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Lavrov: Russia Not Pushing for Ukraine's Federalization

By The Moscow Times

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov

Russia has no plans to annex war-torn eastern Ukraine, whose fate is for Ukrainians to decide, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said.

"We are not suggesting federalization [of Ukraine], we're not suggesting autonomy," Lavrov said in an interview to France-24 television channel aired Tuesday.

"It's for Ukrainians to decide," the minister said in an English-language interview.

Lavrov explicitly advocated Ukraine's federalization in March, before a pro-Russian insurgency broke out in the eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

In the France-24 interview, his only insistence was that Ukraine needs Constitutional reform, with representatives of political parties and regions deciding on how to select regional leaders.

The proposal echoes calls for said "federalization" of Ukraine, meant to give greater independence to Donetsk and Luhansk.

The insurgents campaigned to secede and join Russia, which has been accused of backing them with money, arms and troops, but denied it and refused to annex the regions.

In March, Russia annexed Crimea after an armed invasion followed by a referendum.

But Lavrov said on France-24 that Crimea was "unique" and an "exception."

Ukraine is currently a unitarian state where the central government in Kiev appoints regional leaders, to the chagrin of many in the predominantly Russian-speaking east.

But critics said federalization, which was proposed to include the regions' right to influence foreign politics, could give Russia leverage against Kiev through proxy regional governments in eastern Ukraine.

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