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—Nick Shchetko contributed to this article.

Officials Push for Lasting Peace Deal in Ukraine

Foreign ministers to meet Monday with Russian, Ukraine counterparts to discuss hurdles

Європейські офіційні особи домагаються тривалої мирної угоди в Україні

Міністри закордонних справ зустрінуться в понеділок з російським та українським колегами, щоб обговорити проблеми Незважаючи на триваючі сутички між урядовими військами і підтримуваними Росією бандитами на деяких ділянках лінії фронту, європейські чиновники останнім часом робили оптимістичні заяви: їм здається, заходи, узгоджені в лютому в Мінську, продовжують працювати. Проте Росія і Україна конфліктують через чергові етапи угоди, що покликані реінтегрувати ці регіони до складу України при збільшенні місцевої автономії. Київ запропонував розширити їх місцеві повноваження після виборів, які повинні пройти за участю міжнародних спостерігачів. Але Росія хоче, щоб сепаратисти брали участь в прямих переговорах з Києвом, у тому числі з конституційних реформ, що, за твердженням українських чиновників, має на меті зірвати спроби України інтегруватися із Заходом, - йдеться в статті.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/european-officials-push-for-durable-peace-deal-in-ukraine-142888>

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Ukrainian servicemen stand guard Sunday at a checkpoint not far from Mariupol, Ukraine—near where violence continues to flare despite a fragile cease-fire deal. Photo: irina gorbasyova/European Pressphoto Agency

The foreign ministers of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France are meeting Monday to try to cement a shaky cease-fire in eastern Ukraine into a more durable peace deal by tackling political disputes.

Despite continued clashes on some parts of the front line between government forces and Russia-backed rebels, European officials have voiced optimism in recent days that measures agreed upon in a February deal to tamp down violence—a cease-fire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons—appear to be sticking.

But Russia and Ukraine have clashed over the next stages of the deal, which are supposed to reintegrate the territories into Ukraine with increased local autonomy. Ukraine has offered more local powers after elections monitored by international observers. But Russia wants the rebels included in direct talks with Kiev, including on constitutional reforms, a move that Ukrainian officials say is aimed at undermining its attempts to integrate with the West.

The disputes have hobbled progress in implementing the February agreement, which European leaders brokered in Minsk, Belarus, with the aim of ending an almost-yearlong conflict that has cost at least 6,000 lives and frozen relations between Moscow and the West.

The foreign ministers' meeting in Berlin on Monday will focus on how to move forward with political aspects of the truce agreement signed in Minsk, German diplomats said.

Key points will include how to set up local elections in the occupied areas as well as humanitarian aid for the regions, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said in an interview with a German newspaper on Sunday. He warned the threat of renewed heavy fighting hadn't disappeared as violence continues to flare up near the Donetsk airport and the port city of Mariupol—making it critical to move ahead with political measures that could enable a longer-lasting peace.

“The cease-fire reached in Minsk is largely holding, and the withdrawal of heavy weaponry has come a long way,” Mr. Steinmeier said. “The danger of a renewed escalation has not entirely been averted.”

Balazs Jarabik, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said the Berlin meeting “is a chance to put pressure on Ukraine and Russia to push them into a compromise.”

Ukraine has avoided steps that would give recognition to the rebels, refusing direct talks called for by Russia. Officials have said they will only restart payments including pensions and state salaries in separatist-held areas—a step in the Minsk deal—once elections have taken place. In the meantime, separatists have started their own pension payments in Russian rubles. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov last week accused Kiev of trying to sabotage the Minsk deal.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko faces public and political pressure in Kiev to stick to a tough line. The Kiev-appointed governor of the eastern Donetsk region called for economic ties with separatist-held territories to be restored in a newspaper interview last week, drawing a stern rebuke from Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, who said he should be fired.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is monitoring the cease-fire, has noted an increase in the number of violations in recent days, particularly in Shyrokyne, a village to the east of the industrial port of Mariupol.

Ukrainian officials have called for peacekeepers under United Nations or European Union leadership—an idea opposed by Moscow and viewed skeptically in Berlin. Officials in Kiev say clashes are being provoked by rebels as part of a Russian strategy aimed at destabilizing Ukraine and undermining its push to integrate westward. The separatists and Russia blame Kiev for the fighting.

“It’s neither war nor peace,” Volodymyr Horbulin, a senior security adviser to Mr. Poroshenko, said in a recent interview. “Ukraine needs peace, but Ukraine can’t agree to the conditions that Russia wants to see.”

Mr. Horbulin said the agreement had given Ukraine breathing space to repair its shattered armed forces and steady its wobbly finances. Kiev last month agreed on a \$17.5 billion financing package with the International Monetary Fund.

Rebels have long set their eyes on more Ukrainian territory, including Mariupol. But Mr. Horbulin said Ukraine’s strategy of rebuilding its armed forces had raised the potential costs for Russia of trying to take more territory.

Still, Mr. Horbulin said Ukraine can’t defeat Russia in an all-out war and is relying on Western support to restrain Moscow. European leaders agreed last month on a plan to keep sanctions in place until the Minsk deal is implemented. Western officials have warned that additional sanctions would be implemented if the Moscow-backed separatists attempt to grab more land.

After the Berlin meeting on Monday, Mr. Steinmeier and French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius will travel to the northern German port city of Lübeck on Tuesday for a two-day foreign ministers’ meeting of the Group of Seven large industrialized nations. The Ukraine crisis will be high on the agenda. But Russia’s Mr. Lavrov, whose country was part of the club formerly known as the Group of Eight until being kicked out last year, isn’t invited.

—*Nick Shchetko contributed to this article.*

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