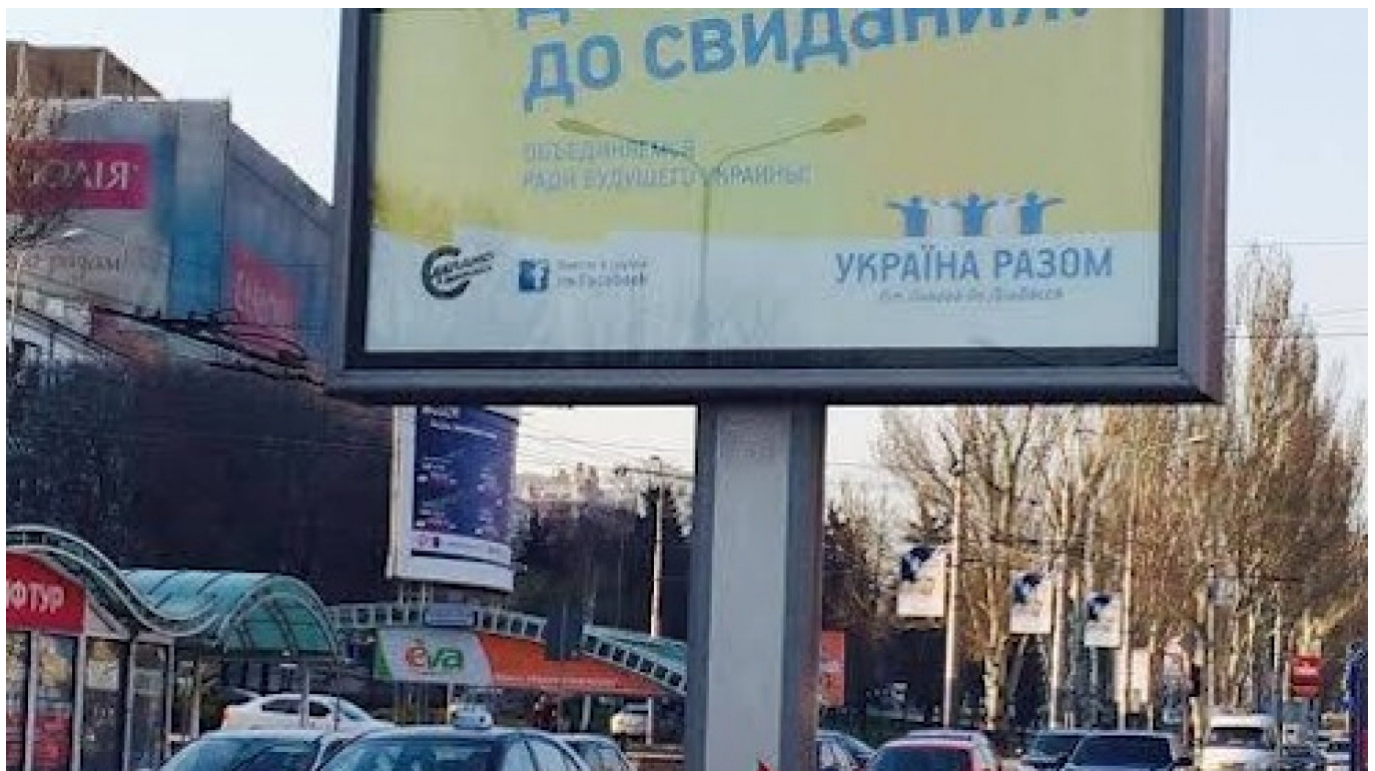


Donetsk Billboard Bids 'Goodbye' to Russia Ahead of Unity Rally

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A billboard in Donetsk, east Ukraine, bids farewell to Russia.

A billboard bidding farewell to Russia has been erected in the center of the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk ahead of a national unity rally planned for April 12, a news report has said.

"Russia, go on, goodbye!" read the text, printed on a yellow background — one of the colors of the Ukrainian flag. The word "Russia" was written in red, while the rest of the message was printed in blue — another color of the Ukrainian flag.

The billboard was timed to mark the national "Chain of Unity" action, planned for April 12, organizers said, Ukraine's TSN.ua reported Wednesday.

Activists have been urging Ukrainians to take to the streets on that day in a show of national unity following Russia's annexation of Crimea, ostensibly carried out to protect the rights of Russian speakers there.

Donetsk, an industrial city with a large Russian-speaking population, has seen a series of rival

rallies by pro-Moscow and pro-Ukrainian demonstrators, with some of the confrontations turning violent.

Activists from Pro-Ukrainian political parties and movements in the Donbass region, where Donetsk is located, had earlier painted stone columns, stanchions and trees along a 3-kilometer stretch of the city's central Ilyich Prospect in the blue and yellow colors of the national flag, TSN.ua reported.

In the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea last month, Internet users in Donetsk also proposed holding a mock "referendum" on whether their hometown should secede to the U.K., as Donetsk was founded by a 19th-century British industrialist.

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