

# CRIMEAN TATARS AND RUSSIA'S ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA

*Throughout history, the Crimean Tatars have challenged Russian aggression by utilizing two main strategies: engaging and confronting. Since its annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Russia has left no room for engagement and has demanded the complete submission of the Crimean Tatar population. This article argues that the Crimean Tatars should not yield to Russian demands, but rather pursue an integrated policy aimed at rallying potential allies such as Turkey, Ukraine, and the EU around their cause, lobbying through their diaspora organizations, and advocating for their human rights through non-violent means. In addressing Turkey's conflicting allegiances to the EU and the Crimean Tatars on the one hand and a burgeoning strategic and economic partnership with Russia on the other, the author argues that Turkey has the capacity to address this challenge creatively, rather than reacting to involved actors.*

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**I**nstead of taking an approach that asks “what will happen to the poor Crimean Tatars after Russia annexed Crimea?” this article will treat the Crimean Tatars as agents, just like other players in the international arena. The Crimean Tatars are the indigenous people of Crimea, and they have survived numerous invasions of Crimea throughout history. Surely, therefore, they have the capacity to address the current problem. This article first provides historical background pertaining to the situation of the Crimean Tatars, and then examines the effects of the Russian annexation on the Crimean Tatar population. The article then reviews the various ways in which Crimean Tatars may approach this challenge in order to maintain their national identity.

### *The Crimean Tatars until the Russian Annexation of Crimea in 2014*

The Crimean Tatars are a Turkic-Muslim people indigenous to the Crimean peninsula. The Crimean Khanate, ruling Crimea from the 14th to the 18th century, descended from the Golden Horde Empire, which emerged after the Chingizid Empire dissolved. The Crimean Khanate became an Ottoman vassal state, and ceased to exist with the Russian annexation of Crimea in 1783. Following this, two-thirds of Crimean Tatars immigrated to the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The remaining Crimean Tatars declared their independence in 1917, but in 1920 the Bolsheviks made Crimea a part of the Soviet Union.

During the Second World War, the male Crimean Tatar population was conscripted by the Soviet army and fought against the army led by Germany’s Nazi government, a segment of them becoming partisans fighting against the Nazi occupation in the mountains of Crimea. Meanwhile, the Soviet government deported the remaining Tatars – mostly women, elderly, and children – from Crimea on 18 May 1944 under the pretext of collaborating with the Nazis. The mass deportation has been claimed to be an act of genocide as nearly half of the deportees perished from hunger, dehydration, and disease.<sup>1</sup>

Though the charges of Nazi collaboration against the Tatars were revoked in 1967, they were not permitted to return to Crimea.<sup>2</sup> This, however, did not prevent the Tatars from launching the first, longest, and the largest human rights movement (almost all of the population participated) in the USSR, demanding the right to return to their homeland and to re-establish their autonomous republic. The Crimean Tatars began to return *en masse* to Crimea under the leadership of OKND (Organization of

1 Victor Ostapchuk, et al., “Statement of Concerned Scholars on the Current Predicament of the Crimean Tatars,” 30 May 2014, <http://scholarsforqirim.com/in-english>

2 Alan Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford: Hoover Press Publication, 1978).

the Crimean Tatar National Movement) and Mustafa Cemilev (Mustafa Abdülcemil Kırımoglu, as known in Turkey). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the repatriated Tatars declared sovereignty in Crimea in 1991.<sup>3</sup> This was soon eclipsed, however, by a declaration of sovereignty by the Russian majority in the peninsula. Shortly thereafter, Ukraine declared sovereignty and Crimea voted to stay a part of Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> Today, only half of the 500,000 Tatars have been able to return to Crimea from their places of exile in the former Soviet Union.

