



THE PENINSULA AS AN ISLAND

CRIMEA IN ITS THIRD YEAR SINCE ANNEXATION

Wojciech Górecki

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KEY POINTS

- More than two and a half years after Russia annexed Crimea (in March 2014), Moscow considers the case closed; it treats the peninsula as an integral part of the Russian Federation and has ruled out any talks on its status. For Kyiv meanwhile, in contrast to its declarations, regaining control of the peninsula does not seem to be a priority – as of now, despite its announcements, the Ukrainian government has not developed a strategy to recover Crimea, and its only *de facto* activity in this regard has been to rely on a limited blockade of the peninsula. These activities are supported by the Crimean Tatars, who are maintaining their own blockade of the access roads to Crimea. The Crimean Tatars and their representative body, the Mejlis, are now the only force in Ukraine who have a genuine, and not merely feigned, interest in altering the Crimean *status quo*.
- Since the annexation, relatively few people have decided to leave the peninsula. These have mostly been Crimean Tatars (individual Tatar leaders have been forbidden to reside in Crimea by the Russian authorities). The predominant approach among Crimea's inhabitants, regardless of whatever views they may have expressed, has been to adapt to the new conditions. Within a few months of the annexation, the vast majority of the inhabitants had adopted Russian citizenship. At the same time, some of them have retained their Ukrainian passports, to make travel abroad possible.
- The standard of living since the annexation has not improved. The only raises have gone to bureaucrats, some state employees, and military & law enforcement officials (*siloviki*), while the income of certain professional groups has even fallen, especially those related to tourism. As well as the drop in the number of tourists, this state of affairs has been caused by the crisis in Russia, sanctions, and the isolation of the peninsula;

this makes it harder to import all kinds of products and goods, which in turn affects their prices. Compared with the period before the annexation, supplies of water, and to some degree electricity, have worsened; it has also become more difficult to access banking services.

- Regardless of the complex of social, transport and communication problems, the vast majority of the Crimean people are satisfied with the annexation, and consider the economic difficulties to be temporary. This is due to the traditionally pro-Russian sympathies of Crimea's residents (two-thirds of whom are ethnic Russians), reinforced thanks to Russian propaganda which has presented the annexation as the restoration of historical justice and protecting the peninsula from war and chaos. The domination of the Russian media will foster the further integration of the peninsula with Russia. Even now, the degree of integration in the social and cultural spheres should be assessed as greater than the level of Crimea's integration into Ukraine was in the years before the annexation.
- The group most affected as a result of the annexation was the Crimean Tatars; they have been the predominant victims of human rights violations, are frequently stopped by the police and the FSB, and are the group most commonly targeted for kidnappings. The Crimean Tatars' Mejlis has been declared an extremist organisation in Russia, and several of its leaders have been banned from entering Crimea; also, the Crimean Tatar television station ATR's licence has not been renewed. At the same time, however, it is difficult to say that mass persecution of the Crimean Tatars is underway.

I. SO CRIMEA ISN'T YOURS, BUT IS IT REALLY OURS?

From the point of view of Moscow – and several other capitals¹ – the ‘Republic of Crimea’ and the separate city of Sevastopol have, since 21 March 2014, been two entities (regions) of the Russian Federation: on that day President Vladimir Putin signed a law admitting both units into Russia. Initially, they joined the newly appointed, separate Crimean Federal District, with its capital in Simferopol; however, on 28 July 2016 the district was abolished, and by presidential decree Crimea and Sevastopol were included into the Southern Federal District. This seems to have been a demonstration that the annexed areas are just as much ‘Russia’ as the other entities of the Federation – the Kremlin has consistently rejected any talks on the future of Crimea, deeming the act of annexation as irreversible and not open to debate – and was intended to aid their accelerated integration with the rest of the country.

