Eastern and Southern Ukraine's Right to Secede and Join the Russian Federation: A Secessionist Manifesto

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Abstract

This article aims to answer a multi-faceted question: do the people occupying the region of Eastern and Southern Ukraine have the right to secede from Ukraine and merge with the Russian Federation? It also evaluates the legal status of the economic sanctions imposed upon the Russian Federation for its alleged interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine.

Public International Law provides no definitive answer to the first question, although “conventional wisdom” denies a right of secession. The denial turns primarily on two United Nations General Assembly Resolutions: (1) the UN General Assembly Declaration on Decolonisation, and (2) the UN General Assembly’s Declaration on Friendly Relations of 1970, and the creation of “law by fiat”.³ The matter is exacerbated by the claim that the term “people” used in relevant international covenants recognising a “right of self-determination” is insusceptible of definition. Historical illustrations of secession, falling short of statistical validity, and competing legal theories among scholars, further confound the meaning of legal texts.

By contrast, public international law arguably provides a definitive answer to the second question. Without a United Nations (U.N.) Security Council Resolution, members of the U.N. may not impose economic sanctions against another member state to cause a change in the internal affairs of that state. In the case of the Russian Federation; the economic sanctions imposed against the Russian Federation primarily by the United States (U.S.) and the European Union (E.U.) constitute violations of public international law.

This article proceeds from the assumption that the international legal system does not repose on a foundation of empirical validity, but rather upon sets of authoritative statements, insusceptible of verification.⁴ In this context, the article seeks to construct an argument, based upon best interpretive practices, canons of statutory construction partially embodied in the “Vienna Convention On The Law Of Treaties” of 1969, and the implied right of secession contained in the UN General Assembly’s Declaration on Friendly Relations of 1970. International Court of Justice (ICJ) decisions and historical incidents of secession are used in support of the argument.

This article makes no pretension that its “reasoning” is correct, since that claim would contravene the basic premise that law, to borrow a phrase, is not only a

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4 Richard Posner, The Problems of Jurisprudence Cambridge, 119, MA: Harvard University Press (1990) (stating that jurisprudence is not a science because law is not concerned solely with the search for truth.)
“dismal science”, but no science at all. Rather, the ambition of the article is modest: to construct an argument based upon interpreting documents in their “best light”, without getting bogged down in traditional doctrinal analysis, or the mud of history.\(^7\)

**Preliminary Remarks**

The separatists in the East and South Ukraine arguably have not stated their ultimate goal: (1) Autonomy within Ukraine under the form of a federated government; (2) Complete secession; or (3) Secession combined with the objective to join the Russian Federation. This obfuscation introduces an obstacle in speaking of a right of secession for East and South Ukraine. In spite of these constraints, the authors speculate that, given six months of civil war, the “Odessa Massacre”, and the increasing anti-separatist polemics of the Kiev government, including threats of a Great Patriotic War, are unlikely to accept anything less than a total separation from Ukraine. The self-proclaimed People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk [DPR and LPR] speak about a common space of security and post-war reconstruction ties with the Republic of Ukraine.\(^5\) However, this article written on shifting sands of facts, assumes for purposes of argument, that the political objective of the “separatists” is secession from Ukraine and ultimate integration with the Russian Federation.

The role of third party states has not been established with any degree of reliability although, in the absence of proof, the U.S./E.U. alliance condemns the Russian Federation’s intervention in the dispute. This perception purportedly justifies the imposition of economic sanctions against the Russian Federation aiming to cause a change in its foreign policy.

**Flow Chart of Argument**

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Many scholars have written on secession, self-determination, and sovereignty. However, the publications repose upon declarative statement, mainly of “experts”, dead or alive, non-definitive decisions of the ICJ, and references to unsettled state practice or norms. This article uses Christopher J. Borgen’s, *Thawing a Frozen Conflict: Legal Aspects of the Separatist Crisis in Moldova: A Report from the Association of the Bar of the City of New York [Borgen Report or BR]*, as the “citadel” to assail since the publication represents a substantial work and a purported accurate statement of public international law on the “right of secession”. The Borgen Report examined the conflict between the Government of Moldova and the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic” [TMR] located between the Dniestr River and the border of Ukraine. The Borgen Report concluded that the TMR lacked a right to secession. Four fissures in the Borgen Report cast doubt upon its argument and conclusion.

