

The Challenge of Crimea for Russia's Domestic and Foreign Policy

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In recent Russian history, the year 2014 unquestionably has emerged as the year of Crimea. Following a period of 22 years as a part of independent Ukraine, the Crimean peninsula entered into Russian custody in the form of two separate subjects of the Federation. The Russian Federation increased its territory by 27 thousand square kilometers and its population by over 2 million people.¹ More than 22 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has set a new precedent in the change of jurisdiction over a territory from one state to another. This event constitutes a watershed in Russian domestic policy and relations between Russia and other countries – such as the newly independent Eurasian countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – and also poses a serious challenge to security throughout Europe.

Crimea: Between the Ukrainian state and the Russian choice

Until 2014, Crimea did not enter geopolitical considerations of the post-Soviet space. In contrast to the south Caucasus, Tajikistan, and Moldova, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the peninsula did not experience armed conflict related to refugees, displaced persons, or mass casualties. Shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, on February 12, 1991, the Supreme Council of Ukraine adopted a law restoring the autonomy of the Crimean oblast as it existed at that time;² its status has not changed since then. Although this issue rears its head in Kyiv from time to time, it has never advanced to practical steps.

The international community recognized Ukraine's territorial integrity (including Crimea) in the context of a memorandum guaranteeing Ukraine's security upon Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons on December 5, 1994 (known as the Budapest Memorandum).³ Regarding Russian-Ukrainian bilateral relations, the Treaty of Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation – signed on May 31, 1997 and ratified by Russian federal law in March 1999 – affirmed that the peninsula belonged to Kyiv.⁴

Significantly, even after the “five-day war” in the Caucasus, where the third Ukrainian president, Viktor Yushchenko, supported his Georgian counterpart, Mikheil Saakashvili, in his actions in South Ossetia, the Kremlin's official position has not undergone substantive changes. On August 30, 2008, Vladimir Putin (at that point Russia's prime minister) claimed, in an interview with the German broadcasting company ARD, “Crimea is not a disputed territory.” However, he added that “there, in Crimea, complex processes are taking place within society. There's the problem of Crimean

¹ “Prezident RF podpisal zakon o vkhozhdenii Krym v sostav Rossii.” *Consultant.ru* (March 24, 2014). <http://www.consultant.ru/law/hotdocs/32368.html>

² Text of the law available online at <http://sevkrimrus.narod.ru/ZAKON/1991-2.htm>

³ Memorandum available online at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G94/652/94/PDF/G9465294.pdf?OpenElement>

⁴ Text of the law available online at <http://sevkrimrus.narod.ru/ZAKON/1997god.htm>

Tatars, of the Ukrainian population, of the Russian population, of the general Slavic population. But this is Ukraine's internal problem."⁵ Moreover, in October 2008, the Friendship Treaty between Russia and Ukraine was extended for an additional decade.

Until 2014, there was no de facto Crimean state with separate non-Ukrainian infrastructure. Only five days before the announced referendum on the status of Crimea (the vote for which took place on March 16), the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, together with the city council of Sevastopol, adopted a declaration of independence. But Crimea did not exist in that capacity for even a month. Already by March 18, the wheels were in motion to admit Crimea to the Russian Federation.

However, this does not mean that Crimea, for all those years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was free from strife. On the peninsula, numerous problems persisted and accumulated, never reaching resolution, a number of which have become emergent with the onset of a full-blown political crisis in Ukraine.

First of all, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was the sole administrative territory in the unitary state of Ukraine with a predominantly Russian population. According to data supplied by a national census in 2001, ethnic Russians comprised 58.3 percent of the population, ethnic Ukrainians 24.3 percent, and Crimean Tatars 12 percent. At the same time, 77 percent of residents of Crimea reported Russian as their native tongue (this number included 97 percent of Jews, 89 percent of Germans, and 82 percent of Belarusians living on the peninsula), and only 10 percent of Ukrainians (11 percent reported Crimean Tatar their native language). Thus about a quarter of the region's non-Russian population consider Russian their native language. Consequently, this segment of the population tends to react warily—often negatively—towards attempts at Ukrainization (both linguistic and political).⁶

Second, the main body of Russia's Black Sea Fleet is based in Crimea (forces stationed on the peninsula account for 75 percent of the Fleet's total infrastructure). Russian military presence on the peninsula is based on the May 28, 1997 agreements between Ukraine and Russia regarding the division of the Black Sea Fleet, the status and conditions for the Fleet's presence on Ukrainian territory, and settlements between the two states. On April 21, 2010, Russian and Ukraine signed the Kharkiv agreements, extending the Black Sea Fleet's lease until 2042; that is, for a quarter century longer than the original agreements of 1997 stipulated.⁷ Be that as it may, stationing the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea not only provides employment to a significant proportion of the peninsula's population, it also bolsters pro-Russian sentiments among Crimeans. Long before 2014, the Crimea gained a reputation as the most anti-NATO territory of Ukraine.

Third, twenty years before the so-called "Crimean Spring," the peninsula experienced harsh confrontation with Kyiv. On January 30, 1994, Yuri Meshkov, a representative of the bloc appropriately named "Russia," won a run-off election and was elected president of the Republic of Crimea. A few months later, the "Russia" bloc won autonomy in the parliamentary elections, garnering 80 percent of the vote. Meshkov and his cohort appealed to voters by promising Crimea's entry into the ruble zone, military

⁵ "Intervyu prem'er-ministra RF Vladmira Putina telekompanii ARD." *Ria Novosti* (August 30, 2008). <http://www.rian.ru/politics/20080830/150810743.html>

⁶ <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/nationality/>

⁷ "Federalnyi zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 2 aprelya 2014 g. N. 38-F3." *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* (April 3, 2014). <http://www.rg.ru/2014/04/03/soglashenia-dok.html>

and political alliance with Russia, and the transition to Moscow time. To many, Simferopol's conflict with Kyiv seemed inevitable. However, in 1994, the central Ukrainian government was not primed for conflict with either pro-Russian forces or with Moscow itself. Moreover, that master of political intrigue, President Leonid Kuchma (one of the primary actors in negotiations to end the conflict in the Donbas), succeeded in sowing discord among members of the "Russia" bloc, and transforming many of them into if not his allies, then "fellow travelers," people loyal to him at least to a minimal degree. In contrast to Tbilisi and Baku, governments which took an uncompromising line in their relations with autonomous breakaway regions, Kyiv instead chose a course of negotiations and closed-door bargaining.⁸

