

By Geir Moulson And Frank Jordans

Germany, France seek progress on Ukraine in talks with Russia
Німеччина та Франція домоглися прогресу по Україні у перемовинах з Росією

На запрошення канцлеру Німеччини до Берліну прибули лідери Росії, України та Франції для проведення чотирьохсторонньої зустрічі з приводу відновлення мирного процесу в східній частині України.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/germany-france-seek-progress-on-ukraine-in-talks-with-russia/article32442482/>



The leaders of Russia, Ukraine and France gathered in Berlin on Wednesday for four-way talks hosted by German Chancellor Angela Merkel that aimed to revive the stalled peace process in eastern Ukraine. The summit was also expected to touch on Syria and Russia's role in the conflict there.

Prospects of significant progress on either front looked poor. "We certainly can't expect miracles" on Ukraine or Syria, Merkel said ahead of the meeting, but added that she wants to exhaust every possibility of progress.

Merkel and Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia, Francois Hollande of France and Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine have met sporadically to discuss eastern Ukraine. Wednesday's meeting was the first time the four have met in more than a year.

The 2015 Minsk agreement brokered by France and Germany has helped end large-scale battles between Ukrainian troops and pro-Russia separatists, but clashes have continued and efforts to reach a political settlement have stalled.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said one focus of the talks would be to increase the number of areas where opposing forces are physically separated to strengthen the cease-fire and prevent a flare-up of hostilities.

The decision to hold the meeting in Berlin follows a flurry of telephone diplomacy over the past week.

Merkel told reporters Tuesday that the talks would be about "establishing where things stand" and stressed that Germany wouldn't refrain from blunt talk – including on Syria.

Merkel and Hollande have been sharply critical of Russia's support for Assad's forces, with Merkel suggesting Tuesday that Moscow was partly responsible for atrocities, citing "Syrian and Russian airstrikes on helpless people, hospitals and doctors."

Merkel said the possibility of imposing sanctions against Russia for its actions in Syria remained on the table.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said the Kremlin wasn't expecting a breakthrough on Ukraine. "The goal of the meeting is to see where we stand and identify the obstacles to fulfilling the Minsk agreements," Peskov said. "Russia has shown a constructive flexibility, but it can't be the only one doing so."

Peskov stressed that the Minsk agreements envision action by Ukraine and the rebels, not Russia. He didn't offer any evaluation of chances of progress on Syria, which Putin, Merkel and Hollande will discuss without Poroshenko.

Outside Merkel's chancellery, hundreds of demonstrators staged competing rallies as the four leaders arrived.

A group of about 30 people waving Russian and Soviet flags chanted "Thank you Putin," while larger groups of Ukrainian and Syrian protesters demonstrated against the Russian president.

"We're here to protest against the war in Ukraine," said Tanja Letaiv, adding that Ukrainians were sympathetic to the Syrian cause.

Loay al-Hamedi, a Syrian living in Germany, expressed anguish at Russia's backing for Syrian President Bashar Assad's crackdown against anti-government groups.