

## **Crimean Tatars: Another Russia's Headache?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Since the “annexation” of Crimea by the Russian Federation, international community has witnessed the alarming situation of human rights in the peninsula, especially towards the Crimean Tatars. According some reports of Council of Europe on Human Rights, and reports of different Non Governmental Organizations and civil societies, the Human right situation is very preoccupying, since the basics freedoms were violated by Russian Authorities. This article will explore the condition of Human Rights in this “new Russian” peninsula and the situation of Crimean Tatars after the “accession” of Crimea to Russian Federation.

Key words: Crimean Tatars, The Situation of The Minorities In Russian Crimea, Human Rights, Issues In Crimea.

“Crimea has always been and remains Russian, as well as Ukrainian, Crimean-Tatar, Greek (after all, there are Greeks living there) and German - and it will be home to all of those peoples. As for state affiliation, the people living in Crimea made their choice; it should be treated with respect, and Russia cannot do otherwise. I hope that our neighboring and distant partners will ultimately treat this the same way, since in this case, the highest criteria used to establish the truth can only be the opinion of the people themselves.”

**Vladimir Putin**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In March 2014, Crimea became officially part of Russian Federation after a referendum not recognised by the International Community. For Russian Authorities, the reattachment of the peninsula to the “Motherland” was a logical process, since the coup d’état against Victor Yanukovich brings the so-called “neo-Nazi movements” to the power in Kiev. After the reattachment of Crimea to Russian Federation, many of those who opposed to the referendum left the territory for fear of repression. The Crimean Tatars have largely left the peninsula, fleeing from persecution. Indeed, after the annexation of Crimea, a part of Tatars and Ukrainian refuses to take Russian citizenship became the targets of the pro Russians activists. However, the situation of Human Rights in Crimea is not different of the situation of Human Rights in the rest of the Russian Federation. But after the annexation of the Crimean peninsula, International pressures, sometimes motivated by political reasons, come from all sides. The Russian Federation, often, critics the reports of international organizations and independent reporters, while accuse the Ukrainian of propaganda and violations of the Rights of Crimean citizens.

After exploring briefly, the tragic history of the Crimean Tatars, and the situation on the peninsula after its accession to the Russian Federation, this article will examine the situation of the minorities in Crimea after March 2014, and then some cases of the violation of the Rights of Crimean Tatars will be examined.

Finally, this article will explore the official position of Russian Federation on the Human Rights issues in the peninsula.

## **1. CRIMEAN TATARS**

Today, Crimean Tatars became the main problem for Russia in the new Russian peninsula. Crimean Tatars represent the most part of the population of the peninsula, which reacted negatively to joining Russia Federation. This was not surprising - most of the Crimean Tatar community sees Russia as a threat, and it will not be easy to change their position, given their tragic history. They had been deported at the end of the Second World War (Brian Glyn Williams, 2002: P.323).

### **1.2.FLASHBACK TO THE HISTORY**

Crimean Tatars were deported from their historical homeland in 1944 on charges of collaborating with the Nazis. Even at this time Crimea didn't have an ethnically Tatar character (Crimean Tatars were about 20% of the population), but the Crimean Tatar language was, along with the Russian language, one of the official languages of the peninsula.

It is noteworthy that most of the people who collaborated with the Nazis managed to leave the Crimea together with the retreating German troops<sup>1</sup>, and the remaining (about 5 thousand people of different nationalities) were arrested by the NKVD organs even before the deportation of the Tatars. On 6 June 1944, a total of 151,083 Crimean Tatars had been sent to Uzbekistan and by the end of July, a total of 151,424 Crimean Tatars (35,750 families) had arrived in there (Bugai, 1995: P. 155.). A total of 228 543 people were evicted from the Crimea, 191 014 of them are Crimean Tatars (more than 47 thousand families)<sup>2</sup>. The deported families were sent mainly to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. In 1944-1945, according to the

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<sup>1</sup>B.G. Williams, pp. 580-582 and 592-593

<sup>2</sup> Бугай Н.Ф. : "Согласно Вашему указанию..." ( Bugai : "According to your instructions ..."), Moscow 1995.

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estimates of the Soviet authorities, 15-25% of the Crimean Tatar expelled died in exile (the representatives of the Crimean Tatar give the terrible figure of 46%)<sup>3</sup>.

After the death of Joseph Stalin and the coming of Khrushchev to power, the Crimean Tatars, unlike the representatives of the majority of the “repressed persons”, were not allowed to return to their homeland. Apparently, this did not result from the specificity of this people for the USSR compared to the Chechens or the Ingushs, but to the strategic and political significance of the Crimea, where the two stations of the Union and the Black Sea fleet was located. Under these conditions, the Soviet leadership decided to maintain the status quo in the Crimea, whereby the Crimea was the usual region in Ukraine, to which it was transferred in 1954 by Nikita Khrushchev.

