

## A UN peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine?

As the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine enters its fifth year, the debate on the possibility of a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission has resurfaced, with a new report and a combination of developments on the international stage creating new momentum. Some see such a mission as a potential opportunity to contribute to unfreezing the Minsk II peace deal, paving the way for local elections. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in the conflict zone is deteriorating.

### Background: How the crisis started

In 2013, Ukraine's then-President, Viktor Yanukovich, decided against signing the Association Agreement ([AA](#)) with the European Union (EU), including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement ([DCFTA](#)). The decision triggered major pro-European [protests](#) in Ukraine. In February 2014, the Ukrainian parliament voted to impeach President Yanukovich, who then fled Kyiv. Russia responded by annexing Crimea in March 2014, in [violation](#) of international law, and by launching an undeclared [hybrid war](#) (adding strong economic pressure and targeted [disinformation](#) measures to its military aggression) against Ukraine. The [EU](#), the [United States](#) and other countries imposed [sanctions](#) on Russia, which retaliated with [counter-sanctions](#).

#### *The Minsk Agreements: Peace plans with limited progress*

In early September 2014, a peace plan for eastern Ukraine (the [Minsk Protocol](#)) was signed. Following immediate violations, a follow-up [agreement](#) was negotiated and signed two weeks later. However, fighting continued, and escalated in January 2015. In February 2015, leaders from France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia [agreed](#) to a new ceasefire, the [package of measures](#) for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements (the 'Minsk II' agreement), which entered into force three days later. Since then, however, little progress has been made. The conflict between Kremlin-backed armed groups and Ukrainian government forces shows no sign of abating; violations of the ceasefire continue to flare up along the line of contact, with daily hostilities and casualties. Europe leads on implementation of the Minsk II agreement through the 'Normandy format', which includes Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia. However, despite [intentions](#) to meet in the context of the Munich Security Conference, the Normandy four (N4) leaders have [not convened](#) since October 2016, followed by a phone conversation in August 2017. Following the 2017 French elections and agreement on a German government [coalition after prolonged talks](#), the N4 leaders are widely expected to re-focus on Ukraine soon.

### Overview of the implementation of the Minsk II agreement

### Status

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1. Immediate, full bilateral ceasefire	<a href="#">Not implemented</a>
2. Withdrawal of all heavy weapons by both sides, establishment of a security zone	Partially implemented
3. Monitoring of ceasefire by the OSCE	Partially implemented
4. Modalities for local elections under Ukrainian law on special status of the Donbas	Partially implemented
5. Pardon and amnesty of figures involved in the conflict	Not implemented
6. Release and exchange of all hostages and other illegally detained people	<a href="#">Partially implemented</a>
7. Safe delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need, based on an international mechanism	Not implemented
8. Restoration of full social and economic links with affected areas	Partially implemented
9. Full Ukrainian control over its border with Russia throughout the conflict zone	Not implemented
10. Withdrawal of foreign armed groups, weapons and mercenaries from Ukrainian territory	Not implemented
11. Constitutional reform including decentralisation, special status for the separatist regions	Partially implemented
12. Local elections in Donetsk and Luhansk regions according to OSCE standards.	Not implemented
13. Trilateral working groups between the Ukrainian government, the separatists and Russia	Yes, but limited results

Source: [Package of measures](#) for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements (February 2015) and [BMI Research](#).



## Who supports what kind of UN peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine?

Back in February 2015, Ukrainian President, Petro Poroshenko, called for a fully fledged UN [peacekeeping mission](#) to be deployed to eastern Ukraine, to help enforce the Minsk II ceasefire. The proposal was rejected by Russia's [UN envoy](#). However, in September 2017, Russian President, Vladimir Putin, put forward his own [proposal](#) for a 'light' version: a limited, six-month UN mission to protect the special monitoring mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE SMM) along the contact line. While some analysts were cautiously optimistic about Russia's ['shift'](#) in approach, others expressed reservations about its motives, warning that Russia could use an international mission as a tool of political [manipulation](#) to cement the [status quo](#); thus its [own presence](#), [securing](#) Putin continued [leverage](#) over Kyiv. Russia's proposal was widely seen as an ['opening gambit'](#), which the Kremlin knew that Ukraine and the West would reject. Some alleged that Putin was merely seeking to present himself as a key global player to the [Russian public](#) ahead of the 18 March 2018 presidential election, and soften his international [image](#) to deliver arguments in favour of easing sanctions.

