

The Gordian Knot: Crimean Tatar-Russian Relations after the Annexation of Crimea

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On 18 March 2014 Russian Federation annexed Crimea, part of Ukraine, after illegally taking military control of its territory and organising an unrecognized referendum on independence of the region. This article's goal is to analyse how the annexation and following Russification of the political, social and legal system affected the minority of Crimean Tatars and its relations with Russia. Crimean Tatars, in their majority opposing the annexation and Russian policy, have faced political repressions, civil rights abuses and intimidation. Russian policy towards the minority aims at forcing them to accept the 'new reality' without granting them freedom of political activities and right to cultivate their cultural heritage, when it's inconsistent with Russian policy and ideology. The question of Crimea as *de facto* part of Russia is treated briefly in this article, while its primary goal is to show the developments and complexity of Crimean Tatar-Russian relations.

Crimea as a Strategic Gain and Economic Burden for Russian Federation

Annexation of Crimea has been a strategic gain for Russia, as it significantly changed the strategic balance in the Black Sea Region. As a result of taking over the peninsula Russia does not any more pay Ukraine for usage of the bases in Sevastopol by the Russian Black Sea Fleet. The annexation also gave Russia a possibility of further uncontrolled militarization of the territory, which it has been taking advantage of for more than a year now. According to Ukrainian and NATO officials Crimea has been transformed in a significant way in terms of weapons systems, however it is difficult to establish precisely, which arms have been already dislocated on the peninsula. Russia has increased the number of its troops in Crimea, extended and reorganised its fleet and aviation (partly by incorporating former Ukrainian units). Last year Russia's defence minister Sergei Shoigu informed about plans to reinforce Crimea with "full-fledged and self-sufficient" defence capabilities, including placing strategic bombers on its territory. In March 2015 he stated that "Russian military has put together nearly 100 units and organisations in Crimea last year as part of the programme".¹

¹ 100 Russian military units created in Crimea: Shoigu, 31 March 2015, <http://qha.com.ua/100-russian-military-units-created-in-crimea-shoigu-133423en.html>, access 23 June 2015.

Control over Crimea enables Moscow not only to increase its military potential in the Black Sea region but also use it as a tool in order to intimidate Ukraine and the West and paralyze its decision making process concerning potential Russian threats. It's important to note that in case of Crimea the imagined threat of NATO or the West moving its military infrastructure towards Russian borders was used as a justification of illegal putting Russian military on Ukrainian soil, the annexation and military reinforcement.

Crimea is, however, a serious economic problem for Moscow. The Kremlin needs to bear costs of financing of the annexed region, which is highly dependent on the budget funds (85% of region's budget is state financing) and absorbed 125 billion rubles (2,19 billion euro) in 2014, more than any other "problematic" region, as Russian call the federal subjects highly dependent of subsidies from the state's budget. The Western sanctions limit if not exclude the possibility of economic development, as the region is closed for investment. Russian business is not eager to risk operating in Crimea as it can bear consequences in international cooperation. To subsidize Crimea Russia – itself suffering from economic downturn – needs to take funds away from other country's regions and even that does not enable the start of promised development programmes in Crimea. Big part of the financing goes to social expenditures and it is highly unlikely that in the forthcoming years any of the infrastructure development programmes can be accomplished, especially that there is a fall in investment all over the country. Sanctions also badly influenced the tourism industry in the peninsula, which was an important source of income before the annexation. According to the information provided by the *de facto* authorities, the number of tourists in 2014 was twice smaller (2,5 -3 million) than a year before (6 million)². With Crimea's occupation and sanctions in force the number of Ukrainian and Western tourists has dried out. Russian visitors, despite the state policy of incentives, don't compensate. Crimea as a tourist destination is expensive and difficult to reach as the bridge over the Kerch Strait has not been built yet.

The Use of “Krymnash” (“Crimea Is Ours”) Ideology in Russia’s Domestic Policy

The annexation of Crimea, accompanied by a massive propaganda campaign, helped Putin's regime overcome a serious legitimacy crisis that has been in progress since the mass protests of 2011–2012. According to the Levada Center's surveys just after the Crimea referendum in March 2014, and Putin's announcement of the annexation, the president's ratings went up from 69% to 80%. Not only have they

² *Kolichestvo turistov v Krymu po itogam goda sokratitsya ndvoe*, <http://top.rbc.ru/economics/29/07/2014/939608.shtml>.

not fallen back since, but in the next months Putin's approval rate ranged between 83% (May 2014) and a record level of 88% in October 2014. Since then, the approval rate has been no lower than 85%. And it was not only the president's rating that went up, but also that of the prime minister, the government, the Duma, and the governors of Russian regions.

