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Ukraine to Hold NATO Referendum – President Poroshenko

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Kacper Pempel / Reuters

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has vowed to put the question of NATO membership to a referendum.

Speaking to German newspaper Berliner Morgenpost, Poroshenko claimed most Ukrainians wanted to be part of the military alliance.

"Four years ago, only 16 percent were in favor of joining NATO. Now it's 54 percent," he said. The president promised to to “do everything in his power” to join NATO if the Ukrainian people voted for it.

A short time earlier, reports claimed that NATO officials had cancelled a meeting with Ukraine in order not to “provoke” the Kremlin.

Tensions are high after an uptick in violence in the troubled eastern region of the country. Beginning Jan. 29, heavy artillery fire returned to districts on both sides of the frontline. At

least one civilian in the the Ukrainian-held town of Avdiivka was killed, and scores more injured.

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Even if Ukraine were to vote in favor of NATO, there is little prospect of membership being granted anytime soon.

Since the Georgian war of 2008, NATO has been reluctant to boost Ukraine's membership hopes. In 2015, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters that Kiev's bid to join the alliance would take "some time."

"Some years ago, [Ukraine] applied for membership ... then they decided to be a non-bloc country. Now they have started the process of reforming with the aim to apply for membership later on. If and when they apply, we will assess that application," he said.

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