Soviet authorities, later, were forced to make some concessions to the Crimean Tatars - in 1974; the ban on their return to the Crimea was formally lifted. However, in reality perestroika has implemented an effective ban on resettlement and Tatar activists have been persecuted. For example, Dzhemilev accused of anti-Soviet activities spent in prisons and exile, a total of about 15 years. In the mid-1970s, after the opening of another criminal proceeding against him, in protest, he went on a hunger strike, which lasted ten months. He was released only in 1986 during the political liberalization of Gorbachev, which allowed the Crimean Tatars to return to their homeland. The mass return occurred in 1989<sup>4</sup> - accordingly, in 2001 (date of the last census in Ukraine) 243 433 Crimean Tatars lived in the Crimea. Today, the Crimean Tatars represent about 12% of the population of the peninsula (approximately 300 000 people). Thus, the number of the Crimean Tatar population is increasing fairly rapidly, although in percentage it has not yet reached the pre-war level.

In 1991, the Tatars of the Crimea created their own system to manage their national autonomy. Parliamentary functions are carried out by the Kurultais, whose elections are held every five years (the Crimean Tatars - citizens of Ukraine and the

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<sup>3</sup> See Svetlana Alieva ed., *Tak eto bylo: Natsional'nye repressii v SSSR, 1919-1952 gody* (Moscow: Russian International Cultural Fund, 1993) and N.F. Bugai ed., *Iosif Stalin - Lavrentiiu Berii: "Ikh nado deportirovat'": dokumenty, fakty, kommentarii* (hereafter *Ikh nado deportirovat'*) (Moscow: Druzhba narodov, 1992) for most of the relevant documents on these deportations from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Council of Peoples Commissars, NKVD, and MVD.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, p. 654

Crimean Tatars permanently residing in Ukraine who have the age of 18) Participate in the vote. The Kurultai<sup>5</sup> (Congress) forms the executive organ - the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars (an analogue of a government). The Tatar leaders argues that, Mejlis and Kurultai, being democratically elected by all Crimean Tatars<sup>6</sup>, represent the interests of the Crimean Tatar people and should be recognized as such. The Mejlis, not registered by the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, is a public structure whose status is not clear. This is due to the fact that Mejlis considers itself a prototype of the state structure and is not prepared to settle for a public role that can be challenged (for example, for other organizations claiming to represent Interests of the Crimean Tatars). Moreover, the granting of the status of the State of Mejlis was impossible because of the difficult relations between various communities in Crimea. After their return to the peninsula, the Crimean Tatars immediately and actively occupy the lands, considering historically as their own lands. Russians fear such an expansion. The Russian community traditionally has a strong majority in the parliament of the peninsula and has blocked the legitimating of this “minority” competitors with great ambitions.

All this could not be taken into account by Kiev authorities, who for a decade failed to pass legislation on the rehabilitation of the Crimean Tatar due of the rejection by the majority of the population of Crimea. As a result, the Verkhovna Rada recognized the Crimean Tatars as the indigenous people of Ukraine, and the Mejlis and Kurultai - their authorized bodies only on March 20, 2014, after the annexation of the peninsula by Russian Federation.

However, in the mid-1990s, Mejlis was partially legitimized - President Leonid Kuchma established a Council of Representatives of Crimean Tatars, whose members were representatives of the Mejlis. This body played an advisory role, but gave Mejlis direct access to the Ukrainian president who bypassed the Verkhovna Rada. From 1991 until 2013, the president of Mejlis was Mustafa Dzhemilev, but since 2013, the 70-year-old leader was replaced by his closest colleague, Refat

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<sup>5</sup> The 1991 Kurultai was explicitly called the 2nd Kurultai, to signify the continuity with the first Kurultai established in December 1917

<sup>6</sup> Elections procedure of Kurultai delegates by the Crimean Tatars, and Mejlis members by the Kurultai delegates, are described in Wilson 1998, 286-289. Rules of procedure (reglament) of the Kurultai and the status (polizhenie) of Mejlis, are published in Avdet, 16 December 1997.

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Chubarov<sup>7</sup>. Dzhemilev is historically closely linked to the Ukrainian national movement - he was elected deputy to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine with the party “People's Rukh of Ukraine”, “Our Ukraine” of Viktor Yushchenko, and in 2012 with the party “Patrie” of Yulia Tymoshenko. In 2010, during the elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea, Mejlis was formally represented by the list of “Ukrainian People's Party Rukh”, which received 7% of the vote (51,000 votes)<sup>8</sup>.

In 2004, Mejlis actively supported the “Orange Revolution”<sup>9</sup> - but some time later, a rupture occurred within the Crimean Tatars movement. In 2006, part of the Crimean Tatars announced the restoration of a political party called “Milli Firka”<sup>10</sup> - successor to a similar party that functioned during the civil war. Unlike Mejlis, Milli Firka was officially registered. In the elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea in 2010, she participated with the list of the Ukrainian Democratic Party Selan, which received only 7268 votes (1%) and could not sit in the parliament of the peninsula. Representatives of "Milli Firka" said that the results of the elections were tricked in favor of the Mejlis, but they had not been able to present convincing evidence. Relations between Mejlis and Milli Firka are extremely tense.