In accordance with the principles of international law, both the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (the official Ukrainian name of this area), and Sevastopol (the separate city) are parts of Ukraine currently under Russian occupation. In addition to Kyiv, this opinion is shared by the vast majority of states and international organisations (including the EU). Given Russia’s effective control of Crimea (Kyiv deems 20 February 2014 as marking the beginning of the occupation), in April 2014 the Ukrainian parliament adopted a law on the protection of the citizens’ rights and freedoms, and on the legal system in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine, which *inter alia* regulated the issues of the activities of the Crimean authorities (Kherson was named their temporary headquarters), as well as confirming that residents of Crimea retain Ukrainian citizenship (the Russian replacement of documents was not acknowledged). The State Service for Crimea and

¹ The annexation of Crimea by Russia has been recognised by Afghanistan, Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea, Syria and Venezuela. It is worth noting that Nicaragua and Venezuela have also recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Sevastopol was created by the Ukrainian Government, although in April 2016 this was merged with the agency dealing with the occupied parts of the Donbas (at that time, the Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons was created).

Regardless of these numerous declarations, however, the return of Crimea does not seem to be a priority for the Ukrainian government. This may be demonstrated by its failure to prepare its long-expected strategy in this area, with tasks assigned to the different agencies and institutions of the state² – to which the Crimean Tatar activists have drawn particular attention³. The cause of this state of affairs seems above all to be the realisation that the restoration of the country's territorial integrity is unlikely in the foreseeable future (which, in the light of the need for urgent domestic reforms, means that this has to be postponed); and further down the road, the ruling elite's fear that hypothetical participation in further Ukrainian elections by Crimea (and the Donbas) could significantly worsen their own parties' results⁴.

After the annexation, a part of the population decided to leave the peninsula. The greatest *exodus* took place during the first few months (before the end of 2014). Fully accurate figures are not available – not everyone has formally re-registered, some people left and then returned – but estimates vary most often from about fifteen to more than twenty thousand people, or about 1 per cent of the total

² Elements of reintegration strategy have been discussed in the Ukrainian parliament, but on 7 September 2016 it failed to accept a series of recommendations on this matter which had already been drawn up (in the form of a parliamentary resolution).

³ OSW (CES) interviews with Mejlis activists and representatives of the Crimean Tatar media. Ukraine, May 2016.

⁴ Both regions have traditionally voted for pro-Russian parties and candidates; for example, in the parliamentary elections on 28 October 2012, 52.34% of the vote in Crimea (excluding Sevastopol) went to the Party of Regions (30% across Ukraine as a whole), while *Batkivshchyna* won 13.09% (25.54%), and the nationalist *Svoboda* party 1.04% (10.44%).

population of Crimea (excluding Sevastopol)⁵. According to data from *Krymstat* (the Crimean statistical office, an organ of the Russian Federal Statistical Service), between 1 January 2013 and 1 July 2014 the population of Crimea (excluding Sevastopol) fell from 1,957,463 to 1,884,473, that is, by close to 73,000 people⁶, but on 1 January 2016 the figure stood at 1,907,106, which is thus an increase.

The changes in the population of Crimea (including Sevastopol) in the years 1989-2016 proceeded as follows⁷:

| | 1989 (a) | 2001 (b) | 2014 (c) | 2016 (d) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Total | 2,430,495 | 2,401,209 | 2,284,769 | 2,323,369 |
| Russians | 1,629,542 (67.05%) | 1,450,394 (60.40%) | 1,492,078 (67.90%) | no data |
| Ukrainians | 625,919 (25.75%) | 576,647 (24.01%) | 344,515 (15.68%) | no data |
| Crimean Tatars | 38,365 (1.58%) | 245,291 (10.22%) | 232,340 (10.57%) | no data |

⁵ Crimean Tatar sources usually report slightly higher estimates; for example, Mustafa Jemilev believes that by summer 2016, about 50,000 people had left, half of whom were Crimean Tatars (Polowanie na Tatara. Z przywódcą Tatarów Krymskich Mustafą Dżemilewem rozmawia Waclaw Radziwinowicz. [Hunting Tatar. The leader of the Crimean Tatars Mustafa Jemilev talks with Waclaw Radziwinowicz], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27–28 August 2016). Other Mejlis activists estimate that about 35,000 people decided to leave (about 50% of the migrants are also assumed to be Crimean Tatars in this case).