Subsequently, Viktor Yanukovich and even his predecessor, Viktor Yushchenko, have stuck to this course, despite the latter's commitment to pro-Western policies and compulsory Ukrainization. In August 2008, when conflict emerged between Yushchenko's support for Mikheil Saakashvili and the solidarity of Sevastopol residents with the Black Sea Fleet sailors who had taken part in the "peace enforcement" operation in Georgia, Kyiv chose not to exacerbate tensions.⁹ The result was a "freezing" of the latent conflict rather than its resolution.

Fourth, over the course of the past two decades, the central Ukrainian government has viewed the Mejlis (the most important Crimean Tatar national organization) as its natural ally in containing the "Russian party." This is why, over the entire period from 1991-2014, the Mejlis came out in support of the new Ukrainian government, the inviolability of the Ukrainian state's borders, and against the pro-Russian movement in Crimea. This, however, does not mean that each and every Crimean Tatar supports the Mejlis leadership's position. Until 2014, in the course of Ukrainian elections, average Crimean Tatars did not necessarily express their preferences according to the party line, instead representing the entire political spectrum, including the Party of Regions and the Ukrainian Communist Party.¹⁰ In addition, Kyiv feared the ethnocentric aspirations of Crimean Tatar activists; their plans for education reform on the peninsula, which would not be based on Ukrainian law. Hence the interest in maintaining conflict between the Crimean Tatar and Russian communities in Crimea. This approach largely defined Kyiv's official policy.¹¹

⁸ For more detailed analysis, see Sergei Markedonov, *The Turbulent Eurasia*. Moscow: Academia, 2010.

⁹ According to sociological studies conducted in August-September 2008 (i.e., right on the heels of the August war in the Caucasus), a staggering 90.4 percent of residents of Crimea supported cooperation with Russia in the sphere of foreign policy. 75.2 percent voted in favor of the Black Sea Fleet remaining in Crimea indefinitely. Only 1.4 percent favored immediate withdrawal of Russian naval forces from Sevastopol.

Available online at <http://www.rusскиivopros.com/?pag=one&id=253&kat=6&csl=39#sdendnote7sym>

¹⁰ Alexei Makarkin, "Krimskye Tatory: problem integratsii." *Politcom.ru* (March 24, 2014). <http://www.politcom.ru/17367.html>

¹¹ Remzi Ilyasov, Deputy Speaker of the Crimean State Council (the legislative organ of the Crimean government within Russia), provides an interesting assessment of Crimean Tatar politicians in Kiev: "Relations of the [Ukrainian] government with Crimean Tatars have looked more like games and beating around the bush. For over two decades, from when Ukraine declared its independence, the Crimean Tatar people, deprived of their homeland, have expected the government to make a formal declaration on the status of the Crimean Tatar people, the Rehabilitation Act, which would constitute crucial prerequisites for the preservation and development of national identity, culture, and language. Unfortunately, Ukraine has

But for as long as Ukraine's foreign policy seesaws between Russia and the West, and in its nation-building, nationalism is combined with wariness towards both Soviet and imperial heritage, Crimea is not "out of bounds," and the latent problems won't come to a head.

The annexation: Occupation or self-determination?

Today, a significant majority of politicians and experts in the US and EU have emphasized Russia's intervention in the Crimean crisis in the winter of 2014. This claim is not disputed in the Russian establishment. On the contrary, in the film "Path to the Motherland," Russian President and Commander in Chief Vladimir Putin openly acknowledges that in February-March 2014, he personally instructed the military and intelligence agencies to bring the peninsula under control of the Russian Federation.¹² However, recognizing the veracity of this assessment, it is impossible not to see that the crisis on the peninsula, which led to the change in its jurisdiction, constitutes one factor of the Russian military intervention.

Prior to the crisis in Ukraine, Moscow's position regarding post-Soviet conflicts can be defined as "selective revisionism;" that is, it displayed complete willingness to defy the opinion held by the overwhelming majority of UN member states concerning Georgia's territorial integrity, yet did not automatically transfer this position to other conflicts (like those in Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh) and in fact even cooperated with the US and EU in both those cases. The Russian leadership has had no general approach to ethno-political conflict, nor to existing de facto states. The Russian Federation has taken three basic positions: recognition of independence (in Abkhazia and South Ossetia), recognition as a member of the negotiating process (in the case of Transnistria, a position with which the Kremlin's Western partners agreed), and non-recognition (in the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic).

At the same time, all of Russia's different positions on ethno-political conflicts synthesized several concerns; firstly, that NATO might expand into territories of the former Soviet Union, leadership of newly independent states might attempt to use the Alliance's resources to minimize Russia's influence; secondly, that strengthening cooperation between countries involved in these conflicts and the European Union might erode Russia's economic and security-related interests in the region.

Despite having several different approaches to resolving conflicts, for Moscow, the post-Soviet space was and remains an area of especially vital interest. Russia was ready to cooperate with international actors where it didn't present a conflict of interests. The most influential country in the CIS after Russia, Ukraine is considered a "priority partner" in the former Soviet region and is thus potentially an important participant in integration projects initiated by Moscow.

The revolutionary events in Kyiv – the "Maidan" and the overthrow of Viktor Yanukovich's government (which the leadership of the Russian Federation considers an

not adopted any legislation aimed at restoring the rights of the Crimean Tatar people, nor at meeting the basic conditions for the revival and preservation of their native land, which has made the people's return a painful process.

<http://m.crimea.kp.ru/daily/26290/3167909/>

¹² Full film version available online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t42-71RpRgI>

illegal coup) – have dramatically changed Moscow’s position towards its “priority partner.” Apprehensive about Ukraine’s transformation from a buffer state into an important player on the side of the US and its allies (as well as about potential renegotiations of the Kharkhiv agreements extending the Black Sea Fleet’s lease in Crimea, where 75 percent of its infrastructure is concentrated), Russia abandoned the status quo.