The massive effect of the "Crimea euphoria" was possible due to multiple factors. Firstly, for the great majority of Russians, this was a "free" prize – they did not feel, at least at the beginning, the costs of the annexation. The negative influence connected with the sanctions was not immediate, and the propaganda campaign managed to transfer the responsibility to the West, allegedly trying to humiliate Russia and to take economic revenge on it for regaining power. Secondly, the annexation avoided bloodshed and was not connected to military losses, thus it was perceived as evidence of Putin's clever policy. Thirdly, gaining Crimea and the way it was interpreted as "rejoining the Motherland" and "historical justice" addressed popular emotions and Russians' sense of injustice.

The enormous propaganda campaign (later enriched with the issue of the war in Donbas) became an important and effective instrument of shaping public opinion and deepening anti-Western and confrontational moods. In this sense, Crimea's annexation marked an important change both in Russian foreign and information policy. These became instruments of isolation, by deepening the division between Russia and its society and the Western world, as a means to maintain the regime's legitimacy.

Most Russians are not aware of the real situation in Crimea or the costs they need to bear because of the annexation. In Russian media the Crimea situation is presented as a triumph for the self-determination of the peninsula's Russian-speaking majority (with help from Russia), and a democratic process, which is not respected by the West because of its "double standards".

Russian Historical Narrative vs. Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian Historical Narratives

In Russian historical memory Crimea was almost always exclusively Russian. This point of view is enhanced not only by Kremlin's current propaganda, but has deep roots in Russian historiography. One of the most important narratives, proving the "Russianness" of the peninsula, is the story of baptism of Prince Vladimir of Kyiv in 988, in the Greek colony of Khersones (now part of Sevastopol). Moscow's point of view ignores the fact that Kyivan Rus is also regarded by Ukraine as its predecessor. Moreover, Russian historical memory disregards a pageant of civilisations that existed on the peninsula, including several Turkic states, which not only predated Vladimir's visit to Khersones but also existed for centuries afterwards. In monopolising Crimea's history, Russia marginalises the

role of the Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians inhabiting this territory, and omits the fact that Russian rule over the region started only in 1783, when the Crimean Khanate was annexed by Catherine the Great.

The Crimean Tatars are descendants of many Turkic and non-Turkic nations living in Crimea, not only of the Tatar troops, who came to area with the Batu-khan conquest of Eastern Europe in the first decades of the 13th century, but first of all of the Turkic Kipchak tribes, who settled in the region in the 11th century. Moreover, many scholars argue that the Kipchaks population mixed with other elder autochthonous ethnic groups in Crimea such as Greeks or Alans, later also with descendants of Italian colonists from Genoese Crimean colonies of Sudak and Caffa, which existed on the peninsula from 13th to 15th century.³ Not surprisingly, contemporary Crimean Tatar historians underline continuity between the traditions of ancient or medieval peoples' inhabiting Crimea and modern Crimean Tatars, whereas Russian scholars prefer not to see any cultural links between them.

The Ukrainians had long history of interactions with Crimea and the Crimean Tatars, which included bloody conflicts, but also periods of political alliances against the Polish–Lithuanian commonwealth and Moscow, as well as flourishing trade and deep cultural relations.⁴ In the 17th and 18th centuries, many Ukrainians moved to the lands of the Crimean Tatar Khan, escaping from Russian territorial expansion and repressions of free Kozak communities.⁵

These facts are little known in Russia and other post-Soviet states as the historiography of the region was shaped by the post-war Soviet historians emphasizing Slavic and especially Russian element's role in political, cultural and economic history of Crimea. For instance, almost unique monography of the region so far remains work of Pavel Nadinskiy from 1950's, covering the peninsula's history from antiquity to the Soviet period.⁶ According to the Stalinist scholar, Crimea was inhabited by the Russians since the ancient times, while other nations only appeared there as invaders. As he stated: "Crimea repeatedly was exposed to invasions by alien peoples. In the early Middle Ages the Huns, Byzantine Greeks, Khazars, Kipchaks and many others temporarily stayed in Crimea. Some of them managed to control some areas of the Crimean peninsula and maintain under their authority for quite a long time. However, all these foreign invaders appeared

³ B. A. Kuftin, *Juzhnoberezhnye tatory Kryma* [w:] *Zabveniyu ne podlezhit. Iz istorii krymskotatarskoj gosudarstvennosti Kryma*, N. Ibadullaev (ed.), Kazan 1992, p. 240.

⁴ O. Gaivoronski, *Qırım Hanlığı tarixiniñ qısqa hikayesi (1223 – 1783)* [in:] *Qırım tarixi*, E. Çubarov (ed.), Aqmescit 2009, pp. 50 – 94, Valeriy Vozgrin, *Istoričeskie sudby krymskikh tatar*, Moskva 1992., p. 228.

⁵ V. V. Stanislavskiy, *Zaporozhka Sich u druhij polovyni XVII – na počatku XVIII st.* [in:] *Istoriya ukrainskoho kozatstva. Narysy v dvoch tomah*, Kyiv 2006, vol. I.

