

Poroshenko Sets Out Cease-Fire Plan for East Ukraine

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A man and his young granddaughter waiting for a bus as they prepare to leave the embattled city of Slovyansk.

The Ukrainian president on Wednesday announced a plan to end the fighting in eastern Ukraine, promising a unilateral cease-fire after discussions with the Russian and German leaders, a potential major development to bring peace to the country.

Petro Poroshenko's plan would offer pro-Russian insurgents in the eastern provinces that form the nation's industrial heartland a chance to lay down weapons or leave the country. It could also help ease the worst crisis between Russia and the West since the Cold War, which was triggered by Moscow's annexation of Crimea that followed the ouster of Ukraine's pro-Russia president.

President Vladimir Putin discussed a possible cease-fire in a phone conversation with Poroshenko late Tuesday, the Kremlin said. Poroshenko also discussed his peace plan with

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, their offices said.

"The plan will begin with my order for a unilateral cease-fire," Poroshenko told reporters in Kiev. "I can say that the period of the cease-fire will be rather short. We anticipate, that immediately after this, the disarming of the illegal military formations will take place."

He said that those who lay down arms and haven't committed grave crimes will be granted amnesty.

Poroshenko made repeated promises of steps to restore peace before and after winning May's election. In his inaugural address June 7, he said he was willing to negotiate with people in the region, but not with "terrorists" with "blood on their hands."

Rebel leaders have remained defiant, saying they would demand the Ukrainian troops withdraw from the east as the main condition for talks.

Denis Pushilin, one of the insurgent leaders in Donetsk, said on independent Russian television channel Dozhd that Poroshenko's latest offer was "senseless."

"They cease fire, we lay down weapons, and then they will capture us weaponless," he said.

Poroshenko has said before that he wanted a cease-fire, but Wednesday was the first time he said government forces will be the first to halt hostilities, which has been Russia's main demand.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, speaking in Baku, Azerbaijan, said that any cease-fire should be "comprehensive," not temporary. However, he said that if it was followed by negotiations "then it could be the step President Poroshenko has promised and which in general we were all waiting for."

The announcement of a unilateral cease-fire seems to be part of a carefully choreographed plan with Russian and German involvement, coming at a time when key leaders of the mutiny were meeting with Russian officials.

In another move that would help appease Moscow, Poroshenko nominated Pavel Klimkin, currently ambassador to Germany, to replace Andriy Deshchytsia as foreign minister. Lavrov had said he would never speak again to Deshchytsia after he joined in an obscene anti-Putin chant as he tried to calm protesters who besieged the Russian Embassy in Kiev last weekend.

Poroshenko did not say when the cease-fire could be declared, but the country's Defense Minister Mykhailo Koval, was quoted as saying it could begin "literally within days."

Poroshenko has said previously that a cease-fire should follow securing the border with Russia, and Ukrainian officials said Wednesday they were completing the effort.

Russia has denied Ukrainian and Western claims that it was fomenting the insurgency in the east by sending troops and weapons, insisting that Russian nationals among the rebels are volunteers.

If Poroshenko's plan is implemented, that would allow the Kremlin a face-saving way out of

the crisis. Putin appears to be eager to de-escalate tensions with the West and avoid a new round of crippling economic sanctions, but has been increasingly under fire from nationalist groups at home who have demanded that he send troops into eastern Ukraine.

An end to fighting and a safe exit for rebels would allow Putin to say that Russia has fulfilled its goal of protecting Russian speakers in Ukraine. Poroshenko, in his turn, also would be able to claim victory over the rebellion.

For Ukraine, an end to hostilities in the east would be essential to shore up the struggling economy and try to mend the rift between the eastern regions where most residents want close ties with Russia, and the west where the majority wants a quick integration into Europe.

If Poroshenko's plan succeeds, that would allow him to consolidate his power and help set ground for early parliamentary elections he has demanded.

Any such cease-fire, however, would raise the question of whether the separatists would respect it, and whether Russia had the desire or the ability to persuade them to do so. Top rebel figures visited Moscow Tuesday and met with senior officials and lawmakers.

Alexander Borodai, a Moscow political consultant who is self-proclaimed prime minister of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, attended a meeting with lawmakers in the Russian parliament's upper house on Tuesday, thanking Russia for "a steady flow of volunteers coming from Russia who fight for the interests of people of Donbass."

At the same time, he acknowledged that "part of the Russian establishment does not want Donbass and other regions of Ukraine join Russia."

Borodai added that he does not see any peaceful steps on Kiev's behalf, only "efforts to suppress the will of the people of Donbass and their choice of self-determination."

The insurgency in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions flared up in mid-April, with rebels, emboldened by Russia's annexation of Crimea, seizing government buildings and declaring independence for their provinces after controversial referendums that were rejected by Ukraine and the West. They have pushed for joining Russia, but Putin has stonewalled their demands.

Ukrainian government forces have struggled to suppress the insurgents, who on Saturday shot down a military transport plane, killing all 49 on board.

The United Nations says at least 356 people, including 257 civilians, have been killed since May 7 alone. There have been more than 200 reports of torture, and 81 people were being held on June 7 as the conflict raged in eastern Ukraine between pro-Russia separatist rebels and the government in Kiev.

UN human rights chief Navi Pillay said in Wednesday's report that the country's "climate of insecurity and fear" has displaced 34,000 people. "Abductions, detentions, acts of ill treatment and torture, and killings by armed groups are now affecting the broader population of the two eastern regions," the report said.

See also:

[Putin and Poroshenko Discuss Possible Cease-Fire in East Ukraine](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/06/18/poroshenko-sets-out-cease-fire-plan-for-east-ukraine-a36505)

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