In 2010, Viktor Yanukovich,(former Ukrainian President) who came to power in Ukraine, fundamentally changed the composition of the Council of Representatives of Crimean Tatars. Mejlis representatives became a minority and the majority of the members of the council were members of public organizations (including Milli Firka), loyal to the ruling Party of Regions. As a result, Mejlis representatives refused to participate in Council meetings, which became the center of attraction for the socio-political forces, opponents of Mejlis. Its president was the Crimean Verkhovna Rada deputy Lentun Bezaziev, elected with the Party of Regions. However, this organization did not have a great authority within the Crimean Tatar population and didn't demonstrate its effectiveness.

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<sup>7</sup> UNPO: “Crimean Tatars: Refat Chubarov Elected As New Leader”, October 29, 2013, <http://unpo.org/article/16532>

<sup>8</sup>Election Resources on the Internet: Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Ukraine - Results Lookup <http://electionresources.org/ua/president.php?election=2010>

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Karatnycky: Ukraine's Orange revolution , Mach /April 2005, Foreign Affairs: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2005-03-01/ukraines-orange-revolution>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.milli-firka.org/language/english/>

## **I.2. CRIMEAN TATARS AND RUSSIAN FEDERATION RELATIONS**

In February 2014, Mejlis was the only socio-political structure in the Crimea, which supported the new Ukrainian authorities<sup>11</sup>. This was not surprising: the alternative was the strengthening of the positions of Russian organizations, including the active promotion of the rapprochement with Russia, headed by Sergei Aksenov. On February 26, approximately 10,000 Crimean Tatars blockaded the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) building in order to counter the Russian activists who considered the new Kiev authorities as the “Nazis” and asked the Crimea to join Russia. During the street clashes, two pro Russians died, and the building of Verkhovna Rada was not occupied by pro-Russians that day. But when the Tatars left, the next day, Rada's buildings were occupied by “unknown” armed men, called “green men.”

Sergey Aksenov was then appointed Prime Minister to accelerate the accession of the peninsula to the Russian Federation. No one of the Crimean Tatar entered to the new government of Aksyonov. Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Temirgaliyev, is a Kazan Tatar which different of Crimean Tatar. However, the tension between Crimean Tatars and the new Crimean authorities and Russia remains tense. This tension is due of several circumstances.

Firstly, the conflicting relations between the Tatar and Russian communities in Crimea are linked both to the opposing interpretations of historical events and to the question of land. In 2012 pro-Russian activists demonstratively dismembered a Tatar near to Simferopol. Moreover, the vice Prime Minister of Crimea Temirgaliyev said that the Tatars must leave part of the land they illegally acquired if they want to legalize their land tenure.

Secondly, Russia is perceived by the Crimean Tatar community as the natural successor of the USSR<sup>12</sup>, and therefore directly responsible for their

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<sup>11</sup> Idil P. Izmirli: Crimean Tatars Support EuroMaidan Protests in Kyiv, Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 10 Issue: 219, December 6, 2013, <https://jamestown.org/program/crimean-tatars-support-euromaidan-protests-in-kyiv/>

<sup>12</sup> Taras Kuzio : “Tatars fear a future under Russia” Putin justified annexation to protect Ukrainian minorities, but Tatars are more afraid of Moscow than Kiev, April 2, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/4/ukraine-crimean-tatarsinputinsrussia.html>

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deportation to Central Asia. Moreover, in Russia the deportation of the Crimean Tatars is interpreted differently. It is important to underline the behavior of Russian Consul General Vladimir Andreev, who forbade Russian veterans to attend the premiere of the film “Haytarma”, which relates the deportation of the Crimean Tatars by Stalin. Andreev accuses the filmmakers of deformation of historical facts and emphasized that Crimean Tatars had collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War<sup>13</sup>. The Russian Ministry immediately reacted to this declaration and relieved Andreev of his duties. But this declaration reveals in reality the position of the majority of the Russian population.

Thirdly, as noted above, the leaders of the Mejlis are historically connected with the Ukrainian national movement.

In the period of preparation for the Crimean referendum, a stake was made on removing at least part of these fears and stimulating the participation of the Crimean Tatar community in the vote. As a result, unprecedented concessions were made to the community. On March 11, the Crimean Parliament adopted a resolution “On guarantees of restoring the rights of the Crimean Tatar people and its integration into the Crimean society<sup>14</sup>.” According to the decree, the authorities guarantee a 20% representation of the Crimean Tatars in all councils and executive bodies. It is also guaranteed that in the future Constitution of Crimea official status of the Crimean Tatar language along with Russian and Ukrainian will be fixed. The resolution recognizes the Kurultai (congress) as the body of the national administration, and also the bodies authorized by it. Parliament Speaker Vladimir Konstantinov called the bill “historic” and said Crimean Tatars have been waiting for the reform for 70 years. “The Crimean Tatar people have not been offered anything like this from either the Soviet Union or independent Ukraine. They have been hoping for this for decades, and it will allow Crimeans of all nationalities to develop and feel safe and comfortable on Crimean soil,” he said.

