSCE confirmed with him that it has launched an observation mission in Ukraine's Zakarpattia region in response to ethnic Hungarians calling for protection against recent alleged ethnically motivated attacks. In a statement released by his Fidesz party, Szijarto claimed that the OSCE leadership positively responded to requests for an OSCE special monitoring mission made by the Hungarian Cultural Association of Zakarpattia following two attacks on its property involving explosives. Szijarto also claimed that the OSCE confirmed in a letter to him that a permanent mission has been established in Zakarpattia. The OSCE is monitoring the situation in the Zakarpattia region from its office in the Ivano-Frankivsk region and has bolstered its presence following the attacks, the organization said on March 11 in response to questions posed by the pravda.com.ua news site. At the same time, the Zakarpattia regional administration didn't receive any proposals for an OSCE permanent monitoring mission, spokesman Yaroslav Halas said the same day as Szijarto's statement. It's possible that the administration's agreement isn't necessary, he said, but it should have been informed, at minimum. Earlier that week, Zakarpattia Regional Administration Head Hennadiy Moskal blamed the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) on organizing the attacks on the Hungarian cultural center. The claims were confirmed by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin, who spoke against an OSCE monitoring mission in Zakarpattia. Concorde analyst Zenon Zawada added: "As we've said before, the Hungarian government is playing with fire in manipulating ethnic tensions in the Zakarpattia region, this time even piggybacking off Russian sabotage efforts, as alleged by Ukrainian state officials. If they are not cooperating directly with the Russians, as we had initially suspected, then the Hungarians are certainly playing into their hands. Part of Russia's hybrid war to dissolve the Ukrainian state is to exacerbate ethnic and linguistic tensions in the country. Hungary is also doing the Kremlin's bidding, whether intentionally or not, in vowing to oppose Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration efforts. For the second time, it blocked a NATO ministers meeting in February. The conventional wisdom is that the Hungarian government has been manipulating these ethnic tensions to boost its poll ratings ahead of the parliamentary elections to be held on April 8. If this strategy fails, it will have left behind a lot of damage to Euro-Atlantic unity amid Russian military aggression. Given that the Hungarians are essentially aiding the Russians in destabilizing the situation in Ukraine, and given that they are using similar tactics (embellishing the fact of an enhanced OSCE presence to allege a permanent mission), we'll be observing the government's actions after the elections for any indications that there could indeed be cooperation with the Kremlin. It's also worth considering that the Ukrainian government has developed a nasty habit of alleging its political enemies, and inconvenient political events, to have roots with "the Russians." So we'll also be observing on whether evidence surfaces that these attacks were truly orchestrated by the FSB.

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