

---

Putin peace plan is basis of Hollande-Merkel initiative on Ukraine – reports

06/02/2015



Angela Merkel and Francois Hollande reworked Putin's peace plan having taken out suggestions the EU and Ukraine were most opposed to, Western diplomatic sources told AP.

The new text is said to contain the promise of more autonomy for the rebel-held eastern Ukraine areas, and more protection for the Russian language and culture.

Apart from more powers, the breakaway eastern Ukrainian regions could be offered extra territory, taking into account the land gains of 1,500 square kilometers (around 600 square miles) the rebels have made since the last peace agreement struck in Minsk in September, German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung reports, claiming knowledge of the plan's details.

German officials have, however, denied reports of offers of territorial concessions being part of the peace talks agenda.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Francois Hollande were in Kiev on Thursday and are now coming to Moscow in a surprise effort to come up with a solution to the Ukrainian crisis. The details of the initiative have not been officially disclosed.

[READ MORE: Merkel, Hollande, Putin to discuss end to Ukraine's civil war at Moscow talks](#)

Hollande and Merkel's unexpected push for peace coincided with the US secretary of state's visit to Kiev. John Kerry had possible weapons supplies on his agenda.

While he said the simultaneous visits of the three leaders were a sign of their unified stance on Ukraine, Brian Becker, director of Anti-War Answer Coalition believes otherwise.

*“You can see Merkel and Hollande going first to Kiev and then to Moscow. This is not being done under the direction of John Kerry and the United States,”* Becker told RT. *“I think the US is concerned that Europe can take an independent path away from the United States, in other words away from the NATO alliance in defense of their own national interests.”*

On Thursday John Kerry didn't exclude the possibility of the US supplying Kiev with lethal weapons.

*“The president is reviewing all of his options, among those options is the possibility of providing defensive systems to Ukraine,”* Kerry told journalists.

European defense ministers that same day spoke clearly against sending weapons to Ukraine.

*“I think the hardliners here are in Washington DC within the US State Department, within the neo-Conservatives, amongst the Pentagon,”* Becker said. *“They more than the so-called European allies in NATO are the ones that have been promoting the possibility of arming Ukraine. The European governments, even while acting as US allies, are more circumspect, more aware of the dangers to themselves and to their own economies.”*

The term *“defensive weapons,”* used by Kiev and Washington is a misleading one, according political analyst, Chris Bambery.

*“I'd like to know what defensive weapons are,”* he told RT. *“I mean what's the difference between offensive and defensive weapons. We are seeing a very confused situation, because there's welcoming the ceasefire...there's welcoming of the arrival of Francois Hollande and Angela Merkel in both Kiev and Moscow, but we also see NATO suddenly announce it's going to be setting bases in eight NATO countries bordering the former Soviet Union.”*

[READ MORE: 30,000 troops, 6 rapid units: NATO increases military power in Eastern Europe](#)

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk, who met Kerry on Thursday evening, vigorously insisted there were Russian troops fighting in the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics. His assertion echoed Kerry's earlier allegations of “Russian soldiers and Russian tanks” crossing the border with Ukraine.

*“It seems to me the only country that strongly denies there are Russian boots on the ground is the Russian Federation and President Putin,”* Yatsenyuk said, according to Reuters. *“If they need it, I can give them my glasses. We are not fighting with so-called rebels or guerrillas, we are fighting the Russian regular army.”*

However, both Kerry's and Yatsenyuk's statements contradict last week's statement by Ukraine's military chief of staff Viktor Muzhenko.

*“We are not militarily engaged with any regular forces of the Russian federation,”* he said.

Moscow has asked in vain for evidence of it being militarily involved in the conflict and has blamed the West for making unfounded accusations.

*“Well, I think the truth is there probably are Russian nationals involved in fighting with the*

*People's republic of Donetsk," Bambery says. "But I don't think there's evidence Russian forces have crossed the border and are interfering. And I think if there was any evidence, the Americans, who are obviously keeping this region under very tight surveillance, if they had that evidence they would have released that evidence immediately. Because they are desperately trying to show that the Russian people are to blame for this and that Vladimir Putin is to blame for this."*

---