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<sup>13</sup> Idil P. Izmirli : Russian Consul General to Crimea Resigns Following Offensive Comments About Crimean Tatar Deportation, Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 10 Issue: 106, June 5, 2013: <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-consul-general-to-crimea-resigns-following-offensive-comments-about-crimean-tatar-deportation/>

<sup>14</sup> RT news: Crimean parliament guarantees broader rights to Tatar minority, Mach 11,2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/crimea-tatar-rights-guarantee-122/>



Moreover, the First vice Prime Minister Temirgaliyev noted that the authorities of the Crimea pledged to allocate 240 million hryvnia (about \$ 22 million) for a program to support Crimean Tatar communities, and Prime Minister Aksenov promised to the Crimean Tatars the positions of one deputy prime minister, two ministers, and also the post of deputy minister in every ministry, including power departments.

“Milli Firka” and one of its leaders Vasvi Abduraimov<sup>15</sup>, was very active in encouraging the Crimean Tatars to participate in the referendum. Abduraimov affirms that he support the “integration of the Crimean Tatars into the Turkish world in the Eurasian space” (to establish links with the Tatars of Kazan) and affirms that the Mejlis is recognized by only 15 or 20% of Crimean Tatars. Furthermore, he accused the Mejlis of having links with the radical Islamist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is recognized as a terrorist Organization and banned in Russia.

However, "Milli Firki" doesn't represent a large part of the Tatars population as the results of the 2010 elections showed. Moreover, there was a split within the party itself. Abduraimov represents only a part of it. The other part, led by Enver Kantemir-Umerov, announced on 8 March that Abduraimov was expelled from the party for inconsistent statements. Kantemir-Umerov also supported the holding of the referendum, expressing the confidence that “a prosperous future awaits” the Crimean Tatars in Russia.

It's important to note that Negotiations with the Mejlis led by Tatarstan's leaders (Tatars of Kazan in Russia)<sup>16</sup>, Mintimer Shaimiev and Rustam Minnikhanov failed<sup>17</sup>. The leader of Mejlis Refat Chubarov called for boycotting the referendum. The attempt to circumvent Chubarov also failed. Indeed, the Russian authorities have bypassed Chubarov to directly contact Mustapha Dzhemilev. Dzhemilev visited Moscow, where he met Shaimiev, representing Tatars of Kazan and had an inconclusive telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin. On the day of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ukrainaninsesi: VASVİ ABDURAIMOV YENİDEN MİLLİ FIRKA BAŞKANI 25 Mart 2014, [http://www.ukraynaninsesi.org/haber/kirim\\_1/vasvi-abduraimov-yeniden-milli-firka-baskani/1053.html](http://www.ukraynaninsesi.org/haber/kirim_1/vasvi-abduraimov-yeniden-milli-firka-baskani/1053.html)

<sup>16</sup> Despite the similarity in the names of these two groups, they are distinct and separate nationalities

<sup>17</sup> State Counsellor of the Republic of Tatarstan- Tatarstan President's Press Office: Mintimer Shaimiev tells about meeting with Mustafa Dzhemilev

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referendum, Jemilev immediately left the Crimea and went to Turkey, where he met Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. After their meeting, there was a telephone conversation between Putin and Erdogan, at the initiative of the Turkish authorities, during which the question of Crimean Tatar was discussed.

The real rate of participation of the Crimean Tatars in the referendum remains debatable. According to Dzhemilev, less than 1% of the Crimean Tatars participated in the referendum. On the other hand, Temirgaliyev said that about 40% of Crimean Tatars participated in the referendum and 25% voted to join Russia. Although, at the same time, Temirgaliyev admitted that this information is just estimation, since there aren't a methods that determine clearly which nationality voted or not voted in the referendum. How then did he and Dzhemilev know the rate of participation of the Crimean Tatars in the referendum?

Therefore, it seems that the truth is somewhere in the middle. Dzhemilev statistics may be true in some areas with a compact population of Crimean Tatars, but it is much more dubious in large cities with mixed populations, especially as some community representatives voted NO to the referendum. Anyways, even Temirgaliyev does not believe that most of the Crimean Tatars participated in the vote - so the problem of the Crimean Tatars' fidelity remains unresolved.

## **2. THE SITUATION OF THE MINORITIES IN RUSSIAN CRIMEA**

Following the annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation in March 18, 2014, minorities groups have been subject of systematic violation of their rights. According to different reports of Human Rights activists, this violation concerns freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and religion, the right of association, and freedom of the Medias...Historically, Crimea is a multi-ethnic region where Russians was a majority. The other ethnical groups are Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, Jews, Armenian, and Azeri...After that the region became de facto Russian territory, Crimean Tatars and Ukrainian became de facto minorities groups.

Despite that the Constitution of the republic of Crimea adopted in April 11, 2014, declared that, Russian, with Ukrainian and Crimean Tatars are the state language of the peninsula, a large part of Crimean Tatars were opposed to be, once again, part of Russian Federation. They still have the memories of their deportation

by Soviet Union and the early Russian colonization under Ekaterina II. Some Ukrainians and specially Crimean Tatars were strongly opposed to the referendum, they were considered by the local authorities as pro-kiev activists. Then, after the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, they feared persecutions.