First, the analysis of the Borgen Report is cabined within well-established norms of public international law contained in the United Nations Charter: all states are sovereign and equal; no state has the right to intervene in the internal affairs of another state; and frictions within a state are domestic matters within the exclusive competence of the state to resolve. These starting premises not surprisingly make the road to secession a difficult odyssey. While the report acknowledges that public international law is virtually silent on the right of secession, the implications of “silence” are not fully delineated in the Borgen Report.

Second, the historical discussion of Moldova is insufficient to support the Borgen Report’s assumption that Moldova qualifies as a sovereign state. While the Borgen Report deconstructs in detail the *de facto* regime of the TMR, the Borgen Report glosses over the source of sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova that is assumed to possess all attributes of a state. However, Moldova did not exist as a state throughout centuries of European history and first came into existence in 1924 as a province called the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic [MASSR] within the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. This was primarily to achieve Stalin’s territorial expansion.

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6 Professor Mancini provides an excellent overview of the right of secession, parsed into sundry theories: (1) “primary rights theorists” advocating secession as a fundamental, though qualified, right, and (2) “remedial rights theorists” advocating secession as a derivative right when the mother State commits a delict. She also distinguishes between “external self-determination” where secession is limited to “colonial peoples” and “internal self-determination” where secession is available to “peoples” within an existing Nation State. Susanna Mancini, *Secession and Self-Determination*, Chapter 23, The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law, pp.1057, (Michel Rosenfeld, Andras Sajo, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

7 Christopher J. Borgen, *Thawing a Frozen Conflict: Legal Aspects of the Separatist Crisis in Moldova: A Report from the Association of the Bar of the City of New York*, St. John’s University, Legal Studies Research Paper Series, Paper #06-0045, July 2006. Five persons representing the New York City Bar Association engaged in pronouncing judgement on the relationship between Moldova and Transnistria. While the Committee had access to officials and legal documents, its stylized analysis strikes a hollow note. Efforts are made to avoid the “straw man” fallacy.

8 Recognising that the TMR is *de facto* a regime implies that it is *de facto* a State, though not *de jure*, since the TMR lacks recognition. However, this point raises two questions: (1) the Montevideo Convention does not require recognition as a State requirement, and (2) illustrates that secession is a factual event and not a juridical act. The authors thank Flora Vern, student at SciencesPo University, Paris, France for clarifying this point.
In 1940, after Germany and the USSR executed the Molotov/Ribbentrop Pact, Stalin created the fifteenth republic of the USSR; the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. The question arises as to the source of sovereignty of Moldova to clothe it in the dress of a state as defined in the “Montevideo Convention On The Rights And Duties Of States” of 1933. The Borgen Report admits Moldova existed only as a “state” by artificial construction of the declaration of USSR Leader Stalin. The question arises; why did the collapse of the USSR result in the creation of Moldova arising solely out of an artificial creation by a political leader bent on aspirations of territorial expansion? By contrast, Transnistria is lost in the quagmire of history, though it has a territory, a population, and a political infrastructure thereby meeting the requirements of the Montevideo Convention. The Borgen Report simply denounces Transnistria as an occupying power, while the latter and Moldova share similar questionable grounds to assert “sovereignty”.

Third, the sources of law consist of thin layers of authoritative statements, non-dispositive opinions of the ICJ and the Canadian Supreme Court, as well as historical instances of secessions lacking statistical foundation to advance the case of state practice. The primary expert is Hurst Hannam of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. In 1966, Hannam explained at a roundtable organized by the U.S. Department of State that; “self-determination during this time was not that all peoples had a right to self-determination but rather that all colonies had a right to be independent”.

In addition, the Borgen Report incorporates statements from the Badinter Commission, formally known as the “Conference on Yugoslavia Arbitration Commission”, to maintain that the exercise of self-determination may not result in frontier boundary redrawing, based on the principle of “inviolability of borders” under customary international law. The Borgen Report also invokes statements of a Commission of Jurists of the League of Nations, organized to evaluate the case of Aaland Islands (1921), to limit the exercise of the right of self-determination to extreme cases of when a mother state “brutally” violates basic human rights. Further, the Borgen Report cites historical instances of secessions to establish state practice for the purpose of demonstrating its narrow reading of the right of self-determination.