⁶ P. N. Nadinskiy, *Očerki po istorii Kryma*, vol. I, Simferopol 1951, P. N. Nadinskiy, *Očerki po istorii Kryma*, vol. II, Simferopol 1957.

in Crimea as temporary conquerors and occupiers of this land. Only Russians had indisputable historical right to Crimea, which was a part of ancient Russian territories”.⁷

Russian historians downplay the role of the Ukrainians in the Northern Black Sea steppe region adjacent to Crimea. There’s a tendency to underline that after destruction by the Russian army of the last Kozak autonomy in Ukraine – the Zaporizhian Sich in 1775 virtually all Ukrainian Kozaks left their former lands. The Russian authors presume that establishment of New Russia (Novorossiia) Governorate in 1760’s turned this territory into ethnically Russian, again ignoring the fact that other ethnic groups were still present there and majority of the newly settled peasants came from other neighbouring parts of Ukraine, not from faraway ethnic Russian lands.

Crimean cities like Sevastopol or Yalta are treated as exceptional in Russian historical memory. The former is extraordinarily important due to the famous sieges, one during the Crimean War (1854-1855), another during the II World War (1941-1942). The historical uniqueness of Yalta is mostly related to the February 1945 conference, when Joseph Stalin hosted President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime-Minister Winston Churchill in the former Tsar’s palace of Livadiya. The meeting of Soviet, U.S. and British leaders for the purpose of discussing Europe’s post-war reorganization (*de facto* dividing the continent into the Western and Soviet spheres of influence), is still perceived by many Russians as one of the moments of “their” empire’s glory.

For the Crimean Tatars, however, both historical dates are related to tragedies of their community. The Crimean War’s civilian victims were mostly Crimean Tatar peasants. After the conflict Tsarist government increased economic pressure on Crimean Muslims perceived as pro-Turkish element, what led to their massive emigration to the Ottoman Empire. The famous Yalta conference in February 1945 was organized less than one year after the deportation of the entire Crimean Tatar population on 18 of May 1944. This Soviet government’s action was explained by propaganda as collective punishment for alleged Crimean Tatars’ massive collaboration with German authorities during the Nazi occupation of Crimea (1941–1944). Between 20% (according to Soviet NKVD sources) and up to 46.2% (according to Tatar organisations) of the Crimean Tatar population died on their way to Central Asia, or in the first year in exile, while living in subhuman conditions in the labour camps.⁸ However, it was not only this tragedy, but the Crimean Tatar elite’s political drive after the war that shaped their strong collective political

⁷ P. Nadinskiy, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 57.

⁸ E. Allworth, *The Crimean Tatar Case* [in:] *Tatars of Crimea. Their Struggle for Survival*, E. Allworth (ed.), Duke University Press, 1988, p. 6.

identity, based on opposition to the Soviet regime. The Crimean Tatar dissidents striving for “rehabilitation” (annulment of deportation decrees) and the right to return to Crimea became one of the most daring opponents of the system. Although the Soviet authorities never allowed them to return to the peninsula, the majority of Crimean Tatars nevertheless did so in the late 1980s and 1990s.

The Annexation of Crimea: from Russian Narrative on “the Banderites’ Threat” to Anti-Ukrainian Policies

On the level of social engineering, Russia used the imagined threat of NATO as justification for taking military control over Crimea. For years, Russian propaganda convinced the societies of Russia and Ukraine of NATO’s aggressive plans. Since the 2004 Orange Revolution, the imaginary “American” or “Western” enemy was said to be planning an overthrow of the legal government using proxies – fake rebels paid by the CIA or other Western secret agencies. When the Euromaidan events started, and former president Victor Yanukovich (fearing responsibility for the bloodshed in Kyiv) escaped the country, the prophecies of Russian propagandists seemed for many Russians to have been fulfilled. The Crimean population started to believe the propaganda about the threat from the Ukrainian “fascist Banderites” or “Nazis” from Pravyi Sector. According to the Russian media narrative, the right wing protesters and rebels from Kyivan Maidan were planning to go to Crimea to take power, and forcefully Ukrainise the population (in the least dramatic scenario) or to commit genocide against Russian speaking inhabitants of the peninsula (in the worst case scenario). Even taking into account that the majority of Crimean inhabitants really believed in that threat, and many of them shared a Russian nationalist outlook, they were not able to organise themselves, and were not determined to start separatist activities. However, the Yanukovich escape and the pro-European revolution were used as a pretext by Russia to “give power to the people,” in order to let them “self-determine” by means of a referendum. In fact, both the referendum and the installation of pro-Russian authorities were organised totally under Russian control and in the presence of Russian military forces, which was acknowledged recently by Putin himself in the documentary “Crimea: The Road to Motherland”.⁹ The building of the Supreme Council of Crimea was captured at night by Russian troops (night of 26–27 February). The deputies voted, in the presence of the soldiers, to conduct the referendum, which was held on 16 March, again with the “assistance” of Russian military units. Two days later the treaty on the accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation was signed in Moscow.