Despite the official declaration of Kremlin on protecting the rights of minorities in the peninsula, most part of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians were opposed to separate from Ukraine and refuse to change their nationality.

Indeed, according to different report, since the annexation of Crimea, by Russia, fundamental Human Rights and freedom have been restricted. Especially towards those who refuse to take Russian passport or continue to oppose to the reattachment of the peninsula to the Russian Federation. Among the minorities groups in Crimea, Crimean Tatars are the most organized groups and most visible. This situation makes them more vulnerable to discrimination. The ethnic Ukrainians are less visible because of their slave's traits. However, they became immediately a target when they explicitly express their pro-Ukrainian views, when they speak Ukrainian or when they celebrate Ukrainian holidays.

Moreover, after the annexation of Crimea, all the Russian legislations and laws on national minorities and towards religious groups have become automatically applicable on the peninsula. Brief, according to different reports, situation of national minorities in Crimea become more complicated after the reattachment of the peninsula to Russian Federation. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minority, Astrid Thors, declared on 2015: "We found in Crimea that those Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars who openly supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine, refused Russian citizenship, or did not support the de facto authorities were in a particularly vulnerable position. Since the annexation of Crimea, the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian communities have been subjected to increasing pressure on and control of the peaceful expression of both their culture and their political views."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The OSCE ODIHR and HCNM joint report identifies widespread human rights violations, discrimination, and legal irregularities in Crimea, Kyiv, 17 September 2015. Accessed from <http://www.osce.org/odihr/182526> on May 10, 2017

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This comment emphasized the difficult situation of the Human Rights in Crimea, after the annexation of the peninsula. There are several cases on the violations of the Rights of Crimean Tatars and others minorities reported by NGOs and Human Rights activists.

### **2.1. CASES OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN CRIMEA**

The most serious violation concerns the Rights to life, Rights to security, and Rights to liberty. Since the annexation of Crimea, according to Human rights activists and different NGOs reports, it reported a numerous cases of disappearances. The Crimean Tatars who from the beginning of the conflict were somehow pro-Ukrainian and didn't accepted annexation were under special pressure from local "authorities". According to Nariman Dzhelalov, deputy leader of the Mejlis, hundreds of violations of the rights of the Crimean Tatars were recorded these last 3 years. Moreover, some sources affirm that not only activists are being persecuted but also ordinary citizens who are not participating in political life.

According to Mustafa Dzhemilev, a Crimean Tatar leader, Member of Parliament of Ukraine, in 2015, 20 Crimean Tatars have disappeared. Some of them were released, while others were found dead. According to human rights activists, the fate of 5 people remains still unknown. Human rights activists note that at least four members from the auto-defense police could be involved in at least four abductions. However, their proximity with the authorities makes almost impossible to conduct investigations and to punish them. It was reported also the cas of Reshat Amitov who was kinapped by three persons in military uniform. His mutilated body was found two weeks later in the village of Zemlyanichnoe. Or the case of the three activists: Leonid Korzh, Seiran Zinedinov and Timur Shaimardanov who have disappeared. And then the case of Islyam Dzheparov and Dzhebdet Islyamov who were arrested on the road between Simferopol and Feodosia by military and taken to an unknown destination. Criminal investigations have been launched by the authorities, but neither the victims nor the perpetrators have yet been found. The others cases include the disappearances of Marcel Aliautdinov (February 2016),

Ernest Ablyazimov (January 2016), and Ruslan Ganiev and his friend Arlen Terekhov (in December 2015)<sup>19</sup>

All these violations was reported by Nils Muižnieks, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, who visited Moscow, Kiev and Crimea<sup>20</sup>

According to Human Rights Watch report, the Tatars have been persecuted in the Crimea since the annexation of the peninsula by Russia. The association refers to arrests and disappearances among the Tatar minority, strong pressure on their institutions and their media, and a virtual exclusion from the public life of those who refuse to adopt Russian citizenship. "Crimea's isolation has made it very difficult to conduct comprehensive human rights monitoring there," said Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia director for Human Rights Watch. "But serious human rights abuses in Crimea should not slip to the bottom of the international agenda."<sup>21</sup>

The Crimean Tatars are about 300,000 people and represent about 13% of the Crimean population. The hostility of most Crimean Tatars towards the idea of union with Russia has provoked a serious conflict with the pro-Moscow authorities. The leaders of the Tatars, Mustafa Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov, head of the Mejlis, were forbidden of entering in the peninsula for five years. Russian authorities accused Mustapha Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov of engaging in the Extremist activities. Chubarov, the current leader of the Mejlis, intends to contest this decision before the European Court of Human Right. Even the books written by Mustapaha Dzhemilev were banned from Crimea.

