

Moldovan Separatist Leader Seeking Better Ties

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TIRASPOL, Moldova — Moldova's breakaway Transdnestr region has elected a new leader who campaigned on a platform of normalizing ties with the rest of the country, rejecting a candidate favored by Moscow.

"My first task will be to work with our neighbors to ensure free movement of people and goods," former parliament speaker Yevgeny Shevchuk said.

Shevchuk received 73.88 percent of votes in Sunday's runoff vote, according to figures from the Central Elections Commission. The Russian-backed current speaker, Anatoly Kaminsky, won just 19.67 percent.

After he was named winner, Shevchuk said he would seek to build "good neighborly relations" with Moldova and Ukraine.

Shevchuk campaigned on a platform of improving ties with Moldova to ensure freedom of movement for Transdnestr's 500,000 residents and other steps to ease their isolation.

He said he would not give up the region's declaration of independence. In a 2006 referendum, Transdnestr voted overwhelmingly to maintain independence from Moldova and seek to join Russia.

"The issue of joining Moldova is beyond the president's powers. It is up to the people, who clearly showed their preference at a referendum on Sept. 17, 2006," Shevchuk said.

Moldova's government expressed hope for progress.

"We are ready to look for new approaches towards resolving the issues that exist between Chisinau and Tiraspol," said Eudjen Carpov, Moldova's deputy prime minister in charge of Transdnestr talks.

Shevchuk, 43, fell out with the outgoing president, Igor Smirnov, in 2009 after suggesting constitutional reform to limit presidential powers. Shevchuk's campaign in this election focused on fighting corruption and nepotism.

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