Although the rest of Tatars also expressed their willingness to return, the window of opportunity to do so soon closed when Uzbekistan and Ukraine consolidated their borders and began to control population movements in and out of their countries. Further, Ukraine was reluctant to provide resources for more Tatar repatriates, and also sought to appease the Russian majority in the Crimean peninsula<sup>5</sup> who were openly hostile to the return of more Tatars.<sup>6</sup>

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Return was also slowed by the problems Tatars faced in the process of settlement in the 1990s and 2000s. The Tatars constituted only 13 percent of the population of Crimea, and suffered from the lack of formal mechanisms of representation in regional (Crimean) and national (Ukrainian) representative and governmental bodies. The Meclis of the Crimean Tatar People was partially recognized by Ukraine in 2001 as an advisory council to the president, but this mechanism ceased to function after 2006. The Ukrainian Parliament also did not pass legislation regarding the status of indigenous people for the Crimean Tatars until after the Russian annexation. This law would have provided the Tatars with the right to national self-determination,

3 Brian Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: the Diaspora Experience and the Forging of a Nation* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

4 Andrew Wilson, “Politics in and around Crimea: A difficult Homecoming,” in E. Allworth (ed.), *Tatars of Crimea: Return to Homeland* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 281-323.

5 After the proclamation of Ukrainian sovereignty, they sought separation from Ukraine and reunification with Russia. Crimea was part of Russia until Khrushchev transferred it to Ukraine in 1957 as a gift “to mark the 300th anniversary of unification of Russia and Ukraine.” Belitser (2000) argues that the real reason was the devastation of Crimean economy after the deportation of Tatars, existence of a possibility of the regeneration of the peninsula only if economic resources were transferred from Ukraine. Natalya Belitser, “The Constitutional Process in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in the context of interethnic relations and conflict settlement,” *International Committee for Crimea*, 20 February 2000, <http://www.iccrimea.org/scholarly/nbelitser.html>

6 Belitser (2000); Oxana Shevel, “Crimean Tatars and the Ukrainian state: the challenge of politics, the use of law and the meaning of rhetoric,” *International Committee for Crimea*, 13 April 2000, <http://www.iccrimea.org/scholarly/oshevel.html>

hence national-territorial autonomy in Crimea. This would have ensured the solution of three major problems of the repatriated Crimean Tatars: (1) full rehabilitation of deportees, (2) the right to have a share in the new privatized lands, and (3) the maintenance of language and religious rights.<sup>7</sup>

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Before the annexation, the rehabilitation of deportees including the compensation for their property, moral compensation, as well as redress for the historical injustices perpetrated by the Soviet Union had not been carried out. Ukraine paid for the re-settlement of the returned Crimean Tatars, while all other members of the Commonwealth of

Independent States, which were inheritors of the Soviet Union, agreed to share the cost for the re-settlement of the repatriated people.<sup>8</sup> The total amount paid as compensation to the deportees has been insufficient and has been decreasing every year. After the annexation, Russian President Vladimir Putin did not recognize the status of the Crimean Tatars as indigenous people, but promised “rehabilitation” in vague terms. There has not been a legal draft or regulations that specify the steps that will be taken in this direction or any statement of a budget of compensation to be paid.

Before the annexation, one of the main plights of the Crimean Tatars had been the unavailability of land to settle, due to lack of compensation for their unjustly confiscated property and the exclusion of the repatriated in the process of land distribution (previously state-owned) to the Crimean population, once the communist system ended. The argument was that because they had not lived in Crimea before the Soviet Union collapsed, they did not deserve a share of the land of Crimea. This forced the Tatars to squat on vacant government land; some of these squats were later legalized by the Ukrainian state. In the post-annexation period, while the so-called new Prime Minister of Crimea, Aksyonov, stated that this practice would no longer be tolerated, no clear plan has been announced for the landless Tatars.<sup>9</sup>

Even before the annexation, the survival of the Crimean Tatar language was also far from being ensured. There were only 18 Tatar schools in the whole of Crimea, and only one in 10 Tatar children could get an education in his/her own language. In fact, except for a short “golden age” period between 1920-28, Tatar culture and language

7 The Crimean Tatar language is an endangered language.

8 Shevel (2000).

9 “Her toprak zaptı eylemcisi toprak alamayacak” [Not all protesters will get their land back] *Kırım Haber Ajansı*, 28 October 2014, <http://qha.com.ua/her-toprak-zapti-eylemcisi-toprak-alamayacak-134653tr.html>

has continuously eroded under the hegemony of the Russian language throughout the Soviet Union as well as in the post-return period. Today, Crimean Tatar is one of the endangered languages of the world. It is ironic that Russians claim the endangerment of the Russian language as a reason for their separation from Ukraine. After the annexation, despite promises for equal treatment of the Crimean Tatars and the institution of the Crimean Tatar language as one of the official languages of Crimea, there have been no clear steps in this direction. Moreover, there are reports of people being harassed for speaking Crimean Tatar on the streets.

