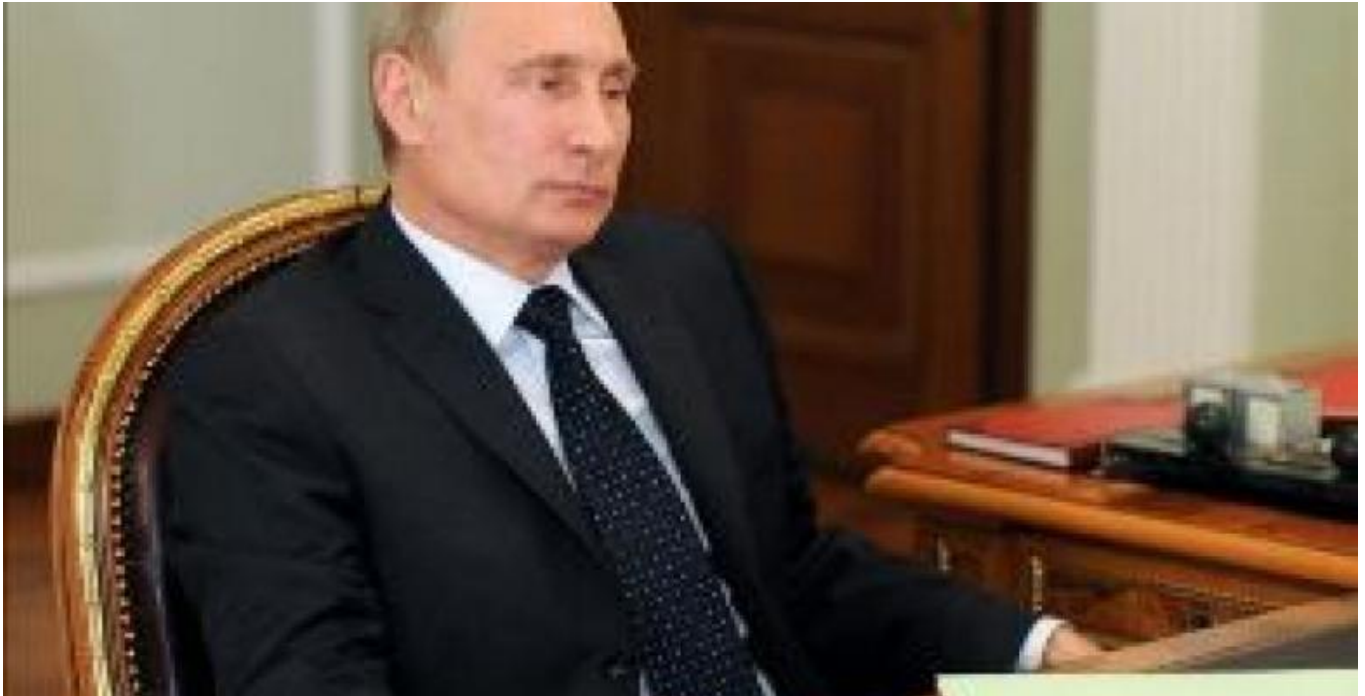

Putin Calls Upon Ukraine to Change Its State Model to Halt War

01/09/2014



“We need to immediately begin substantive talks ... on questions of the political organization of society and statehood in southeastern Ukraine,” Putin said in remarks on state-run Russian television.

The aim of the talks would be to “safeguard the legitimate interests of those people who live there,” said Putin, an allusion to the Russian-speaking majority living in the far eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, the main rebel bastions that Putin has taken to calling “Novorossiya” (New Russia).

Although Putin did not mention it in his remarks, Russia has lobbied insistently to have Ukraine convert itself into a federation where the regions would have substantial autonomy in budgetary and linguistic matters, as well as in directly electing their leaders.

However, shortly after the Russian president delivered his comments, the Kremlin said that he was not referring to outright independence for southeastern Ukraine but rather to beginning a national dialogue regarding the territorial model of the state in the neighboring country.

With regard to that, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has insisted on several occasions that his country will never be a federation and that the population of the eastern regions will be able to raise their children using Russian but that it will not be designated as a second official language for the country in the constitution.