Moreover, the new government in Ukraine played on fears and phobias towards Moscow. Following the victory of the “second Maidan,” fissures in Ukrainian society along geographical lines deepened, and separatist tendencies in the southeast of the country grew. It must be emphasized that the radical position held by the new Ukrainian government (in contrast to the outgoing regime, Viktor Yanukovich’s “Party of Regions”), initiating the repeal of the law giving regional status to languages other than Ukrainian, has contributed to this in no small part.¹³ Although the Verkhovna Rada vetoed the law’s repeal on February 23, 2014, the very fact of these attempts to repeal it was enough to galvanize Russophiles and pro-Russian sentiments in Crimea and in certain southeastern regions, particularly the Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkhiv oblasts.¹⁴ Initially, protests were directed against the new political leaders, who had violated the Constitution, and, according to the protesters, usurped power; only later did these protests grow into an open struggle to secede from Ukraine and join Russia.¹⁵

However, Russia’s support for the separatist movements in the south and east of Ukraine, which it considered a safeguard against Kyiv’s aspirations to join NATO, had quite different consequences. The beginning of a new phase in the Ukrainian crisis —the confrontation between Moscow and Kyiv over their divergent positions on the territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state, on the backdrop of attempts at self-determination by large groups of the population in border regions, began in Crimea, where Russian policy is led by mass Russophile movement and military presence. Significantly, the Russian contingent was placed there on the basis of international negotiations, which created optimal support for the passing of the referendum that resulted in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea’s secession from Ukraine and entry into the Russian Federation.

¹³ The law officially came into effect on August 10, 2012. It stipulated that organs of local self-government could keep records and make statements in the language of national minorities, if they constituted more than 10 percent of the region's population. People received the right to correspond with government offices in the regional language. Immediately thereafter, Russian was recognized as a regional language in the majority of regions in southeastern Ukraine.

“Rada otmenila zakon o regional’nykh yazykakh, ofitsial’no razreshavshii dvuyazychie.” *Newsru.com* (February 23, 2014). <http://www.newsru.com/world/23feb2014/norussianplz.html>

¹⁴ For the decision on the “language law,” 232 MPs out of 334 voted. When deciding on the veto, Oleksandr Turchynov, then Speaker of the Rada and Acting President, said that it was absolutely necessary to pass a new law that would be “completely balanced” and which would “take into account the interests of both Eastern and Western Ukraine, all the ethnic groups and minorities.

Text available online at <http://rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/Povidomlennya/88685.html>

¹⁵ It is worth a mention that the Speaker of the Supreme Council of Crimea, Volodymyr Konstantinov (who later became of the leaders of Russian policy) spoke on February 12, 2014 about a return to “certain aspects of the autonomous status of the early 1990s,” about the “decentralization of power” (Ukrainian!) and the “horizontal crosslinking of Ukraine.” And even a week later, when the idea of joining Russia began to gain currency in the halls of Parliament, Speaker Konstantinov interrupted one MP’s speech with words about the need to “help Kiev defend its power.” Text available online at

http://crimea.gov.ru/news/12_02_2014_2; <http://crimea.comments.ua/news/2014/02/19/110004.html>

The plan for carrying out the referendum and for the peaceful neutralization of Ukrainian troops in Crimea was implemented with practically no casualties. Moreover, nearly two thirds of Ukrainian service-members in Crimea, including the commander of the Ukrainian navy, Denis Berezovsky, swore allegiance to Russia, and the transition of military facilities to Moscow's control proceeded peacefully. However, this plan was predicated on several important conditions—the readiness of the majority of citizens to make this radical choice, and by the paralysis of the Ukrainian citizenry and military administration, which we have not encountered in other regions of southeastern Ukraine, and which accounts for the failure of the “Bolshaya Novorossiia [Greater New Russia]” idea (in eight regions of Ukraine).¹⁶

Thus, labeling Russia's actions as “annexation,” while true from the viewpoint of international law, would paint an incomplete picture without also accounting for the unconstitutional change of power in Ukraine, Kyiv's failures and mistakes in its regional policy, and the reluctance of Ukraine's Western partners to take Russia's reasoning into account. Meanwhile, all of the aforementioned actions radicalized both public sentiment in Crimea and resolve to destroy the status quo in Moscow. Did the Kremlin intend to increase its opportunity to play a more subtle game, either by supporting Crimea without formally recognizing it (as it did in Transnistria) or by recognizing its independence and signing intergovernmental agreements with it regarding the stationing of the Black Sea Fleet (as it did in South Ossetia)? Probably. But the Kremlin decided to cut the Gordian knot, reducing (in its view) all the potential risks. After all, any military or political venture, let alone the destabilizing situation in Crimea, was fraught with almost automatic involvement of Russian troops in a military conflict. The total lack of confidence in Kyiv's new government (not to say that this opinion was unfounded) only stirred existing fears. Even while agreeing with certain indications that an annexation took place, it is impossible not to note the inconsistencies of certain Crimean realities with this explanation for what occurred. Above all, the majority of the peninsula's population supports Crimea's new status (this is confirmed by polling agencies with no links to the Kremlin and Staraya Square).¹⁷

But with Crimea passing into Russian control, only one set of problems has been put to rest, while others have either cropped up or encountered new catalysts.

The price of Crimea: The international dimension

¹⁶ In early January 2015, the political strategist and publicist Alexander Borodai, who from May 16-August 7, 2014 served as Prime Minister of the Donetsk People's Republic, said in an interview, “There is no ‘Novorossiia.’ We all, of course, use this term, but to be honest, it's a false start. Novorossiia is an idea, a dream, so to speak. It's an idea that hasn't come to life. It hasn't come to life for a whole variety of reasons.”