Since their return to Crimea, because of the Russian hegemony within the peninsular institutions, the Crimean Tatars have been excluded in the bureaucracy, courts, police and army, and other government institutions, despite the majority of them being highly educated. The unemployment rate among the Tatars is high, and they suffer discrimination in most spheres of life. Even before the Russian annexation, the percentage of imprisonment among Crimean Tatars was larger than other groups in the peninsula. They have been frequent victims of racist attacks and human right abuses by public and private security forces, as well as by racist groups and individuals. In the post-return era, social, political, and economic deprivation, compounded by a lack of compensation for past injustices fuelled enormous resentment among the Crimean Tatar population. Still, the Crimean Tatars were known for conducting a non-violent struggle, despite their plights.

*“The actual annexation of Crimea by Russia after the referendum violated international law because it represented an abuse of the right of territorial self-determination.”*

The Crimean Tatars had many problems as an indigenous minority in Ukraine, however they largely remained as loyal Ukrainian citizens. Ukraine's partly-free political system and its prospects for democracy and membership in the EU gave the Tatars hope and strength to fight. Therefore, Tatars strongly supported the Orange and Euromaidan Revolutions in Ukraine. Now the second Russian annexation of Crimea has provided them with an even bigger challenge.

### ***The Effects on the Crimean Tatar People of Russia's Annexation of Crimea in 2014***

Shortly after the Euromaidan Revolution and former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's ousting from power, Moscow organized a *coup* in Crimea on 27

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February 2014, installing a new local government in Simferopol and declaring a referendum on Crimea’s political future. The 16 March referendum was illegal and illegitimate as it was contrary to norms of referenda: it lacked the possibility of and time for free public discussion of the ramifications of the vote, recognized international monitoring, a clear option to vote for the *status quo*, or even the right to vote without

being intimidated and harassed by the 40,000 masked Russian troops and armed local Russian paramilitary. As Ostapchuk et al. stated in their open letter, signed by 293 scholars from all around the world, the referendum result indicating 97 percent approval for unification with Russia was falsified. The Russian Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights published on their website that the turnout was not more than 30-50 percent and that only half of those who actually turned out voted for secession.<sup>10</sup> It was of course taken down from the website quickly.<sup>11</sup> Surveys before the referendum showed that at most 41 percent of the Crimean population would have opted for joining Russia.<sup>12</sup> The actual annexation of Crimea by Russia after the referendum violated international law as it represented an abuse of the right of territorial self-determination. The Crimean Tatar national assembly, the Qurultay, and its representative-executive body, the Meclis, categorically condemned the Russian annexation and boycotted the referendum.

Despite their initial promises that “measures will be taken to solve all the social and legal problems of Crimean Tatars that went unsolved by the Ukrainian authorities for many years,” the Russians banned the Crimean Tatar leaders Mustafa Cemilev and Refat Chubarov (Meclis Head), as well as İsmet Yüksel, a diasporic Crimean Tatar from Turkey and a consultant to the Meclis, from entering Crimea for five years.<sup>13</sup> The Russian authorities also prohibited the commemoration of the 70th

10 Victor Ostapchuk, et al., “Statement of Concerned Scholars on the Current Predicament of the Crimean Tatars,” 30 May 2014, <http://scholarsforqirim.com/in-english>; “The Russian Presidential council questioned the results of the Crimean referendum,” 3 May 2014, <http://www.stopfake.org/en/the-russian-presidential-council-questioned-the-results-of-the-crimean-referendum/>; Paul R. Gregory, “Putin’s human rights council accidentally posts real Crimean election results, only 15 percent voted for annexation,” *Forbes*, 5 May 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2014/05/05/putins-human-rights-council-accidentally-posts-real-crimean-election-results-only-15-voted-for-annexation/>

