

The War in Donbass: German Chancellor Angela Merkel Fears Devastating Defeat of the Ukrainian Army

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[German Chancellor] Angela Merkel seems to anticipate the economic and military collapse of Ukraine. Berlin's civil service is naturally working hard on a peace plan. To avert fiasco, Merkel must now discuss a truce with [Russian President] Vladimir Putin. This war could end well for the rebels.

Merkel and [French President] Francois Hollande met on Thursday with [Ukraine's President] Petro Poroshenko. On Friday, their journey continues to Putin in Moscow.

The federal government has denied a newspaper report of a peace plan by Germany and France to Ukraine. "This is not true," a government spokesman said on Thursday evening to a report in the Süddeutsche Zeitung (Friday edition). The Journal had reported that Chancellor Merkel and French President Francois Hollande wanted to propose to Kiev's President Petro Poroshenko on Thursday night an immediate ceasefire.

However, convinced by the denial to the contrary, the SZ writes that the new program had been already in preparation for some days, by high officials of the governments involved. The trigger seems to be the combination of military gains by the separatists, and the U.S. debate on sending lethal weapons to Ukraine.

Poroshenko wants to make it clear that the final chance has come to save Ukraine against a dramatic military defeat and economic collapse. On Thursday, the Ukrainian central bank had its key interest rate rise by five percentage points to 19.5 per cent, and the local currency UAH fell by almost half of its value.

Therefore, it seems that Merkel and Hollande were now advised to speak immediately with Putin on a solution to the conflict.

In return for a ceasefire, separatists would be granted broad autonomy in eastern Ukraine, and it would be covering a larger area than previously planned. The demarcation line that is based on the Minsk Agreement will now be unsustainable. According to the SZ, territorial gains by the separatists will necessitate adding up to 1500 square kilometers to the proposed autonomous region.

Sources were not disclosed, but the SZ is usually well informed in such matters.

However, even if the peace plan in the reported form should still be ready for signing by Angela Merkel, the military and economic collapse of Ukraine is apparently nonetheless

expected.

Hollande and Merkel came together on Thursday in Kiev with Poroshenko to find a way out of the escalating situation. On Friday they want to discuss in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin ending the conflict. In the background of the diplomatic thrust are the increasingly violent battles in Ukraine's east.

Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier traveled to Latvia and Poland on Thursday to discuss there with his counterparts the crisis. Steinmeier warned of a "total loss of control" in the military conflict in eastern Ukraine. Moreover, ways should be explored "to calm the situation before the conflict gets out of control and is not amenable to solution by proposed policies."

Both Human Rights Watch and the OSCE reported this week that fragments of cluster bombs were found in Lugansk. There is evidence that these were fired by the Ukrainian army. The attack injured two civilians; two more were killed, and an unknown number of other civilians might also have been hit.

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