“‘Novorissii’ – net: eks-glavar’ DNR priznal, chto proekt na Donbasse provalen.” *Glavred* (January 2, 2015). <http://glavred.info/politika/novorossii-net-eks-glavar-dnr-priznal-chto-proekt-na-donbasse-provalen-299569.html>

¹⁷ “Pew Poll: Crimeans happy with ‘annexation’ by Russia; believe referendum was free and fair.” *Human Rights Investigations* (May 12, 2014). <http://humanrightsinvestigations.org/2014/05/12/pew-poll-crimeans-happy-with-annexation-by-russia-believe-referendum-was-free-and-fair/>

The change in the Crimean peninsula's status has caused the largest-scale confrontation between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moscow had, of course, diverged from Washington and Brussels before this; the most stark example was the "five-day war" in the Caucasus, where attempts by the Georgian government to destroy the infrastructure of the unrecognized republic of South Ossetia and shut Russia out of the process of peaceful settlement of the Russian-Georgian conflict led to open intervention by Russian armed forces. However, the current conflict has a variety of important distinguishing features. First of all, it takes place on the backdrop of awareness of post-Soviet Russia's failure to integrate into the Western world while still maintaining its "special position" on a number of issues (foremost, the security of its "near neighbors").¹⁸ Secondly, the current confrontation is taking place in the midst of a high degree of consolidation from the EU and the US regarding Russian policy towards Ukraine.¹⁹ It would be wrong to assume that the economic links between our country and the most powerful EU member states, especially Germany, will prevail over Euro-Atlantic unity, but recent spy scandals, associated with US surveillance of its NATO allies, have made the EU disappointed in the actions of the US.

Washington considers Russia's actions a transgression of international law and an attack on the foundations of world order.²⁰ The subtext is its concerns about the "re-Sovietization" of the post-Soviet space (that is, the return of Russia's exclusive control over the former USSR) and the creation of precedents for changing the regional status quo without taking American interests into account (i.e. that this precedent may be used by other international actors competing for foreign policy independence, be it China, India, Turkey). The American leadership does not pretend that it would not like to see a regime change in Russia. Washington is trying to prevent Moscow emerging as an alternative center of gravity in Europe.²¹

The European Union's position (due to the fact that it is an integrated union comprised of different governments with specific interests) shows more nuance. Within the EU we see a number of different strategies. Poland, Sweden, and the Baltic countries have unequivocally rejected Russia's actions and equally unequivocally support Washington's policy. Germany and France have made attempts to maintain cooperation with the Russian Federation (while putting pressure on its policies), and Hungary, Greece, Italy, and Cyprus are striving to continue a mutually beneficial partnership, not

¹⁸ In this regard, Vladimir Putin's speech at his tenth annual press conference (December 2014) was particularly telling, where he spoke of "defending our right to exist" in the context of relations with the West, and also used the metaphor of Russia as a bear, which "they will always chase across the taiga, to put it in chains; and once they've put it in chains, they'll pull out its teeth and claws."

Text and video available online at <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47250>

¹⁹ The synchronicity of sanctions against Russia from the US, NATO, and EU demands attention. For a more detailed analysis, see V. L. Inozemtsev, "Ostorozhenye. Dveri zakryvayutsya: Sleduyushchaya sanktsiyasa." *Business Journal* 12: 255 (2014).

²⁰ "President Putin has upended the international order, and a slap on the wrist will not deter future Russian provocations," said Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., who chairs the committee. "In the face of Russian aggression, Ukraine needs our steadfast and determined support, not an ambiguous response."

Julie Pace and Deb Riechmann, "Obama, Ukraine President To Meet At White House." *Huffington Post* (September 18, 2014).

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/18/obama-ukraine-poroshenko_n_5841892.html

²¹ "Lavrov: USA idyot va bank— 'beryot na pont' I khochet smenit' rezhim Rossii." *Polit News* (November 22, 2014). <http://politnews.net/2527>

seeing the Crimean crisis in absolute terms. At the same time, since March 2014, the EU as a whole (not the individual countries) has, on the basis of a consensus, along with the United States, introduced a number of sanctions against Russia.²² Meanwhile, not a single EU member state has refused to recognize Ukraine's territorial integrity and recognize the new status quo in Crimea. The maximum potential lies in the possibility of individual representatives of EU member states "understanding" Moscow's motives.²³ Along these lines, certain voices in Europe have persistently demanded that their countries listen to Russia's arguments and not reduce their entire policy towards Russia to a sanctions regime (Italy, Hungary, Greece, Slovakia, Austria). However, criticism in Europe regarding US policy towards Russia and Ukraine has not yet reached the critical mass necessary to steer the conversation towards possible policy changes or even a different course entirely.

After armed conflict broke out in April 2014 in the Donbas region (in Ukraine, called the ATO—the "anti-terrorist operation"), the focus of international attention shifted from Crimea to other southeastern regions of Ukraine. After the Minsk agreements in February 2015, with the participation of representatives from Germany and France, the easing of sanctions against Russia was tethered to the fulfillment of agreements reached in the Belarusian capital regarding the de-escalation of violence in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. This position was announced at the EU summit in Brussels in March 2015.²⁴ However, this shift in focus does not mean abandoning inroads to the issue of Crimea, which is seen in the US and the EU as Moscow's transition to a policy of total—no longer selective—revisionism.

Russia's confrontation with the West has rendered its foreign policy track "turn to the East" absolutely essential. Consequently, Russia has intensified bilateral relations with China, India, and, Turkey (Putin made official visits to these countries in May and December 2014) and Iran (in April 2015, Russia decided to lift its ban on supplying S-300 missile systems to Iran).²⁵ However, despite the nuanced position of Russia's eastern partners, none of these countries recognized the change in Crimea's status. At most, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi was willing to receive Sergei Aksyonov, prime minister of the Republic of Crimea, as a member of the Russian delegation, which elicited sharp criticisms from Delhi's western partners.²⁶ At the same time, official Beijing (which many in Moscow consider an important counterweight to Washington's global

²² V. L. Inozemtsev, Op. cit.