⁶ http://crimea.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_ts/crimea/resources/3f51fe8047d4c435a335a7ed3bc4492f/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5.pdf

⁷ Author's calculations on the basis of the following data: the Census of the Soviet Union from 1989 (a); the Ukrainian census of 2001 (b); the Russian census in the then Crimean Federal District of 14–25 October 2014; that census included 87,205 people, or 3.82% of the total population, who did not report their nationalities; therefore the percentages of Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars were calculated in relation to those people who did report their nationality, and not in relation to the total population of Crimea including Sevastopol (c), as well as data from *Rosstat* for 1 January 2016 (d).

Probably at least half of those who have left are Crimean Tatars (about 7500-15,000, which is 3-6% of their entire population in Crimea); these probably included members and sympathisers of the Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is banned in Russia but legal in Ukraine (according to data from the Russian Interior Ministry, the number of such sympathisers in Crimea fell in the first year since annexation from 10,000 to 2500⁸; the departure of persons associated with this party has also been confirmed by Crimean Tatar sources⁹). In addition to the Tatars, Crimea has also seen the departure of people loyal to the Ukrainian state, including activists of the local Maidans, officers of the army and law enforcement agencies who remained loyal to Kyiv, and small traders who feared for the future of their companies. Most emigrants from Crimea have moved on to 'continental' (or 'mainland') Ukraine¹⁰, and a number have gone to EU countries. At the same time, a similar number of citizens of the Russian Federation (around 20,000) have moved to the peninsula, including Sevastopol; these people have mainly been assigned work in the organs of administration and the institutions of force¹¹.

Those who have remained – that is, the vast majority of the residents – have over time adapted to the requirements of the new authorities, regardless of their attitude to the annexation. According to estimates by the Mejlis, by the autumn of 2014 20-30%

⁸ <https://ria.ru/incidents/20150330/1055412640.html>; it was not stated how many of these people had left Crimea, and how many had stayed, but left the party.

⁹ <http://courier.crimea.ua/news/courier/ludi/1154303.html>

¹⁰ This word is commonly used in Crimea (and often also in Ukrainian journalism) to refer to the remaining part of Ukraine, reflecting the sense of isolation of the peninsula's inhabitants.

¹¹ The report «Крым без правил. Перемещение Российской Федерации населения гражданского на оккупированную территорию Украины» [Crimea beyond rules: displacement of Russian civilian population to the occupied territory of Ukraine] (2015), prepared by a coalition of Ukrainian human rights organisations, lists the names of over 120 people who upon their arrival on the peninsula took positions in the governments of Crimea and Sevastopol, as well as in the judicial and prosecutorial authorities.

of Crimean Tatars and about 80% of representatives of other nationalities had taken Russian passports (citizenship). At that time (autumn 2014) the authorities ran a publicity campaign which sowed the fear that after the end of the 'transitional period' (that is, from 1 January 2015; the full economic and legal integration of Crimea into the Russian Federation was to have been completed by that date), residents who did not possess Russian documents could lose their jobs or their businesses; students were threatened with refusal to issue their graduation certificates. Then, the deadline to resolve this issue was moved to April 2015¹². It should be assumed that there are now only a few individuals in Crimea who do not have Russian citizenship¹³, as a Russian identity card is required for dealing with all bureaucratic matters, to visit a doctor at a state clinic, etc.

One part of the strategy to adapt to the new conditions was the approach to replacing number plates on cars and other means of transport. The Russian authorities do not accept cars bearing Ukrainian-issued Crimean number plates¹⁴, and cars with Russian-issued Crimean numbers are not allowed into Ukraine. Residents of Crimea who frequently travel between Crimea and the

¹² OSW (CES) interviews, etc.

¹³ According to the Russian Federal Migration Service, as of 21 April 2014, i.e. within the one-month deadline for making such a declaration, 3427 Crimean inhabitants were formally refused Russian citizenship (http://rian.com.ua/CIS_news/20140422/345528247.html; failure to file a special application led to automatic recognition of the given person as a citizen of the Russian Federation, but this person had to act individually to acquire the relevant documents). It is hard to say how many people in this group left Crimea and how many remained on the peninsula. It must be assumed that the majority of migrants who have moved to 'continental' Ukraine did not submit formal documents to refuse citizenship of the Russian Federation.