⁹ “Krym. Put’ na rodinu. Dokumentalniy film Andreya Kondrashova,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=t42-71RpRgI, accessed 15 May 2015.

Since the lightning installation of the occupying government led by Sergei Aksyonov (formerly a marginal politician, and in the 1990s a member of an organised crime group), Russia has been consistently conducting a policy of “erasing” Ukraine from the peninsula. That concerns closing schools and classes with Ukrainian as the language of instruction, the arrests of Ukrainian activists (among others, Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov), or preventing gatherings to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the Ukrainian national poet Taras Shevchenko. To cut links with Ukraine, authorities blocked Ukrainian TV channels, which are not available even through the internet. Crimea’s inhabitants cannot use Ukrainian mobile phone services, which are banned on the territory of the peninsula.

Crimean Tatars’ Situation after the Annexation

Although the Russian majority of the peninsula’s population still supports Russia’s annexation of Crimea despite economic problems, the Crimean Tatar minority remains in opposition to the Russian installed authorities. The Crimean Tatars constitute only about 15% of the peninsula’s population, having a bigger share (up to 29%) in several rural regions.¹⁰ However, the political “weight” of this population is much bigger. Muslim Crimean Tatars, together with small groups of Karaims and Krymchaks (both sects within Judaism), are three autochthonous nations of the peninsula.¹¹ Moreover, the Crimean Tatars are the only significant part of the population that does not subscribe to pro-Soviet nostalgia.

Since their return, in the early 90s Mejlis, the political body representing the Crimean Tatars, has been in alliance with Ukrainian patriotic and anti-Soviet political forces such as Rukh. Later, the Crimean Tatar Mejlis supported Orange Revolution, and Yulia Tymoshenko in the 2010 presidential election. That also resulted in worsening the situation of the Tatar minority during the Yanukovych presidency. During the Euromaidan and Russian military intervention, the Crimean Tatars were the most vocal group protesting against Yanukovych, and subsequently Russia’s annexation of the peninsula.

From the time of annexation, the Kremlin tried to address the Crimean Tatar issue. Failing to gain their leaders’ political support, Moscow decided to start repressions against them. In the beginning of March 2014, Crimean Tatar activist Reşat Ametov, who peacefully protested against the annexation, was kidnapped and killed by the Russian militia Samooborona. Since then, several other activists

¹⁰ There is no up to date information on the number of Crimean Tatars living in Crimea, as the last Ukrainian census was held in 2001.

¹¹ Sometimes the Urums, Crimean Tatar speaking Orthodox group, who were resettled by the Tsarist authorities in 1778 from Crimean peninsula to Azov region are regarded as a fourth autochthonous ethnic group of Crimea. Y. Zinchenko, *Etnobenez krymskotatarskoho narodu* [in:] *Krymski tatarı*, Kyiv 1998, p. 18.

have been kidnapped or disappeared. The main targets of the repression are Mejlis and its leaders. In May 2014, Mustafa Cemilev, Crimean Tatar leader and well-known Soviet dissident, was not allowed to enter Crimea, and soon after the same ban was imposed on Refat Çubarov, head of Mejlis. Ahtem Çiygöz, his deputy, was arrested in January 2015, and accused of having played a role in the clashes that took place between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian demonstrators in February 2014, a month before the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia. His pre-trial detention was extended until July. Some members of Crimean Tatar community were pressured to testify against their leaders including Ahtem Çiygöz.¹²

Soon after the annexation Russian police and Federal Security Service (FSB) started searches in Crimean Tatars' homes, mosques and religious schools (me-drese) allegedly looking for some illegal Islamist publications.¹³ In some cases such kind of publications were intentionally planted in Crimean Tatar homes. The searches were conducted in a humiliating manner. Crimean Tatar women were subjected to psychological abuse through the searches conducted in the absence of female officers.¹⁴

Replacing Crimean Tatar Institutions with Russia-Friendly Substitutes

In the same time Russian authorities since the annexation has been trying to use religious factor in order to convince Crimean Tatars to accept new realities in Crimea. For this purpose Russian Muslim leaders entered dialogue with their Crimean coreligionists. For instance, already in March 2014 Mintimer Shaimiev, former president of Tatarstan (one of the most populous subjects of Russian Federation traditionally inhabited by Muslim Volga Tatars) invited Mustafa Cemilev to Moscow to conduct negotiations on Crimean Tatars' status and situation after the annexation. Cemilev went to Moscow, but was only allowed to have telephone conversation with Putin and refused to recognize Russian authority in Crimea.