²³ Lenka Ponikelska and Michael Winfrey, "Ukraine conflict won't freeze as Russia needs peace, Zeman says." *Bloomberg Business* (February 20, 2015). <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-20/ukraine-conflict-won-t-freeze-as-russia-needs-peace-zeman-says>

²⁴ "Sammit ES: prodlenie sanktsii protiv RF i sozdanie energeticheskogo soyuza." *RIANovosti* (March 22, 2015). <http://rian.com.ua/analytics/20150322/365132605.html>

²⁵ Aleksandr Andreev, "Povorot na vostok." *RIANovosti* (May 21, 2014).

<http://ria.ru/columns/20140521/1008730350.html>; Pavel Shlykov, "Turtsiya ne popadetsya v 'krymskuyu lovushku.'" Russian International Affairs Council (December 2, 2014).

http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/index.php?id_4=4887#top; "Vizit Vladimira Putina v Indiyu." *RIANovosti* (December 21, 2014).

http://ria.ru/trend/Vladimir_Putin_visit_India_11122014/; "Sekretar' sovbeza Irana: Tegeran ozhidaet postavki S-300 v 2015 godu." *TASS* (April 14, 2014).

<http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1900732>

²⁶ Saurav Jha, "Vladimir Putin's productive India visit." *The Diplomat* (December 12, 2014).

<http://thediplomat.com/2014/12/vladimir-putins-productive-india-visit/>

ambitions) has publicly declared its commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity and asserted the need for negotiations on the status of the Crimean peninsula.²⁷

Particularly noteworthy is the restraint that Ankara has shown in its foreign policy concerning the plight of Crimean Tatars (taking into account the historical links between Turkey and Crimea, as well as the significant pressure on the Turkish government from society and lobbyists within the country). However, when the Turkish air force shot down a Russian bomber near the Syrian border in November 2015, it seriously damaged bilateral relations between Turkey and Russia. This event has provoked a serious confrontation. Although it has not produced an immediate effect on developments in Crimea, it potentially establishes additional risks for Black Sea security.

Russia's unilateral decision to reevaluate its border with Ukraine has not met with unequivocal support in a single post-Soviet state. Member countries of the Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Union took a more passive position than expected. Only official Yerevan has expressed willingness to consider the Crimean referendum in the context of the people's self-determination.²⁸ In the remaining cases, the position of Moscow's strategic partners can be described as benevolent neutrality at best.²⁹ At the same time, the Ukrainian crisis will not hinder the normalization of Russian-Georgian relations. Official Tbilisi has not joined in the sanctions against Russia, though it has not removed the restoration of its territorial integrity and de-occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from its agenda. Dialogue has continued between Grigory Karasin (Russia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs) and Zurab Abashidze (Georgia's Special Representative for Relations with Russia), as well as in the form of joint participation in the Geneva consultations on security issues.³⁰ Azerbaijan has taken a somewhat moderate

²⁷ Premier of the People's Republic of China Li Keqiang said on March 15, 2015: "Regarding the issue of Crimea, its causes and origins are complex. We hope that this issue will find a political solution through dialogue." "Prem'er KNR: 'My – na territorial' nuyu tselostnost' Ukrainy." *BBC Russia* (March 15, 2015). http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/rolling_news/2015/03/150315_ru_china_ukraine_crimea

²⁸ The wording of the press release about the telephone conversation between Vladimir Putin and Serzh Sargsyan on March 19, 2014, which was posted on the Armenian president's website, merits consideration: "In this context, the presidents touched on the situation created by the referendum in Crimea and established that this is an example of a people exercising their right to self-determination through a free demonstration of will." Thus responsibility for this assessment was divided neatly between the two presidents, and the Armenian leader's position does not come across as his exclusive opinion. Text available online at <http://www.president.am/ru/press-release/item/2014/03/19/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-conversation-with-the-President-of-Russian-federation/>

²⁹ In January 2015, President Alexander Lukashenko gave a harsh assessment of ideas about the "Russian world": "There are some certain smart-alecks who like to say that Belarus, as they see it, is a part of the Russian world, if not of Russia itself. Forget about it. Belarus is an independent sovereign nation." "Lukashenko: Belarus- ne chast' russkogo mira." *Korrespondent* (January 29, 2015).

<http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3472649-lukashenko-belarus-ne-chast-russkoho-myra>
Even so, the Belarussian leader has publicly spoken out against the federalization of Ukraine and against views of the new Ukrainian government, which arose as the result of the Maidan protests, as illegitimate. "Lukashenko protiv federalizatsii Ukrainy." *BBC Ukraine* (April 23, 2014).

http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2014/04/140423_ru_s_lukashenko_appeal

On December 22, 2014, the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, said, "I appeal to Russia and Ukraine to think over how to reach a compromise to get out of this conflict and preserve the territorial integrity of Ukraine." "Nazarbaev prizyvaet sokhranit' tselostnost' Ukrainy." *Rosbalt* (December 22, 2014). <http://www.rosbalt.ru/ukraina/2014/12/22/1351142.html>

³⁰ Fridon Dochia, "Gruziya ne podderzhit sanktsii protiv Rossii." *Kavpolit* (August 12, 2014). http://kavpolit.com/articles/gruzija_ne_podderzhit_sanktsii_protiv_rossii-8301/

position towards Russia. Having expressed support for Ukraine's territorial integrity in various international forums, at the same time, official Baku opposed depriving the Russian delegation of its voting rights in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).³¹

Be that as it may, despite the lack of support for the "Crimean issue" among even its closest allies and partners, Russia believes that the results of the popular vote in Crimea and Sevastopol lend legitimacy to the "return" of the peninsula. The very same violation of legal agreements is generally justified within Russia as not being exclusive (especially on the backdrop of events in the former Yugoslavia and the Middle East). It's also a commonly held view in Russia that Moscow's actions are guided largely by the United States and its allies' pathological resistance to a peer dialogue with Russia that takes into accounts its interests and arguments.