¹⁴ The owners of the vehicles had time to exchange their number plates until 1 April 2016. From that date until the beginning of September, 3300 drivers were fined for driving vehicles bearing Ukrainian numbers issued in Crimea, to a total sum of 1.97 million roubles (the average size of the fine was thus around 600 roubles, or about US\$10), and 209 drivers had their driving licences temporarily confiscated (the law states that the punishment for a repeat offence is confiscation of the driver's licence for a period of one to three months); <http://ru.krymr.com/a/27963967.html>

‘mainland’ (there is no data on their numbers) have re-registered their vehicles with families or friends resident in Kherson, Kyiv or elsewhere, and drive them around the peninsula and the rest of Ukraine on the basis of a notarised certified authorisation.

Despite having adopted Russian citizenship, some Crimean residents have retained Ukrainian documents, usually without informing the new authorities of this fact (as of 1 January 2016, hiding the possession of dual citizenship risks criminal liability). The scale of the phenomenon is impossible to estimate, but it must be assumed that any Crimean who regularly travels outside the CIS has a Ukrainian passport; in March 2014, the consulates of EU states in Russia received a recommendation to cease issuing visas to residents of Crimea. Moreover, it is now virtually impossible for residents of Crimea to obtain Schengen visas with a Russian passport at consulates in Ukraine (according to media reports, in the initial period some residents of Crimea received Russian documents registered in the Siberian and Far Eastern regions of the Russian Federation). A Ukrainian identity card is also needed to enter the ‘continent’ (exit from Crimea takes place on the basis of a Russian document, and entrance into the area controlled by the Ukrainian authorities requires a Ukrainian document; sometimes, Ukrainian officials destroy or confiscate the Russian identity cards with Crimean registration which they find)¹⁵.

Obtaining a new Ukrainian identity card requires travel to the ‘mainland’ and a wait of about two weeks, which takes time and money (residents of Crimea can report to any office in the

¹⁵ The infrastructure of the Ukrainian checkpoints on the roads leading to Crimea recalls that of border crossings (border guards, customs, pavilions of veterinary and phytosanitary control customs, etc.), which is further evidence that the authorities in Kyiv have – at least for the moment – *de facto* come to terms with the loss of the peninsula (no such infrastructure is to be found on the ‘border’ with the part of the Donbas controlled by pro-Russian separatists).

country)¹⁶. Other documents – birth certificates, marriage, death – can in certain cases be handled by an intermediary, for example by giving authority to a lawyer from a non-governmental organisation supporting Crimean residents (the *Krym SOS* organisation has the widest reach: <http://www.krymsos.com/>), although a great deal of determination is still necessary to fulfil all the requirements and procedures. Because of these difficulties, as well as recurring cases of ill-treatment towards residents of Crimea in Ukrainian offices (calling them traitors, demanding bribes) it seems justified to claim that over time – especially after the road and rail bridge over the Strait of Kerch is opened, which is planned for 2018-19, and the peninsula's physical isolation is reduced – interest in Ukrainian papers will dwindle, and will be limited to the most determined individuals (Ukrainian patriots who for various reasons will not have decided to make the final move to the 'continent', as well as people who frequently travel abroad).

¹⁶ By April 2016 residents of Crimea had been issued with about 5000 Ukrainian identity cards. Maksim Koshelev, Украинские документы для крымчан [Ukrainian documents for residents of Crimea], *Крымское Слово*, no. 2, 26 April 2016. In Russia the identity card is issued from age 14, and in Ukraine from age 16.

