

& WEEKLY REVIEW **THE TIRASPOL TIMES**

Published on Tiraspol Times & Weekly Review (<http://www.tiraspoltimes.com>)

Ukraine voters not allowed to cast their ballots in Pridnestrovie

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Created 19 Aug 2007 - 7:14pm



III *Seen by Ukrainians as authoritarian, Viktor Yushchenko will not allow his countrymen in Pridnestrovie to participate in elections*

RYBNITSA (Tiraspol Times) - With the campaign for Ukraine's parliamentary election of 30 September well underway, nearly a third of Pridnestrovie's population of 550,000 people already know that they will not get a chance to cast their ballot.

Ukraine has already announced that it will not allow voting to take place in Pridnestrovie, and will not provide its citizens with a chance to cast their ballots in the region.

" - This is discrimination," says Oleg B., 56, an ethnic Ukrainian from the city of Rybnitsa in northern Pridnestrovie.

Polling stations will be set up for Ukrainians who reside in Moldova, despite the fact that Pridnestrovie's population form has a much larger proportion of Ukrainians.

With 29% of the population, Ukrainians form the third largest minority group in Pridnestrovie, after almost equal numbers of ethnic Moldovans and Russians. Yevgeny Shevchuk, the 39 year old pro-democracy Speaker of Parliament, is a native Ukrainian born in Rybnitsa.

By contrast, Ukrainians only make up 8% of the population in Moldova. Of these, most have Moldovan citizenship. Only 3,500 of Moldova's Ukrainians have opted for the

Ukrainian citizenship, versus 80,000 of Pridnestrovie's Ukrainians who obtained citizenships of Ukraine.

Closing of polling stations

The right to vote is not a new right. Observers point out that in Pridnestrovie, the local Ukrainian population is used to being able to participate in the construction of Ukraine's democracy: For the first 16 years of Pridnestrovie's existence, Ukraine allowed them to vote.

"- Polling sites in Pridnestrovie were closed in 2006. Previously, citizens could vote in Dubossary, Rybnitsa and Tiraspol," said Vladimir Korobov, director of the Research Centre for Ukrainian Borderlands.

" - Ukrainians in the Dniester region have only Ukrainian passports," he said, adding that if they go to vote in Chisinau, Moldova, they are required to also shown Moldovan passports.

Last time that Pridnestrovie's Ukrainian citizens were able to vote in a Ukrainian election was in that country's presidential election in 2004. A total of seven polling stations had been opened throughout the length of Pridnestrovie. More than 90% of the votes of Pridnestrovie's Ukrainian citizens went to Viktor Yanukovich.

After these results, which did not favor the current President Viktor Yushchenko, the right to vote was taken away from Pridnestrovie's Ukrainian population.

Ukraine poll sees Yushchenko as "authoritarian"

Voters in Ukraine hold a negative view of their president, according to a poll by the Sophia Social Research Center. As reported by Angus Reid Global Monitor, 42.2 per cent of respondents think Viktor Yushchenko is an authoritarian politician who neglects the rule of law for his personal benefit.

Only 32.2 per cent of respondents see Yushchenko as a democratic leader working to protect the country's Constitution, while 25.4 per cent are currently undecided.

On 2 April 2007, Yushchenko dissolved Parliament and called an early ballot. On 27 May, Yushchenko and his opponent - Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich - agreed to hold a legislative election on 30 September.

Despite holding Ukrainian citizenship, ethnic Ukrainians in Pridnestrovie are prevented from voting by the refusal of Ukraine to install polling stations in the country. In order to cast their ballots, Pridnestrovie's Ukrainians must undertake a trip to either Chisinau (Moldova) or Odessa (Ukraine) which entails crossing the borders of Pridnestrovie.

Pridnestrovie declared independence in 1990. Also known as Transnistria, Transdniester or Transdnistria, the unrecognized country was part of the now-dissolved Moldavian SSR (MSSR) inside the Soviet Union from 1940 to 1990. Previously, it was a part of Ukraine. (*With information from Angus Reid*)

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