Based upon its cursory discussion of Moldovan history and its reliance upon razor thin law, the report constructs a “three-prong” legal test that permits the exercise of secession under exceptional circumstances and that bears similarities to the principle of “remedial sovereignty”. The three-prong test comprises: (1) “Secessionists” must constitute a “people”; (2) The state in which they are currently part brutally violates human rights; and; (3) There are no other effective remedies under either domestic or international law. Applying this test to the TMR, the report concludes that the TMR fails to meet the three-prong test and therefore lacks a right of secession.

Fourth, noteworthy is the failure of the Borgen Report to define the term “brutally violate” and to indicate the time of its occurrence. Unclear is whether “brutality” is

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9 The most persuasive answer is that the post-Soviet Union “super powers”: the US and the EU found it politically suitable. See, Mancini, supra note 6 at 491 [stating “The European Union developed its Guidelines on the Recognition of New States in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union” and noting that “The United States produces analogous policy documents”].

10 Id. at 38.
limited to physical, economic, or psychological harm. Equally unclear is the timing of the acts of brutality that give rise to a colorable claim of secession. For example, in the case of Ukraine, the response to the separatist movement is evidently brutal; acts of war. However, preceding what may be called the “civil war” were the acts of the government in Kiev sufficiently “brutal” to justify secession. Would language genocide constitute a brutal act of a mother State? The lack of clarity of the second prong dooms the test to failure.

Consequently, the Borgen Report is built largely upon statements of unelected officials, Commissions appointed by a league that no longer exists, and the European Community that lacked control of Yugoslavia, in addition to anecdotal evidence from history. This methodology consists of law by fiat. The legal rules contained in the report are products of declarative statements of select authorities; none of whom surprisingly are drawn from the territories seeking to exercise the right of “self-determination”. That omission “silences the lambs”.

**An Alternative Reading Of The “Right Of Secession”**

Law is an interpretive enterprise whereby a reader of law, whether a judge, scholar, or advocate imposes order and coherence upon related but not necessarily consistently written texts. Dworkin provides, “the concept of law is fundamentally an interpretive enterprise aiming to describe the values, interests and goals embodied in the law”, and further elaborates that, “Constructive interpretation is a matter of imposing purpose on an object or practice in order to make it the best possible example of the form or genre to which it belongs.”11 Posner provides an important restraint: “while a literary critic may be an influential person, he or she is a private individual. The exercise of power by appointed officials with life tenure ... is tolerated only in the belief that the power is constrained; and the principal, though not sole, constraint is authoritative texts.”12 Article 31 of the 1969 Vienna Convention instructs: “A treaty shall be interpreted in good faith and in accordance with the ordinary meaning to be given to the terms of the treaty in their context and in the light of its object and purpose”. The fusion of Dworkin and Posner’s views, plus traditional canons of statutory construction, partially embodied in the 1969 Vienna Convention, provide a methodology to interpret the law governing a right to secession.13

A right of secession may be derived from principal public international law texts using the above methodology without reliance upon secondary and tertiary sources of

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13 The primary canons of construction used are: (1) Plain meaning rule: follow the plain meaning of the text, except when text suggests an absurd result or a scrivener's error. (2) *Expressio unius est exclusio alterius*: expression of one thing suggests the exclusion of others, (3) Follow ordinary usage of terms, unless the text gives them a specified or technical meaning, (4) Follow dictionary definitions of terms, unless the text provides a specific definition, and (5) consider extrinsic sources, such as legislative history and statements of drafters, only if a term is ambiguous. These canons of statutory construction are consistent with the Vienna Convention 1969, though the canons precede the Convention. Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (with annex), Concluded at Vienna on 3 May 1969, Sec. 3, Arts. 31 and 32.
The United Nations Charter was produced after World War II primarily to avoid World War III as its main function is to uphold “international peace and security”. On its founding effective date, there were fifty nation states. Now arguably there are close to 200. With the exception of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the U.N. Charter governs states and threats to international peace. This aspect has led certain scholars to conclude that it does not govern secession or rights of self-determination. Nevertheless, even conceding to the primary construct of the U.N. Charter to protect the integrity of states and to avoid future international armed conflict, it does not follow that the U.N. Charter implicitly disregards the rights of individuals or “peoples”. Nor does it follow that the Charter sanctions the wholesale slaughter of a “people” within a state when “people” exercise their human rights. The maxim “expressio unius est exclusio alterius” applies with force to interpretation of the U.N. Charter. Those matters not specifically mentioned in the Charter are outside its ambit. Since the Charter does not mention secession, its supposed exclusive ambit of state sovereignty is stretched thin.