11 “Post-Crimea Relations with the West,” *The New York Times*, 18 March 2014,

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/19/opinion/post-crimea-relations-with-the-west.html?hp&rref=opinion&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/19/opinion/post-crimea-relations-with-the-west.html?hp&rref=opinion&_r=0)

12 Oxana Shevel, “How to defeat Russia,” *Al Jazeera*, 23 March 2014,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/03/how-defeat-russia-201432113203787697.html>

13 Steve Gutterman, “Crimean Tatar leader tells Putin secession would break post-Soviet pact,” *Reuters*, 12 March 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/12/us-ukraine-crisis-putin-crimean-idUSBREA2B1CM20140312>

anniversary of the deportation on 18 May 2014. Every year on May 18th, 30-35 thousand Crimean Tatars and others would come together to mourn for the dead during the deportation in the central square of the Crimean capital of Simferopol. On the anniversary in 2014, paramilitary police and hovering attack helicopters were on duty to intimidate groups from gathering. Still, 15,000 Crimean Tatars decided not to succumb to intimidation and met in front of the Kebir Mosque in Simferopol.<sup>14</sup>

Russian President Vladimir Putin promised rehabilitation for the Crimean Tatars; however, they currently face risks to their security. Almost 20 Tatar men have been abducted or found dead since Crimea's annexation; Reshat Ametov was kidnapped and killed by two gunmen after holding a solitary protest against annexation. The Prosecutor General of Crimea said that "anyone who does not recognize the annexation will be deported. (...) anyone who incites ethnic strife will also be deported."<sup>15</sup>

*"To manipulate the Crimean Tatars into submission, Russia clearly follows a divide-and-rule policy."*

The Crimean Tatars boycotted the post-annexation local elections that Russians thought were a legitimization of the annexation. The turnout was quite low (around 50 percent). Immediately after the election results were released, and it became clear that the Crimean Tatars had boycotted the election, the Federal Security Service of Russia (FSB) along with police and armed military officials raided the Meclis and confiscated documents and laptops. They seized the building and belongings of the Meclis (computers, documents, money) and ordered the Kırım Fund Charity, which owned the Meclis building, to evict the Meclis, fining it for not following the order in 24 hours.<sup>16</sup> The Kırım Fund is banned from leasing or selling its properties, and the authorities are currently trying to expel Cemilev from its Board of Founders through court order. Possibly, the Russian government of Crimea will take over the fund to employ it for its own purposes. Crimean authorities shut down the Meclis as of October 22th, denying its role in representing the Crimean Tatars.<sup>17</sup> Aksyonov argued that legally it does not exist because it was not registered as an NGO. The Meclis had refused to register itself as an NGO or a political party

14 Victor Ostapchuk et al. (2014).

15 "Kremlin prosecutor Poklonskaya targets Crimean Tatars," *Kyiv Post*, 24 September 2014, <http://www.kyivpost.com/multimedia/video-2/ukraine-today-kremlin-prosecutor-poklonskaya-targets-crimean-tatars-video-365778.html>

16 "Crimean authorities order purge of banned literature," *Euromaidanpress*, 15 October 2014, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/10/15/crimean-authorities-order-purge-of-banned-literature/>

17 Idil Izmirli, "The Tale of the First Local Elections in Occupied Crimea and the End of the Meclis Era," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 23 September 2014, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=42860&cHash=c0ee9669eded556618fd921608286a2#.VFvjNPmUfIY](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42860&cHash=c0ee9669eded556618fd921608286a2#.VFvjNPmUfIY)

because it is a Parliament, politically representing all of the Crimean Tatar people, not just one faction. A democratically-elected organization demanding minority rights apparently conflicts with the authoritarian political structure of Russia, where there are arguably no democratic elections at any level.<sup>18</sup> It is likely that the Crimean authorities will utilize the pro-annexation Milli Fırqa organization, or splinter members of the Meclis (such as Remzi İlyasov, who participated in the recent election), to manipulate and subjugate the Crimean Tatars.

