NATO Chief to Make First Visit to Ukraine Amid Strains with Moscow

BRUSSELS - NATO's secretary general will make his first visit to Ukraine this month, Ukraine's foreign minister said Monday, dismissing the idea that this would provide Moscow, which is backing pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine, with leverage over the alliance. A meeting with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, Paris Klimkin said, which he called off as his ex- soviet union nation seeks to integrate with the West, would upgrade NATO's representation in the crisis-torn region and enhance technical cooperation, Klimkin said. He said that the visit would enter negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday to discuss the situation in eastern Ukraine, where a pro-Russian separatist rebellion has been underway since 2014, and the situation in Syria, where the US-led coalition has been fighting the Islamic State. According to Klimkin, the visit would show that NATO remains a robust and unified alliance that is ready to defend the interests of its members. He added that the visit would also be an opportunity to reinforce NATO's commitment to the defence of all its members, and to communicate with the Russian leadership on the need to de-escalate tensions in eastern Europe.