

Ukraine president: Ceasefire will start at 11:00GMT Friday if Minsk meeting goes ahead

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*"At 14:00 local time (11:00GMT Friday), provided the [Minsk] meeting takes place, I will call on the General Staff to set up a bilateral ceasefire and we hope that the implementation of the peace plan will begin tomorrow,"* Petro Poroshenko said on the sidelines of a NATO summit in Wales on Thursday.

On Wednesday, Poroshenko expressed "great hope" that the peace process in Ukraine will commence in Minsk on September 5, when representatives of Kiev, Moscow and OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) are scheduled to meet.

Poroshenko's announcement paves the way for implementing the 7-step peace plan, which was proposed to the conflicting sides by Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday.

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The heads of the self-proclaimed People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk said that they are ready to implement the ceasefire at 11:00GMT on Friday, on condition that Kiev subscribes to the plan for a political settlement to the conflict.

Ukraine has been engulfed in violent internal conflict since April, when Kiev's military began its crackdown on the southeastern regions of the country.

According to United Nations' estimates released on Tuesday, over 2,249 people have been killed so far and more than 6,033 wounded in the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

The number of internally displaced Ukrainians has reached 190,000, with another 207,000 finding refuge in Russia, the UN said.

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