The most authoritative statement of the absence of a universal right to secession is contained in the U.N. General Assembly’s “Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations” of 1970. The latter Declaration states that the “right of self-determination” cannot be construed as “authorising or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair … the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States”. The majority view provides that the “right of self-determination” encompassing a right of secession is an exclusive right held by “peoples” of a colony.

In the context of self-determination and secession, certain scholars yield to the view that statements made by political leaders, such as President Woodrow Wilson, drafters or observers, whether living or dead, involved in treaty process, carry great, if not, definitive weight, to the interpretation of terms, in spite of the ordinary meaning of the terms contained in the treaty. This article rejects that view on grounds that the meaning of a covenant intended to have enduring effect need not get stuck in the mud of history, and, if the term has an ordinary meaning then that meaning trumps the “travaux préparatoires”. See generally Geoffrey P. Miller, Pragmatics and the Maxims of Interpretation, 1990 WIS. L. REV. 1179. Professor Miller demonstrates striking similarities between ancient interpretive texts and modern canons. Modern canons are similar to older interpretive tools, including norms and conventions used to construe ancient Hindu texts, medieval Christian commentary on interpreting the Bible, Talmudic commentary on construing the Old Testament, and rules governing the interpretation of Roman law.

Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.

The UN Charter technically is not subject to the interpretive framework of the Vienna Convention 1969, as the latter is inapplicable retrospectively. However, the Vienna Convention states nothing extraordinary. It incorporates the traditional canons of statutory interpretation.

E.g., International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, Article 1, and International Covenant on Civil and Economic Rights, Article 1.

An abundance of scholarly articles exist on this subject, but the authors find that Stephen C. Neff in his article “Some Considerations on Secession and Independence: The Cases of Kosovo and Georgia, Amsterdam Law Forum, V. I, p.33 (2009) expresses concisely and elegantly the debate over positive and negative secession, as well as his fine analysis of UN documents. Id. at 35

Most documents and pronouncements, including the United Nations Charter are broadly drafted, contain ostensibly conflicting objectives, and therefore are susceptible to varying interpretation. The Declaration of 1970 is no exception. That Declaration contains an explicit exception to denying a right of secession to “people” within an existing sovereign State by predicating that denial upon adherence by the sovereign State to conduct itself “in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples”. Hence, a violation of the obligations in Articles 2 of the “International Covenant On Civil And Political Rights” (ICCPR) and “The International Convention on Civil and Economic Rights” (ICCER) opens the door to support an argument of secession for “peoples” within a sovereign State subject to domination and exploitation.

Further support for this position is found in Articles (2) and (3) of the Preamble of the UN Charter setting forth its purposes, not limited to Nation States:

1. To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace; and

2. To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. (Emphasis added)

The invitation for peace-loving states to join the United Nations implicitly requires that a state manage its internal conflicts without engaging in war with a class of its citizens. Except for self-defence, the exclusive means to resolve breaches of international peace is recourse to the Security Council under Chapter VII, Articles 39-51. Chapters XII through XIII are inapplicable to the extant question.

The two main international conventions dealing with rights of “self-determination of peoples” are: (1) The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and (2) The 1966 International Convention on Civil and Economic Rights (ICCER). Both conventions contain an identical article germane to the question posed in this text. The English version of Articles 1(1) of the ICCPR and ICCER state: “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”.

