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Putin Agrees to Renew Normandy Format Talks

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Kremlin Press Service

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin have discussed the need to renew efforts to implement the Minsk agreements, the Kremlin press service reported Thursday.

According to the Kremlin statement, Putin agreed in the telephone conversation with Merkel to return to discussions in the Normandy format.

Russia had suspended meeting in the so-called Normandy format — the working group of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia, formed in 2015 to implement the Minsk peace agreements — after accusing Ukraine of "resorting to terrorism."

Russia's security forces in August claimed to have foiled a "terrorist plot" by the Ukrainian military in Crimea. Russia annexed the peninsula in 2014.

While Putin said that talks scheduled for this month’s G20 summit “made no sense,” Kiev vehemently denied the allegations, saying Russia was manufacturing a pretext for “further aggression” against the country.

Following Thursday's phone call, a timetable of upcoming meetings “at various levels” had been agreed, the Kremlin statement said.

The Normandy format — named after the French region where the heads of state of Russia, Germany, Ukraine and France first met in 2014 — has been plagued by tension and mistrust between Russia and Ukraine, with both sides accusing the other of reneging on commitments agreed to as part of the Minsk peace accord of 2015.

During the phone call, Merkel also expressed concern over the Syrian situation and urged Putin to improve conditions for the civilian population, Reuters reported, citing a German government spokesman.

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