

Ukraine: The Minsk agreements five years on

Six years after the beginning of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula, the Minsk peace agreements to end the fighting have yielded limited results. Despite some progress in late 2019 – including prisoner swaps and new peace talks – fighting in eastern Ukraine continues.

Background: How the crisis started

In 2013, Ukraine's then-President, Viktor Yanukovich, decided against signing an association agreement (AA) with the European Union (EU), sparking major pro-European [protests](#) in Ukraine. In February 2014, the Ukrainian parliament voted to impeach Yanukovich, who fled Kyiv. Russia responded by annexing Crimea in March 2014, in [violation](#) of international law, and launched a [hybrid war](#) against Ukraine, including aggression in eastern Ukraine and targeted [disinformation](#) campaigns. The [EU](#), the [United States](#) and other countries imposed [sanctions](#) on Russia. The EU-Ukraine AA entered into force in September 2017.

The Minsk agreements: New impetus for the peace plans?

In 2014, a peace plan for eastern Ukraine (the [Minsk Protocol](#)) was signed. As fighting continued, in 2015, leaders from France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia (the 'Normandy Four') [agreed](#) to a new ceasefire and a [package of measures](#) for the implementation of the Minsk agreements (the 'Minsk II' agreement). Since then progress has been limited. Violations of the ceasefire continue to flare up along the line of contact. As the death toll has risen to some [13 000](#), up to 30 000 have been wounded, 1.4 million people have been [displaced](#), and 3.4 million people need humanitarian aid, in January 2020 the United Nations (UN) [appealed](#) for US\$158 million for humanitarian assistance and protection of vulnerable people in eastern Ukraine. In 2019, however, some [progress](#) was made. Two prisoner swaps – including the release of Ukrainian filmmaker and [2018 Sakharov laureate](#) Oleg Sentsov – took place, in [September](#) and [December](#) 2019. Moreover, the first [Normandy Four summit](#) since 2016 was [held](#) in Paris on 9 December 2019. Among other steps, the parties [agreed](#) to implement the ceasefire in full and disengage military forces in three additional (unspecified) regions by the end of March 2020. They noted that the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) in Europe needed secure access throughout Ukraine to implement its mandate in full. Other issues, such as the withdrawal of Russian-backed troops, elections in separatist-held regions and a special status for the Donbass region (advocated by Russia) remain unresolved. New talks are due in spring. Since the summit, ceasefire violations have resumed and deadly clashes [continue](#). On 18 February 2020, five EU members of the UN Security Council – Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany and Poland – [deplored](#) recent fatalities and reminded Russia in particular of its Minsk agreement commitments. However, some see the recent [dismissal](#) of Vladislav Surkov – long-term, hawkish Ukraine adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin – as a sign of [change](#) in Russia's approach to Ukraine.

The role of the European Union and the European Parliament

The EU has consistently [supported](#) Ukraine's territorial integrity, and backs the work of the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group (a group of representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE) to help end the war in the Donbass. The duration of the EU's economic sanctions against Russia is explicitly linked to complete implementation of the Minsk agreements. The EU is one of the largest humanitarian donors in the eastern Ukraine crisis and has provided [€141.8](#) million in emergency financial assistance; €23 million in 2019 alone. Parliament has pointed repeatedly to the Kremlin's particular [responsibility](#) for the [implementation](#) of the Minsk accords.

Statement by the VP/HR: [2020/2570\(RSP\)](#).

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