The identical article of the French text provides, “Tous les peuples ont le droit de disposer d’eux-mêmes. En vertu de ce droit, ils determinant librement leur statut politique et assurent librement leur développement économique, social, et culturel”. The identical article of the Russian text provides, “Все народы имеют право на самоопределение. В силу Этого права они свободно устанавливают свой политический статус и свободно Обеспечивают свое экономическое, социальное и культурное развитие». In addition, nothing in Article 1(3) of the ICCPR, in all three versions, restricts this right of self-determination to colonies.

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20 UN Charter, Article 4(1).
The preambles to both Conventions are telling. The Preamble to the ICCPR provides that “The State Parties to the present Convention” recognize:

1. The inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world;

2. These rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person; and

3. Consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his economic, social and cultural rights

The obligations imposed upon Nation States are equally telling. Articles 2 (1) and (2) of the ICCPR provide:

1. Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

2. Where not already provided for by existing legislative or other measures, each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to take the necessary steps, in accordance with its constitutional processes and with the provisions of the present Covenant, to adopt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized in the present Covenant.

Further, Article 2 (1) of the ICCPR imposes affirmative obligations upon “State Parties” to enact legislation to make certain that “people”, “les peuples” and “все народы” may effectuate the rights set forth in the Covenant. Consequently, when a sovereign state violates the fundamental rights recognised in United Nations documents, including “natural law” rights, then that sovereign State has violated its international law obligations and gives rise by negative implication to a right of secession by the “people” harmed by unlawful State action.

**The Meaning Of The Term “People”**

Following the canon of construction to give words their ordinary meaning, the *Oxford/Collins English Dictionary* defines the term “people” as follows; (1) “persons collectively or in general”, and (2) “a group of persons considered together” unified by some common element. The term “people” is to be distinguished from the term “the people” that has the following meanings; (1) “the mass of persons without special distinction, privileges, etc.” and (2) “the body of persons in a country, esp. those entitled to vote”.  

The French text arguably provides a more precise definition of the term “people”. *The Larousse Dictionnaire de la Langue Française*, provides: “an ensemble of persons constituting a social or cultural community”.\(^\text{22}\) Finally, the Russian text provides the most compelling definition of the term “people”, as distinct from a nation state, by reference to those persons who possess the same language, interests, inhabit a particular region, and ethnic background.\(^\text{23}\) The common thread among the three definitions is that “people” refers to distinct groups of persons sharing a range of common traits that unite them together.

A persuasive event from American history illustrates the ordinary meaning of the term “people”: the Mayflower Compact, regarded as the first constitutional document of North America. While *en route* to America, the Mayflower was occupied by Pilgrims and non-Pilgrims. When conflicts arose during the voyage and peril threatened its success, the “people” of the Mayflower entered into a covenant under which they would be governed. The non-Pilgrims did not want to be ruled by the Puritans, and the Puritans realized the importance of unification, thereby resulting in a mutually acceptable pact.

The United States Declaration of Independence arguably contains the most celebrated use of the term “people”. The Declaration provides, “When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another … they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation”. The simple explanation of the term “one people” is a reference to the members of the thirteen colonies. Without undertaking a deviation into American history, the members of the colonies were “one people” only to support the separation from the British Empire; they certainly were not one people in other respects. They were composed of the “haves” and “have-nots”, divided along lines of industrial and agricultural economies, and slave-holding and non-slave-holding States. Slaves *per se* were not regarded as persons entitled to legal protections.

Article I of the ICCPR provides that: “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”. Assigning the ordinary meaning of the term “people” to the text, it follows that a distinct class of persons within a nation state has the right to determine the political entity under which they are ruled, when the nation state has violated its clear-cut obligations under the treaties.

The “people” in the East and South of Ukraine are Russians, not Ukrainians. The Russians occupying the East and South are distinctly different from Western Ukrainians in terms of language, religion, ethnicity, and anthropology. West Ukrainians are not Slavs and by certain studies; they are Gallic.