Another attempt to use Russian Muslims as a tool to attract Crimean Tatars to Russia's political project was creation of religious institution alternative to Crimean Muftiate – a Taurida Muftiate in August 2014. Since the Crimean Muftiate (established in 1994) was always representing Crimean Tatar milieus close to Mejlis, Russian authorities decided to create parallel institution to weaken its influence on Crimean Muslim community. According to media, the Taurida Muftiate was supported by Russian mufti Talgat Tajjiuddin. Crimean mufti Emirali

¹² *Crimea Report. The Situation of the Crimean Tatars Since the Annexation of Crimean by the Russian Federation*, 5 June 2015, www.aa.com.tr/documents/AA/haber/crimea_report.pdf, p.10, access 24 June 2015.

¹³ In contrast to Ukraine where no censorship exists, according to Russian legislation some categories of publications may be considered as “extremist” and illegal.

¹⁴ *Crimea Report...*, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

Ablayev considered this move as an interference into religious life of Crimean Muslims.¹⁵

The occupying authorities try to divide and rule, and create parallel structures representing Crimean Tatars in order to marginalise Mejlis. The authorities co-opt some Crimean Tatar politicians in attempts to take control of the Crimean Tatar minority and replace the repressed Mejlis leadership. Until the annexation the Mejlis consisting of delegates of Crimean Tatar Congress (Qurultay) was a genuine institution representing Crimean Tatars. Since the Mejlis has been consistently opposed to the annexation and refused to cooperate with Russia, the occupational authorities have conducted the policy of suppression and intimidation. Apart from continuing personal repressions towards Mejlis' members, the *de facto* authorities confiscated the property of the Crimea Foundation (owner of all Mejlis assets) including the Mejlis building. Crimea Foundation president Mustafa Cemilev was forced to resign but despite that the confiscation was not revoked.¹⁶

Since the annexation Russian authorities have been also reaching out to the members of Crimean Tatar minority in order to create collaborating structures. One of the most prominent such politicians is Remzi Ilyasov, vice-speaker of the Crimean *de facto* parliament and founder of the pro-regime Tatar movement "Crimea." His decision to legitimise Russian-imposed power structures was criticised by Mejlis, and he was stripped of his Mejlis membership. However, it seems that he is seen by Moscow as a possible candidate to take over the leadership among the Crimean Tatars, with the help of administrative resources. Ruslan Balbek, Crimean Tatar deputy prime minister of the *de facto* government, has been a strong supporter of the annexation and participated in creating the separatist authorities. In April, during an unofficial Turkish delegation visit to observe the situation of the Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea, Balbek did everything he could to convince the Turks that minority rights had not been violated. He said that Crimean Tatars "only profited"¹⁷ from the annexation. The Turkish representatives also met with members of Ilyasov's pro-Russian movement. According to the Turkish delegation report, the *de facto* authorities of Crimea tried to keep a close watch on its members and prevent them from meetings with members of Crimean Tatar community critical towards the new regime¹⁸. The authorities used such means as administrative pressure (including

¹⁵ *Rossiyskogo muftiya prosyat poyasnit zuyavleniya o ego prichasnosti k sozdaniu novogo krymskogo muftiata*, 03. 09. 2014, <http://ru.krymr.com/content/article/26564908.html>

¹⁶ *Crimea Report...*, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁷ "Balbek nameknul turetskoy delegatsii, chto krymskiye tatory 'tolko vyigrali' ot anneksii," 28 April 2015, <http://ru.krymr.com/content/news/26983383.html>, accessed 15 May 2015.

¹⁸ *Crimea Report...*, op. cit., p. 4.

those towards the venue owners) to obstruct the meetings and the government controlled media manipulations in order to picture the delegation as not impartial. The Crimean Tatars that talked to the delegation members without the authorities authorisation were facing pressure and threats. At the same time the *de facto* authorities insisted that the delegation members hold a meeting with the *de facto* Commissioner for Human Rights Institute Lyudmila Lubina to get an “official” version of the situation.¹⁹

Lenur Islamov, a Crimean Tatar from Moscow and owner of many businesses in Russia, became another important Crimean Tatar political figure. Islamov, claiming that contrary to other Crimean Tatars he already had Russian citizenship, and thus was not betraying his state by collaboration with the authorities, agreed to become deputy prime minister in the *de facto* government. However, he later resigned from this position and focused on his media business, including Crimean TV station ATR, which had played a very important role in the renaissance of the Crimean Tatar language and culture. Despite Islamov’s moderate stance towards Russian occupation, ATR was not re-registered on the peninsula and ceased broadcasting at the beginning of April. The official reasons for not granting ATR with the license, given by the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor)²⁰ were of legal and bureaucratic nature. Despite fourfold attempt to put in the documents the ATR media holding were said to not meet the requirements and failed to get a license. The reason given by the *de facto* prime minister Aksyonov, in conversation with Islamov, was that ATR was “controlled by the U.S.” and disseminated anti-government propaganda, offering hope that Crimea may someday be returned to Ukraine. In fact, the channel was moderate in its critical comments towards the *de facto* government, and Islamov was even ready to confine its coverage to strictly non-political issues. Contrary to Ilyasov, it seems that Islamov, trying to use his Russian ties to defend the Crimean Tatars’ minority rights, and was not perceived by Moscow as easily controllable.