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<sup>19</sup> Data retrieved from Crimea-SOS, Interactive Map of Human Rights Violations, <http://crimeamap.krymsos.com/ru/list.html> on May 10, 2017

<sup>20</sup> Strasbourg, 27 October 2014 CommDH(2014)

REPORT BY NILS MUIŽNIEKS, COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE FOLLOWING HIS MISSION IN KYIV, MOSCOW AND CRIMEA FROM 7 TO 12 SEPTEMBER 2014

<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2624575&SecMode=1&DocId=2197556&Usage=2>

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch :Ukraine: Fear, Repression in Crimea ,Rapid Rights Deterioration in 2 Years of Russian Rule, March 18, 2016, accessed from

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/18/ukraine-fear-repression-crimea>  
On May 10,2017

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Moreover, the Crimean authorities have forbidden the gathering for the celebration of 18 May, anniversary of the deportation of Crimean Tatars; on the pretext that it would be dangerous. Mosques, schools (madrasas) and houses belonging to the Tatars were systematically searched by the special “anti-extremism” branch of the Ministry of Internal affair and by the police. The only independent TV station of the Crimean Tatars, ATR, has come under pressure and many activists, journalists and bloggers have been forced to leave the peninsula.

Moreover, detention, searches and interrogations targeting Crimean Tatars and Ukrainian activists become regular. Human Rights groups reported houses searches in the regions mostly populated by the Crimean Tatars and Ukrainian, in the autumn 2015 and winter 2016.<sup>22</sup> The freedom of assembly is also restricted, particularly for the Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians. This situation was reported by the ODIHR and HCNM<sup>23</sup>. Another flagrant violation of freedom was held on May 16, 2014, two days before the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deportation of the Crimean Tatars. The authorities banned all public manifestation or assembly for 18 days.

Other violations reported were the restriction on freedoms of expression. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia, some televisions channels, radios and newspapers were banned by the new authorities. Dissident voices were reprimanded and independents journalists were targeted. Immediately after the reattachment of the peninsula to Russia, the Russian legal norms on extremism and separatism enter in force in Crimea, and the new legislations opened the door for all sorts of Human Rights violations.

However, as a counter argument, the Russian Federation accuses Ukraine and western Medias of propaganda around Crimean Tatars issues. Indeed, Russian authorities argued that the situation of National minorities, in general, and Crimean Tatars particularly became better since the reattachment of the peninsula to the “motherland”.

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<sup>22</sup> Crimea-SOS, Interactive Map, <http://krymsos.com/en/projects/interaktivna-karta-porushen-prav-lyudini-v-krimu/>

<sup>23</sup> OSCE, Report of the Human Rights Assessment Mission on Crimea, p. 41. Accessed from <http://www.osce.org/odihr/182526> on May 10,2017

## **2.2. RUSSIAN POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN CRIMEA**

In an interview with Gazeta.ru on November 19, the Prime Minister of Crimea Sergey Aksenov denied the information of Human Rights Watch about violations of the rights of the Crimean Tatars.

The report of the organization, according to Aksenov, has no objective confirmation. The head of the Crimea did not see the mention of concrete facts and people in the report. He called on human rights defenders to provide specific information and, in that case, to conduct an objective investigation and punish the perpetrators. "However, as a rule, as a result, it turns out that there are no facts, but there are some empty conversations," Said Aksenov .

He also called inappropriate the name of the Russian government "occupational", and he dubbed the report "propaganda." "The Russian government is not an occupying power in the Crimea, more than 97% of Crimean voted for reunification with Russia on March 16. On March 18, our region and the city of Sevastopol became constituent entities of the Russian Federation, and in the course of this September elections, absolutely legitimate authorities were elected Compliance with all international standards. What "occupation" can we talk about? "- said Sergei Aksenov<sup>24</sup>.

In the very report of HRW it is said that the Crimean authorities forbid the inhabitants of the peninsula to gather, intimidate those who opposed Russia's action in the Crimea. There are also mentioned searches in the homes of Crimean Tatars - with names and testimonies. The document states that the authorities issued Russian citizenship to the inhabitants of the Crimea "forcibly".

Aksyonov advised human rights defenders to pay attention to the violation of human rights and mass killings in the Donetsk and Lugansk republics and to calculate the number of victims there.

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<sup>24</sup> Национальный акцент :Сведения о нарушениях прав крымских татар Аксенов назвал "пустыми разговорами"20 ноября 2014, <http://nazaccent.ru/content/13928-svedeniya-o-narusheniyah-prav-krymskih-tatar.html>

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On the violation of the rights of the Crimean Tatars, the exiled leaders of the Mejlis constantly say. The inhabitants of the peninsula themselves complained of searches in houses and mosques and abductions of people. With these cases, the authorities promised to investigate, but the outcome of the investigations has not yet been announced.

It is clear that a large part of Crimean population, are pro-Russian. And after the referendum, it is normal that some people demonstrate that they oppose to be part of Russia. But the discourses about the violation of Human Rights in Crimea are sometime, political motivated. 23 years that Crimean Tatars lived as Ukrainians, but their situation remained the same. Crimean Tatars are minority, and even if Crimea and Sevastopol have territorial autonomy, their situation was the same. However it's important to note that Russian Federation and Ukraine have not the same legislations on national minority, separatism issues and extremism.