II. THERE'S NO DOUGH, BUT HANG ON IN THERE!

Residents of Crimea with pro-Russian attitudes – who are in the vast majority on the peninsula – supported the annexation not only for ideological motives, but also in the hope of a significant improvement in their living standards. Initially, in most cases salaries and pensions actually increased significantly. It appears that the raises were a kind of ‘reward for loyalty’, and served as a propaganda message that joining Russia pays off (according to rumours circulating in Crimea, the funding for these increases came from confiscated Ukrainian assets, primarily banks). However, after a few months – in some cases, right after the end of the ‘transitional period’ – the benefits were often reduced. Officially this has been attributed to the adjustment of the payment salaries in the public sphere to the Russian system, where salaries are influenced by age, seniority, grading etc. (in the period immediately after the annexation, the level of individual benefits was to have been determined on the basis of the respective average Russian salaries). However, these reductions, combined with inflation and a decline in the rate of the rouble, mean that now the financial situation on the peninsula is not significantly different from the present situation in Ukraine (which Russian propaganda presents as a state which is almost bankrupt and cannot meet its citizens’ basic needs).

The changes in the size of payments can be traced on the basis of the following examples:

- Doctors: in the initial period after the annexation, they earned up to 20-40,000 roubles (about US\$560-1120, at the exchange rate at that time), and now they can count on about 10-20,000 roubles (about US\$150-300);
- Teachers: likewise, initially 12-15,000 roubles (about US\$340-420), and now about 8-10,000 roubles (about US\$120-150);
- Pensioners: the minimum pension was around 8000 roubles (about US\$225); this is currently around 6000 roubles (a little over US\$90);

- Unemployed people: the monthly benefit was around 6000 roubles (nearly US\$170), and currently stands at about 850 roubles (about US\$13), which is not even enough to pay the municipal charges¹⁷.

Crimean salaries compared to those in Russia and Ukraine

According to Rosstat (the Russian Federal Statistical Service), in 2015 the average monthly salary in the then Crimean Federal District was 22,792 roubles (about US\$340); in the ‘Republic of Crimea’ it was 22,464 roubles (about US\$335), and in Sevastopol 24,187 roubles (over US\$360)¹⁸. Regardless of the fact that within Russia these are not high earnings (the Russian average salary was 34,030 roubles, just under US\$510), the examples given above show that in fact even skilled professionals in Crimea earn much less (the majority of the several thousand job offers available in 2015-2016 in the Crimean Employment Centre offered salaries ranging from 5000 to 12,000 roubles, or about US\$75-180). The figure for the average salary is raised by law enforcement officers (especially from the FSB), professional soldiers, employees of the judiciary and senior officials; salaries for these groups run at around 100,000 roubles (about US\$1530), and are accordingly higher for top managers and directors¹⁹.

The average pension in the then Crimean Federal District as of 1 January 2016 was 11,637.60 roubles (about US\$175); in the ‘Republic of Crimea’ it was 11,460.50 roubles (over US\$170), and in

¹⁷ On 1 April 2014, the US dollar exchange rate was 35.6 roubles, but on 1 September 2016 it was 65.25 roubles. Data on wages comes from the OSW’s (CES’s) own estimates based on a range of media reports.

¹⁸ http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/wages/. Data for 2014 is not available.

¹⁹ <http://ru.krymr.com/a/27968518.html>. The amounts relating to the year 2015 were calculated on the basis of an exchange rate on 1 December 2015 of US\$1 = 66.74 roubles.

Sevastopol 12,544.40 roubles (about \$190). The Russian average was 12,080.90 roubles (just over US\$180)²⁰.

For comparison: in Ukraine, the average monthly salary in 2015 was 4195 hryvnias (about US\$175), and the average retiree's pension 1601 hryvnias (over US\$65)²¹. This is significantly less (in dollar terms) than in annexed Crimea, although the purchasing power is comparable because Russian prices are generally higher than Ukrainian prices, and prices in Crimea, due to the isolation of the peninsula, are close to those in Moscow (food, including dairy products and meat as well as vegetables and fruits, and clothing & building materials cost up to twice as much as in the neighbouring Krasnodar Krai). One commodity which has become cheaper since the annexation is used cars: one can now pay about US\$2-3000 for a ten-year-old Western car in good condition in Crimea. Fuel (petrol, diesel, gas) is cheaper in Crimea than in Ukraine (by about 15-25%).

