

Ukraine's fate linked to "deeply flawed" Minsk Accords

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After shuttling from Moscow to Kyiv this week, French President Emmanuel Macron declared a set of vague, failed ceasefire agreements signed by Russia and Ukraine seven years ago are "the only path forward" to de-escalating the current crisis.

Why it matters: The [Minsk Accords](#) are, in principle, supported by Russia, Ukraine, France, Germany and the U.S. Bridging massive gaps between how each side interprets Minsk has been impossible up to now — yet it's increasingly viewed as the best chance to stave off a catastrophic war in Europe.

Flashback: The two Minsk agreements, signed in 2014 and 2015, call for a ceasefire between Ukraine and the Russian-backed separatists waging an insurgency in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region.

- Under heavy military duress, Ukraine agreed to grant the two separatist-controlled regions some form of "special status," in exchange for Russia withdrawing its forces and returning control of the border to Ukraine.
- But the Minsk agreements didn't detail what should come first: the political steps Russia seeks or the security measures allowing Ukraine to reclaim its sovereignty.
- That's why further negotiations have stalled and the ceasefire hasn't held, as both Russia and Ukraine demand implementation of Minsk on their own terms.

What they're saying: Kurt Volker, who served as U.S. special representative for Ukraine from 2017 to 2019, told Axios the Minsk agreements are "deeply flawed," citing their ambiguity and the fact Russia won't even admit to being a party to the conflict.

- "The way I approached this was that the only way this ever gets done — actual peace — is if Russia changes its mind and decides that they want to end the war," Volker stressed.
- He said it was "wrong" for the West to push Ukraine to continue making unilateral concessions on Minsk: "I think Ukraine has already done everything it can do. We ought to be pushing Russia to implement the Minsk agreements."
- A source close to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told Axios: "Ukraine has always been committed to implementing Minsk. It is Russia who is not implementing it, and worse yet trying to use the process to sow instability in Ukraine."

The big picture: Minsk, if implemented according to Russia's terms, would give Kremlin proxies representation in the Ukrainian government and a potential veto over foreign-policy decisions — including on joining NATO or the EU.

- Ukraine has passed laws to implement some Minsk provisions, but fervently opposes Russia's interpretation on special status. It vows not to take any more steps until Moscow rolls back its occupation.
- Russia is now threatening to launch a larger-scale invasion to keep Ukraine in its "sphere of influence" and prevent it from ever joining NATO by installing a puppet government or forcing Zelensky to implement Minsk on Russia's terms.
- "Russia's goal is to keep Ukraine under its control and Minsk is just a tool. They see that this is not working and that's why they're now switching to other tools," says Olga Tokariuk, a non-resident fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis based in Kyiv.

Between the lines: The political dynamics in Ukraine have changed dramatically since Minsk was negotiated seven years ago.

- Thousands of Ukrainians have been killed in the war, and Russia has issued over 500,000 passports to people in the occupied territories in an effort to reassert its influence over Ukraine.
- "It's an open secret that Minsk doesn't work," Tokariuk says. "Unfortunately, there is nothing else at this point. And it is too risky politically, especially now with the Russian military presence in Ukrainian borders, to admit to this open secret."