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Putin Talks Syria, Ukraine With Normandy Format Leaders

By The Moscow Times

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Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel talks to France's President Francois Hollande.

President Vladimir Putin has held phone talks with the leaders of Ukraine, France and Germany to discuss the situation in Syria and in Ukraine's Donbass region, the Kremlin said in a statement Tuesday.

Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and Ukrainian leader Petro Poroshenko discussed the peaceful settlement of the situation in south-east Ukraine as well as possible steps to tackle the socioeconomic and humanitarian problems in the region.

All leaders stressed the importance of complying with Minsk agreements and of enhancing the effectiveness of the OSCE's special monitoring mission in the region "by giving it additional powers," the RBC newspaper reported.

“Vladimir Putin called for an immediate end to attacks by the Ukrainian armed groups on Donbass' residential areas. He emphasized that a key part of any settlement should be direct dialogue between Kiev and Donetsk and Luhansk,” the statement said.

Members of the so-called Normandy Format — the group of senior diplomats from the four countries actively working to resolve the situation in eastern Ukraine — have also received a set of proposals from the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) and Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), RBC reported. The suggestions touch upon “local elections, special status, amnesty and decentralization,” and “should be carefully considered,” the Kremlin statement said.

In addition to the situation in Ukraine, the leaders discussed some aspects of the situation in Syria.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko urged Russia to release “all the Ukrainian hostages, including Nadiya Savchenko, Gennady Afanasyev and Yury Soloshenko,” the RBC news website reported, citing a statement on the Ukrainian president's website.

Poroshenko used the talks to call for Russia to withdraw its troops from the area, calling current shelling near the city of Avdeevka, “a real obstacle to progress in the peaceful settlement,” the statement said.

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