In opinion polls carried out as part of the Russian sociological Open Mind (*Открытое мнение*) project between April and June 2016 on a representative sample of 1100 respondents from Russian-occupied Crimea and Sevastopol, the question 'Which social problems in Crimea do you consider the most relevant for you and your family?' received the following responses (respondents could select more than one problem):

| | |
|---|-----|
| – increase in the prices of food products | 83% |
| – low salaries | 63% |
| – bad roads and problems with movement | 63% |
| – increases in municipal charges | 61% |
| – low level of medical services | 59% |
| – low pensions | 52% |

²⁰ http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/urov/urov_p1.htm

²¹ <http://www.krisa.com.ua/srednyaya-zarplata-v-ukraine/>, <http://pensiyaexpert.ru/calculator/srednyaya-pensiya-v-ukraine-po-itogam-2015-goda.html>

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| – bad work and arbitrary behaviour by officials | 51% |
| – corruption | 49% |
| – low level of municipal services | 45% |
| – the threat of unemployment | 37% |
| – severance of ties with Ukraine | 34% |
| – high level of crime | 31% |
| – the arrival of large numbers of new residents to Crimea | 24% |
| – power cuts | 22% |
| – ethnic problems | 21% |
| – the reluctance of part of the population to be residents of Russia | 17% |
| – blockade of supplies from Ukraine | 15% |
| – difficulty in travelling abroad | 13% ²² |

A similar hierarchy of issues emerges from the research carried out at the end of June and the beginning of July 2016 by VTsIOM (the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Centre), although a slightly different methodology was used in the study; among other things, respondents could specify up to five problems (affecting the respondent and his family), and only answers marked by a minimum of 3% of respondents were taken into account. Therefore individual issues were highlighted by smaller percentages of respondents. The inhabitants of occupied Crimea and Sevastopol were questioned separately, and the representative samples numbered 1000 respondents:

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| – bad roads, slow pace of their construction and repair | 25% |
| | (in Sevastopol 30%) |
| – high prices | 23% (39%) |
| – reduction in the number of jobs | 13% (8%) |
| – low salaries, lack of raises | 12% (26%) |
| – adverse changes to the health system | 6% (7%) |
| – high municipal tariffs | 6% (7%) |

²² http://www.openopinion.ru/content_res/articles/OO_Crimea_brief.pdf. Other problems were identified by 9% of respondents.

- poor level of land management 6% (9%)
- reduction in the quality of medical services 6% (10%)²³

A symbol of the Crimean people’s disappointment at their living conditions more than two years after the annexation (which does not, however, translate into dislike for the current *status quo* or any increase in pro-Ukrainian sentiments) is the exchange between the Prime Minister of Russia Dmitri Medvedev, who visited the peninsula in May 2016, and a group of residents. The older women complained that their pensions were not being index-linked, to which the head of government said, “There is simply no money now. The money will be found – we’ll make the adjustment. You just hang on in there, [I wish you] all the best, good moods and good health.” The saying ‘There’s no dough, but hang on in there’ (in Russian *Денег нет, но вы держитесь*) has entered colloquial language as an illustration of a situation in which the state washes its hands of its obligations and leaves the citizens to fend for themselves. This quote has since been used in a song by the well-known Russian satirist Semyon Slepakov²⁴.

²³ <https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=115782>. In this study, very few respondents (only 2% and 4%) complained directly about corruption and bureaucracy (but in addition, 4% and 3% of the respondents indicated ‘problems with registering the documents, queues, bureaucracy’).

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8v2WIVeJ3c>

III. CORRUPTION, LIES, AND THE IMPUNITY OF THE BUREAUCRATS

The problems identified by the respondents in the polls discussed above refer to different agendas. However, we can isolate two groups of problems from them: those that have been caused as a result of the direct actions or omissions of the Russian authorities (both local and federal), or are related to the prevailing situation in Russia (the multidimensional crisis preventing raises in salaries and pensions), and those that are the result of the links with Ukraine being broken. Problems independent of the annexation, such as the poor quality of the roads (which is the result of many years of neglect), constitute a separate group, although over time these responsibilities will also begin to burden the current rulers of the peninsula.

