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Crimean Parliament Dismisses Cabinet and Sets Date for Autonomy Referendum

By The Moscow Times

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The Crimean parliament on Thursday voted in favor of holding a referendum on whether to expand its autonomy and passed a no-confidence motion dismissing the region's government.

The referendum — set for May 25, the same day as Ukraine's presidential election — was supported by 61 out of the 64 deputies who attended Thursday's emergency session, the parliament's press office told RIA Novosti.

Crimeans will vote "yes" or "no" on whether the "Crimea has state sovereignty and is a part of Ukraine, in accordance with treaties and agreements."

Fifty-four deputies supported the decision to remove the region's Cabinet and its prime minister Anatoly Mogilyov. The parliament said that the Cabinet's work in 2013 had been unsatisfactory, Interfax reported.

News reports said that Mogilyov has been replaced by Sergei Aksyonov, head of the Russian Unity party.

Crimea, a region of Ukraine with semi-autonomous status, has become a hotbed of tension between pro-Russian residents and those who support the newly appointed government in Kiev that took power after the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovych.

The region's parliament building in Simferopol was seized early Thursday morning by armed men who hoisted a Russian flag above it. The assailants did not prevent deputies from entering the building, however.

The presidium of the parliament said in a statement earlier that they were convinced that "only holding an all-Crimea referendum on the question of advancing the autonomous status and expanding authority lets Crimeans themselves — without external pressures and dictates — determine future autonomy," the Crimean Information Agency reported Thursday.

Ukraine is slipping into "chaos, anarchy and economic disaster" after the "unconstitutional seizure of power by radical nationalists" the statement said, adding that the presidium would take responsibility for the region.

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