Other Crimean Tatar media outlets, such as children’s channel “Lale”, radio channels “Meydan” and “Lider FM”, website “15 Minutes”, Crimean Tatar news agency HQA and others also were denied a license by Roskomnadzor. A Crimean Tatar newspaper *Avdet* and a periodical *Yıldız* that had been financed by Mejlis had to cease to be published because of the Mejlis assets confiscation²¹.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

²⁰ According to the Russian laws the media organisations working in the Crimea before the annexation and willing to continue their work were obliged to apply to Roskomnadzor to get a license for broadcasting before 1 April 2015.

²¹ *Crimea Report...*, op. cit., p. 18.

There were reports about threats addressed to the owners of ATR channel aiming at making them sell the television and continuous interrogations or bans on entrance to Crimea for editors and journalists of various Crimean Tatars media outlets.

The ATR channel was moved to Kyiv, from where it resumed broadcasting on 18 June from a temporary office. In the meantime the *de facto* authorities of Crimea announced that they would create a state Crimean Tatar broadcasting company²² in yet another attempt to exchange the real Crimean Tatar institutions with ones controlled by Russia and collaborating with the new authorities. At the same time the ATR, equally as Mejlis is being presented as not truly interested in promoting Crimean Tatar values but aiming at building divisions and representing interests of specific persons, not the whole community. Such comments coming from people like Remzi Ilyasov (who actually was the initiator of the idea of a state Crimean Tatar media) are to marginalise the original Crimean Tatar institutions and slander them in the eyes of the Crimean Tatars.

Even taking into account that some pro-Russian groupings among Crimean Tatars were active before annexation (for example, the National Party, *Milli Firka*), the Aksyonov regime's current repressive political line cannot be accepted by the Crimean Tatar minority. There were attempts, also on the part of Mejlis to try to find a compromise, a model of cooperation with the *de facto* authorities, that would enable peaceful cohabitation. The minority representatives' condition was that the new authorities should grant Crimean Tatars with their full minority rights in practice, not only theoretically and that they should not create obstacles to for cultivating of Crimean Tatar national traditions. This did not happen as the *de facto* authorities were not ready to fulfil their promises about including Crimean Tatar representatives in the parliament of Crimea, supporting the Crimean Tatar language and education.²³ On the contrary - the new regime chose repressions as method. Arrests of activists, searches of Tatar houses and mosques under the pretext of looking for "extremist" literature became everyday occurrences. Therefore, any significant Crimean Tatar support for the current authorities seems highly unlikely. One of the conclusions of the Turkish delegation's report was that the Crimean Tatar community representatives main concern is to protect their national identity in spite of the harsh political conditions after the annexation²⁴.

²² *V Simferopole sozdayotsya Obshchestvennoe krymsko-tatarskoe televidenie*, 24 April 2015, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2528884>, access 23 June 2015.

²³ „Nakhodimsa na kryuchke, ozhidaya svoego chasa”, Interview with Nariman Dzhelalov <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/27087865.html>, 25 June 2015.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

Vladimir Putin's Historical Policy as an Obstacle to Crimean Tatar-Russian Reconciliation

Historical legacy has been and will continue to be the most serious problem in relations between Crimean Tatars and Russia. Putin addressed the problem of rehabilitation of the Crimean Tatar nation in his annexation speech on 18 March 2014. The Russian president acknowledged that they had been treated “unfairly” as had a number of other peoples of the USSR, but that Russians were the biggest group that suffered most during the repressions. He said the process of rehabilitation had to be “finalised.” On 14 November 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued a statement “On Recognising the Illegal and Criminal Repressive Acts against Peoples Subjected to Forcible Resettlement and Ensuring Their Rights.” It officially recognised 11 “Repressed Peoples,” including the Crimean Tatars.²⁵

On 21 April 2014, Putin signed a decree on “Measures to rehabilitate Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Crimean Tatar and German nations and State support for their revival and development.”²⁶ It envisaged actions concerning reinstating historical justice, defending rights and interests, enabling social and spiritual revival, regulating rights to real property, and more.

