

Comment by the Information and Press Department on Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's participation in the Normandy format ministerial meeting

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On June 11, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is due to take part in the regular Normandy format meeting of foreign ministers in Berlin.

The central topic to be discussed will be progress in the implementation of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements of February 12, 2015, as well as the agreements reached at the top-level Normandy format meeting in Paris on October 2, 2015, and in Berlin on October 19, 2016. The participants will discuss in detail the situation in the conflict zone and compliance of the parties – Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk – with their obligations in the military, political, socio-economic and humanitarian sphere.

Recent events have shown that the Kiev authorities have no intention of complying with the Minsk Agreements, grossly distort their logic and sequence, and artificially link their willingness to move forward on the political track with total military capitulation of Donbass and control of the border with Russia. The Ukrainian side does not offer the inhabitants of the southeast any political guarantees, but rather does everything to provoke tensions on the line of contact using every opportunity to toughen the economic, trade and transport blockade of the region.

The situation is becoming increasingly tense in the southeast again. Kiev has disrupted the "Easter" ceasefire announced in late March of this year. The Ukrainian Armed Forces grossly violate the agreement on the separation of troops and hardware of the sides. Not having carried out this process in Stanitsa Luganskaya, the Ukrainian forces are digging in in Zolotoye and Petrovskoye from where they and the Donbass self-defence forces pulled back their troops and hardware in the autumn of 2016. The closer the positions of the conflicting sides to each other the greater the danger of military clashes. It is necessary to seek full implementation of the Framework Agreement of September 21, 2016 on the separation of forces and equipment, the withdrawal of heavy weapons and demining.

The Russian side intends to demand an immediate restoration of the status quo that was established in Zolotoye and Petrovskoye after the separation of the forces and equipment there in 2016 and the completion of the same process in Stanitsa Luganskaya. When the pullback of heavy vehicles and weapons has occurred this will mark an important step towards achieving a stable ceasefire in accordance with the Minsk Agreements.

Special attention will be paid to the political aspects of settlement. Above all, we are looking at the need to seal the agreement on the procedure for coming into force of the law on the special status of Donbass, better known as the Steinmeier formula, which was agreed at the Normandy format summit in Paris back on October 2, 2015 and confirmed by the leaders of the Normandy Four in Berlin on October 19, 2016.

There is a need for progress in solving humanitarian problems. In particular this regards the coming into force of the law on amnesty, exchange of hostages and illegally detained persons, and improvement of the humanitarian situation in Donbass. Urgent measures have to be taken to ensure uninterrupted water and power supply to the local residents, and that social outlays are paid (pensions, benefits, wages, etc.).

As for the UN presence in Donbass, Russia introduced a corresponding draft resolution at the UN Security Council in September 2017. However, we have still not received written amendments to the document. Instead, our European and American partners are promoting the idea of a military operation of "coercion into peace" and the establishment in the region of an international military-civilian administration pending the holding of local elections there. Donetsk and Lugansk reject these proposals as they run counter to the Minsk Agreements. Any formats of international assistance in the settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis, including those led by the UN, must have the consent of the parties to the conflict, Kiev and Donbass.