

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.

Related article: [Kiev Says Russia and Ukraine in Talks for Next Prisoner Swap in March](#)

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.

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.

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