Face-to-face talks between the Russian and Ukrainian presidents failed to produce a breakthrough for ending the conflict over eastern Ukraine, as Kiev released videos of captured Russian soldiers and rebels pushed toward a government-held city.

The one-on-one session, which Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko described as "tough and complex," ended early Wednesday after a day of talks on the crisis in the Belarusian capital of Minsk.

Mr. Poroshenko said afterward that he would prepare a "road map" toward a possible cease-fire with the pro-Russia separatists, according to a statement carried by news agencies.

Russia's President Vladimir Putin expressed support as well as apparent skepticism. "Russia will do everything possible for the peace process, if it begins," he told reporters separately, adding that it "should get started as soon as possible."

Mr. Putin also played down the significance of the Russian troops caught on the Ukrainian side of the border this week.
Russia plans new aid convoy

Putin plays down Ukraine's allegation of Russian troops crossing the border

IEA chief says Europe must rely on Russian gas

Just ahead of the talks, Ukraine released videotaped interrogations of the soldiers, who it said were part of a column of Russian infantry vehicles that its forces had attacked on Monday. The Russian Defense Ministry said the soldiers had strayed accidentally into Ukraine while patrolling an unmarked section of the border, according to the news agency Interfax.

"Ukrainian servicemen happened to be on our territory as well....It was never a problem and I hope that in this case it won't be a problem from the Ukrainian side," Mr. Putin said, apparently referring to recent incidents when Ukrainian troops crossed into Russia to escape rebel fire.

The two leaders, together for the first time in two months, were joined by officials from the European Union, Belarus and Kazakhstan in an attempt to end the bloodshed in Ukraine, which has flared into the biggest East-West crisis since the end of the Cold War.

"Today in Minsk, without any question, the fate of the world and the fate of Europe are being decided," Mr. Poroshenko said early in the day.

But Mr. Putin focused on trade issues during the initial round-table discussion, sidestepping mounting concern over the insurrection that has claimed an estimated 2,000 lives this year.

In his public comments, Mr. Putin highlighted the dangers he said Russia faces if Ukraine pursues closer ties to the West. Since the onset of the crisis, Mr. Putin has accused the West of meddling in Ukraine's internal affairs and trying to spoil its relations with Moscow.

Mr. Putin said that a trade agreement between Kiev and Europe will flood the Ukrainian market with European goods, which may then find their way into Russia. "In this situation Russia cannot stand idle. And we will be prompted...to take retaliatory measures, to protect our market," Mr. Putin said.

In a seemingly conciliatory sign after their face-to-face talks, however, Mr. Putin said he and Mr. Poroshenko agreed to restart talks on natural-gas deliveries. Moscow cut off supplies to its neighbor earlier this year, claiming that Kiev has to repay mounting debt.

Ukraine's latest political crisis began after Ukraine's previous president, Viktor Yanukovych, abruptly moved late last year to sign a trade agreement with Russia instead of the EU. Mr. Yanukovych was toppled in February after months of street protests. Mr. Poroshenko, elected in May, has since revived the agreement with Europe.

At the same time, Ukraine is battling an insurgency in the east that began in April. Kiev accuses Russia of funneling men and arms across the border to support the separatists, a charge Russia denies.

The round-table discussion was followed by a four-hour private meeting. Belarus President Alexander...
Lukashenko said afterward that Minsk would serve as the setting for continued talks.

"Of course all of us would like a breakthrough," including a cease-fire and "a start to political dialogue in Ukraine," Mr. Lukashenko said. "But the fact of today's meeting itself is a success, a step in the only proper direction."

Ukrainian defense officials reported new fighting Tuesday near the port city of Mariupol on the Azov Sea—which for weeks they have said was solidly under government control.

Government defense spokesman Col. Andriy Lysenko said a column of Russian armored vehicles and artillery was shelling army positions a few dozen miles from the city, which had some 500,000 residents before the crisis started.

Col. Lysenko said Ukrainian forces had destroyed much of the column Monday after it had crossed the border, but that some remaining tanks and howitzers were firing on Ukrainian units from villages near the border. Russia denies sending the vehicles across the border.

Anton Gerashchenko, a senior Interior Ministry official, said in televised comments that the Russian armor brought into Ukraine to support the assault was a relatively small column, and looked less like an invasion force than an attempt to sow panic.

In the videotapes, the soldiers said they were part of a paratroop unit based in Kostroma, about 210 miles northeast of Moscow. They said they had been ordered to the Ukrainian border for military exercises, and had been given uniforms stripped of any indications that they were Russian military units.

One of the soldiers said they knew they were heading into Ukraine, but another said they thought they were on an exercise inside Russia. "They started shooting at us, and my vehicle blew up," said one. "Then I knew this wasn't an exercise; it wasn't just a march."

—James Marson in Mariupol, Ukraine, contributed to this article.

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Corrections & Amplifications

Ukraine said the Russian paratroopers were part of a convoy that crossed into Ukraine. An earlier version of this article incorrectly said it crossed into Russia.