### *A new report reignites the debate*

Kyiv continues to push for a comprehensive peacekeeping mission to take control of the separatist areas in Donbas quickly, supported by the [USA](#) (whose decision to provide [lethal weapons](#) to Ukraine from 2018 has been strongly denounced by Moscow) and [Germany](#)). In February 2018, a [report](#) commissioned by ex-NATO Secretary-General and current adviser to Poroshenko, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, proposed that the UN deploy 20 000 peacekeepers in eastern Ukraine. The report argued that a UN special representative could broker compromises between Kyiv and the separatist leaders to enforce the ceasefire and enable the Minsk II-mandated local elections. The report, which was welcomed by Principal Deputy Chief Monitor of the OSCE SMM, Alexander [Hug](#), suggested that non-NATO EU members Austria, Finland and Sweden play a key role, in addition to states closer to Russia (Kazakhstan and Belarus), NATO/EU Member States 'with good ties to Russia' (Greece), or with little direct stake in the conflict (Portugal). Swedish Defence Minister, [Peter Hultqvist](#), said Sweden would be open to leading a UN mission and sending troops if Russia and the West agree. Finnish Defence Minister, [Jussi Niinistö](#), responded that Helsinki supported the idea, but saw problems in limiting participation to a few selected EU countries. The Chief of the Joint Staff of the Collective Security Treaty Organization ([CSTO](#)), a military alliance of six post-Soviet states, including Russia, said on 6 March that CSTO is ready to participate in a ['peacemaking mission'](#) in Donbas. The European Parliament's lead Member for Ukraine, Elmar Brok (EPP, Germany), said on 6 March that the [aim](#) of a potential UN mission in Donbas should not be to freeze, but to resolve the conflict and restore Ukraine's control over its borders.

## Behind the frontlines, a deteriorating humanitarian situation

As of February 2018, the death toll had reached 10 303. Some 24 778 people have been injured so far in one of the largest humanitarian [crises](#) in Europe since World War II. Some [4.4 million](#) people are affected, with 3.4 million people in need of humanitarian aid. Freedom of movement is restricted, and de facto 'authorities' are hindering access for humanitarian organisations to non-government-controlled areas. The conflict has resulted in 1.5 million internally displaced persons, while some 1.1 million people have fled abroad. Damage to critical civilian infrastructure (including transport, water supply, electricity and schools) continues to grow.

## Role of the EU and the European Parliament

Ukraine is a [priority country](#) for the EU and the European Parliament. Since early 2014, the EU has increased its support for economic and political reforms in Ukraine, which has made significant efforts to undertake and implement reforms in accordance with the EU-Ukraine AA/DCFTA. The EU sees the full implementation of the Minsk agreements as the basis for a solution to the conflict, and has progressively imposed [restrictive measures](#) against Russia in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and the deliberate destabilisation of Ukraine.

The EU has continually expressed concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine. On 28 February 2018, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Christos Stylianides, announced further [humanitarian aid](#) of €24 million to help victims of the conflict. With the new aid from the budget of the EU's humanitarian aid and civil protection service, ECHO, the EU will have provided over €677 million for the people of eastern Ukraine since the conflict erupted in 2014.

The European Parliament has played a [key diplomatic role](#) in relations between the EU and Kyiv. Members have repeatedly called for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements ([15 November 2017](#)) and recalled the particular responsibility of the Russian government ([16 March 2017](#)).