Kiev was the first capital of Russia [then Kyiv'ska Rus']. This area, including the East and South, was traditionally under Russian rule. The term “Oukraina” literally borderlands, derived from Slovenian documents in the 12th century. During this time and subsequently, “Rus” and Poland used the term to refer to territories on the edges

\(^{22}\) Larousse, *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française* [Larousse 1995].
\(^{23}\) В.Даль "Толковый Словарь живого великорусского языка”.
http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc2p/275610
of their borders. Various powers controlled the territory of present Ukraine and the latter never was a political entity of its own. In 1654, while certain territories of present Ukraine were under Polish rule, Bohdan Khmelnytsky signed the “Treaty of Pereyaslav”, forming a military and political alliance with Russia to protect Cossack controlled territory, called the “Zaporozhian Host”. After the war with Poland, the latter gave Kiev and the Cossack lands, east of the Dnieper, to Russia.

Since 1654 until 1917, certain territory now known as Ukraine was under Russian Empire control and rule. The Russian Revolution opened a period of civil war in the region designated “Ukraine”. Subsequently, during the period 1919-1922, central parts of what is “now known” as Ukraine became the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and in 1922; became a member of the USSR. At this time, Lenin decided to integrate “Novorossia” into the Ukrainian SSR. After World War II, the Ukrainian SSR increased by absorption of the western territories, including the Carpathians. In 1954, Nikita Khrushchev, who from 1933 until 1949 served as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, by fiat gave the Crimea to Ukraine. This is arguably an unlawful transfer of territory under the USSR Constitution since the General Secretary lacked authority to make this decision.

Ukraine did not become an independent nation until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Ukraine is an amalgam of territories resulting from wars, revolutions, and political decisions of dubious merit. The ultimate consequence is that the “people” of the former “Novorossia” are under the control of West Ukraine, an area that historically disdains Russians. Archpriest Andrei Tkachev has stated; “The word ‘Ukrainian’ was seldom used in the Russian empire until 1917. Both Belarusians and Ukrainians were considered Russians – inhabitants of White Russia [future Belarus] and Little or South Russia [future Ukraine]”. Tkachev adds; “One of the biggest problems of modern Ukraine is that it does not want to learn from history, which it has shared with Russia for at least 300 years. Many Ukrainians think that this is not THEIR history, that it was forced on them, so one should not learn from it. This is a mistake”. In addition, in 1991, many persons who formerly held the nationality of Russia in their USSR passports suddenly were Ukrainians, without having anything to do with Ukraine except accidental location. The historical development of modern Ukraine demonstrates that the “people” of the East and South Ukraine, for a duration exceeding the existence of Ukraine, were under Russian rule and are Russians.

The Delict

Differences between the East and the West, including ethnicity, language, and political conviction, always have existed in Ukraine. These differences escalated into conflict in November 2013 when “Euromaidan” protested against the government’s decision to suspend talks with the EU and resume negotiations with the Russian Federation to join the Tri-lateral Customs Union. The East and South then raised the question of creating a federation, maintaining that Ukraine was not a single unitary State. In February 2014, Turchynov became the transitional President of Ukraine and

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57% of the new Government was pro-West. The government replaced key government officials in all regions with politicians, including oligarchs, loyal to the new government’s policy of extreme nationalism. Laws then were enforced to criminalise expressions of dissent against the government, particularly speech related to federalization. Any person supporting the concept of “federalization:” was labeled a “separatist”. In addition, the government conducted discussions to limit the use of the Russian language. Initially, East and West peacefully protested against these government initiatives. During this period, “Euromaidan” took by force administrative buildings in the East and West. In response, Anti-Maidan groups followed suit by seising government buildings in the East, insisting on federalization of Ukraine, and retaining the Russian language.

Subsequently, Donetsk and Lugansk proposed to hold referenda on 6 April 2014 to join the Russian Federation. On 14 April 2014, Turchynov authorised military action against “separatists” in the East and South thereby leading to civil war. On 11 May 2014, the Donetsk Republic held a referendum to approve “self-rule” supported by 89% of voters. That same day, Luhans held an identical referendum, supported by 96.2% of voters. On 22 May 2014 the confederate state of Novorossiya was proclaimed, incorporating both the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhans People’s Republic. The government’s military action designed solely to preserve a unitary State has killed civilians, displaced populations, and destroyed property, including hospitals and schools. The pro-West government’s omission to protect civilians burned alive in public by pro-Maidan extremists in the City of Odessa violates fundamental rights by omission.

