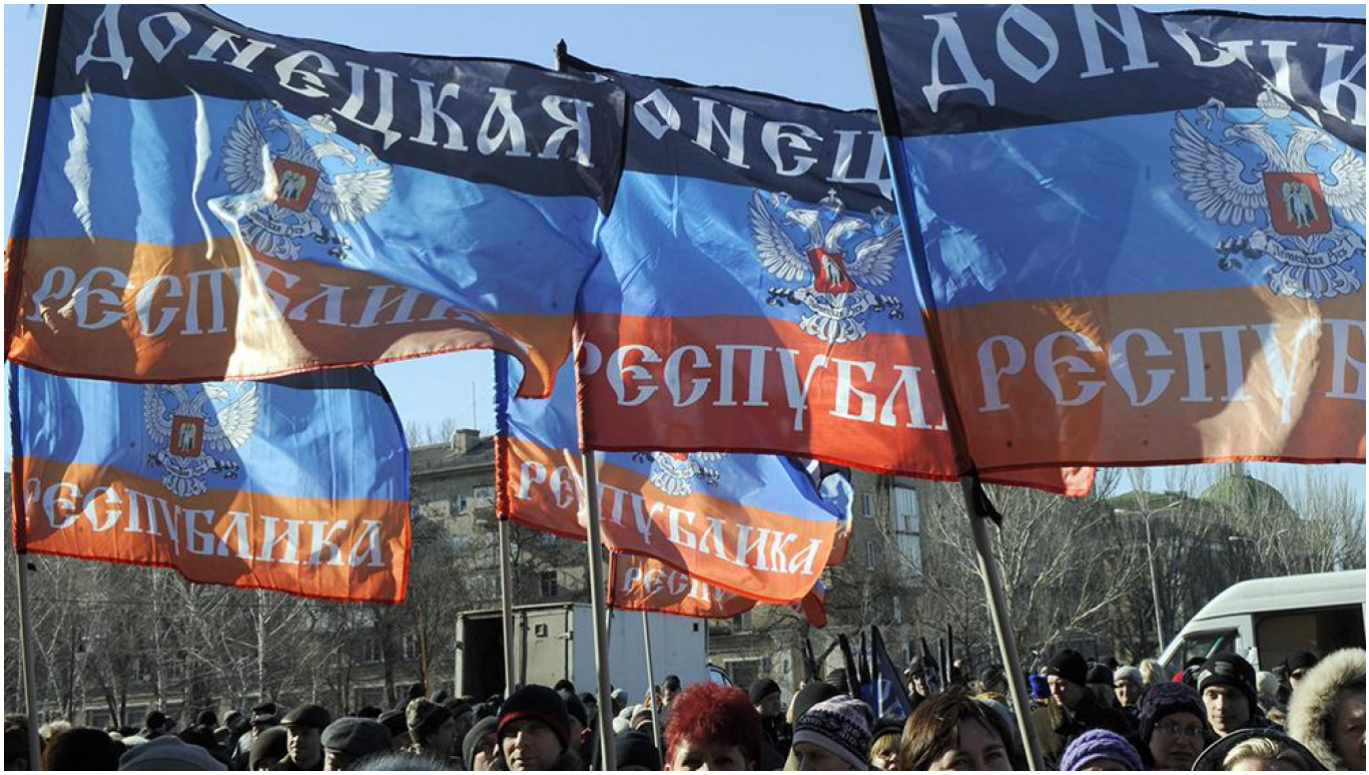
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30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Less Than Half of Russians Surveyed Back Kremlin Support for Ukraine Separatists

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People hold flags of the Donetsk People's Republic (Alexander Khudateply / TASS)

Forty-one percent of surveyed Russians believe Moscow should support separatists in Ukraine's Donbass region, according to a new poll published by the independent Levada Center.

Moscow has been accused of supporting pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine since then-president Viktor Yanukovych was toppled in February 2014. The ensuing conflict between Kiev and separatists in eastern Ukraine has claimed the lives of more than ten thousand people, according to UN estimates.

Thirty-seven percent of those surveyed by Levada said Moscow should be a neutral party in the conflict. Only 6 percent said Moscow should support the Kiev government in the conflict with the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics.

Levada Center sociologist Stepan Goncharov told the RBC outlet that the forty-one percent support for the self-proclaimed eastern Ukrainian republics of Donetsk and Luhansk is relatively high despite the overall cooling of interest among Russians on the subject of Ukraine.

The joint poll by the Levada Center and Kiev International Institute of Sociology research firm also showed continuing tension between Russians and Ukrainians.

Between May and September of this year, the percentage of Russians surveyed with positive views of Ukraine jumped six percentage points to thirty-two percent. Ukrainians with a positive view of Russia, on the other hand, dropped six percentage points to thirty-seven percent.

Around two-thirds of those surveyed described Russia's annexation of the Black Sea peninsula of Crimea as more beneficial than harmful.

Levada's survey was carried out among 1,600 Russians on Sept. 15-19 in 137 towns and cities across 48 Russian regions. The margin of error did not exceed 3.4 percent.

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