Today in Crimea, “any suggestion that Russian authorities are harassing the Crimean Tatars or infringing their rights,” using the words “annexation” and “occupation” in relation to the Russian regime in Crimea, and calling for boycotts, are all termed extremism.<sup>19</sup> Shevket Khaybullayev, the chief editor of *Avdet* newspaper was summoned to police headquarters and accused of mobilizing the Crimean Tatars for opposing the regime because the newspaper informed the readers that the Meclis had decided to boycott the Crimean elections. Prominent Tatar leaders and Tatar media outlets (*Avdet* and *Kırım* newspapers, and *ATR* television) have been accused of “extremism” and received warnings from the prosecutor’s office. The authorities fined 39 Meclis members after they met with Cemilev and Chubarov in Kiev, and the state media labeled them “extremists.”<sup>20</sup> Russian security forces wearing masks and carrying machine guns raided mosques, Crimean Tatar schools, the homes of 30-40 prominent activists as well as ordinary people, and libraries, claiming they were searching for extremist literature. The list of extremist literature includes 2000 books related to Islam, the Meclis, and Cemilev, all of which Ukraine had previously allowed.<sup>21</sup> The Russian government also shut down the Crimean Tatar library.

The Crimean Tatar population – most of whom have kept their Ukrainian passports – face coercion to take Russian citizenship. As of 1 January 2015, those Crimeans who do not have Russian passports will either be deported or will not be given residency permits that allow them to stay, work, and receive education. The Russian government announced that only about 5000 new residency permits will be issued for Crimea.<sup>22</sup>

The lives of the Crimean Tatars changed overnight, from living in a democratic state one day to living in an authoritarian state the next. Russian law punishes acts

18 Gönül Şamilkızı, “Kırım Tatarları yeni sürgünün eşliğinde,” *TRT Avaz*, 26 September 2014, <http://www.trtavaz.com.tr/haber/kirim-tatarlari-yeni-surgunun-esiginde/3/54250ec28a58c916183fe7f4>

19 “Crimean Tatar TV channel ATR accused of ‘extremism,’” *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 25 September 2014, <http://khp.org/en/index.php?id=1411646632>

20 Kathrin Hill, “History repeats itself as Moscow cracks down on Crimean Tatars,” 4 November 2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/0fb85596-636c-11e4-8a63-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3IW5HDMuG>

21 Hill (2014).

22 Şamilkızı (2014).



against Russian state interests with 10 years in prison. Such acts may easily include demands for national-territorial sovereignty, the convening of the Qurultay and Meclis, or signing a petition against the Russian annexation. The decline of freedom, as well as the intimidation and harassment faced by those who conduct “acts” such as speaking Crimean Tatar or Ukrainian is remarkable. The so-called “self-defense” forces have still not been abolished. In March 2014, several Crimean Tatar homes were marked with an X at night,

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and the Tatar population of Sevastopol was counted for no apparent reason.<sup>23</sup> Both acts generated fears among the Crimean Tatars about possible preparations for deportation.<sup>24</sup> A woman was summoned to FSB for having some Ukrainian hryvnia inside her books. Hate speech against the Tatars, which was rampant in Crimea even before the annexation, has increased even more.<sup>25</sup>

In the meantime, 10,000 Crimean Tatars have left Crimea.<sup>26</sup> It is clear that the Russians are enforcing “sustained pressure to toe the line or be expelled.”<sup>27</sup>

### ***Policy Suggestions***

The annexation of Crimea is a major setback for the goal of Crimean Tatar national-territorial autonomy, as the struggle for rights within Ukraine now seems to have been in vain. However, it is still important that Kiev recognized the status of indigenous people even if it was after the annexation. If the Crimean Tatar issue is taken more seriously in Ukraine, related legislation can quickly follow.

