

Rebel Leader Says East Ukraine Wants to Join Russia

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Denis Pushilin **Valentin Sprinchak / TASS**

The head of one of eastern Ukraine's breakaway regions has said his separatist-held republic wants to join Russia as a full-fledged member.

The Donetsk and Luhansk regions, collectively known as the Donbass, are combat zones between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian military in a conflict that broke out in April 2014. More than 13,000 people have been [killed](#) in the war, and the sides regularly accuse each other of violating an internationally brokered ceasefire there.

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"The Donbass must return to its homeland as a full member," Denis Pushilin, the head of Donetsk, [said](#) in an interview with local media on Sunday. "The Donbass looks toward Russia today."

Sunday marked the fifth anniversary of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, known equally by the abbreviations DNR and DPR. Russia [recognizes](#) passports issued in the separatist-held areas, and the Russian ruble is already a commonly used currency.

Addressing the flag-waving crowd that day, Pushilin said the DNR's main goal is to accede to Russia like Crimea did in 2014.

"Of course we'd like the integration to go faster," Pushilin [said](#). "But we understand there are geopolitical implications, and we know our path is thornier [than Crimea's], yet the goal is clear and we're getting there."

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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