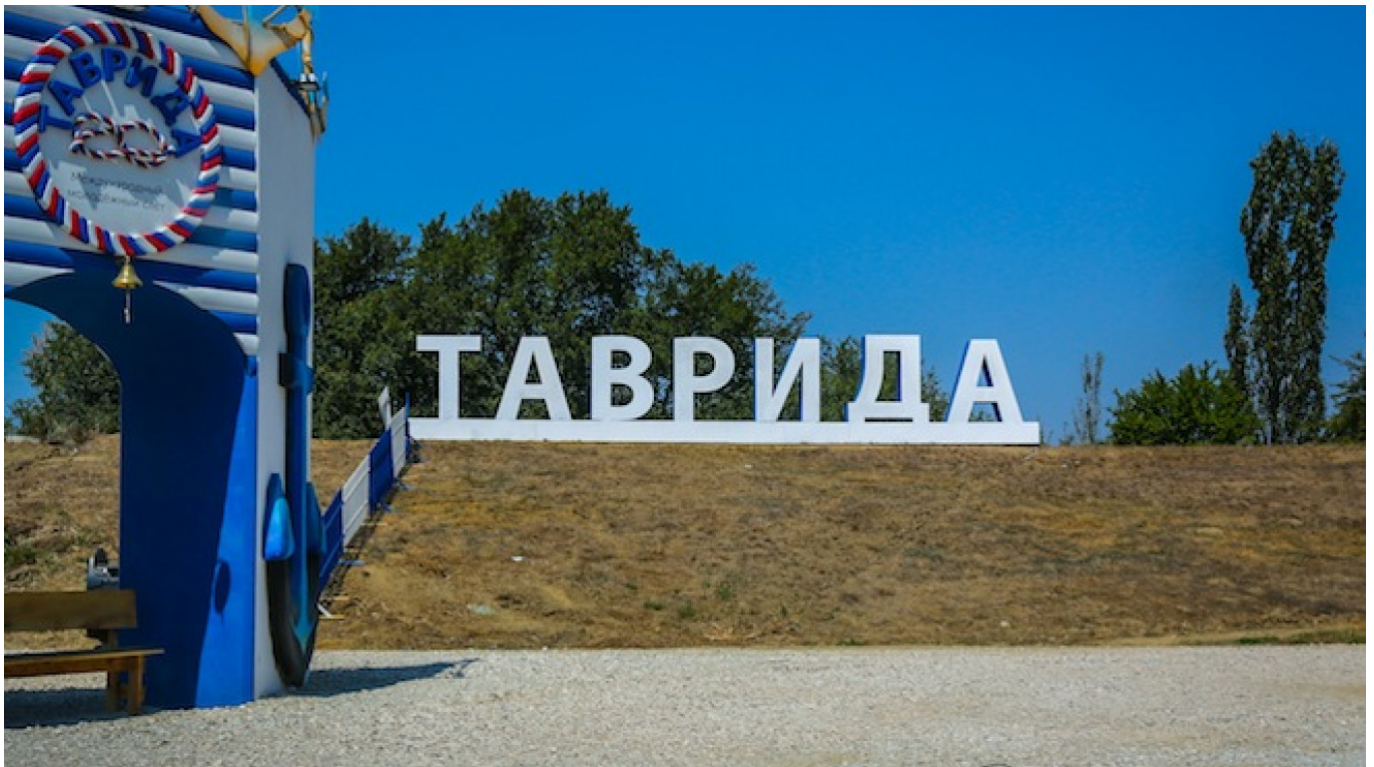


Russian Youth Forum Blocks Participants From Ukrainian Separatist Republics

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Young activists from the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR, LPR) in eastern Ukraine have had their invitations to take part in a Russian youth forum retracted, the Kommersant newspaper reported Tuesday.

Representatives of the officially unrecognized regions were deprived of their places due to "extremely strong competition," organizers of the event in Crimea explained.

Unsuccessful applicants had complained about people from the separatist regions of eastern Ukraine taking part in the event, Kommersant reported.

"Due to strong competition [for places], the decision was taken to hold an extra selection round and some participants previously offered a place will unfortunately not take part," Russia's Federal Youth Agency said in a statement.

The Tavrida youth forum begins in Crimea on July 1 and will run until August 19.

In total, 24 young people from the two regions had planned to go to the forum. Four planned to visit the first session, which will focus on training in music, composing and choreography, Nikita Tomilin, director of a Crimea-based cultural organization, told Kommersant.

“They had passed the selection round and prepared themselves for the trip. The LPR's ministry for youth affairs had told them that their transport costs would be covered. They then unexpectedly received a letter from the organizers saying that because of the strong competition, they held another selection round and the participants from the LPR didn't get through,” said Tomilin.

Two girls from the eastern Ukrainian cities of Donetsk and Makiivka in the DPR, confirmed to Kommersant that their invitations to take part had been retracted and that the organizers had asked them not to comment on the situation.

The Tavrida youth forum first took place in Crimea's Sevastopol, months after the peninsula had been annexed by Russia in 2014.

After around 300 participants took part in the first year, 1,500 took part in 2015. Representatives from the DPR and LPR took part in both forums, Kommersant reported.

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