

After referendums in Donbas “people’s republics,” Kherson & Zaporizhzhia, Putin and leaders of the four entities sign accession treaties



Russian President Putin and heads of Kherson & Zaporizhzhia occupied territories and Donetsk & Luhansk “people’s republics” signing accession treaties today.

On Sept. 20, in the wake of Ukraine’s success in retaking from Russia a substantial amount of territory in the northeastern region of Kharkiv, thwarting an effort by Russia to move westward from the territory it held in Kherson region, and denying Russia any further gains in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine, the leaders of the Donetsk and Luhansk “people’s republics” and the Russian occupation authorities in the portions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions held by Russia announced their decision to hold referendums on becoming constituent territories of the Russian Federation. The synchronized decision was, of course, orchestrated by Russia.

Later that day, Russian President Vladimir Putin recorded a message, televised the next morning, on the situation in the Donbas and the “special military operation” launched on February 24 to “liberate it from the neo-Nazi regime, which seized power in Ukraine in 2014 as the result of an armed state coup.” Speaking of “our brothers and sisters in the Donetsk and Lugansk people’s republics, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions and other areas that have been liberated from the neo-Nazi regime,” he said, “the issue concerns the necessary, imperative measures to protect the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Russia and support the desire and will of our compatriots to choose their future independently, and the aggressive policy of some Western elites, who are doing their utmost to preserve their domination and...weaken, divide and ultimately destroy our country.” Claiming “we have no moral right to let our kin and kith be torn to pieces by butchers; we cannot but respond to their sincere striving to decide their destiny on their own,” and noting that “the parliaments of the Donbass people’s republics and the military-civilian administrations of the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions have adopted decisions to hold referendums on the future of their territories and have appealed to Russia to support this,” he said, “I would like to emphasise that we will do everything necessary to create safe conditions

for these referendums so that people can express their will. And we will support the choice of future made by the majority of people in the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics and the Zaporozhye and Kherson regions.”

The referendums in the four areas were scheduled for five days from last Friday through this past Tuesday. They were, as French President Emmanuel Macron said, “a travesty...the height of cynicism.” Many potential voters had fled to safer locations and many others had been killed or wounded in Russian attacks on apartment buildings, schools, and hospitals or in Ukrainian counter-attacks, which meant it would be impossible to calculate any realistic measure of the number of potential voters and hence the proportion of the voters who approved the proposal to become part of the Russian Federation. And as if that weren't sufficient to deprive the referendums of any legitimacy, many of the voters who participated in the referendums did so after having been visited by Russian troops carrying a box in which the vote would be deposited; they were, indeed, voting while looking at the barrel of a gun.

Not surprisingly, the referendums produced overwhelming majorities in favor of joining the Russian Federation as a constituent entity. In the Donetsk People's Republic, Russia's Central Election Commission reported that 99.23 percent of the voters had voted in favor of becoming part of Russia and the turnout was 97.5 percent. In Luhansk, the CEC said that 98.4 percent of the voters had voted in favor of joining Russia and the turnout was 94.2 percent. In Zaporizhzhia, where the Russian occupation authorities created an election commission in July, that commission reported that 93.1 percent of the voters had voted in favor of joining Russia and the turnout was 85.4 percent. And in Kherson, in which the Russian occupation authorities, like their colleagues in Zaporizhzhia, had created an election commission in July, that commission reported that 87.1 percent of the voters had voted in favor of joining Russia and the turnout was 78.9 percent.

On Feb.21, Russia's 30-member Security Council agreed that Russia should, as the leaders of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and the Russian Duma had requested, recognize their sovereignty and independence, after which Putin signed executive orders recognizing the sovereignty and independence of both. Today, Putin signed executive orders, effective today, recognizing the sovereignty and independence of the Kherson Region and the Zaporozhye Region. And in a meeting today with the leaders of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and the leaders of the Russian occupation authorities in Kherson and Zaporozhye regions, Putin and each leader signed an accession treaty by which, when ratified, the leader's entity will become a constituent part of the Russian Federation. The Constitutional Court must approve the incorporation of the entities into the Russian Federation and, assuming it does, the State Duma and the Federation Council, the two chambers of Russia's Federal Assembly, will then approve the accession treaties. Both chambers are expected to ratify the treaties on Tuesday.

Before the signing of the accession treaties, Putin gave a speech in which he reiterated once again his view that the 1991 decision to terminate the USSR as a territorial entity was a “national catastrophe” and made it clear, in calling on Ukraine to return to the negotiating table, that today's decision to incorporate the four areas as constituent entities of the Russian Federation is not negotiable. He said he had no doubt that the Federal Assembly will approve the

establishment of the four new regions as constituent entities of the Russian Federation “because this is the will of millions of people. It is undoubtedly their right, an inherent right sealed in Article 1 of the UN Charter, which directly states the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. I repeat, it is an inherent right of the people. It is based on our historical affinity,,... Behind the choice of millions of residents in the Donetsk and Lugansk peoples’ republics, in the Zaporozhye and Kherson regions, is our common destiny and thousand-year history....In 1991 in Belovezhskaya Pushcha [where the presidents of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian republics agreed to terminate the USSR] representatives of the party elite of that time made a decision to terminate the Soviet Union, without asking ordinary citizens what they wanted...This tore apart and dismembered our national community and triggered a national catastrophe.” And then returning to the present, he said, “For eight long years, people in Donbass were subjected to genocide, shelling and blockades; in Kherson and Zaporozhye, a criminal policy was pursued to cultivate hatred of Russia, for everything Russian....But the people of Donbass, Zaporozhye and Kherson weren’t broken, and they had their say. I want the Kiev authorities and their true handlers in the West to hear me now, and I want everyone to remember this: the people living in Lugansk and Donetsk, in Kherson and Zaporozhye have become our citizens, forever.”

Continuing, he said, “We call on the Kiev regime to immediately cease fire and all hostilities; to end the war it unleashed back in 2014 and return to the negotiating table. We are ready for this, as we have said more than once. But the choice of the people in Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson will not be discussed. The decision has been made, and Russia will not betray it. Kiev’s current authorities should respect this free expression of the people’s will; there is no other way. This is the only way to peace.” And he made it clear, once again as he did in his “This is not a bluff” speech last week, that “We will defend our land with all the forces and resources we have, and we will do everything we can to ensure the safety of our people.”

Putin didn’t repeat the words with which he concluded his speech last week. But he didn’t have to; those who read or heard today’s speech no doubt remember them very well: “The West has gone too far in its aggressive anti-Russia policy, making endless threats to our country and people. Some irresponsible Western politicians are doing more than just speak about their plans to organize the delivery of long-range offensive weapons to Ukraine, which could be used to deliver strikes at Crimea and other Russian regions...Washington, London and Brussels are openly encouraging Kiev to move the hostilities to our territory. They openly say that Russia must be defeated on the battlefield by any means...They have even resorted to the nuclear blackmail. I am referring not only to the Western-encouraged shelling of the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant, which poses a threat of a nuclear disaster, but also to the statements made by some high-ranking representatives of the leading NATO countries on the possibility and admissibility of using weapons of mass destruction – nuclear weapons – against Russia. I would like to remind those who make such statements regarding Russia that our country has different types of weapons as well, and some of them are more modern than the weapons NATO countries have. In the event of a threat to the territorial integrity of our country and to defend Russia and our people, we will certainly make use of all weapon systems available to us. This is not a bluff.”

The question now, of course, is how will Ukraine and the West respond to today's land-grab.

David R. Cameron
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