The Crimean Tatar diaspora will be strengthened in mainland Ukraine by the increase in the number of refugees, as well as political figures who are extradited from Crimea.

23 Nataila Antelava, “Who will protect the Crimean Tatars?”, *The New Yorker*, 6 March 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/who-will-protect-the-crimean-tatars>

24 Izmirli (2014).

25 Astrid Thors and Janez Lenarčič, “Human Rights and Minority Rights Situation”, *OSCE Human Rights Assessment mission in Ukraine*, 12 May 2014, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/118476?download=true>

26 Olga Rudenko, “Five months after Russian takeover Crimean Tatars unhappy with the new rulers,” *Kyiv Post*, 7 August 2014, <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/five-months-after-russian-takeover-crimean-tatars-unhappy-with-new-rulers-359774.html>

27 Judy Dempsey, “Russia is (again) persecuting Crimean Tatars,” *Judy Dempsey's Strategic Europe*, 25 September 2014, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=56754>

The diaspora in Ukraine must organize and activate the diaspora in Turkey and elsewhere through the mechanism of the World Congress of the Crimean Tatars. Diaspora and social movements increasingly have become actors in international relations, and can establish effective political lobbies. The World Congress can function from Kiev and Ankara, while the Meclis can survive informally in Crimea. As the Crimean Tatar movement has the experience to organize without a formal structure, the Crimean Tatars need to tap this experience, especially that of the veteran activists who fought against the Soviet Union. In order to protect lives and maintain moral superiority, it is important that the Crimean Tatar movement remain non-violent unless there is a physical attack on their people.

Apart from emigration, throughout history, the Crimean Tatars have employed two strategies for survival. One strategy was to engage with the repressive Russian authorities and creatively utilizing the available venues for expressing identity. The alternative strategy was to confront the repressive regime and trying to break free from Russian hegemony. This time, however, Russia closed the door for the possibility of engagement. Even those Crimean Tatars who willingly accepted posts in the Crimean government in April had to resign, as they understood that the regime does not allow engagement but requires complete submission. To manipulate the Crimean Tatars into submission, Russia clearly follows a divide-and-rule policy. The Crimean government stamps out efforts to advocate for minority rights by heavily repressing or banning the true representatives of the community and by elevating and working with the puppet Crimean Tatars they installed. The Russian regime founded an alternative muftiate, called Islamic Muftiate of Tavriia, while there was already a legitimate Crimean Muftiate. The Russians also try to decrease trust in the Meclis and prefer to work with an alternative, fringe Crimean Tatar organization, Milli Firqa. The Head of the Milli Firqa, Vasvi İbrahimov, received a state medal from Putin. Since the Russians are not allowing engagement and compromise, the only possible strategy left for the Crimean Tatars is confronting with the regime.

The Crimean crisis of 2014 created a foreign policy dilemma for Turkey, as Turkey grappled with balancing its NATO allegiance and loyalty to Crimean Tatar kin with its growing economic relations and strategic partnership with Russia. Thus, Turkey's reaction to the Russian annexation of Crimea and support of the Crimean Tatars was subdued.<sup>28</sup> Today, human rights violations against Crimean Tatars are a severe problem, and the Crimean Tatars diaspora together with Turkish nationalists protest that Turkey pays less attention to the Crimean Tatars than to other human rights crises, such as those experienced by Palestinians and Syrians.

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28 "Turkey will continue to protect Crimean Tatars' rights, says Davutoğlu," *Today's Zaman*, 7 March 2014, [http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy\\_turkey-will-continue-to-protect-crimean-tatars-rights-says-davutoglu\\_341491.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_turkey-will-continue-to-protect-crimean-tatars-rights-says-davutoglu_341491.html)

The Crimean Tatar diaspora demands that Turkey join the bandwagon of states that apply economic sanctions to Russia.<sup>29</sup> However, Turkey continues to engage with an increasingly isolated Russia, and uses this leverage to demand improvements on the situation of the Crimean Tatars. Russia is Turkey's second-largest trading partner, and a large percent of Turkish energy needs are supplied by Russia. Russia is also a nuclear power.

