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Explainer: What Are the Minsk Agreements?

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In February 2015, the Minsk II agreements were signed by Belarus' Alexander Lukashenko, Russia's Vladimir Putin, Germany's Angela Merkel, France's Francois Hollande and Ukraine's Petro Poroshenko. **kremlin.ru**

As tensions between Russia and the West over Ukraine remain at an all-time high, the 2015 Minsk protocols have become a key factor in discussions aimed at resolving the long-simmering conflict in eastern Ukraine.

France and Germany-mediated talks between Russia and Ukraine on Thursday in Berlin failed to reach a breakthrough despite nine hours of negotiations, with the Russian and Ukrainian sides disagreeing over their interpretations of the Minsk agreements.

Here's a brief look at the Minsk agreements and why Ukraine and Russia have been unable to find a middle ground:

What's the difference between Minsk I and Minsk II?

The first Minsk Protocol was signed by Ukraine, Russia, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the pro-Russia separatist leaders in September 2014. Ukraine and the separatists agreed to an immediate 12-point ceasefire deal including withdrawal of heavy weapons and prisoner exchanges. But the agreement failed to stop the fighting, with frequent violations by both sides.

Five months later, after Ukraine lost territory to pro-Russia separatists, Minsk II was signed. Representatives of Russia and Ukraine, mediated by France and Germany, signed a 13-point agreement in February 2015. The second agreement also quickly broke down, with the OSCE reporting around 200 weekly violations in 2016-2020 and more than 1,000 since 2021, according to Novaya Gazeta.

In addition to the ceasefire, Minsk II's notable points include the withdrawal of weapons, monitoring of the ceasefire by the OSCE and the holding of local elections in the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics on their future status in Ukraine.

Where do Russia and Ukraine disagree?

The major disagreements over Minsk II stem from differing interpretations of Russia's role in the conflict and how the points should be implemented.

The Minsk accord does not contain any obligations that Russia is bound to fulfill. Moscow calls itself a mediator, like the OSCE, to help Ukraine and the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics reach an agreement, according to BBC Russia.

Ukraine argues that point 10 of the Minsk agreement, which mentions the withdrawal of "all foreign armed forces" refers to Russia, while Russia denies having any military presence on the territories.

The implementation order of political and military steps is another point on which Russia and Ukraine disagree. While Russia argues that elections in the separatist republics should come before the withdrawal of military equipment, Ukraine insists on the opposite.

More than 720,000 people living in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions have obtained Russian citizenship under a simplified passport regime Russia adopted in 2019 — something Ukraine sees as a violation of the Minsk accord.

Ukrainian law recognizes the Donetsk and Luhansk regions territories as occupied by Russia, and as a result Ukrainian officials argue that granting special status to these territories is unfeasible.

Who has said what about the Minsk accord?

Mainstream Russian and Ukrainian media tend to reiterate arguments made by their countries' officials.

In Ukraine, the widely watched ICTV broadcaster debates about why exactly "the Minsk accord is dead" and news website Censor.net discuss why Russia misinterprets the Minsk

agreements and how they should be rewritten.

Russian state-run television refers to the Minsk agreements as “the only solution” to Russia-Ukraine tensions, echoing the statement made by Russian President Vladimir Putin in his Monday meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron.

Speaking to Macron on Tuesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenksiy said Ukraine is committed to fulfilling the Minsk accords, as long as this happens in the way Kyiv interprets them.

Earlier this year, Ukraine’s security chief argued that the full realization of the Minsk accord would lead to domestic destabilization that would give Russia the upper hand.

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