



# Is Russia behind climate change protests in EU? 'Definitely yes', says Ukraine



*Belgian students gather to call for urgent measures to combat climate change during a demonstration in Brussels, Belgium, 14 February 2019. [Stephanie Lecocq/EPA/EFE]*

Ukraine is sure that Russia actively supports the recent protests in EU countries against global warming, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin told a group of Brussels journalists on Monday (18 February).

Klimkin, in Brussels as EU foreign ministers meet to discuss several hotbeds of tension, including Ukraine, was asked if he agreed with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who mentioned the protests after talking about hybrid warfare from Russia.

In recent weeks, secondary school pupils from Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the UK have recently been mobilising, demanding governments to take more serious decisions to stop global warming.

At the Munich Security conference, Merkel expressed doubts that German children, after years, had suddenly hit on the idea without outside influence.

In Belgium, Joke Schauvliege, a climate minister in Flanders, was forced to resign after saying she had information from the intelligence services that the schoolchildren protests were directed by an unnamed foreign power. Her statements caused public outrage. The Belgian state security services denied having reported anything about this to Schauvliege, and she had no other choice than to resign.

Asked about the climate change protests in Europe and the allegations of foreign interference, Klimkin was adamant that Russia was involved, and that Moscow's attempts at meddling were "mind-boggling".

"It's a point of exchange with all our partners. Russia has been supporting stirring up trouble around Europe because Russia's goal is to weaken up the democratic institutions and to weaken the EU as such. Climate change protests: definitely yes. Different pseudo-environmental organisations: look at Italy, where they are trying to disrupt the future gas pipelines", he said.

He was referring to the protests of local authorities in Puglia against the Trans-Adriatic pipeline (TAP), designed to bring gas from Azerbaijan to the peninsula.

In the last five years since the Maidan revolution in the former Soviet republic, Ukraine itself has become the playground of all sorts of hybrid warfare and its leaders have become specialists in the matter, eager to share their experience with EU counterparts.

Klimkin explained Russia's motivation to instigate protests against climate change in the following terms:

"The Russians are simply crazy about selling more gas to Europe. [...] To shift, to reshuffle climate change movements is one of the key Russian priorities, to explain that 'more gas is fine, coal is bad, but Russian gas is good, Russian gas is reliable. Let's engage in the same political pattern like we had in the 1970's, a kind of new Ostpolitik.' And it's not only in Germany, it's also in Italy, it's everywhere," Klimkin said,

He described Russia's efforts to interfere on several levels: "It's about fake NGOs, it's about trying to buy journalists, it's about trying to buy media, it's about meddling in the political class. Not the same scope as in Ukraine, but it's so visible".

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