



INSIDE OF A WHITE SPOT



REFERENDUM IN TRANSNISTRIA

They say that there are no “white spots” on the map of Europe. But the self-proclaimed Pridnestrovsk Moldova Republic (PMR), squeezed between Moldova and Ukraine, is the true “terra incognita” for the Western Europeans. Very little is written about it and, whatever information is available, it usually has a negative connotation, as if Pridnestrovie is a broken off chip of an Evil Empire, the center of contraband for weapons and “live goods”. Analyzing the scarce data available on the region, one can assume that the nature of local power is a dictatorship and the population has no rights whatsoever – not only political, but also human. Such state of the matter is utterly unbearable for the 21st century Europe, so, we decided to see for ourselves if it is indeed true.

Why Pridnestrovie?

Our interest in processes taking place in Pridnestrovie was caused by several reasons. Our group’s main task is monitoring of the elections, referendums, and other forms of manifestation of People’s Will with the goal to reveal the degree of their freedom, openness and consistence with the western standards. From this point of view, the referendum in Pridnestrovie was an exceptionally interesting event for us, because it was conducted in the region with an undefined legal status.

Also, in the light of triumphal all-European integration, it was important to understand why the citizens of one or another region of an officially democratic country feel a persistent need to fight for the right to self-govern all the way up to separation and self-definition. To us understanding of the process and reasons for

separation is ever so important for construction of a solid and stable integration model and objective rating of states-partners in the international political process.

We were interested in other nuances. For example, the process of gradual formation and further functioning of the state structures in a “separated” region, as such. We wanted to observe the proportions between the roles of local factors and international common trends of government establishment. Or simply stated, we wanted to understand whether common “proper” government establishments could successfully function in the “improper” environment. It is because an implementation of a functional state system is the best test for “mature sovereignty”.

And finally, it was just a simple human curiosity. European history is rich with examples of the great state mergers (Spain, Italy, Germany), but there were equally great examples of the opposite. For instance, at the time, the formation of countries like Portugal, Belgium, Norway and Ireland were considered as a display of separatism and extremism. So it was extremely interesting to become a witness of a historic process.

Quick Preparation

Once we decided to visit Pridnestrovie we took the most logical approach and sent a letter with a request for cooperation to the Foreign Ministry of Republic of Moldova. Unfortunately, we did not get a reply, probably because the Republic of Moldova did not recognize this referendum and, thus our presence there was deemed disadvantageous. Then we sent a similar letter to the sites of several newspapers published in Tiraspole and within a week received a permission to be present there as international observers.



*Members of delegation - A.Gerand, A.Ebert and
T.Retznik with other international observers*

What did we see?

As strange as it sounds, the region, which was depicted as European Wild West, made a better impression than the adjacent areas of Ukraine and Moldova. There are no signs of destruction, military presence, dictatorship or organized violence. The highways are intact, there are no problems with water and electricity supplies, the buildings and landscapes around them are well taken care of. This was not just the impression from a “staged show” that was put on specifically for the foreign guests, because in a few days we saw nearly the entire region of Pridnestrovie.

The economy of PMR is actively developing - as much as it is possible under the conditions of severe sanctions enforced by the neighboring countries. The working factories look almost like a miracle in the post-soviet territory. Pridnestrovie, unlike the neighboring countries has managed to maintain and even multiply the industrial potential and did not lose its qualified professionals. As a result, the manufactured products are quite competitive and in demand.



Members of delegation at the enterprises of region

We discovered that the population of Pridnestrovie (PMR) fully enjoys the benefits of basic political rights and freedoms, such as freedom of speech, of meetings, of secret and direct elections. There were the explicit signs of a thriving social life and civil activity of the residents. This is well illustrated by the fact that 78% of residents have participated in the referendum and over 90% of them spoke for independence of the region.

Pridnestrovie (PMR) possesses a well-rounded and established government system. The level at which the referendum was organized and conducted indicates that it functions quite effectively. The problem of the trilingual region, which is one of the keystone reasons of the Moldova-Pridnestrovie conflict, was effectively resolved by presenting all the relevant information in all three state languages – Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan.



The photo chronicle of a referendum 17.09.2006

The referendum procedure has fully met the European standards, without any exceptions every adult resident of the region was given a real opportunity to openly express his/her opinion on any given issue. The processing of the bulletins was done openly in the presence of many local and external observers. Without going into the nuances of the political side of the issue, we noticed that the results of the referendum reflected the true moods and views of the majority of the residents of Pridnestrovie. We hope that this will be considered in resolution of the above political crisis.

Based on the results of the monitoring, our delegation made the following concluding statement.

Vox populi – vox Dei

Making any juridical estimation falls outside of our task, we just tried to stay objective. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the manifestations of the Peoples' Will. When the Peoples' Will is strong and unflinching it overcomes all the hurdles and reaches the set goals. If it was any different the current world map would not have countries like Ireland, Switzerland, Belgium, Portugal and USA. But whether one or another expression of Peoples' Will would become defining and final – only time will tell.



Meetings with management Transnistria

On a private note, we believe that the recognition of independent status of PMR is an emerged necessity. Over half a million of people are tired of living in an unsettled state of “people without defined citizenship”. The seemingly temporary status of PMR that was established 15 years ago now significantly delays the economic and social development of the region. And widely advertised in European press Moldova Republic’s re-integration plans are in essence just rhetoric, meant for external use only. Political beau monde of Kishinev is obviously still not ready to take its part of the blame for fueling the conflict.

Follow your own Constitution!

A while back this slogan was used by the dissidents in their appeal to the USSR and the democratic world pledged them their full support. Really, if some dogma treated as a moral imperative, is followed selectively by its own creators and easily broken, then in casual-legal terms it is called felony, and in political terms it is called “a double standard”.

It is to our regret, that on multiple occasions we have brought up this phenomenon evident in the relationship between the European Union and USA with the Eastern European countries. Now the “double standard” is being used more frequently not for strategic or tactic goals, but mostly as a cynical common practice. Whether it is a basic nearsightedness or a well planned and paid for crime against the very foundation of our civilization – future will tell, and this future is not a distant one. So far we can only attest to the presence of some flawed, but well organized system, which leads us to a thought that “conspiracy theory” supporters might be right. Purposely creating an ordeal around for example, Kosovo, the international organizations diligently pretend not to notice the processes that are taking place in Pridnestrovie.



Press conferences with participation of members of our delegation passed during all referendum

For the members of our delegation the statement issued by the USA Department of State and by representatives of OBSE about their intend to ignore the results of the referendum in PRM became not only a demonstrative act of denial of a clearly stated People's Will, but a shocking neglect of they own keystone political values – “The Declaration of Human Rights” and “Bill of Rights”. Such a neglect of self-established rules will have far reaching, but not necessarily immediate consequences.

In this regard, the experts from the Central-European Group of political monitoring will continue to observe the development of the political process and to inform the society about all the events and deviations that take place.