



Freedom in the World 2014 - Transnistria

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2014 Scores

Status: Not Free

Freedom Rating (1 = best, 7 = worst): 6.0

Civil Liberties (1 = best, 7 = worst): 6

Political Rights (1 = best, 7 = worst): 6

OVERVIEW

International negotiations on the status of Transnistria – also known as the Pridnestrovskaya Moldavskaya Respublika (PMR) – continued during 2013 under the so-called 5+2 format, with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Russia, and Ukraine attempting to mediate between Moldova and the separatist PMR, and the United States and the European Union (EU) joining as observers. The talks focused on minor issues related to freedom of movement across the de facto border separating Transnistria from the rest of Moldova, and generally failed to address the overarching political questions.

In May 2013, the PMR parliament rejected a proposal by President Yevgeniy Shevchuk to relocate the legislature from Tiraspol to Bender, a separatist-controlled city on the right bank of the Dniester River where the Moldovan government has also maintained some presence. However, the PMR government issued a decree in June that included Bender and other contested areas within its "state border." Some observers speculated that these and other provocative actions by separatist authorities formed part of Russia's campaign to dissuade Moldova from moving closer to the EU at a summit scheduled for November. Moldovan representatives nevertheless initialed an EU Association Agreement as planned.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 10 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

Residents of Transnistria cannot choose their leaders democratically, and they are unable to participate freely in Moldovan elections. While the PMR maintains its own legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, no country recognizes its independence. Both the president and the 43-seat, unicameral Supreme Council are elected to five-year terms. In 2011, the legislature

approved constitutional amendments that created a relatively weak post of prime minister and set a two-term limit on the presidency.

The Obnovleniye (Renewal) party maintained its majority in December 2010 legislative elections, winning 25 of 43 seats. Party leader Anatoliy Kaminsky was reelected as speaker. While the December 2011 presidential election, like all voting for PMR institutions, was not recognized internationally, it featured increased competition and a somewhat broader choice for voters compared with previous polls. Founding PMR president Igor Smirnov, whom Moscow had urged not to seek a fifth term, was eliminated in the first round, taking 24 percent of the vote in a field of six. Shevchuk, a former parliament speaker, led with 39 percent, followed by Kaminsky, who had Russia's endorsement, with 26 percent. Shevchuk went on to win the runoff against Kaminsky, securing 74 percent of the vote. Kaminsky resigned as parliament speaker and head of Obnovleniye in June 2012. He was replaced in both posts by his deputy, Mikhail Burla.

In June 2013, Tatyana Turanskaya was appointed as the PMR's acting prime minister, and lawmakers approved her permanent appointment to the post in July. Shevchuk had promoted her multiple times since 2012; previously she had worked at a local tax inspectorate.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 5 / 16

Shevchuk, who had fallen out with Smirnov in 2009 and was expelled from Obnovleniye in July 2011, formed the Vozrozhdeniye (Revival) movement to back his presidential bid. Although he was committed to maintaining strong ties with Russia, he pledged to tackle corruption and laid out plans to reduce barriers to travel and trade with Moldova.

Obnovleniye, which remains the majority party in the legislature, is associated with Transnistria's monopolistic business conglomerate, Sheriff Enterprises, and maintains a close relationship with the ruling party in Russia. All of the PMR's political establishment, including nominal opposition parties, supports the separatist system and Russia's role as patron.

Moscow's strong political influence in Transnistria is undergirded by the presence of roughly 1,000 Russian troops, who are ostensibly stationed in the territory to guard Soviet-era ammunition depots and uphold a 1992 cease-fire between the PMR and the Moldovan government. During 2013, Russia pressed Moldova and Ukraine to allow it to bring in new military supplies and reopen a defunct military airport in Tiraspol.

