
RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS PROMPTS MEETING WITH PUTIN AT G-20 SUMMIT

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□□□□ leaders of Russia, Germany and France agreed to meet next month to address the crisis in Ukraine, amid an uptick in fighting between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian government forces and debate in Europe over the future of sanctions on Moscow.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President François Hollande and Russian President Vladimir Putin will meet on the sidelines of a Group of 20 major economies summit in China in the first week in September, the Kremlin said on Tuesday. The leaders spoke by phone to discuss developments in eastern Ukraine, the Kremlin said. Fighting in the area has surged as Ukrainian forces battle pro-Russia separatists.

A concern has been voiced over instability along the contact line, a systematic violation of cease-fire, the Kremlin said.

A spokeswoman for the German chancellery said the three leaders shared concern about the recent high number of violations of the cease-fire in Donbas, the region of eastern Ukraine where fighting erupted in 2014, the year Russia annexed Crimea.

Ms. Merkel and Mr. Hollande called on President Putin to help calm the situation, the spokeswoman said. There was agreement that progress was urgently needed and that in particular a stabilization of the cease-fire had to be achieved.

Continuing violence in eastern Ukraine has undercut a European-brokered cease-fire agreement.

Mr. Hollande's office said the French leader expressed concern about the resurgence of tensions in recent weeks and increasing violations of the cease-fire agreement. He stressed the risks an escalation would pose to the entire process, Mr. Hollande's office said.

News of the planned meeting came as Vice President Joe Biden underlined America's commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on Tuesday during a visit to Latvia, one of three former Soviet republics in the Baltics that are now NATO members. Mr. Biden met with the leaders of the three, which also include Estonia and Lithuania. The nations have expressed concern about deterring Russian aggression.

Russia has supported separatists in eastern Ukraine through covert intervention, although the Russian government denies directly aiding them. The Russian government has faced sanctions over the Ukraine crisis, and Mr. Putin has seen personal ostracism: The Russian leader left early from a G-20 meeting in Australia in November 2014, after facing stiff criticism from other world leaders over Moscow's role in the crisis.

Kiev and Moscow have also recently escalated their rhetoric, raising more doubts about the prospects for a peaceful resolution.

Mr. Putin recently blamed the Ukrainian government for the deaths of two Russian service members in Crimea, and suggested his government would respond. Mr. Putin said the incident meant there was no sense in holding a proposed meeting among Russian, Ukrainian, German and French foreign ministers on the sidelines of the G-20 session in China.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko called the claim absurd and cynical, saying it was a pretext for the latest military threats against Ukraine.

Kaynak/Source: