1. ENGLISH VERSION

PEACE IN TRUTH AND JUSTICE BETWEEN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

Submitted to Presidents Putin, Zelensky, Trump, and other Heads of governments and many Journals and Newspapers in different languages by Professor Dr. phil. habil. Dr. h.c. Josef Maria Seifert. [2]

PREAMBLE

Aware that it is high time and a concern of thousands upon thousands of Ukrainian and Russian families, indeed of all humanity, to end the scourge of the now three-year old terrible war between Russia and Ukraine and the 11-year civil war in Ukraine between government troops and the self-proclaimed independent Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk), another peace plan is being proposed here after so many failed ones.

This peace plan is neither based on the power and coercion of Ukraine to leave the lands that rightly belong to it, nor on ideological interpretations of history and its goals, but solely on truth and justice.

May my hope be fulfilled that this peace plan will be accepted by all three parties waging this war between two brotherly peoples, based on the firm and philosophically well-thought-out ethical and logical foundation on which it stands.

The text of the peace agreement set out below proposes a peace agreement in two very different wars that have, however, become intertwined since 2022: Firstly, the civil war that has been raging in Ukraine for 11 years (2014-), secondly and primarily, the war between Russia and Ukraine (2022-). This bigger war is not a purely local conflict but an international war with the potential of turning into a world war. Therefore, peace that ends this war is in the interest of the whole world.

A just peace can only be proposed if, first, the truth about justice and injustice in these two wars is known. [i]

JUST PEACE TREATY BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

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Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia

§ 1

Distinction between just and unjust elements and war aims of Russia and Ukraine, and a general sketch of what a just peace between Russia and Ukraine would look like

Since the civil war in Ukraine preceded the Russo-Ukrainian War and, to some extent, underlies it, its objectives and conduct must be examined first.

I. JUST AND UNJUST UKRAINIAN GOALS OF WAR

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1. The heroic self-defense of Ukraine against Russian aggression and against the intention to reduce Ukraine to a part of Russia is undoubtedly an entirely legitimate goal of Ukraine's war since 2022.

2. The aim of the war of the Ukrainian government against the provinces that were striving for independence and had already declared it is the prevention of secession and forcing them to remain in Ukraine.

A. In accordance with the positive, man-made law of the text of the Ukrainian constitution, which does not provide for independence and certainly not for secession of its oblasts, this goal of war is.

B. However, there is a basic human and natural right to independence, preceding and independent of positive law, of every individual person, as well as of individual provinces, smaller population units, and culturally, linguistically, and politically distinct areas. This right of a distinctive majority to independence is not solely a natural law but is also clearly and unreservedly recognized in international law and by the UN; not so the right to secession.

Against attempts to separate the right to independence from that to secession, however, we see: the right to independence is inseparable from the right to secession. How could the British colonies in North America have become independent in 1776 and form the USA without separating from Great Britain? How can any province or colony achieve independence and statehood without separating from its homeland or colonial power?

C. By virtue of the personhood of each of its members, provinces and other communities have, upon a majority vote, the natural right to independence and, in logical consequence thereof, to separate from their home state.

D. Donetsk and Luhansk wanted to exercise these rights based on two referendums.[ii]

(Even if there were reasonable doubts about the truth of the quorum and correct count of the majority votes for the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk, the fact that an impressive majority of local populations stood up for autonomy has not even been questioned by the Ukrainian government; moreover, a repetition of the referendums or an examination of the truth about these historical facts would be extremely costly and even impossible due to the fact that many Ukrainians have since left the Donbass because of the war. Hence, the present draft agreement, to serve a quick, just and at the same time real and not imaginary and unrealizable peace, assumes for strong reasons the existence of such referendums with a large majority in favor of secession.)

Therefore, from the point of view of international law, and even more so of pure natural law, the Ukrainian government's war against the secession of Donetsk and Luhansk and against their exercising their right to independence is unjust.

E. Consequently, the defense of their right to independence and secession by the warring provinces is a just war. Similarly, the Ukrainian government's war since September 2022 against the independence and secession of these provinces is an unjust aggression.

II. UNJUST AND JUST RUSSIAN GOALS OF WAR

Putin has named a number of very different war aims of his war against Ukraine:

1. *Military support for the self-declared independent republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.*

In light of the injustice of the Ukrainian fight against independence and secession of Donetsk and Luhansk, Russia's first war aim in the Russo-Ukrainian War is just. Provided that this referendum truly corresponded to the will of a sufficient majority of the citizens of both Donetsk and Luhansk, the justice of the Russian defense of their rights to

independence includes also their incorporation, based on the majority decision of the population of the two provinces and Russia's invitation, of the two independent republics of Donetsk and Luhansk into Russia. (Also, the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, though not having declared themselves to be independent republics before, have, using their rights to independence and secession, voted with a large majority, in September 2022, to move to Russia.)

In consequence, a just peace between the Ukrainian government and the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk as well as between Russia and Ukraine, requires an immediate end to the war waged by the Ukrainian government against the aforementioned provinces and a serious attempt at reparation and redress for the damage inflicted on these provinces and on those Russian soldiers who defended their rights.

2. A second war aim of Russia, which Putin formulated in his long speech before the beginning of the "military operation", was the "denazification" and "disarmament" of Ukraine. Now there are two possible interpretations of what Putin meant by the Nazification of Ukraine that he wants to eliminate: For one thing, he could be referring to some real neo-Nazi declarations, including pro-Hitler slogans, that actually existed among some Ukrainians and circles and that he would consider so widespread and dangerous that they pose a serious risk of Russia's neighboring country oppressing Jews or even committing a new holocaust.

However, the Nazi elements in the literal sense in Ukraine are too few and too uninfluential (less than 2 %) to justify a war.

Another interpretation of the alleged "Nazification" of Ukraine would be that Putin wanted to draw a comparison between forms of suppression of Russian culture and language in the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine and the contempt and description of Jews by the Nazis.

In this latter regard, there is no doubt that certain speeches by previous presidents of Ukraine about the separatists (such as calling them vermin that should be exterminated) contained Nazi-like and abhorrent anti-Russian language reminiscent of Hitler's ghastly speeches about the Jews.

Even the much larger flood of Nazi-like, anti-Russian speeches and attitudes does not, however, have the current regime of Zelensky to such an extent that they could justify a war. Therefore, a war against the Nazification of Ukraine, with just that purpose, would be, at least so it seems, unjustified.

3. Shortly before Russia invaded Ukraine, Putin mentioned, in his long programmatic speech, a third war aim that has sparked outrage worldwide. This third goal of the war was presented by Putin as being based on historical truth: Ukraine has historically been the cradle and origin of Russia, with Kiev as its center, was part of the former Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, and is a country populated to a fairly large extent by Russian-speaking or bilingual citizens.[iii]

Starting with these facts, Putin, adding many other premises, construed a justification of his third aim of war: Ukraine, he maintained, just like other former Soviet republics, was only granted self-determination and secession by the former Soviet government in virtue of a tragic mistake about the historically founded true identity of Ukraine, which is Russian. Therefore, Russia has the right, indeed the sacred mission, to correct and reverse this historical error as well as to eradicate the shocking triumph of Western immorality, which manifests itself in many forms, including the pride parades authorized in Ukraine while punishable in Russia.[iv] (Especially this latter aspect prompted the Patriarch Kyrill of the Orthodox Church in Moscow to call Putin's war against Ukraine "holy").

Prescinding from the concept of a holy war of Putin, a man hardly qualified as holy fighter against a morally evil society (of the sort of divinely commanded wars like the wars described in the Old Testament), the Russian war-aim of conquering the whole Ukraine and undo its independence and secession since 1991, is largely based on an ideology that does not recognize the legally and ethically binding rights of Ukraine to self-determination and secession, nor the statehood of Ukraine explicitly granted by the Soviet Union itself, in order to justify a war of expansion, which contradicts former Russian commitments, positive international law as well as eternal natural law.

Therefore, any just peace treaty would have to include a binding and internationally monitored renunciation by Russia of such hegemonic ambitions and territorial claims to parts or all of Ukraine, because a war based on this war aim is, by nature, gravely unjust.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 2
Recognition of just and unjust warfare in the war between Russia and Ukraine

The justice and injustice of a war not only depend on the war's end but equally on observing or violating an ethics of warfare. Therefore, a war might have the best purposes, but if it uses means of the "total war", kills civilians, destroys hospitals and schools, uses rapes as means of humiliating the enemy, such a war is utterly unjust.

Numerous war crimes have been documented by international observers on both sides of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

A just peace between Russia and Ukraine, therefore, also requires a serious attempt at reparation and redress for the damage done by unjust and criminal acts of warfare by either party.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 3
Ukraine recognizes the self-determination and secession of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson *oblasts and their secession to Russia.*

Ukraine recognizes the independence and secession of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts, which joined Russia on September 30, 2022, following two additional referenda with an overwhelming percentage of voters voting for joining Russia.

Even in the event that these rights do not exist based on natural law to independence (as assumed in the present treaty), but that these four provinces carried out the secession to Russia unlawfully (as implied by the constitution of Ukraine), Ukraine recognizes the transfer of the aforementioned provinces to Russia as a historical fact that cannot be violently reversed by Ukraine. A more solid basis of the peace contract between Russia and Ukraine, however, calls for the secession of these four provinces not only as an irreversible political reality, but also as a consequence of a legitimate exercise of their rights to autonomy and secession.

Therefore, Ukraine renounces any attempt to reconquer these four oblasts once and for all.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 4
Ukraine accepts Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, though it was based on a referendum that was only deemed legal by Russia and some other countries, but illegal and invalid in Ukraine's eyes and those of some critics.

Ukraine also recognizes the transfer of the Crimea to Russia as a result of the exercise of its right to secession, which is a part and logical consequence of its inhabitants' right to self-determination.

Even if this step were not required by a valid (denied by Ukraine) referendum in Crimea organized by the provincial Ukrainian government, the real political situation in the sense of those compromises without which no peace on earth can be achieved requires § 4.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 5

Russia recognizes the newly determined borders with Ukraine. Therefore, Russia returns to Ukraine all parts of Ukrainian territory outside the five oblasts. In turn, Ukraine recognizes the territorial integrity of Russia and therefore returns all parts of Russia, especially in the Kursk region, which it presently controls.

Therefore, Russia withdraws its troops from all parts of Ukrainian territory outside the five oblasts. Revoking earlier affirmations of Zelensky, Ukraine also withdraws all its forces from the former and newly added Russian territory.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 6

Mutual solemn and irrevocable decision and pact to respect the sovereignty of the neighboring state and the inviolability of the newly established borders and to refrain from all plans of conquest, reconquest, or other interference against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the neighboring country.

In view of Putin's earlier plans and speeches and his third war aim, his agreement to this point must bear the character of a solemn, binding, and irrevocable declaration by Russia (through Putin). Parallel to this step, Ukraine will renounce any attempt to reconquer Crimea or the Donetsk and Luhansk provinces, as well as to launch any further attacks on Russian territory.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 7

Ukrainian recognition of the rights to independence and secession of all Ukrainian oblasts

A lasting and just peace between the two parties in the civil war (government and provinces), and, due to the intermingling of both wars, between Ukraine and Russia, requires, moreover, not only the explicit Ukrainian recognition of the rights to, or at least the fact of, the independence and secession of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as well as of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, but of all Ukrainian oblasts. Ideally, this would be done by amending the Ukrainian constitution along the lines of the EU and Liechtenstein, thus confirming constitutionally the rights of the Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia and Kherson oblasts to independence and secession and giving these rights a firm legal basis in positive law (i.e., the constitution).[v]

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 8

Return to Ukraine of all territories conquered by Russia outside the five mentioned Oblasts, withdrawal of all Russian troops from any part of Ukraine outside the provinces of Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson

The statehood of Ukraine and the inviolability of its borders, as well as the right to self-determination of all its provinces, demand the immediate and complete return to Ukraine of all territories and cities conquered by Russia outside of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson and the Crimea, i.e., in provinces that never voted for independence and/or secession but were after the Russian invasion also occupied by Russia. These conquests have to be recognized as unjust and ought to be reversed. At the same time, Ukraine will give up all the territories it has conquered in the Kursk region (Russia).

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 9
Ukraine withdraws its application for NATO membership for an indefinite period.

In view of the assurance given by some NATO representatives, especially by the German Minister of External Affairs, Genscher,[vi] before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, not to expand NATO eastwards, Ukraine, subject to Russia's signing of the peace treaty proposed here, withdraws its application to NATO membership for an indefinite period.

It takes this step also in view of the overwhelming support it has received, in fact, from NATO states during its present war. A careful examination of these facts assures Ukraine that its interests and rights in the world community can be secured within the framework of a status of neutrality similar to that of Switzerland and Austria.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 10
Ceasefire and Start of Talks between Russia and Ukraine

An immediate and rigorously adhered-to ceasefire, along with the start of talks on the details and consequences of the peace treaty, should precede the final peace agreement and begin immediately, if possible, with US and NATO participation in the peace talks.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 11
Both Ukraine and Russia admit to unjust actions through which the war broke out, and regret and abandon these actions.

Who is the unjust aggressor in the Russian-Ukrainian war? The answer to this question seemed entirely clear until recently: Of course, Russia, both because its annexation of the Crimea out of the blue kicked off the Donbass war, and because Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 and began a long battle of aggression, misrepresented itself as a mere short military operation.

The official Ukrainian narrative repeated by Selensky after his hot dispute with Trump and Vance in the Oval Office on February 28, 2025, is that there never was a civil war in which the indigenous population of Donetsk and Luhansk opted for independence, but that this whole separatist movement was only organized and manipulated by Russia. If this were true, the Ukrainian government would always have led a war of defense against Russia, never a war against its own citizens. For this claim, the truth of which would make Russia the sole aggressor and initiator of the war, Ukraine offers a few weak arguments, such as that some Russians were fighting in Donetsk.[vii]

In contrast, the arguments that this independence movement originated in the provinces themselves are overwhelmingly strong.[viii]

Also, a closer examination of Trump's recent reproach to Zelensky that Ukraine started the war, throws some doubts on the claim that Russia was the clear and sole initiator of the war that began in 2022, because this claim of Trump is by no means so absurd and ludicrous as it seemed to the world Press:

1. First of all, the annexation of the Crimea was not a violent action of war, but an unbloody action that occurred based on a referendum conducted by local Ukrainian Crimean government officials in March, 2014, with an alleged result of 90 % of votes in favor of the Crimea's secession and incorporation in Russia, which occurred and was ratified by the Duma soon after.[ix]
2. The action of the Ukrainian government against the separatist effort of secession in Donetsk, supported by Russia, started in 2014 a bloody civil war which, in 2022, merged with the war between Russia and Ukraine.

Hence, both Ukraine and Russia have a considerable responsibility for the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian War.

Regarding the origin of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is clear that Ukraine initiated the civil war against its autonomous provinces, which was one of the major causes of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

On the other hand, the Russian invasion, inasmuch as it extended far beyond a support of the autonomy-seeking provinces and extended to Kiev and committed horrendous war crimes in the center of Ukraine, was and is clearly a war of Russian aggression. Any just peace requires Russia's complete and internationally controlled abandonment of this unjust end-of-war and withdrawal of all its troops from Ukrainian regions outside the five areas.

So much said about the somewhat confused beginning of the first (civil) war between government and oblasts (consequently also of the second Russo-Ukrainian war that started from the first) and the Russian support of the provinces, which is one of the war-aims Putin cited, we turn to the war, since the Russian attack on Ukraine is pursuing Putin's third goal, the conquest of Ukraine. This war with this goal has been undoubtedly entirely and solely started by Russia and changed the war of defense of 2 (and since September 2022, four) Oblasts into an all-out and unjust war of expansion.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 12
A serious will to foster a "culture of peace"

Both countries concerned commit themselves to refraining from all elements of hostility and mutual harm in the fields of culture, sports, and the economy. Instead, they will undertake and promote the difficult struggle for a "culture of peace" and a "culture of friendship and brotherhood".

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 13
Security and freedom guarantee for ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious communities and groups

Neither Ukraine nor Russia will suppress ethnic or religious groups within their territories and thereby destabilize peace efforts.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 14
Russia and Ukraine solemnly and irrevocably affirm their acceptance of all points of this peace treaty

Russia and Ukraine solemnly and irrevocably affirm their acceptance of all points of this peace treaty and will refrain from any attempt to further alter the new Ukrainian borders through new wars of conquest and military intervention or retaliation.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 15
International monitoring of strict adherence to all parts of the peace treaty and their review.

Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Russia
§ 16
With the support of many nations lifting sanctions against Russia after signing and keeping the Peace Treaty

All countries that have imposed sanctions on Russia will, after Putin's signature under this peace treaty and on the condition of Russia's full compliance with it, lift all sanctions against Russia.

These sanctions will be reinstated and upheld, however, if and when Russia does not abide by all the terms of this peace pact.

Signatures of Putin, Zelensky, NATO representatives, and representatives of all countries that have imposed sanctions on Russia.

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[i] Upon request to jmmbseifert12@gmail.com, the full text of both peace proposals can be obtained, with more comments and arguments in favor of each article of the proposed Peace Treaty.

[ii] The referendums on secession in Donetsk and Luhansk took place on May 11, 2014. These referendums were organized by pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) following the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

The official question on the ballot asked whether voters supported the "state independence" of their respective regions. According to the organizers, the results showed an overwhelming majority in favor of secession.

[iii] Think, for example, of the great Ukrainian author of Taras Bulba, written in his native tongue, Nikolai Gogol, whose Russian works "The Overcoat" and "Dead Souls" were the seminal works of the great Russian literature of the 19th century.

[iv] LGBTQ+ pride parades are held and authorized in Ukraine, whereas in Russia, they are generally banned.

Ukraine has gradually moved toward greater tolerance and legal recognition of LGBTQ rights, particularly since 2014, when the country began aligning more closely with the EU's most liberal ethical standards. While there is still social resistance and occasional counterprotests, pride parades have been held in major cities like Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odesa.

Kyiv Pride is the largest event and has taken place annually since 2013 (except during wartime). It receives police protection, and Ukrainian authorities have progressively supported LGBTQ+ rights within the framework of European integration.

In some cities, authorities have refused to allow parades due to security concerns, but in general, Ukraine does not outright ban them.

In Russia, LGBTQ+ pride events are effectively prohibited under laws such as:

The 2013 "gay propaganda" law, which bans the promotion of "non-traditional sexual relations" to minors, makes it difficult to hold public LGBTQ+ events.

The 2022 expansion of the law criminalizes any positive portrayal or promotion of LGBTQ+ identities in public, media, and advertising. Russian authorities routinely deny permits for pride marches, and attempts to hold them often result in arrests and crackdowns by police. Key Differences: Ukraine, despite ongoing social challenges, allows LGBTQ+ pride parades under democratic freedoms, while Russia enforces strict bans and legal persecution of LGBTQ+ activism.

[v] The permission of secession of member states (Brexit) from the EU and, even more so, the new constitution of the Principality of Liechtenstein provide shining examples of the recognition of the rights to independence and thus also to secession. In the EU, the right of secession or withdrawal is applied and respected, as evidenced by the case of Brexit.

The right of municipalities in Liechtenstein to secede has been enshrined in the constitution since the 2003 constitutional reform. This amendment established that each municipality has the right to decide by democratic decision on its secession from the Principality.

The constitutional reform expanded the rights of the prince, but it also strengthened the right of self-determination of the municipalities, including the right to leave the country if the majority of the citizens of a municipality so decide.

[vi] Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the former German Foreign Minister, made several remarks in the early 1990s regarding NATO's eastward expansion, particularly in the context of German reunification and negotiations with the Soviet Union. One of his most significant statements came in 1990, when he assured Soviet leaders that NATO would not expand eastward if Germany were reunified.

On February 2, 1990, in a speech in Tutzing, Bavaria, Genscher stated:

"What is certain is that NATO will not expand to the east." This statement was interpreted as a reassurance to the Soviet Union that NATO would not extend beyond the newly unified Germany. This position was echoed in diplomatic talks at the time.

During discussions with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, Genscher also reportedly emphasized that NATO should not move closer to Soviet borders, especially into Eastern Europe. Declassified documents later showed that Western leaders, including Genscher, communicated similar messages to the Soviet leadership, but these statements never became legally binding commitments.

[vii] This narrative claims as proofs the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, the presence of Russian soldiers and weapons in the Separatists' seizure of government buildings and some cities in the Donbass, as well as in counterattacks of the provinces against the Ukrainian government's "anti-terrorist operations" against them, and the early Russian recognition of the two independent republics.

These facts, however, only prove Russia's support for the provinces' fight for independence, later confirmed by the war in 2022, but not in the least that the movement for autonomy and secession did not originate in the two provinces themselves.

[viii] I present them here in the excellent summary of ChatGPT:

There are several arguments supporting the idea that the independence movement in Donetsk and Luhansk originated primarily from local forces and popular support, rather than being an artificial creation of Russia. These arguments suggest that the conflict initially was an intra-Ukrainian civil war before Russia later became more directly involved.

1. *Longstanding Regional Identity and Soviet Nostalgia*

Donetsk and Luhansk historically had strong economic and cultural ties to Russia, with a population that largely spoke Russian and identified with Soviet heritage.

Many residents opposed the nationalist policies of post-1991 Ukraine, particularly efforts to prioritize the Ukrainian language and culture over Russian.

The regions overwhelmingly supported pro-Russian politicians like Viktor Yanukovych, and his ousting in the 2014 Maidan Revolution was perceived as a coup against their interests.

2. *Local Reaction to the Maidan Revolution (2014)*

The Euromaidan protests and the overthrow of Yanukovych (a Donetsk native) led to fears in eastern Ukraine that the new government would impose nationalist policies hostile to the use of Russian in schools and public life.

Protests erupted across southeastern Ukraine in early 2014, with demonstrations in Kharkiv, Odessa, Donetsk, and Luhansk. This suggests that the initial unrest had a local basis rather than being purely instigated by Russia.

3. *Referendums in Donetsk and Luhansk (May 2014)*

Unrecognized referendums were held in both regions, with high reported turnout and majorities allegedly voting for independence. Although Western and Ukrainian sources dispute their legitimacy, the fact that such votes occurred indicates at least some level of local initiative.

Even if Russian support played a role, it does not negate the possibility that significant portions of the population genuinely supported secession.

4. *Fighting Against the Ukrainian Military Before Large-Scale Russian Intervention*

Before large-scale Russian military assistance, local militia groups fought against Ukrainian forces in 2014.

Ukrainian military offensives, particularly in the summer of 2014, faced strong resistance from local fighters, suggesting that the movement was not just Russian-directed but had genuine support.

The Ukrainian "Anti-Terrorist Operation" (ATO) was framed as a campaign against rebels within Ukraine, reinforcing the notion that the conflict was internal.

5. *Diversity of Rebel Leadership and Forces*

While some leaders of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR/LNR) had connections to Russia, others were locals, including former Ukrainian security officers and activists.

Russian volunteers participated in the fighting, but so did many locals who opposed Kyiv’s authority. The presence of some Russian fighters does not necessarily mean the rebellion was entirely Russian-led.

6. *Minsk Agreements and Ukraine’s Acknowledgment of a Civil Conflict*

The 2015 Minsk Agreements, which were negotiated between Ukraine and the separatist republics (with Russia, Germany, and France as mediators), implicitly recognized that the Donbas regions were parties to the conflict rather than simply Russian proxies.

If Ukraine had viewed the conflict solely as a war against Russia, it might not have agreed to negotiations that included the leadership of the DNR/LNR.

7. *Ukraine's Own Internal Divisions*

A substantial number of people in eastern Ukraine viewed the post-2014 government in Kyiv as illegitimate, not just because of Russian propaganda but due to longstanding political, linguistic, and economic grievances.

Some Ukrainian politicians (such as Viktor Medvedchuk) promoted federalization, reflecting local desires for greater autonomy even before the war began.

Conclusion

While Russia undoubtedly played a significant role in supporting the Donbass insurgency—through military aid, fighters, and later official recognition—the argument that the conflict was initially an inter-Ukrainian civil war rests on substantial evidence. The combination of regional identity, dissatisfaction with the post-Maidan government, local resistance to Ukrainian military offensives, and early separatist activity, prior to large-scale Russian intervention, suggests that the movement had substantial internal roots. In this view, Russia did not create the conflict but capitalized on and later escalated an already existing intra-Ukrainian division."

[ix] March 18, 2014, Russia officially signed a treaty incorporating Crimea into the Russian Federation.

March 21, 2014 – The Russian parliament (Duma) formally ratified the annexation.