

Poroshenko: Ukraine Cease-Fire Deal Talks May Be Held Tuesday

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Petro Poroshenko delivers a speech during a ceremony to hand over weapons and military equipment to servicemen and to mark the Day of the Armed Forces at an airdrome in Chuhuiv, Dec. 6.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said Saturday that a preliminary agreement had been reached to hold talks in Minsk on Tuesday on implementing the steps of a September cease-fire deal with eastern separatists, Interfax reported.

Clashes in east Ukraine, where Russian-backed separatist rebels are fighting Kiev government troops, have continued despite the signing of the cease-fire deal three months ago, and the death toll has risen to more than 4,300 since mid-April.

"So far a preliminary agreement has been reached that a meeting in Minsk will take place on the Dec. 9," news agency Interfax Ukraine quoted Poroshenko as saying.

Representatives of Ukraine, the pro-Russian separatist leadership, Russia and the OSCE security watchdog held talks in the Belarussian capital on Sept. 5 that led to Kiev and rebels agreeing a 12-point peace plan, the Minsk Protocol.

Poroshenko said the latest round of talks would focus on agreeing a schedule for the implementation of the terms of the protocol, including the creation of a non-militarized buffer zone from which the two sides will withdraw artillery and other heavy military equipment.

The proposed date of Dec. 9 coincides with a promised "Day of Silence," when both Ukraine and separatists, who have repeatedly accused the other side of violating the terms of the of the September cease-fire, have pledged to observe a truce.

According to United Nations data, an average of 13 soldiers, rebels and civilians have died every day since the cease-fire was formally agreed.

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