The first group of problems may be deemed to include the corruption and arbitrary behaviour of administrators at multiple levels, as well as the overgrowth of the bureaucracy. As one online commenter cited on the website *krymr.com* (*Krym.Realii*, a project of Radio Liberty) wrote, “corruption, lies and the impunity of the bureaucrats, their disrespectful attitude to the people, every kind of prohibition – these are the main signs of Russia coming here.”²⁵ Meanwhile, according to Olga Skripnik, coordinator of the Crimean Human Rights Group, “the inhabitants of the peninsula have no way to defend their rights, which is related to the fact that Crimea remains a grey zone, where neither Russian nor international law applies.”²⁶

These problems have probably affected the owners of small and medium-sized companies to the greatest extent. Before the annexation, small entrepreneurship was very well developed: in 2013 in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) at least 116,200

²⁵ <http://ru.krymr.com/a/27937477.html>

²⁶ <http://ru.krymr.com/a/news/27970104.html>

individual entrepreneur-individuals were operating, and the Ukrainian state register of individual entrepreneurs included 57,365 companies in the ARC (including 54,527 legal entities, and 2838 entities which did not have this status), as well as 16,203 in Sevastopol (15,598 and 605 respectively)²⁷. Small and medium-sized businesses in the ARC employed a third of all employees on the peninsula, and their share of Crimea's income amounted to 30% of its budget²⁸.

After the annexation, many of these small entrepreneurs suspended their activity: in January 2015, the number of individual entrepreneurs was only about 30,000 (including over 23,000 in the 'Republic of Crimea' and 7000 in Sevastopol), and the number of companies was over 21,000 (including more than 15,000 in the 'Republic of Crimea' and 6000 in Sevastopol)²⁹. This decline was caused by the following factors: **(a)** the lower number of visitors to Crimea (the tourist sector will be dealt with separately in later parts of this text); **(b)** so-called 'Crimean' economic sanctions imposed by the West; **(c)** the rupture of commercial and business ties with Ukraine; **(d)** logistical and legislative issues (Ukrainian legislation is more liberal to entrepreneurs than that of Russia); **(e)** the complicated accounting and reporting system required by the Russian tax authorities, and finally **(f)** the imposition of all sorts of 'disciplinary' penalties and fines on entrepreneurs.

Legal entities in Crimea were obliged to re-register (in accordance with Russian legislation) by 1 March 2015, but not all of them were able to do so, often for formal reasons. Entities that were not

²⁷ Data from Ukrstat, the Ukrainian state statistical service, for 1 March 2014.

²⁸ *Антология современной крымской мифологии* [Anthology of contemporary Crimean mythology, ed. Pavel Kazarin & Olga Dukhnych, Kyiv 2016]. <http://docs.rferl.org/ru-CRI/2016/02/23/eaf6be4b-16ae-443e-9a4d-67c1cef-b15db.pdf>

²⁹ https://www.nalog.ru/rn77/news/activities_fts/5150597/. This analysis of the Ukrainian and Russian data is merely indicative, because the statistical systems of the two countries are different.

registered (the deadline was not moved back because the ‘transitional period’ was considered to have been completed) were deprived of the right to do business on the territory of the Russian Federation, and were subject to liquidation. By the beginning of September 2016, more than 2000 commercial, service and catering buildings had been pulled down as illegal on the basis of administrative decisions (without any decision by a court). Such actions were often dramatic; for example, on 2 September 2016 in Yalta, 75-year-old entrepreneur Aleksandr Strekalin set himself on fire in protest against the demolition of his restaurant, with fatal results³⁰. In the absence of registration, and under the pretext of the fight against the shadow economy, a number of markets and bazaars were eliminated, and illegal economic activity is now subject to high penalties; for example, renting a private room to tourists (which was a source of additional income for Crimean Tatars in particular) can now be punished by a fine of up to thirty times the amount of income earned³¹.

Based on media reports and statements from human rights defenders, it can be assumed that in some cases the denial of registration of a company or the demolition of a property is associated with the desire of people associated with the new authorities to take over that business. These are often arrivals from Moscow or other Russian cities, who have significant financial resources at their disposal. Describing this phenomenon in greater detail – as well as the problem of property confiscation – would go beyond the framework of the current study³².

