The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Macron Sees Path to Calm Russia Tensions After Ukraine Push

By Max Delany and Jerome Rivet for AFP

February 08, 2022

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy (R) and French President Emmanuel Macron after a press conference following their meeting in Kyiv. **Sergei Supinsky / AFP**

French President Emmanuel Macron said Tuesday he saw a path forward on easing tensions with Russia over Ukraine, after conducting an urgent round of shuttle diplomacy between Moscow and Kyiv.

Macron held talks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in Kyiv a day after a five-hour meeting at the Kremlin with Russia's Vladimir Putin, as the West scrambles to defuse fears Moscow could invade its ex-Soviet neighbor.

The French leader said he now saw the "possibility" for talks involving Moscow and Kyiv over the festering conflict in the east of the country to move forward, and "concrete, practical solutions" to lower tensions between Russia and the West.

"We cannot under-estimate the moment of tension that we are living through," Macron said at a joint press conference after meeting Zelenskiy.

"We cannot resolve this crisis in a few hours of talks," he said. "It will be the day and the weeks and the months to come that will allow us to progress."

Macron said Putin had told him that Russia "would not be the source of an escalation" in the situation, despite amassing more than 100,000 troops and military hardware on Ukraine's border.

With the assurances in hand, Macron landed later Tuesday in Berlin where he is due to debrief Polish President Andrzej Duda and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who himself has just returned from Washington.

The European leaders, meeting in the so-called Weimar format, are expected to present a united front.

Related article: Ukraine Says Diplomatic Solution More Likely Than Russian Attack

Zelenskiy said he hoped separate talks of high-ranking officials in Berlin on Thursday could pave the way for a summit with the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany aimed at reviving the stalled peace plan for Kyiv's conflict with Moscow-backed separatists.

Putin — who has demanded sweeping security guarantees from NATO and the United States — said after his talks with Macron that Moscow would "do everything to find compromises that suit everyone."

He said several proposals put forward by Macron could "form a basis for further steps" on easing the crisis over Ukraine, but did not give any details.

French proposals

At the same time as sending its military hardware to Ukraine's borders, Putin has issued demands the West says are unacceptable, including barring Ukraine from joining NATO and rolling back alliance forces in eastern Europe.

The French presidency said Macron's counter proposals included an engagement from both sides not to take any new military action, the launching of a strategic dialogue and efforts to revive the peace process for Ukraine's conflict.

It also said an agreement would ensure the withdrawal of some 30,000 Russian soldiers from Belarus at the end of joint military exercises later this month.

The Kremlin insisted that it never had any intention of leaving the troops permanently on Belarusian territory.

The West faces a tough task trying to convince a wary Zelenskiy to accept any compromises.

Kyiv has laid out three "red lines" that it says it will not cross to find a solution — no

compromise over Ukraine's territorial integrity, no direct talks with the separatists and no interference in its foreign policy.

Moscow is pressuring Ukraine to offer concessions to the Russian-backed rebels who have been fighting Kyiv since 2014 in a conflict that has claimed over 13,000 lives.

Ukraine says the Kremlin wants to use the two breakaway eastern regions Russia supports as leverage to keep the country under Moscow's sway.

Russia sends warships

Russia has denied it is planning an invasion — but the U.S. warns it has massed 70% of the forces it would need for a large-scale incursion.

Moscow kept bolstering its forces around Ukraine on Tuesday as it announced six warships were heading to the Black Sea from the Mediterranean as part of previously planned global maritime maneuvers.

Ukraine's Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov told local television that Kyiv was planning to hold its own exercises involving Western-supplied anti-tank missiles and Turkish combat drones in response to the Russian-Belarusian drills.

U.S. President Joe Biden meanwhile ramped up the pressure on Moscow Monday by warning he would "end" the controversial new Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Europe if tanks rolled into Ukraine.

Biden's declaration at a press conference with Scholz was the bluntest so far on the fate of the massive pipeline, which is complete but has yet to begin funneling natural gas.

Scholz was less direct and said only that Berlin was "united" with Washington in imposing sweeping sanctions on Russia, declining to mention the pipeline by name.

Scholz will be in Moscow and Kyiv next week for talks with Putin and Zelenskiy.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/02/08/macron-sees-path-to-calm-russia-tensions-after-ukraine-push-a76302