Underlying the political strife is the energy assets in East Ukraine. Ukraine’s role as a transit country for gas supplied to the EU and the discovery of shale gas fields in the East and West are matters that cannot be overstated, since it raises EU gas security issues. In 2013, GAZPROM delivered $10 billion worth of gas to Ukraine.\(^\text{26}\) Due to mismanagement and corruption, Naftogaz Ukrainy, has run up debt of $3.3 billion to Gazprom. Ukraine’s financial condition as demonstrated by its “balance of payments” is not sustainable. In addition, Ukraine’s “total shale gas deposits are estimated around 7 trillion cubic meters, which places the country at the third place in Europe after Poland and Norway”.\(^\text{27}\) The largest shale gas field is located in “Eastern Ukraine [Donets’k and Kharkiv regions] in the Dnipro-Donbas petroleum basin”. Royal Dutch Shell entered into a contract with the Donetsk and Kharkiv regional councils without consultation, and over the objection, of local stakeholders. Royal Dutch Shell would have to commit up to $50 billion in foreign investment to develop the gas field, begin production, and recover its investment.

Economic interests often, if not consistently, underlie shifts in political status and armed conflict. In the context of the present Ukraine crisis, the economic interest at stake is “oil and gas”. Michael Hudson, a renowned economist, has stated, “The basic principle to bear in mind is that finance today is war by non-military means. The aim of getting a country in debt is to obtain its economic surplus, ending up with its


property. The main property to obtain is that which can produce exports and generate foreign exchange. For Ukraine, this means mainly the Eastern manufacturing and mining companies, which presently are held in the hands of the oligarchs. For foreign investors, the problem is how to transfer these assets and their revenue into foreign hands – in an economy whose international payments are in chronic deficit as a result of the failed post-1991 restructuring”. The United States and the European Union are engaged in a new “Cold War” against Russia.

Consequently, the central government of Ukraine has committed acts of delict sufficient to give rise to a derivative right of the “people” of the East and South to make a pragmatic choice as to their political affiliation.

**East and South Ukraine Have a Right to Secede from Ukraine**

The population of the East and South Ukraine are a “people” within the meaning of the ICCPR and ICCER since the term “people” encompasses “persons” by its ordinary language [the preambles] and distinct groups of persons within a single nation state. Recourse to recognized dictionaries is dispositive. Hence, there is no need to go outside the four corners of these conventions. The population in East and South Ukraine constitute a class of persons, in other words a “people”, tied together by language, culture, religion, ethnicity, and economic interest.

The claim that the ICCPR and ICCER were designed for decolonization is unpersuasive. Dworkin instructs: “ignore authorial intent”. The treaties were adopted at a time when decolonization was well established. Equally significant, decolonisation has nothing to do with protecting human dignity of persons within the colonies, but with the economic interests of former colonial powers in newly independent states. Put simply, the colonies are worth more in trade and commerce to colonial powers as independent nations, than as colonies.

The U.N. Charter does not prohibit secession and therefore the Charter is not dispositive. In addition, the ICJ decision in Kosovo, while not a precedent, arguably provides support for regional Ukrainian secession. The Court noted that, “During the second half of the twentieth century, the international law of self-determination developed in such a way as to create a right to independence for the peoples of non-self-governing territories and peoples subject to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation”. The Court found that nothing in international law prohibits secession, and stated: “general international law contains no applicable prohibition of declarations of independence” thereby holding that the Kosovo declaration of independence was consistent with international law.

Although the decision of the ICJ is rooted in the particular historical circumstances of Kosovo/Serbia and U.N. Resolutions, the court concluded, “that the adoption of the declaration of independence of 17 February 2008 [by Kosovo] did not violate general international law, Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) or the Constitutional Framework”. Combined with the ICCPR and ICCER, people, under given

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circumstances, have a right to secession. Therefore, the view that secession is solely an internal matter must be rejected.  

