

# Ukraine, Pro-Russia Separatists Hold First Prisoner Swap of 2020

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The full release of prisoners on each side could help thaw relations that have been frozen since Russian forces annexed Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014. **Mikhail Sokolov / TASS**

Ukraine and Russian-backed rebels in the country's east carried out their first prisoner exchange of the year Thursday, over a month after the sides had tentatively planned to hold the exchange.

Kiev [held talks](#) with the Kremlin in early March on exchanging the remaining prisoners from the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The sides eventually reached the latest deal on April 8.

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The self-declared Donetsk People's Republic in eastern Ukraine handed over nine pro-government prisoners to Kiev, Ukraine's top human rights official [said](#). In exchange, Donetsk [said](#) Kiev handed over 11 separatists, one of whom refused to return to the pro-Russian statelet.

The neighboring Luhansk People's Republic said it plans to swap 11 pro-Ukrainian government prisoners in exchange for seven separatists. Local media [reported](#) that the 11 prisoners have arrived at the designated exchange point.

Russia's Foreign Ministry called the exchange a positive step toward conflict settlement efforts and said it hoped the sides would reach new deals next week, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy agreed in December to send prisoners home, with scores [handed over](#) just before the end of 2019.

The conflict that broke out in 2014 has killed more than 13,000 people, left a large swath of Ukraine de facto controlled by the separatists and aggravated the deepest east-west rift since the Cold War.

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