Crimean Tatars: the complications of integration

Along with the annexed territory, Russia has inherited a wide range of problems relating to interethnic relations on the Crimean peninsula, which have remained unresolved by the Ukrainian governments of the last 20 years. Among them, the issue of building relationships with Crimean Tatars, who comprise about 12 percent of Crimea's total population, has proved especially thorny. This is no surprise, given the tragic history of this group, which survived Stalinist deportation and could not return to its homeland for many years. The events of the twentieth century largely define contemporary Crimean Tatar identity. During the years of Ukraine's jurisdiction over Crimea, feelings of anger and blame in mass Crimean Tatar consciousness, brought about by Soviet-era trauma, were transferred to Russia, as the successor of the USSR, even though post-Soviet Russia has done a great deal to condemn Stalin's policies and commemorate the victims of political repression and deportation. As Putin rightly pointed out in his "Crimean Speech," "Yes, there was a period when the Crimean Tatars, like some other peoples of the USSR, suffered cruel injustice."³² However, it's worth mention that the history of Crimea has added a certain sharp edge to its perceptions of Russia, above all, the centuries-old confrontation between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, the latter of which made the Crimean Khanate its vassal up until the Russian Empire annexed Crimea at the end of the eighteenth century.

During Crimea's time within the bounds of post-Soviet Ukraine, the Crimean Tatars' most pressing problems found no resolution. Moreover, official Kyiv artificially inflated fears and stereotypes connected with their tragic history during the period of Soviet totalitarianism. The fact that to this very day the social organization of the Crimean Tatar people with the greatest social capital is the Mejlis, which, over the years, established working contacts with the Ukrainian government and political class, and, as a result, strictly opposed the referendum on Crimea's status and its entry into the body of the Russian Federation, compounds the urgency of the situation. Other organizations (for instance, "Milliy Firqa," "Qirim Birligi," and the "Qirim" movement) are currently

³¹ Ilgar Velizade, "Ne golosom edinyam." *Kavpolit* (January 30, 2015).
http://kavpolit.com/articles/ne_golosom_edinyam-13590/

³² Ibid.

undergoing organizational development, or do not possess sufficient resources to compete with the Mejlis.

Nonetheless, the Russian government has prioritized the integration of Crimean Tatars into Russian society from the very beginning of Crimea's accession into Russia. The constitutional commission on the development of provisions of the basic law of the Republic of Crimea within the Russian Federation included Lentun Bezazyev, who is member of several councils of the highest governing body of the autonomous region and served from 2010-2014 as the Chairman of the Council of Crimean Tatars' People's Representatives under the President of Ukraine. The preamble to the Crimean Constitution (adopted April 11, 2014) affirmed the concept of the "multinational people of the Republic of Crimea," and Article 10 proclaims Crimean Tatar an official language, along with Russian and Ukrainian.³³ This constitutional provision provides a foundation for future normative-legal acts for the development and preservation of full linguistic equality.

On April 21, 2014, Putin signed a decree "On Measures for the Rehabilitation of the Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Crimean Tatar and German Peoples and State Support for their Revival and Development." According to its text, this document proposed the creation of a separate program for Crimea's development until 2020, taking into account measures aimed at the national, cultural, and spiritual revival of these peoples.³⁴ Its implementation requires the allocation of 10.85 billion rubles. Even before October 2014, the national budget included 450 million rubles to facilitate the resettlement of deported ethnic groups out of the 800 million planned for that year.³⁵

However, the declaration of principles and pragmatic policy decisions do not always exactly correspond—far from it. Unfortunately, efforts to establish a personal dialogue between Putin and preeminent Crimean Tatar activist Mustafa Dzhemilev failed. After their conversation on March 12, 2014, Dzhemilev not only did not cease but even strengthened his efforts to internationalize the Crimean issue. Subsequently, he repeatedly called upon American and European politicians to bring in a peacekeeping mission of UN troops to Crimea and thus ignore the results of the people's will of March 16. In addition, Dzhemilev repeatedly met with Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan with the goal of enticing Ankara towards actively protecting Ukraine's territorial integrity and containing Russia.

To a significant extent, the implacable position of Dzhemilev and the Mejlis influenced the subsequent relationship dynamic between the Russian government (at both the federal and regional levels) and the Crimean Tatar movement. Almost immediately Russia placed its hope in marginalizing Dzhemilev and his supporters and creating alternative structures loyal to Russia and to the new government. Moscow succeeded in making a number of important gestures to the Crimean Tatars (for instance, Vladimir Putin met with a Crimean Tatar delegation in Sochi on May 16, 2014, that is, on the eve of the seventieth anniversary of the deportation; a number of Crimean Tatars ascended to power in the new government, including Remzi Ilyasov, Ruslan Balbek, and Zaur

³³ Constitution available online at <http://www.rada.crimea.ua/content/uploads/files/Constituciya.pdf>

³⁴ "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 21 aprelya 2014 g. N 268." *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* (April 23, 2014). <http://www.rg.ru/2014/04/21/reabilitaciya-site-dok.html>

³⁵ Alexei Pletnev, "Remzi Ilyasov: Ukraina dolzhna prekratit' ispol'zovat' krymskikh tatar v svoikh interesakh." *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* (October 3, 2014). <http://m.crimea.kp.ru/daily/26290/3167909/>

Smirnov). However, the confrontation with the Mejlis, now, as before, remains a complex challenge for Russian Crimea. This issue is at the very apex of this organization, whether former leader, Mustafa Dzhemilev (who, in April 2014, was served a notice prohibiting his entry into the Russian Federation), or its current leader, Refat Chubarov (who, in June of this year, received a similar ban), or his advisor, Ismet Yuksel (who was denied entry on August 9). It is of utmost importance to see that a significant portion of the population is behind these leaders and supports the Mejlis.

