

Russian Soprano Netrebko Shocks by Posing With Ukraine Separatist Flag

By [The Moscow Times](#)

December 10, 2014



Opera singer Anna Netrebko and Oleg Tsaryov, former deputy of the Ukrainian parliament and pro-Russian politician, hold a flag of Novorossiya (New Russia) during a charitable ceremony and press conference in St. Petersburg.

Russian soprano Anna Netrebko, one of the biggest names in international opera, has stirred controversy by posing with the flag of Ukraine's pro-Russian rebels and making a donation to the opera house in the separatists' main stronghold, Donetsk.

Netrebko said on Facebook she had not recognized the flag of "Novorossiya," or New Russia, when she posed alongside a rebel official on Sunday and entrusted him with the donation of 1 million rubles (\$18,439).

"The presence of the flag was unplanned and caught me off guard; I actually did not recognize it at first and realized only later what it was," the diva said.

Oleg Tsaryov, the rebel official, published a photo of the encounter on his Twitter feed, prompting strong reactions on Netrebko's Facebook page. While some fans exclaimed "Bravo!" other comments voiced disgust and called her stupid or naive.

There was criticism from Austria, where Netrebko lives and has dual citizenship.

"Her meeting with a separatist leader and having a photo taken in front of a separatist flag is highly problematic," an Austrian foreign ministry spokesman said. "Given the really difficult situation we are facing in Ukraine, this is anything but helpful."

Netrebko said her donation to the opera house in Donetsk was not about politics.

"I simply want the fighting to end as soon as possible, and I want to support art and artists in a time of terrible conflict," she said, describing her own heritage as both Russian and Ukrainian.

The United Nations says more than 4,300 people have been killed in eight months of conflict between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian rebels in the east of the former Soviet republic.

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