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By Sabra Ayres

Pro-Russia militias say they know what they want. But do they? Militants occupying government buildings across eastern Ukraine are clear in their calls for 'federalization.' When pressed on what that means, though, things get murky.

Проросійські загони самооборони стверджують, що знають, чого хочуть

Бойовики, що займають урядові будівлі в східній Україні ясні у своїх закликах до 'федералізації'. Проте при більш детальному уточненні, що це означає, все встає не таким однозначним.

Багато жителів сходу країни, що підтримують сепаратистський рух, визначають себе як "українців"- українців, яким набридло те, що вони вважали халатністю в управлінні їх індустріальним регіоном, де сильна ностальгія по колишньому Радянському Союзу. Навіть якщо приєднання до Росії не є для них оптимальним варіантом, в регіоні великою повагою користується сильна рука російського президента Володимира Путіна, - йдеться в статті.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/0424/Pro-Russia-militias-say-they-know-what-they-want.-But-do-they-video>

DONETSK, Ukraine

Vladimir Makovich, the speaker of the self-described Donetsk Republic's council knows what he wants: a referendum that will lead to the "federalization" of Donetsk.

Ukrainian forces launch an operation Thursday to drive pro-Russia insurgents out of occupied buildings in the country's tumultuous east, prompting new threats from...



"The referendum will be good for the east and south, because it will ensure that no one else in the country can decide where we should go and what we should do," he says.

But when pressed on the details – How will they go about holding the referendum? What will it ask? What would "federalization" even mean for the region? – he is far less certain how to respond. And he is not alone.

Despite largely uniform calls for a referendum on "federalization" of Ukraine, the anti-Kiev protesters now occupying government buildings across the restive Donbas region in eastern Ukraine don't appear to have a plan for how to bring that about – or even what their realized goal might look like. And because of a lack of governmental infrastructure and a dearth of the expertise to enact the necessary logistics, their goals appear to be out of reach without help.

"I would say that most people have no idea how this federalization concept would work here," says Tatyana Nagornyak, a political science professor at Donetsk National University. "The concept is too confusing and most people are assuming that it would be like the Russian Federation. But that also is not a true federation in reality."

A fractured movement

The interim central government in Kiev has said that it is willing to consider decentralization of Ukraine and allow regions to elect their own local governments, among other conditions. The Kiev-appointed governor, Sergei Taruta, this week suggested Ukraine conduct a nationwide referendum on decentralizing the country's governance system. Mr. Taruta also proposed that holding the referendum on the same day as the presidential election, May 25, thereby facilitating the referendum with the logistical means – and some say the legal validity – to be implemented.

But the Kiev-approved suggestion was rejected by the headquarters of the Donetsk Republic on the 11th floor of the occupied Donetsk region administration – from which Taruta was ousted on April 6. The "people's republic" insists it will hold its version of a referendum no later than May 11, most likely with a question that asks, "Do you support the sovereignty of the Donetsk Republic?"

A similar question was posed in Crimea's referendum on March 16, which eventually led to Russia's annexation of the peninsula.

But eastern Ukraine differs from Crimea in many ways in this scenario. In Crimea, the Russian-backed regional parliament had the infrastructure to conduct a referendum vote

for millions of Crimeans. About 60 percent of the population identified itself as ethnically Russian, meaning the outcome was somewhat of a foregone conclusion.

In Donetsk and Luhansk, a neighboring oblast east of Donetsk where pro-Russia separatists are also occupying buildings and hoping for a referendum, the scenario is not as clear-cut. There is a broad spectrum of opinions on the question of joining Russia, federalization of Ukraine, or creating an independent Donbas. And there is no central leadership across the pro-Russia separatists holding the police stations and government buildings across the region.

There are still many easterners supporting the separatist movement who identify themselves as Ukrainians, albeit Ukrainians who are fed up with what they see as Kiev's negligence in adequately governing their industrialized region, where nostalgia for the former Soviet Union runs high. Even if joining Russia is not their first choice, there is a lot of respect in the region for the strong hand of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"The Ukrainian government never invested in our factories and mines here, which are in terrible shape and very unsafe," says Dima Medvedchuk, one of a group of pro-Russia activists standing in front of the city hall in Yenikivo, ousted President Viktor Yanukovich's hometown. Mr. Medvedchuk supports a referendum on federalization, so that an independent Donbas region within Ukraine could decide all of their own financial problems without Kiev's meddling.

"No, no. We should be part of the Russian Federation," argues Ruslan, another in the group who declined to give his last name for fear the Ukrainian authorities would arrest him as a separatist. "Only one leader can come in here and rebuild our mines and factories: [Vladimir] Putin, and he'll do it very quickly. He should be the president here."

Shaking her head at the young men outside the building, Galina Horebayets says "We don't need to join Russia. Kiev just needs to listen to us." Ms. Horebayets describes herself as Ukrainian, but also supports a referendum, though she admits she doesn't know exactly what it should decide.

'Nothing to lose'

A reoccurring theme in the east is the call for "order and stability." Indeed, lawlessness seems to have taken root in some of cities and towns where pro-Russia separatists have taken over buildings.

"The fear is now that we have these very angry groups of people who are also very poor, very scared, and in many cases, armed," says Ms. Nagornyak, the political science professor. "They were easily manipulated by Russian media, who's been playing into their fears and desperation by feeding them with the idea that they need saving."

The groups claim to be "controlling" these economically depressed cities, they have no experience in political strategy, and so they are unable to answer a lot of the questions about what their demands are exactly, she says.

"What's worrying is that they simply have nothing to lose in these scenarios," Nagornyak says. "They have nothing, and they have nothing to lose. So, when they say they will fight to the death, they mean it."