

Moscow Ukrainians Vote as Putin Promises to Respect Their Choice

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As voters across Ukraine flocked to their local election commission to cast ballots for Kiev's new leadership Sunday, voter turnout proved scarce at a remote polling station established for Ukrainian expatriates living in Moscow.

By 6 p.m., only about 100 Ukrainian voters had showed up to the Ukrainian Embassy to vote.

Voters were required to register one week in advance, so some voters arrived to the polls only to realize that they would not be able to cast their votes.

"I think this is a very important day for Ukraine, we can show that we are a unified nation that can choose its leaders," 22-year-old voter Anton Volovik said while standing in front of the embassy.

"I think that one day things will go back to normal, and relations between Russians

and Ukrainians will be fine, but it will take time for political ties to restore themselves," he said.

Volovik and another voter Oleg, 32, who refused to give his last name due to privacy concerns, said they voted for Anatoly Hrytsenko, a moderate pro-Western candidate.

The most recent election poll, which was conducted by the International Republican Institute among 1,200 Ukrainian residents with a margin of error of 2.8 percent gave Hrytsenko only 3 percent of the vote.

Petro Poroshenko and Yulia Tymoshenko came out as the leading contenders with 21 and 11 percent respectively.

"I am not indifferent to the fate of my motherland, even though in fact both Russia and Ukraine can be considered such for me," Oleg, an IT specialist who has been working in Moscow for more than 17 years, said.

Sunday's turnout stood in stark contrast to a remote referendum held at another Moscow precinct on May 11.

Some among the scores of voters that turned up to that polling station, which had been established by the self-proclaimed authorities of Donetsk and Luhansk, waited in line for upwards of three hours. These voters eventually learned that their ballots would not be counted, when Donetsk Central Election Commission head Roman Lyagin said that none of the polling stations established outside of the region had been coordinated with the self-proclaimed authorities.

Over the weekend, President Vladimir Putin said that Russia would respect the choice of the Ukrainian people. "The new president can be some kind of transitory figure, or he can take over all the power. It is clear that both scenarios will only aggravate the political struggle in the country," Putin told a group of leading international journalists in St. Petersburg on Saturday.

At the same time, Putin assured that the government "will work with the newly elected authorities."

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