



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MEDIATION

"Fostering a culture of peace among ethnic and religious groups"

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U.S. 501 (c) (3) tax exempt public charity, nonprofit and non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

MEDIATION ACADEMY

Specialized Mediation Training The Mediation of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts

Mediation Project

Mediation Case Study (Developed by Manuel Mas Cabrera, Summer 2018)

Proposed Case Study: Separatism in Eastern Ukraine - The Status of the Donbass

What Happened? Historical Background to the Conflict

In the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Elections, during which the Orange Revolution occurred, the east voted for Viktor Yanukovich, a favorite of Moscow. Western Ukraine voted for Viktor Yushchenko, who favored stronger ties to the West. In the runoff vote, there were allegations of voter fraud in the neighborhood of 1 million extra votes in favor of the pro-Russian candidate, so Yushchenko's supporters went to the streets in order to demand the results be annulled. This was backed by the EU and the US. Russia obviously supported Yanukovich, and the Ukrainian supreme court ruled that a repeat needed to occur.

Fast forward to 2010, and Yushchenko was succeeded by Yanukovich in an election deemed fair. 4 years of a corrupt and pro-Russian government later, during the Euromaidan revolution, the events were followed by a series of changes in Ukraine's sociopolitical system, including the formation of a new interim government, the restoration of the previous constitution, and a call to hold presidential elections. Opposition to the Euromaidan resulted in

the annexation of the Crimea, the invasion of eastern Ukraine by Russia, and re-awakened separatist sentiment in the Donbass.

Each Other's Stories – How Each Group Understands the Situation and Why

Donbass Separatists' Story

Position: The Donbass, including Donetsk and Luhansk, should be free to declare independence and self-govern themselves, as they ultimately have their own interests at heart.

Interests:

Legitimacy of the Government: We consider the events of February 18-20, 2014, to be an illegitimate takeover of power and hijacking of a protest movement by rightwing Ukrainian nationalists. The immediate support the nationalists received from the West suggests that this was a ploy to reduce a Pro-Russian government's hold on power. The rightwing Ukrainian government's actions to weaken the role of Russian as the second language through the attempted annulment of the law concerning regional languages and the dismissal of most separatists as foreign supported terrorists, make us conclude that the current administration of Petro Poroshenko does not take into account our concerns in the government.

Cultural Preservation: We consider ourselves ethnically distinct from Ukrainians, as we were once part of Russia before 1991. A good amount of us in the Donbass (16 percent), think we should be totally independent and a similar amount believe we should have enhanced autonomy. Our linguistic rights should be respected.

Economic Well-Being: Potential ascension of the Ukraine into the European Union would have negative effects upon our Soviet-era manufacturing base in the east, as inclusion in the Common Market would expose us to debilitating competition from cheaper manufacturing from Western Europe. In addition, the austerity measures often supported by the EU bureaucracy often have wealth destroying effects upon the economies of newly accepted members. For these

reasons, we wish to operate within the Customs Union with Russia.

Precedent: Just as with the former Soviet Union, there have been many examples of functioning nations being created after the dissolution of larger, ethnically diverse states. Cases such as Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo provide examples we could follow. We appeal to those precedents in arguing our case for independence from Kiev.

Ukrainian Unity - The Donbass should remain part of Ukraine.

Position: The Donbass is an integral part of Ukraine and should not secede. Instead, it should seek to solve its problems within the current governing structure of Ukraine.

Interests:

Legitimacy of Process: The referendums held in Crimea and the Donbass did not have approval from Kiev and are thus illegal. In addition, the support of Russia for eastern separatism makes us believe that the unrest in the Donbass is primarily caused by a Russian desire to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty, and thus the demands of the separatists are akin to the demands of Russia.

Cultural Preservation: We recognize that Ukraine has ethnic differences, but we believe that the best way forward for both of our peoples is through continued centralization within the same nation-state. We have, since independence in 1991, recognized Russian as an important regional language. We further recognize that only around 16 percent of Donbass residents, according to the 2014 Kiev International Institute of Sociology survey, support outright independence.

Economic Well-Being: Ukraine joining the European Union would be an easy way to get better paying jobs and wages for our economy, including raising the minimum wage. Integrating with the EU would also improve the strength of our democratic government and fight against the corruption affecting our daily lives. We believe that the European Union provides us the best avenue for our development.

Precedent: The Donbass is not the first region to express an interest in separatism from a larger nation state. Throughout history, other sub-state national units have expressed separatist tendencies that have either been subdued or induced away. We believe separatism can be prevented like in the case of the Basque region of Spain, which no longer supports an independentist orientation *vis-à-vis* Spain.