After the annexation of the Crimea by Russia, the international community imposed an embargo on the peninsula. On the contrary, these measures aimed to punish Russia have contributed to the suffering of the population of the Crimea in general.

In November 2016, a Turkish delegation headed by Hasan Cengiz, emphasized the contradictory information on the violation of the Rights of Crimean Tatars. Indeed, a delegation sent by Ankara was composed of 22 persons, among them the deputy major of Ankara Ahmet Tunc. One of the aims of the visit was to clarify the situation of the Crimean Tatars in the peninsula. "All the news about the Crimea is a lie. The Crimean Tatars are well, they have fairly comfortable living conditions" said Hasan Cengiz<sup>25</sup>.

### **2.3. CRIMEAN TATARS, BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP SEA**

After the accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin said that, Crimea is a unique, multicultural region with different traditions and peoples and it is very similar to Russia. In the peninsula, Russians and Ukrainians, Crimean

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<sup>25</sup> Sputniknews: Persecutés, les Tatars de Crimée? Mensonge selon des turcs, November 25, 2016, <https://fr.sputniknews.com/international/201611251028872344-crimee-tatars-turquie/>



Tatars and other ethnic groups lives together, saving their own identities, traditions, languages and confessions, for a long time.

It should be noted that the total population of the Crimean Peninsula is about 2.2 million people, of whom nearly 1.5 million are Russians, 350 000 are Ukrainians who consider Russian as their mother tongue, and about 290,000-300,000 are Crimean Tatars. President Putin noted that Crimean Tatars “as the referendum has shown, also lean towards Russia” (Putin, 2014). Moreover, President Putin promised “to make all the necessary political and legislative decisions to finalise the rehabilitation of Crimean Tatars, restore them in their rights and clear their good name”.<sup>26</sup>

When, on April 19, the International Court of Justice, accused Russian authorities for violating the basic Rights of Crimean Tatars<sup>27</sup>, Dimitry Peskov, Putin’s spokesperson said that “in fact, there are no restrictions for operation of public organizations of Russian citizens, Crimean Tatars. However, there are some extremist organizations. Therefore, extremism will be fought like everywhere across Russia,” he said. “What is not banned is permitted - public, political or any other activities, and there are no problems here,” he added<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, according to Russians authorities, the ordinary Crimean Tatars or Ukrainians living in the peninsula have the same rights as the others Russians citizens. But only the extremists’ groups and extremists’ peoples are banned and persecuted there. This situation is similar to the others part of Russia. The some policies are used in others parts of the Russian Federation, such as Chechnya, Ingushetia...and Russian Caucasus in General.

It’s important to talk about the argument and counter-argument on the Violation of Human Rights in Crimea. There are two points of view on the

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<sup>26</sup> Discours de Vladimir Poutine sur l’adhésion de la Crimée  
par Vladimir Poutine, RÉSEAU VOLTAIRE | MOSCOU (RUSSIE) | 18 MARS 2014  
<http://www.voltairenet.org/article182817.html>

<sup>27</sup> The Court finds that Russia must refrain from imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar community to conserve its representative institutions, including the Mejlis, and ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/166/19412.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Russian Beyond the Headlines: Kremlin: No restrictions for Crimean Tatars’ organizations in Russia  
April 21, 2017 TASS [https://www.rbth.com/news/2017/04/21/kremlin-no-restrictions-for-crimean-tatars-organizations-in-russia\\_747776](https://www.rbth.com/news/2017/04/21/kremlin-no-restrictions-for-crimean-tatars-organizations-in-russia_747776)

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“confrontation” of Russians and Tatars in the peninsula. The first point of view is supported by the leader of the Crimean Tatar community in Moscow Ernst Kudusov. According to him, today Crimean Tatars “aims to create hostility between Ukrainians and Russians.” “Those who are now in favor of the accession of the Crimea to the Russian Federation are a purely Russian-speaking population, neither Ukrainians nor Crimean Tatars want it, and they use every possible way to prevent them”. Said Ernst Kudusov.

The second point of view is that the Tatars in the Crimea are the fifth column, the enemies of Russia; this view was supported by the President of the Middle East Institute, Yevgeny Satanovsky in one telecasts.

However, it’s clear that the truth lies always in the middle and it is desirable that it be expressed by the Crimean Tatars, living in the peninsula, and not by the “overseas guests”, even if they are Tatars. “The fact is that they (Mejlis) reduce the allegations relating to the violation of the rights of Crimean Tatar. This land is not allocated, there is no national autonomy, and the events in the Crimea were carried out without the will of the Crimean Tatars. It is usually a rhetoric that has existed for many years, said Snaver Khalilov, a Crimean Tatar from Simferopol, a former employee of the Crimea Development Program at the United Nations. He added that so far there is no direct offense; no one says “you are a Crimean Tatar and therefore you have not to live here, or something likes that”<sup>29</sup>.