Native Romanian speakers are poorly represented in government. While the authorities do not allow voting in Moldovan elections to take place in PMR-controlled territory, residents with Russian citizenship had access to two dozen polling stations for Russia's tightly controlled presidential election in 2012. Shevchuk strongly endorsed the candidacy of Vladimir Putin.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

Corruption and organized crime are serious problems in Transnistria. The authorities are entrenched in the territory's economic activities, which rely in large part on smuggling schemes. In 2012, the deputy director of Moldova's Information and Security Service (SIS) alleged that criminal groups used the PMR's banking system to launder proceeds from trafficking in persons, drugs, and arms. PMR officials strongly denied the claims. The EU assists Ukraine and Moldova in efforts to

maintain customs controls along their internationally recognized border. Russia has a major stake in the Transnistrian economy and backs the PMR through loans, direct subsidies, and natural gas supplies. Transnistria has not paid the state-owned Russian energy giant Gazprom for gas imports since 2007, building up a debt of about \$4 billion. Individuals associated with the Smirnov administration have been accused of embezzling Russian aid and Transnistrian public assets.

Civil Liberties: 14 / 60 (-1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16 (-1)

The media environment is restrictive. Nearly all media are state owned or controlled and refrain from criticizing the authorities. A government decision in October 2013 offered bonuses to journalists at state-run outlets for coverage of official activities. The few independent print outlets have small circulations. Critical reporting draws harassment by the government, which also uses tactics such as bureaucratic obstruction and the withholding of information to inhibit independent media. Sheriff Enterprises dominates the private broadcasting, cable television, and internet service markets. Opposition groups reported in mid-2013 that a series of 10 websites with antigovernment content had been blocked without explanation beginning in late 2012. They included news portals and opposition party sites.

Religious freedom is limited. Orthodox Christianity is the dominant faith, and authorities have denied registration to several smaller religious groups. Unregistered groups face harassment by police and Orthodox opponents. There are no legal exemptions from military service for conscientious objectors, leading to criminal punishment of Jehovah's Witnesses and others.

Several schools that provide instruction in Romanian using the Latin alphabet, which is associated with support for unity with Moldova, face harassment by PMR officials and are forced to use substandard facilities. A 2012 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights found Russia liable for the PMR's restrictions on Romanian-language education, ordering Moscow to pay about \$1.4 million in damages to a group of Transnistria residents who had sued in 2004 and 2006.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 2 / 12

The authorities severely restrict freedom of assembly and rarely issue required permits for public protests. In July 2013, opposition politicians and free speech advocates were allowed to hold a small protest against the recent website blocking, but its impact was limited by other events, such as a military band concert, that were scheduled for the same time and location.

Freedom of association is similarly circumscribed. All nongovernmental activities must be coordinated with local authorities, and groups that do not comply face harassment, including surveillance and visits by security officials. The region's trade unions are holdovers from the Soviet era, and the United Council of Labor Collectives works closely with the government.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

The judiciary is subservient to the executive and generally implements the will of the authorities. Defendants do not receive fair trials, and the legal framework falls short of international standards. Politically motivated arrests and detentions are common. Human rights groups have received

credible accounts of torture in custody, and prison conditions are considered harsh and unsanitary. A UN report issued in February 2013 found excessive use of pretrial detention, lengthy sentences for minor crimes, and an "alarming" health situation in prisons, including multiple cases of drug-resistant tuberculosis. There is no separate juvenile justice system, and addicts face forced medical treatment. Suspicious deaths of military conscripts occur periodically amid reports of routine mistreatment.

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, authorities discriminate against the Romanian-speaking plurality. Ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians together account for some 60 percent of the population. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people are also reportedly subject to discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Travelers are frequently detained and questioned by the PMR authorities. In the 5+2 negotiations during 2013, Moldovan representatives said they were considering lifting travel restrictions on Transnistrian residents who held passports issued by Russia or Ukraine. The majority of residents hold Russian, Ukrainian, or other countries' passports, though many are believed to have multiple citizenship. Transnistrian negotiators are also seeking acceptance of PMR-issued vehicle licenses, shipping permits, and university diplomas.

The 2013 UN report found that many residents have lost their rights to housing or agricultural land following flawed privatizations of factories and collective farms.

Women are typically underrepresented in positions of authority, making up less than 10 percent of the legislature, though Shevchuk's government includes several high-ranking women. Domestic violence against women is a widespread problem, and police sometimes refuse to take complaints from victims. Transnistria is a significant source and transit point for trafficking in women for the purpose of prostitution.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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