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Merkel and Hollande Back Putin's Calls for New Cease-Fire in Ukraine

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The leaders of France and Germany backed Russia by calling for a new cease-fire in eastern Ukraine on Thursday but told Russian President Vladimir Putin to prevent separatist fighters and arms crossing the border into Ukraine.

French President Francois Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel told Putin it was important to reach a political solution quickly in the three-month-old conflict between government forces and separatists in the country's east.

In a three-way telephone conversation, they asked Putin to "exert all necessary pressure" on the separatists and to take "the concrete measures required to control the Russia-Ukraine border," Hollande's office said in a statement.

Moscow denies accusations by Ukraine and Western governments that it has been fuelling the conflict by allowing fighters and weaponry to move freely into eastern Ukraine from Russia.

The Kremlin said in a statement that the three heads of state supported "a swift renewal

of the cease-fire and a meeting of the contact group" on resolving the crisis.

The three leaders have had regular phone conversations on the conflict. They will also soon hold talks with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Hollande's office said.

Government forces have gained the upper hand over the separatists in the Russian-speaking eastern regions. More than 200 government soldiers have been killed as well as hundreds of civilians and rebel fighters.

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