

U.S., Russia, EU Ministers Set for Crisis Talks With Ukraine

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BRUSSELS — The U.S, the European Union, Russia and Ukraine will meet at ministerial level next week to discuss the Ukraine crisis, the EU has said, offering a glimpse of possible diplomatic progress in the conflict.

The meeting will involve U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchytsia, the EU said Tuesday.

Further details of the meeting, which will be held at an unspecified location in Europe, are still being worked on, an EU source said.

Separately, an EU diplomat who asked not to be named said the EU planned to set up a special support group to help Ukraine stabilize its precarious economy and political situation.

The support group, whose creation is expected to be announced Wednesday, will bring together "several dozen people" to work out priorities for the country, the diplomat said.

"The support group will identify and coordinate with the Ukrainian authorities the necessary help and assistance they need to stabilize the economy and political situation, help with reforms," the diplomat said.

The group, whose work could be extended to Georgia and Moldova, which are also seeking a closer relationship with the EU, will draw on the expertise of various EU member states and work with the international financial institutions.

Last month the International Monetary Fund announced a \$14 billion-\$18 billion loan for Kiev in return for tough economic reforms that will unlock further aid from the EU the U.S. and other lenders over two years.

EU policy-makers have made tackling the Ukraine crisis top priority after Moscow last month annexed the Crimea peninsula.

Russia has dismissed Western accusations that Moscow is destabilizing Ukraine.

The Ukraine crisis began after former pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to spurn an EU offer of closer trade and political relations started months of street protests that eventually led to his downfall.

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