The Crimean Tatar community, however, did not perceive this document as anything more than just a bureaucratic act. According to Mustafa Cemilev, “this is just a piece of paper that does not influence reality.”²⁷ So far his concerns proved to be right. Russia has granted Crimean Tatar language status of official language but at the same time the number of hours of Crimean Tatar language instructions in schools have been reduced²⁸, old school textbooks were banned and new ones were not supplied, Crimean Tatar National Schools were raided and both teachers and students were subjected to pressure from the officials²⁹. Crimean Tatars are considered to be one of the native communities of the Russian Federation, but they were not recognised as the indigenous people of Crimea.³⁰

It does not seem that Russia would be eager to address Stalin's mass deportation of Crimean Tatars seriously, especially as historical policy in Russia now tends to justify all the crimes of the Stalinist period as necessary actions in order to con-

25 J. O. Pohl, “The Deportation and Fate of the Crimean Tatars,” 5th Annual World Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities; *Identity and the State: Nationalism and Sovereignty in a Changing World*, 13–15 April 2000, Columbia University, New York, www.iccrimea.org/scholarly/jopohl.html.

26 “Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 21 aprelya 2014 g., Nr 268,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 23 April 2014, www.rg.ru/2014/04/21/reabilitaciya-site-dok.html.

27 Interview with Mustafa Jemilev, 12 May 2015.

28 *Crimea Report...*, op. cit., p. 5

29 *Ibidem*, p. 10.

30 *Ibidem*, p. 6.

duct modernisation of the state, which then made it possible to win the war with Nazi Germany. As Stalin is being rehabilitated, the question of condemning his actions, especially those undertaken during the Second World War (also strongly mythologised) seems impossible. Even before the annexation, Russia proved it was not willing to discuss the subject of the tragedy of the Crimean Tatars tragedy, and in 2013, the film “Khaytarma,” telling the story of the 1944 deportation, was banned from cinemas in Russia and broadly criticised.

Last year, before the 70th anniversary of the deportation, the *de facto* authorities in Crimea banned all mass gatherings, including those commemorating the victims. The Mejlis members’ houses were searched, about 150 activists were interrogated, and additional special police (OMON) forces were sent to Crimea from other parts of Russia. Eventually, the Tatar community was allowed to conduct a modest meeting in the suburbs of Simferopol. Ahead of the 71th anniversary the *de facto* authorities have again banned the Mejlis commemoration under the pretext that Crimean Tatars, together with “Ukrainian nationalists,” were planning to conduct “provocations” and “terrorist attacks.” According to Mustafa Cemilev, the authorities were trying to intimidate Crimean Tatars to stop any public actions.³¹

On 5 February 2015, the occupation authorities erected a monument of Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt in Yalta, to commemorate the 1945 conference. The monument, named the ‘Big Three’, was unveiled in the presence of Sergey Naryshkin, speaker of the Russian Duma. As part of the preparations for the anniversary of the 9 May victory over Nazi Germany, local communists also unveiled a memorial plaque of Stalin in front of the Communist Party office in Simferopol. Both actions were strongly opposed and criticised by Crimean Tatars as glorifying the Soviet tyrant responsible for mass repressions. On the side of the Crimean Tatars, any compromise on the subject of repressions – the central point of their identity and history – is out of the question. Thus it can be expected that this will continue to be the core problem in relations with Russia.

Russian propaganda does not address this very problem, and, since the moment of the referendum, has been presenting false information to its citizens. Those Crimean Tatars who are against the annexation are presented as simply pro-Ukrainian, without further explanation of what stands behind these attitudes. For Crimean Tatars, the time of Kyivan authority over Crimea, although not ideal, was better and safer than, historically, any period under Russian or Soviet authority. Coverage in the Russian media does not inform about the mass boycott of the referendum, instead suggesting that many Crimean Tatars were voting for “Russian stability.” The media have presented “touching” stories about Russian–Tatar families in Crimea, to prove that most Crimean Tatars support the referendum and

³¹ Interview with Mustafa Cemilev, 12 May 2015.

annexation, and that the only reason for criticism of Russian policy is supporting the “oppressive” Kyivan authorities.

* * *

The annexation of Crimea plays a central role of the new Russian political order and is perceived as the foundation of the regime’s legitimacy. Thus Moscow will be eager to strengthen the myth of “Russian Crimea” by fiery defence of the annexation on the international arena and cultivating propaganda myths inside the country. Any change of stance on Crimea would be perceived by Moscow as a political defeat.

Russia used an imagined threat to Russian speaking citizens in Crimea to annex and occupy the peninsula, but the first thing it did was to install authorities subordinate to Moscow and repress the non-Russian minorities. In other words, the pretext of protecting the rights of one ethnic group was used as an excuse to brutally violate the rights of others. As Moscow’s goal is to continue with its russification policy in order to comply with the myth of the “Russian Crimea,” the rights of Crimean Tatars will continue to be seriously violated.