*“What Russia must acknowledge is that Turkey, China, the EU, and NATO also have legitimate roles to play in the post-Soviet arena.”*

Because of interdependence between the two countries, Moscow is courting Ankara by making promises such as the “rehabilitation of the Crimean Tatars,” which seem inconsistent with other acts of the regime that are clearly detrimental to the Tatars' well-being.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Russia would benefit from Turkish economic investments in Crimea. However, the Turkish-Russian rapprochement has limits. After all, although Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan tried, he could not prevent Cemilev's ban from Crimea. Sooner than we think, because of historical legacies and the geopolitical situation, Turkey might need to downgrade its relations with Russia and conform to the EU policy of containing Russia.<sup>31</sup>

In an interview after the annexation, Dr. Hakan Kırımlı asked: “What does it mean that Crimea is a strategically important base for Russia? A base for attacking where?” Turkish security interests are seriously under risk after Russia annexed Crimea. Crimea is as strategically important as Cyprus is for Turkey's security. It is important for the Crimean Tatar Meclis and diaspora to promote shared positions with Turkey. Turkey must overcome the fears of awakening its ethnic groups, and embrace the fact that it is a state of diasporas. Diasporas can be important strategic assets in conducting its foreign policy.

What is missing in Turkish foreign policy is the Eastern European dimension. As Crimean Tatar *émigrés* in Turkey argued a long time ago, Turkey must develop close relations and cooperation with the Eastern European countries, which are also wary of possible Russian aggression.

29 “Kırım Derneği Genel Merkezi'nden Aziz Türk Milleti ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devleti'ne Açık Çağrı,” [An open letter to the Turkish nation and the Republic of Turkey from the Crimea Foundation Headquarters], 17 September 2014, <http://kirimdernegi.org.tr/sdetay.asp?did=474.0.a>

30 Semih İdiz, “Turkey faces ‘geography’s revenge’ in Crimea,” *Al Monitor*, 21 March 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/originals/2014/03/turkey-crimea-policy-russia-strategy-tatars-geography-rights.html#>

31 İdiz (2014).

Turkey could be more proactive toward the Crimean Tatar population, rather than reactive to Russian moves. It is also probable that, as economic problems are exacerbated in Crimea because of non-recognition and distance from mainland Russia, the Crimean Tatars may become scapegoats and the subject of an increasing witch-hunt. Therefore, it is important for international organizations and the diaspora to follow the human rights situation in Crimea. The Crimean Tatars should not be left isolated.

The best interests of the Russian people can only be served when Russia ceases to be an “empire.” Russia uses Russian nationalism embroidered with Soviet mythology to attract the post-Soviet states and bring them into its own orbit. While Russia acts very concerned about Russian citizens abroad, it does not provide real minority rights for the Muslim or other minorities and indigenous peoples within its own borders. The Russian attitude is orientalist towards its “near abroad” as Russia denies the neighboring people agency, portraying demands for democracy as manipulated from abroad. However, what Russia must acknowledge is that Turkey, China, the EU, and NATO also have legitimate roles to play in the post-Soviet arena.<sup>32</sup> The EU, instead of pushing Turkey into the arms of the Eurasian Union and Shangai Five, must increase foreign policy coordination with Turkey especially in a crisis like the Crimean one. Coordinating Turkey-EU policy can only truly be facilitated by meaningful progress in Turkey’s process of accession to the EU.

While many realists bash the US and EU for promoting democracy and enlarging NATO and the EU into the “sphere of influence” of Russia, the truth is that both the US and EU neglected Ukraine and did not provide adequate financial and political resources for its transition to democracy. The US and the EU have the responsibility to ensure the well-being of Ukraine and the Crimean Tatars. They cannot afford to forget Crimea.

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32 Andrey Makarychev, “Russia, Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership: From Common Neighborhood to Spheres of Influence?,” *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2014), pp. 181-199, <http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/russia-ukraine.pdf>; Also see: Jeffrey Mankoff, “Russia’s Latest Land Grab,” *Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141210/jeffrey-mankoff/russias-latest-land-grab>