A central thread of secession is oppression and abuse of a minority “people” by a majority “people”. Take the Civil War in the U.S. as an illustration. While there are myriad reasons why Southern States seceded from the “Union”, a central tenet was the imposition by the Northern States of a political, economic, and social regime that was anathema to the South, including non-Slave owning Southerners. Under public international law, as understood today, Lincoln may be regarded as a war criminal for authorizing the killing not only of Southern soldiers but also of civilians and the destruction of property as demonstrated by Sherman’s “March to the Sea”.

The government of Ukraine has abrogated its obligations under both the ICCPR and ICCER by failing to provide a mechanism to ensure that “self-determination” is handled internally without armed conflict. Treating the “separatists” as enemies of the State and “terrorists” [a term that international law cannot even define], and authorizing the use of military force to kill its own citizens amounts to undeniable breaches of Articles 2 (1) (2) of the ICCPR.

Therefore, the “separatists” in East and South Ukraine have a right to secede from Ukraine. The “separatists” are a “people” within the ordinary meaning of that term; they have suffered harm by the mother state and the reply of the mother State to launch a military operation against the “separatists” is adequate proof of Kiev’s lack of diplomatic initiative. Secession need not lead to a new state since given the linguistic, cultural, and historical ties with Russia, the separatists may seek a pragmatic solution by seeking annexation to an already existing Nation State; the Russian Federation.

The Illegality of Economic Sanctions Against the Russian Federation

Article 39 of the United Nations Charter provides: “The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.”

Article 41 further provides: “The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations”.

29 This article rejects the view of Professor Borgen who has stated that, “The norm of self-determination is not a general right of secession. It is the right of a people to decide on their culture, language, and government. It has evolved into the concepts of “internal self-determination,” the protection of minority rights within a state, and “external self-determination,” secession from a state. While self-determination is an internationally recognized principle, secession is considered a domestic issue that each state must assess itself”. Borgen Report, supra note 7 at 6.
The Declaration of 1970 provides, “No State may use or encourage the use of economic, political or any other type of measures to coerce another State in order to obtain from it the subordination of the exercise of its sovereign rights and to secure form it advantages of any kind”.

The United States and the European Union, among other U.N. members, have imposed economic sanctions upon the Russian Federation for its alleged interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine. The Security Council of the United Nations has not made any fact-finding resolution that the Russian Federation has violated a principle of international law. In addition, the Security Council has not authorized the implementation of economic sanctions against the Russian Federation. Therefore, based upon member state obligations, the economic sanctions imposed by the United States, the European Union and other sovereign States, are illegal.

An elusive question is what has the Russian Federation in fact done to interfere in the internal affairs of Ukraine as to justify any U.N. sanction? The argument may be turned upside down and it may be argued that the United States and the European Union have interfered in the internal affairs of Ukraine, therefore violating their public international law obligations. Hence, the economic sanctions against the Russian Federation violate the United Nations Charter and may violate WTO obligations.

**Conclusion**

The Ukraine has violated the rights of the people of East and South Ukraine, under the ICCPR and ICCER, not to mention the soft law of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Given the breach of its treaty obligations and its reliance on military force, the “people” of East and South Ukraine, under the ordinary meaning of the terms: “people” and “self-determination”, have a right to secede from Ukraine to vindicate their political, social and economic rights.

It follows that the U.S. and E.U.; members of the U.N., cannot take unilateral action against a State purportedly acting contrary to UN principles without a resolution of the Security Council that first requires a finding of the “crime of aggression” addressed in Article 5 (d) of the Rome Statute or at the least; “aggression”. This defiance of U.N. procedures of due process brings into question the validity of U.S., E.U., and any other country imposing sanctions against the Russian Federation. Statements by the United States and the European Union that the activity in the separatist zone constitutes a breach of international law or national Ukrainian law requires full substantiation. Propaganda disseminated by the United States and European Union to justify intervention into the internal affairs of Ukraine is a violation of U.N. Charter principles. Security Council approval is required to impose economic sanctions against the Russian Federation.

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30 While the Russian Federation vetoed a UN Security Council Resolution declaring the March 2014 referendum on the future of the Crimean peninsula illegal, the UN has not issued any resolutions regarding sanctions against the Russian Federation related to the separatist movement in East and South Ukraine.