

The Donetsk Brief

To Whom It May Concern

Background. Some residents in the Ukrainian city of Donetsk have launched a tongue-in-cheek campaign to join the UK, on the grounds that the city was founded by an industrialist from Wales.

"Donetsk residents! English brothers! The decisive moment has come!" says the online appeal (which makes no distinction between England and Wales), according to the Novosti Donbassa website. The campaign appears to parody Crimea's recent referendum on joining Russia, which has resonated across eastern Ukraine.

The heavily industrialized city was established in the late 19th century as a foundry run by John Hughes, a native of Wales. Locals called him John Yuz, so the town was initially named Yuzovka.

"We demand a referendum on returning Yuzovka to its historical fold as part of the UK! Glory to John Hughes and his city! God save the Queen!" the campaign adds.

Below is the information relevant to a possible decision to annex (hereinafter: reunite with) the city of Donetsk to Wales.

Important facts. Donetsk is the largest city in Ukraine's largest mining and industrial region, Donbass (the theory that this is a corrupted form of the English phrase "don't be an ass," presumably coined by the Welsh founder Hughes, has yet to be verified). Mining now has more emotional than economic value and is heavily subsidized by the state. Most of the mines are closed, and those still open run almost two miles deep, so that by the time a miner reaches the bottom he more or less has to turn around and start back up. There is, in any case, almost no coal left. Still, the miners go down each day to keep themselves busy between football games (see *Popular pastime*, below).

Political situation. Tense, especially on weekends when there are no football games in town. Before the recent pro-Welsh demonstrations, the movement for reunification with Russia had been dominant. It is led by the so-called *babki* — old women nostalgic for the "good old Soviet times," when they had socialized medical care and could get artificial teeth for free. This group is to be approached with extreme caution. Though toothless, the *babki* can turn violent and dangerous, especially when their dearest values — the red flag, the Lenin monument in the central square — appear to be under threat. In the event of reunification with Wales, their feelings will need to be considered (the NHS will help a great deal here), and certain reassuring symbols of the past restored as appropriate. One such symbol is the *obkom*, the regional committee of the Communist Party, to which the *babki* are in the habit of sending complaints

about corrupt officials and cheating or drinking husbands. This need not become a costly undertaking, since the complaints were rarely acted upon in the first place. More often than not, the mere wave of a red flag, or the sound of a Soviet military march, has a soothing effect.

Population. No exact figure. It fluctuates with the presidency of Ukraine: when a representative of the western part of the country is elected, a substantial portion of Donetsk's inhabitants (known elsewhere in Ukraine as "the Donetski") goes to prison. Correspondingly, under the "eastern" Yanukovich, the population grew considerably.

Location. Somewhere in the east of Ukraine. Important note for decision-makers: Ukraine is not in Russia. It is an independent country (for now). Nor should it be confused with the UK (not yet), an error most foreigners make on being introduced to a Ukrainian abroad.

Language. Surprisingly, not Russian — let alone Ukrainian, which the locals openly despise as the language of the fascists encroaching from the west. It is *Fenya*, a Russian-based prison slang with a limited vocabulary of roughly seventy-five words, which nonetheless does nothing to impede the Donetski's ability to communicate effectively and voice their demands, whether at pro-Russian rallies or, more recently, pro-Welsh ones. This native gift for brevity should ease the mastering of English and speed assimilation after reunification.

Popular pastime. Besides mining, football. It is the essence of local social life, if not life itself. The days when the home team, Shakhtar ("Miner"), plays at one of the city's three stadiums are all-Donbass holidays. Members of the local elite turn out in their finest — police chiefs and top brass in dress uniform, their wives in evening gowns. On entering the VIP section, each is handed two one-liter plastic bottles of beer and a bag of roasted, salted sunflower seeds (see *Favorite snack*, below) to see them through the match. The VIP section itself has a bulletproof glass booth, from which Ukraine's richest oligarch — the real Don of Donetsk, and owner of Shakhtar — Rinat Akhmetov (see *Living icons*, below) watches his team play. He cannot be too careful: his predecessor and business partner, Alik the Greek, was blown to pieces along with several dozen other members of the city elite.

Favorite snack. Roasted sunflower seeds, sold on every street corner by the *babki* in home-made paper packets (two sizes, large and small). The Donetski consume them incessantly; the husks litter sidewalks, tram stops and bus stops (a small price to pay for reunification).

Favorite drinks. Vodka. Despite a recent surge in beer production (owned by Akhmetov, naturally) and sales, many still regard beer as essentially non-alcoholic. Even so, pubs — pronounced by the locals "poobs" — are extremely popular for socializing, chasing shots of vodka with beer, or drinking beer that has been spiked outright. With its superior beers, Wales has a great deal to offer the "poobic" life of the Donetski. Beer itself is consumed mostly by teenagers, who drink it in the street, on public transport, and on the banks of the Donets and Bakhmutka rivers.

Icons. Lenin, Stalin, Putin, and, lately, Hughes — the last something of an anomaly, his surname lacking the "-in" ending that ordinarily sends Soviet (and Russian) minds into a trance of eternal admiration. There is also a certain Artyom, an enigmatic figure said to have played an important

role in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 (see also *Landmarks*, below), who spent some years living in Australia.

Living icons (besides Putin).

1. Rinat Akhmetov. The man the Donetsk look up to in the most literal sense: whenever Shakhtar scores, every face in the stadium turns toward his bulletproof booth, and a murmur runs through the crowd — "Look, Rinat is happy, Rinat is happy, Rinat is happy..."
2. Viktor Yanukovich, or Vitya the Brute (*kham*, in Russian), the runaway president driven from power and from the country by the opposition (the fascists, to the Donetsk), who had two prior criminal convictions before becoming president. Ukraine is currently said to be reconsidering the constitution, with a view to reducing the requirement for a presidential candidate to just one served sentence.

Environment. Virtually none. Most, if not all, of the metallurgical and chemical plants that form the backbone of the local economy are still running the heavily polluting equipment Hughes purchased at the end of the 19th century. There is no vegetation worth mentioning, and several rivers originate on plant grounds and carry very little actual H₂O. One of these, the Bakhmutka, runs so thick it can hardly be said to flow — and in which, according to the observant teenagers who gather on its banks to drink beer, used condoms can be watched dissolving in real time.

Landmarks. The statue of the revolutionary Artyom. His colossal granite figure in the city center is dear to the heart of every Donetsk resident. Viewed from a certain angle in profile, the middle finger of the hand at his side looks unmistakably like a penis in a state of partial arousal — which only reinforces his air of determination and resolve. Proud hosts invariably walk their visitors to this exact vantage point.

Another landmark unique to Donetsk is the statue of Lenin seated in a chair on the second floor of the central railway station. Before the mid-1950s, when the city was still called Stalino, it was a statue of Stalin. After the dictator's death, his head was sawed off and replaced with Lenin's. The new head turned out to be incongruously small, but this seems to have bothered no one. It has sat there ever since, on a body still dressed in Stalin's famous military tunic.

Note: in the event of reunification, the statue could, at similarly minimal cost, be converted into a statue of Hughes.

Conclusion

The author is convinced that the foregoing must be taken into account in any scenario for reunification. The landmarks, values and icons enumerated in this paper need to be preserved at all costs or — in the unlikely event of a total evacuation of Donetsk — relocated to Wales in their entirety, including the mines, the stadiums and the Bakhmutka river (where else would Donetsk's youth drink beer and watch condoms dissolve?). Not to mention the sunflower seeds.

If necessary, the city could be renamed Hugheston, and the region Donbassshire.