Snaver Khalilov noted that he lives in Crimea since 1987, and claimed that the majority of Crimean Tatars living in the peninsula doesn’t consider the Mejlis as a representative of their interests. Snaver Khalilov believes that the task of the Russian authorities is to deal with the legal status of the Crimean Tatars before the OSCE. At the same time, “the status of the Crimean Tatars must not undermine the status of other peoples living in Crimea, Crimean Tatars need just to be rehabilitate” Snaver Khalilov said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized the main reason for the negative attitude of the Crimean Tatars towards Russia. The main reasons were the deportations and repressions in the post-war period, Soviet power headed by Stalin.

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<sup>29</sup> PRAVDA.RU :Снавер Халилов: Татарского бунта в Крыму не будет,January 12,2015, Читайте больше на <https://www.pravda.ru/news/districts/12-01-2015/1243466-halilovs-0/>

At the same time, the president noted that this is not a tragedy of the only Crimean Tatar, all Soviet people and many peoples of the USSR suffered from Stalinist repression. However, Vladimir Putin supported the rehabilitation of Crimean language as a State language. Moreover, the Crimean Tatars receive a quota of 20 percent of the representation in the Crimean parliament and all others government bodies<sup>30</sup>.

In 1991 the Crimean Tatars created their own system of bodies of national self-government. The functions of the parliament are performed by the Kurultay, elections are held every five years. The Kurultai forms the executive body - Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people (analogue of the national government). However, the Mejlis is a social structure.

It's important to note that the historical problems of Crimean Tatars are used by Ukraine and others groups in their confrontation with the Russian Federation. Even before the annexation of the peninsula, Crimean Tatars fought to recover their territory and national identity.

Today, propaganda around the issue of Crimean Tatars is used by many Islamist nationalist organizations (recognized in Russia as extremists), who exploit this problem in their own interests. Many of these organizations provide financial assistance from the West, Turkey or the United Arab Emirates. The extremists' religious organizations like Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jamaat, and the Wahhabis and Salafis, organization prohibited in the Russian Federation use the Crimean problem to attract new sympathizers among young Crimean Tatars.

Be with Russia or with Ukraine? The response of this question seems to be pending. But the real fact is that Crimean Tatars seek for their rehabilitation and their national identity. However if we do comparison between Ukraine and Russia today, for many observers, Russia is different, economically and geopolitically stronger than Ukraine. But the dividends that the Crimean Tatars will derive from the new situation will largely depend on how they will position themselves in these

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<sup>30</sup> PROF-NEWS :Крымские татары получают квоту в 20 процентов в органах власти  
Крыма ,March 12,2014 : <http://profi-news.ru/world/20140312/146204/>

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new realities. If they camp in an irreconcilable position, they will have fewer opportunities.

OSCE commission didn't visit even the Crimea, but drawn conclusions about the large flow of refugees from the peninsula. Others sources didn't confirm this allegation. However, there were some movements of people belonging to the organization Hizb ut-Tahrir. "They leaved Crimea, because in Ukraine this organization is not persecuted, but in Russia it is considered as extremist," - Said scientist Yaroslav Dunaev to the Russian service of the Voice of America.<sup>31</sup>

### CONCLUSION

After exploring the history of Crimean Tatars and the situation of the Human Rights in the peninsula, we found two contradictory positions.

On the one hand, since the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the international community is concerned about the human rights situation in the peninsula, especially vis a vis Crimean Tatars. Indeed, European Council strongly criticized Russian authorities for the degradation of the Human Rights situations in Crimea , and European Parliament adopted a resolution which condemn the of Human Rights violations perpetrated against Crimean residents, in particular against the Tatars, an indigenous people of the Crimea. After the "accession" of the peninsula to the Russian Federation, many families have left the territory for fear of violence against the pro-Ukrainians. Crimean Tatars become the victims of persecution by the Russian authorities since most of them supported the "Euro-maidain"<sup>32</sup> and were against the referendum.

On the other hand, Russian Federation rejects all the reports on the violation of Human Rights in Crimea. Russian authorities see the different reports as a "purely political" propaganda. That is why Russian Federation considered that the draft resolution presented last year by Ukraine on the Security Council of United Nations, was "unilateral", concocted for purely political goals, and it didn't reflect the reality in the Crimea. Moreover, according to Russian authorities, the maritime blockade imposed by Ukraine to the Crimea created severe shortages within the

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<sup>31</sup> PRAVDA.RU: Татарам Крыма подкинули яблоко раздора, Mach 24, 2014.

Читайте больше на <https://www.pravda.ru/districts/south/crimea/27-03-2014/1202032-tatar-0/>

<sup>32</sup> The so-called revolution against the government of Victor Yanukovitch

inhabitants of the peninsula, who also suffered from restrictions on banking operations, as well as unilateral measures imposed by European Union (EU sanction against Russian authorities).

Finally today, the situation of Humans Rights in Crimea is not different of the others part of Russian Federation. But today, Crimean Tatars become as a political tools used by different protagonist in this new media war, between Ukraine and Russian Federation. Therefore Crimean Tatars become another Russia's Headache, like the Chechens, Ingush and others minorities in Russia.

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