

Germany, France Name Terms for Joining New Ukraine Crisis Talks

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European Central Bank (ECB) President Mario Draghi (L) talks to Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel during a European Union leaders summit in Brussels in this Jun. 29, 2012 file photo.

PARIS — Germany cast doubt on whether a four-way summit on the Ukraine crisis in Kazakhstan's capital Astana on Jan. 15 would take place on Monday, and France's president said the meeting would depend on the likelihood of "new progress" being made.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said on Dec. 29 he had invited the leaders of Russia, France and Germany to talks in an attempt to restore peace to Kiev's eastern territories.

But, asked about the planned summit, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert said, "I can't say yet if and when such a meeting will take place. Such a meeting only makes sense if we can make real progress."

"We have a very clear idea of what constitutes real progress. This would be first and foremost achieving the full implementation of the Minsk peace accord and a genuine and lasting ceasefire, a contact line between areas controlled by Ukraine and rebels and a withdrawal of

heavy weaponry. Such things must be prepared in advance," he said.

In an interview with France Inter radio, French President Francois Hollande struck a more optimistic note: "I will go to Astana on the 15th of January on one condition, which is that there should be a possibility of making new progress. If it's just to meet and talk without making any actual advances then there's no point. But I think there will be progress."

Top-ranking diplomats from Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France are meeting in Berlin on Monday, and their foreign ministers held a telephone conference on Friday.

Merkel is due to meet Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk in Berlin on Thursday, and the German and Ukrainian finance ministers are also due to hold talks that day.

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