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Pro-Russian Rebels in Ukraine Say Elections Still in Oct, Nov

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Armed separatists stand in front of the monument to Vladimir Lenin in Donetsk, Ukraine.

Pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine said on Tuesday they were going ahead with local elections in October and November in defiance of Kiev, and only hours after they appeared to say they were prepared to postpone the vote to avoid "stalemate" in peace efforts.

Under terms of a peace agreement signed in Minsk in February, local elections were meant to be held in the separatist regions along with the rest of the former Soviet republic this autumn. But Kiev has since said they cannot take place in the east because of continued security problems there.

The separatists, in response, scheduled their own ballot for October and November, angering Kiev which said it would not recognize the results.

Separatist envoys to the Minsk peace process Vladislav Deinego and Denis Pushilin were

quoted as saying their ballot would go ahead, despite comments earlier on Tuesday which suggested the votes could be pushed back to Feb. 21.

"That was in reference to the next round of elections ... The dates of the first round of elections for the heads of cities and regions remains unchanged: Oct. 18 in the Donetsk People's Republic and Nov. 1 in the Luhansk People's Republic," separatist website DAN quoted Pushilin as saying.

It was not clear how or why the confusion in the message came about.

The comments come as the two rebel envoys meet representatives of Ukraine and Russia, under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, for further talks on the implementation of the peace process.

On Monday, President Petro Poroshenko criticized separatist plans for independent local balloting in October and November. "These aren't elections, they're not free, they will not meet the standards of the OSCE. This directly and severely contradicts the Minsk agreements," he said.

In the past, Ukrainian and rebel forces have blamed each other for repeated ceasefire breaches but both sides are now broadly respecting a truce that took effect on Sept. 1, according to OSCE monitors.

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