The issue, naturally, is not entirely simple and unambiguous. The regional authorities' policy employs prohibitive measures and takes an enforcement approach. On May 16, 2014, Sergei Aksyonov (at that time the acting head of the Republic's government) banned mass political action in Crimea until June 6, under the pretext of preventing incidents connected with the civil unrest in southeastern Ukraine. Then, on June 26, 2014, local authorities forbid holiday events celebrating the Day of the Crimean Tatar National Flag, which traditionally have been held in the central square of the Crimean capital. In September, authorities seized Mejlis property in Simferopol, and in December, banned a Human Rights Day rally.³⁶

However, it's impossible not to see a kind of confrontational logic in the other side's actions, which manifested most strongly in its campaign to boycott the September 14 elections (the first elections in Crimea as part of Russia). Dzhemilev himself several times publicly called on the Crimean Tatar Youth League to boycott the Russian army's draft in Crimea and Sevastopol, not to mention his continuous appeals at various levels to a harsher foreign policy towards Moscow.³⁷

The aforementioned conflicts have made it all the way to the head of the Russian government. At a meeting of the Council for Civil Society and Human Rights under the President of the Russian Federation on October 14, 2014, Vladimir Putin listened to an impartial critique of the regional Crimean government and security forces by Nikolai Svanidze, a well-known Russian journalist and historian. This dialogue is extremely interesting from the point of view of the different emphases used by the government and by liberal society; i.e. security and stability vs. open dialogue and human rights. Both discourses are extremely important. Neither the president nor the journalist dissembled, by any means, when they spoke about the challenges to Russian national interests or about discrimination as an additional risk. However, these discourses exist in parallel dimensions, without interfering with one another.³⁸ The well-known Russian Orientalist Alexei Malashenko warns (on the backdrop of those excesses which have taken place in the North Caucasus) against extremes with regard to harsh persecution of the opposition: "Experience shows that as soon as relations between Muslims become strained, religious fundamentalism begins to appear." And he warns of the danger that a "small but active group of Muslims, which views Moscow with extreme enmity," will emerge.³⁹ In addition, the North Caucasus (keeping in mind all the caveats regarding Moscow's record

³⁶ "Vtoroi den' obyskov v medzhisle." *Newsru.com* (September 17, 2014). <http://www.newsru.com/russia/17sep2014/obysk2.html>

³⁷ "Po slovam Dzhemileva, krymskie tatory budut ignorirovat' povestki v rossiiskoi armiyu." *TSN* (November 14, 2014). <http://ru.tsn.ua/ukrayina/krymskie-tatory-massovo-otkazuyutsya-sluzhit-v-rossiyskoy-armii-397942.html>

³⁸ Available on the Kremlin's website at <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46786>

³⁹ *Newsru.com* (September 22, 2014). <http://www.newsru.com/russia/22sep2014/medj.html>

on human rights) by and large has not been the primary focus of international politics. Crimea, however, is another matter. Almost from the very moment of the change in its status, it became the focus of intense international scrutiny. Not a single leader of the North Caucasus could, in his wildest dreams, imagine himself as the guest of a European parliament or NATO. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the current Vice Speaker of the Crimean Parliament, Remzi Ilyasov (who, in 2013, declared his candidacy for President of the Mejlis and won 114 votes, ultimately losing to Refat Chubarov by only 12 votes), being a critic of Dzhemilev's strategies and a supporter of the pro-Russian election, speaks of the need for a more delicate hand in work with Crimean Tatar organizations: "In this difficult period, which all of us in Crimea are living through, it's necessary for certain law enforcement activities to be carried out very subtly and flexibly so, God forbid, we don't hurt or offend anyone whomsoever."⁴⁰

An isolated economy

Socio-economic development constitutes no less important a priority for Crimea, first of all, on account of the peninsula's population's heavy dependence on the tourism industry (which has contracted due to the massive outflow of Ukrainian tourists and visitors from European countries), as well as because of the lack of a direct land link between Russia's two new subjects and the "mainland." The Crimean peninsula obtains 80 percent of its water supply from Ukraine through the North Crimean canal. More than two thirds of the incoming water (between 600-700 million cubic meters) goes towards Crimea's agricultural sector.⁴¹ Ukraine's initiative to disconnect Crimea from its power supply on the eve of 2015 (while Ukraine itself was experiencing an energy deficit) demonstrates the extent of the peninsula's vulnerability.

It is worth noting that Russia has hardly inherited an untarnished legacy from Ukraine. While it belonged to Ukraine, the peninsula was a highly subsidized region more than half of whose budget came directly from Kyiv.⁴² Its socio-economic indicators fell far below the Russian standard. According to data from May 2014, 95 percent of the region's budget will be supplied from the Russian federal budget. In total, in 2015, Russia is expected to spend 100 billion rubles on Crimea, and between 2015-2017, 373 billion rubles. According to the federal target program for Crimea and Sevastopol until 2020, the total expenditures from the federal budget for the region will amount to 733.5 billion rubles.⁴³

Alexander Andryakov, CEO of the Economic Expert Group, estimates that "the costs of Crimea are unprecedented—even the North Caucasus republic don't receive as much from the federal center."⁴⁴ However, in this case, it's not a matter of the economic

⁴⁰ Alexei Pletnev, "Remzi Ilyasov: Ukraina dolzhna prekratit' ispol'zovat' krymskikh tatar v svoikh interesakh." *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* (October 3, 2014). <http://m.crimea.kp.ru/daily/26290/3167909/>

⁴¹ TASS (April 24, 2014). <http://tass.ru/ekonomika/1143378>

⁴² Ivan Golunov, "Stanet li Krym samym dotatsionnym regionom Rossii?" *Slon* (March 14, 2014). http://slon.ru/russia/stanet_li_krym_samym_dotatsionnym_regionom_rossii-1069452.xhtml

⁴³ Sergei Titov and Maksim Tovkailo, "Zatraty federal'nogo byudzheta na FCP Kryma i Sevastopolya sokrashcheny s 1.1 tril do 790 bil rublei." *Vedomosti* (July 8, 2014). <http://www.vedomosti.ru/finance/articles/2014/07/08/cena-kryma#ixzz3IqqIvDkw>

⁴⁴ Margarita Lyutova and Maksim Tovkailo, "100 bil. ne khvatit." *Vedomosti* (May 20, 2014).

benefit principle, but of investing in the government's prestige. The Kremlin sees its incorporation of Crimea as a resurgence of Russia's political subjectivity and full sovereignty in the international arena.

