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Crimea Votes to Join Russia and Secede From Ukraine

By The Moscow Times

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A crowd of pro-Russian Crimeans gathered to celebrate the outcome of Sunday's referendum.

With 100 percent of the ballots counted, an overwhelming 96.77 percent of Crimeans have voted to secede from Ukraine and join Russia, the referendum commission said Monday.

“The number of ballots cast in support of reunification with Russian amounted to 1,233,002, which is 96.77 percent,” referendum commission head Mikhail Malyshev said, Interfax reported.

In total, 1,274,096 people participated in Sunday's referendum, representing about 83.1 percent of the Crimean electorate, he said.

Only 2.51 percent of voters, or 31,997 people, supported the referendum’s other option for greater autonomy from Ukraine. A further 0.72 percent of ballots were deemed invalid.

The final results were in line with polling data released with only 50 percent of the ballots counted, which showed that 95 percent of Crimeans supported secession, 3 percent wanted to stay with Ukraine, and 1 percent of the ballots were void.

The ballot presented voters with two options: secede from Ukraine and request annexation by Russia, or remain part of Ukraine by restoring the 1992 Crimean constitution that provided the peninsular region with greater autonomy. The ballots were printed in the three main languages spoken in Crimea: Russian, Ukrainian and Tatar.

The referendum has sparked one of the most serious geopolitical standoffs between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War. The West has joined with the Kiev government in condemning the Crimean referendum as illegitimate and unconstitutional. Moscow, however, insists that Crimea should be allowed to choose its master.

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