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By Andrea Thomas

Germany Says Russia, Ukraine Agree on Heavy Weapons Pullback

German Foreign Minister Reports Some Progress in Meeting but No Breakthrough

Росія і Україна домовилися про порядок виведення важкого озброєння з буферної зони навколо лінії поділу на сході України, яке було частиною попередньої мирної угоди, підписаної між Україною і проросійськими заколотниками у вересні минулого року, повідомив міністр закордонних справ Німеччини Франк-Вальтер Штайнмайер. Угода була досягнута після зустрічі міністрів закордонних справ Франції, Німеччини, Росії та України в Берліні, де головні дипломати досягли невеликий прогрес, але не в змозі зробити прорив, який би допоміг вирішити конфлікт в Україні, який розпочався майже рік тому, сказав пан Штайнмайер.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/germany-calls-on-russia-and-ukraine-to-be-open-to-concessions-1421873198>



German Chancellor Angela Merkel, right, and German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier Photo: Associated Press

BERLIN—Russia and Ukraine have agreed on a procedure to withdraw heavy weaponry from a buffer zone around the division line in eastern Ukraine that was part of a previous peace

agreement signed by Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian rebels last September, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said late Wednesday.

The agreement came after a meeting of foreign ministers from France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine in Berlin, where the top diplomats made some small progress but failed to generate a breakthrough that would help resolve the conflict in Ukraine that began almost a year ago, said Mr. Steinmeier, who hosted the gathering.

“I am not here to tell you this was the breakthrough,” said Mr. Steinmeier after the meeting that lasted over three hours. “But I believe we have achieved noticeable progress today.”

Contrary to talks conducted by the same top diplomats in Berlin last week, the Russia and Ukraine now agreed that the division line set out in the September cease-fire agreement will be the line from which the withdrawal of heavy weaponry should start, he said. The officials agreed that the weaponry should be pulled back in a 9-mile buffer zone east and west of the division line.

Ukrainian forces and pro-Russia rebels had signed off on a cease-fire plan reached in the Belarusian capital of Minsk in September. In that plan, both sides agreed on a division line and to withdraw heavy weaponry, but neither side had honored the agreement and instead accused the other of breaking the cease-fire.

The Berlin meeting between Mr. Steinmeier and Laurent Fabius, Pavlo Klimkin and Sergei Lavrov —the foreign ministers of France, Ukraine and Russia, respectively—also ended with a joint statement in which the ministers called on all parties involved in the conflict to stop fighting and restore the cease-fire. Russia also pledged to use its influence on pro-Russian rebels to honor the cease-fire, Mr. Steinmeier said.

“They note with serious concern that their call for full respect of the regime of quiet has not been followed, and that, to the contrary, fighting in the Donbass area has severely escalated causing the loss of many human lives including civilians,” the ministers said in a joint statement. “This must stop immediately and the regime of quiet must be restored. They call on all actors on the ground to fully respect it.”

Before the meeting, Mr. Steinmeier had called on Russia and Ukraine to be open to concession and to help prevent a further military and political escalation of the crisis after fighting flared up in eastern Ukraine in recent days.

“The renewed flare up of the fighting in Ukraine over the past days has shown that the situation remains dangerous and is getting more dangerous. People got killed once again,” Mr. Steinmeier said ahead of the meeting. “This situation mustn’t continue.”

Ahead of Wednesday’s meeting, Berlin had been cautious about the outcome despite a proposal from Moscow that Ukraine government forces and pro-Russian rebels withdraw heavy weaponry to the front line both sides agreed to as part of the Minsk agreement.

Earlier Wednesday, Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that the cease-fire agreed by the conflicting parties in September last year has gotten more fragile.

She said the purpose of the Berlin meeting was to find sufficient common ground that would justify a peace summit between the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine in Kazakhstan’s capital, Astana.

An “actual implementation” of Wednesday’s agreement would bring the parties closer to such a summit, Mr. Steinmeier said.

Before the meeting in Berlin, Kiev has announced plans to increase its troops and Ukraine’s President Petro Poroshenko accused the Kremlin of sending more than 1,000 troops across the border in recent days, bringing the total on its territory to about 9,000. Russia denies sending forces to Ukraine.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Wednesday declined to comment on the number of Russian troops in Ukraine, saying they move troops back and forth.

“We have seen an increase in Russian equipment inside eastern Ukraine, and we speak about equipment like tanks, artillery, armored vehicles, advanced air defense systems,” Mr. Stoltenberg said Wednesday in Brussels. “And this Russian military presence with forces and equipment in eastern Ukraine does not contribute to a peaceful and negotiated solution.”

—Naftali Bendavid in Brussels and Christian Grimm in Berlin contributed to this article.

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