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Leading Powers Seek to Step Up OSCE Monitoring in Ukraine

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French Foreign Affairs Minister Laurent Fabius walks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov prior to their meeting at the Quai d'Orsay ministry in Paris, Feb. 24, 2015.

PARIS — The foreign ministers of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany have agreed to seek a reinforcement of the international monitoring mission in Ukraine and renewed their calls for an oft-breached cease-fire agreement to be respected.

The meeting of about three hours in Paris on Tuesday was called in a bid to rescue an agreement the four powers brokered this month in Belarus capital Minsk, setting out terms for a cease-fire and the withdrawal of arms in the conflict in east Ukraine between government forces and pro-Russian rebels.

"Against this backdrop we must be more ambitious in how we implement individual steps of the Minsk Agreement," Germany's Frank-Walter Steinmeier told reporters after the meeting, calling the lack of confidence between the two sides "total."

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said the four had agreed to call for a one-year

extension to the mandate of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) cease-fire monitors in Ukraine and reinforce their personnel, equipment and funding.

A French diplomatic source said that would be discussed in the coming days in Vienna and would include providing the mission with protected vehicles and more technical surveillance means.

"If we let them work they have sufficient personnel to criss-cross the zones and carry out controls, but they just don't have access to these zones for now," he said.

While Steinmeier noted there had been some signs of progress regarding agreements to withdraw heavy weaponry from conflict zones but said that should now physically take place "within the coming days"

The French source said the withdrawal plan proposed by both Ukrainian and separatist military chiefs was deemed credible by French and German military experts.

Leaving the talks first, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov described them as "very useful."

His Ukrainian counterpart Pavlo Klimkin was more downbeat, saying there had been no "breakthrough" and noting the four had not agreed language condemning events on the ground in Debaltseve, a town taken by pro-Russian rebels since the cease-fire was due to start.

He said he feared separatists would now relocate forces towards the government-held port of Mariupol.

"It can't be perceived as a breakthrough. What we need is for the shelling to stop. We need the implementation of the Minsk accords, nothing more," he told reporters at the embassy in Paris.

The French diplomat said the next follow up meeting would take place in Berlin within 10 days at deputy minister or political director level.

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