It seems that Russian idea is to try to gain the support of the Tatar community by taking control over their leadership. This would enable Moscow to present its policy as a successful model of cohabitation. Actions undertaken by the Russian authorities in Crimea, such as the repression of Tatar political leaders and activists, as well as closure of their media, prove that Moscow is not ready to let Crimean Tatars cultivate their legacy and traditions freely. Apart from the ban on the commemoration of the Deportation, political repressions and mass media closure there are other actions of de facto authorities that confirm the choice of repressive policies. For example, Crimean Tatars were denied to organise any mass actions on the Crimean Tatar Flag Day 26 June 2015.³²

The goal of Russian policy towards the Crimean Tatar minority is to convince or compel its members to admit that they are Russians. Only after the Crimean Tatars’ consent to accept ‘new reality’, they will be allowed to preserve Crimean Tatariness understood as apolitical, regional identity. However, it seems highly unlikely that the Crimean Tatars, a minority with ages-long experience of resisting both Russia and the USSR, will accept the role of apolitical ethnographic group, in which their traditions are used only decoratively, copying the Soviet treatment of ethnic minorities. Some may decide to emigrate, and in 2014 already 10,000 Crimean Tatars left the peninsula.

³² *Zayavlenie organizatsionnogo komiteta po podgotovke i provedeniyu meropriyatiy, priurochennykh ko Dnyu krymskotatarskogo natsionalnogo flaga*, <http://bayraq.info/haberler/79-zayavlenie-orgkomiteta.html>, access 23 June 2015.

History will be the main problem in mutual relations, and Crimean Tatars will not be willing to relinquish their historical memory, which is a crucial element of their identity. Thus it seems like two models of co-existence are possible, both negative. One presumes that the minority goes underground, the other will be continuation of repressions by the authorities, ostensibly in order to fight pro-Ukrainian, anti-Russian, “fifth column”. With its neo-Soviet ideology and increasing glorification of Stalin’s policy, it does not seem as if Moscow is willing to even try to offer any model of cohabitation that would be acceptable for the Crimean Tatars.

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Węzeł gordyjski: stosunki tatarsko-rosyjskie po aneksji Krymu

Justyna Prus, Konrad Zasztowt

18 marca 2014 r. Federacja Rosyjska dokonała aneksji Krymu, części Ukrainy, po nielegalnym przejęciu wojskowej kontroli nad jego terytorium i zorganizowaniu nieuznanego referendum dotyczącego niepodległości regionu. Celem artykułu jest analiza tego, w jaki sposób aneksja i następująca po niej rusyfikacja systemu politycznego, społecznego i prawnego wpłynęły na mniejszość Tatarów Krymskich i ich relacje z Rosją. Tatarzy Krymscy, w ogromnej większości sprzeciwiający się aneksji i i rosyjskiej polityce, stali się ofiarami represji politycznych, naruszeń praw obywatelskich i zastraszenia. Polityka rosyjska wobec mniejszości ma na celu zmuszenie ich do zaakceptowania „nowej rzeczywistości” bez prawa do aktywności politycznej i kultywowania własnego dziedzictwa kulturowego, tam gdzie nie jest ono spójne z polityką i ideologią Rosji.

Kwestia Krymu jako *de facto* części Rosji jest jedynie zwięźle omówiona w tekście. Jego głównym celem jest ukazanie zmian i złożoności w relacjach tatarsko-rosyjskich. Autorzy prognozują pesymistyczny wariant rozwoju sytuacji. Ich zdaniem strategia Federacji Rosyjskiej polegająca zmuszaniu Tatarów do uznania, że są w istocie Rosjanami, nie

Гордиев узел: русско-татарские отношения после аннексии Крыма

Юстина Прус, Конрад Заштовт

18 марта 2014 г. Российская Федерация аннексировала часть Украины - Крым, после нелегального военного вторжения на его территорию и организации непризнанного референдума, касающегося независимости региона. Цель статьи – анализ того, как аннексия и последующая после нее русификация политической, общественной и юридической системы повлияли на этническое меньшинство крымских татар и их отношений с Россией. Крымские татары, в большинстве своем сопротивляющиеся аннексии и российской политике, стали жертвами политических репрессий, нарушений гражданских прав и политики запугивания. Целью российской политики в отношении этнического меньшинства, является принуждение к принятию «новой реальности» без права политической активности и культивирования собственного культурного наследия, там, где оно не соответствует политике и идеологии России.

Проблема Крыма, как *de facto* субъекта России, описывается в тексте кратко. Главная цель статьи – исследование появившихся изменений и

ma szansę na powodzenie. Tatarzy Krymscy, z tradycjami oporu wobec presji zarówno Rosji jak i ZSRR, nie przyjmą roli apolitycznej grupy etnograficznej, dla której rodzime tradycje są jedynie dekoracją. Część wybierze emigrację, część działalność podziemną.

сложностей в русско-татарских отношениях. Авторы прогнозируют пессимистический вариант развития ситуации. По их мнению стратегия Российской Федерации основываясь на принуждении татар к признанию того, что они являются русскими, не имеет никаких шансов на успех. Крымские татары, имеющие традиции сопротивления давлению со стороны как России так и СССР, не примут роль аполитической этнографической группы для которой родные традиции являются только декорацией. Часть из них выберет эмиграцию, а часть – подпольную деятельность.