The sanctions regimes that some Western countries have aimed directly against Crimea pose additional difficulties. Meanwhile, since December 20, 2014, capital investments in Crimea and Sevastopol from EU countries have become illegal. European citizens and companies registered in the EU may no longer buy real estate or legal entities in Crimea, finance Crimean businesses, or offer them any related services. In addition, EU tour operators may no longer offer tour services in Crimea and Sevastopol.⁴⁵ Washington has enacted similar measures. The United States Department of the Treasury has gained the right to impose sanctions on individuals and companies operating in Crimea.⁴⁶ This de facto precludes banking and investment activity.

The peninsula's first holiday season as a part of Russia showed in sharp relief that organization of the "Crimea-Caucasus" ferry link (which was not designed to support its current load) is also extremely pressing, not to mention the construction of a Kerch strait bridge. After some discussion, on January 30, 2015, the LLC "Stroigazmontazh" was officially announced as the only general contractor for the bridge's design and construction and the marginal cost was set at 212.5 billion rubles in 2015 prices. The bridge is estimated to be open to car and railroad traffic on a temporary basis by December 18, 2018.⁴⁷ However, this is a matter of perspective; according to the assessment of Crimea's Deputy Minister of Resorts and Tourism, Olga Burova, in the first 6 months of 2015, 1.772 million tourists visited Crimea, which is 29.5 percent fewer than visited in the same period the previous year (2.515 million). According to some analysts, this decline in the number of tourists can be explained by the sharp decline in visitors from Ukraine, and by poor infrastructure, which has not actually been updated since the Soviet era.⁴⁸

As a result, the state has attempted to remedy the situation through "dirigiste methods." Thus in April 2014, President Vladimir Putin signed a list of instructions regarding transport development, which provides measures that will ensure reliable passenger air service to Crimea and reduce to cost of air travel to the peninsula.⁴⁹ In fact, it effectively subsidizes air travel to the peninsula, which, in the absence of a full-fledged rail link and until the completion of the Kerch strait bridge, has become the primary means of traffic between Crimea and "greater Russia."

However, Moscow is already aware that a policy of "dirigisme" alone, without stimulating free economic activity, will not solve Crimea's development problem.

<http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2014/05/20/100-mlrd-ne-hvatit#/ixzz3Iqu5jG8P>

⁴⁵ "Sovet ES prinyal novye ekonomicheskie sanktsii protiv Kryma." *Svobodnaya Zona* (December 18, 2014). <http://www.szona.org/sovet-es-prinyal-novye-ekonomicheskie-sanktsii-protiv-kryma/#t20c>

⁴⁶ "Obama obyavil ekonomicheskuyu blokadu Kryma." *RIANovosti* (December 20, 2014). <http://ria.ru/world/20141220/1039281386.html#ixzz3MSNidKYe>

⁴⁷ Igor Zubkov, "Opredelen podryadchik stroitel'stva Kerchenskogo mosta." *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* (January 30, 2015). <http://www.rg.ru/2015/01/30/most-site.html>

⁴⁸ Veronika Lisovskaya, Semyon Mikhailov, and Anastasia Klennitskaya, "Krym prishel v upadok." *Russkaya Gazeta* (July 2, 2014). <http://www.gazeta.ru/business/2014/07/02/6094881.html>

⁴⁹ "Putin poruchil dostroit' dorogi v Sevastopole i razvivat' aeroport Bel'bek." *Sevastopolskie Novosti* (April 22, 2014). <http://sevastopolnews.info/2014/04/lenta/politika/069219195/>

Consequently, it engineered the creation of a free economic zone on the peninsula (Putin signed it into law in December 2014, and it came into effect on January 1, 2015). This law creates a Free Economic Zone (FEZ) in the Republic of Crimea and City of Sevastopol for 25 years, a period which may later be extended. Special conditions will apply to the participants in the FEZ, including a special tax regime in accordance with the RF's legislature on taxation and duties and procedure, established by the RF's budget legislature, a subsidy to compensate the costs of participating in the FEZ.

The document also laid out the mandatory volume of capital investments in the investment project (over the first three years of the project, investments must consist of no less than 30 million rubles, and for small- and medium-sized enterprises, no less than 3 million rubles).⁵⁰

However, it is impossible to implement even the best of intentions without high-quality government and management structures. Many Russian journalists and experts, who have already visited Russian Crimea, have noted that despite the harsh opposition of American—and, more generally, Western—policy, local residents are, for the most part, interested in filling elected officials' posts and in the functioning of democratic procedures. In general, the contrast between foreign political disputes and interests and the request to modernize internal policy seems strange. Be that as it may, officials in both Moscow and Russian Crimea should not forget, carried away by conversations about stability, that the “Russian spring” was itself initiated from below, no thanks to “armchair activists,” and, in many respects, in spite of them. One striking example of the phenomenon of “Crimea’s awakening” is successful Sevastopol businessman Alexei Chaly, who, even after “coming into power,” has retained his signature style (dressed informally in a sweater).⁵¹

Obviously, any high expectations that result from Crimea’s new status as a part of Russia have a limited lifespan, after which many pointed questions will inevitably arise. The Russian government would do well to forestall their emergence, not by exerting force, but rather by raising the quality of infrastructure and resolving other social problems. Thus the acquisition of Crimea, for Russia, is not the “end of history,” but the beginning of a complex process of integrating not merely the territory, but more importantly, the peninsula’s inhabitants. For it to meet with success in this regard, it would be easier for Russia to assert its position during negotiations with Western partners. As internal failures emerge (such as solving management problems, the economy, and inter-ethnic relations), external pressure will undoubtedly increase. As a result, there is all the more reason to act.

⁵⁰ Elena Shmeleva, “Srokom na 25 let.” *Russkaya Gazeta* (December 2, 2014).

<http://www.rg.ru/2014/12/02/krym.html>;

Pavel Kazarin, “Komu pomozhet svobodnaya ekonomicheskaya zona v Krymu.” *Slon* (December 17, 2014). https://slon.ru/world/svobodnaya_zona_v_krymu-1196434.xhtml

⁵¹ Author's interview. Sevastopol, September 15, 2014 and Feodosia, September 17, 2014.