³⁰ <http://ru.krymr.com/a/news/27970104.html>; *op. cit.*

³¹ OSW (CES) interviews, etc.

³² For more on these topics, see the report ‘Annexed Property in Crimea’ ed. Yulia Tyshchenko, Kyiv 2016, as well as the programme *Все под снос. Справедливо ли демонтируют кафе, торговые точки и рынки Крыма [Everything under the wrecking ball. Is it fair to demolish the cafes, stores and markets of Crimea?]*, available on the above-mentioned website at <http://ru.krymr.com/a/news/27970104.html>

A problem which affects all Crimea's inhabitants to a greater or lesser degree concerns the medical services, the difficulty of access to them and their deteriorating quality. To get to the doctor, one needs firstly to get a ticket for the queue for appointments, and only then can one arrange a visit. In private clinics there are no queues, but certain kinds of tests cannot be carried out, because Western reagents have run out, and the Russian replacements are of poor quality³³. According to media reports, the largest hospitals are losing numerous professional staff, especially anaesthesiologists, who can count on higher earnings (for example, in Central Russia) than in Crimea. For example, between April and August 2016, seven anaesthesiologists left the Municipal Hospital No. 1 in Sevastopol alone, a state of affairs which threatens to paralyse the surgery department³⁴.

Another effect of the sanctions imposed on Russia is that Crimean residents' access to banking services has become more difficult. Crimean ATMs accept credit cards from the Russian Mir system, but other transactions often fail to be completed (bankers suggest that clients should not use Visa and MasterCard, because there have been cases of the machines retaining their cards). Moreover, remittances from abroad also fail to arrive; the systems reject transactions including the word 'Crimea' in the name or address of the beneficiary, which also affects money transfers for some Ukrainian organisations (such as *Krym SOS*). However, there have also been cases where the systems accept money orders if the address indicates a town in Crimea without using the name 'Republic of Crimea'³⁵.

Problems resulting from ruptured ties with 'continental' Ukraine include the deterioration of the water supply, power cuts, and a complex of issues related to the Crimean Tatar blockade of

³³ OSW (CES) interviews, etc.

³⁴ <http://classic.newsru.com/russia/26aug2016/sevas.html>

³⁵ OSW (CES) interviews, etc.

the peninsula which began in September 2015. In spring 2014, after the failure of negotiations between the Ukrainian government and the *de facto* authorities of Crimea, Ukraine cut Crimea off from the water of the Northern Crimean Canal, which at a stroke reduced the irrigated cultivated area in the north of the peninsula (from 406,000 hectares before the annexation to a little over 10,000 hectares in 2015)³⁶ and hence the crop yields, causing the need to transition to cultures that demands less water and, where possible, spot-watering of plants using water from local sources. The deficit of water has not affected those residents of Crimea who are employed outside agriculture (apart from the increase in food prices): drinking water for the peninsula's population can be fully covered by local artesian wells and the water resources of the Crimean mountains³⁷.

One serious inconvenience for the economy and residents of Crimea came from the restriction, and then the temporary interruption of electricity supplies from the Ukrainian 'mainland' (before the annexation around 70–80% of power consumed on the peninsula came from Ukraine). After Russia took control of Crimea, power supplies took place under an agreement between the Ukrainian Ukrinterenerho company and the Russian Inter-RAO energy company, although between 19 and 22 November 2015 a series of electricity poles were blown up and long-term damage was caused to all four transmission lines (all these attacks took place outside of Crimea). No-one confessed to the sabotage, although it should be assumed that it was the work of Ukrainian radicals, supporters of tough policies against the annexed peninsula, and perhaps having

³⁶ Как выживает бизнес аграрный в Крыму [How is agricultural business surviving in Crimea], *Крымское Слово*, #2, 26 April 2016. (Crimea's total land area is 2.2 million ha, of which 1.8 million ha is agricultural land, including 1.6 million hectares of arable land: <http://ru.krymr.com/a/27935453.html>).

³⁷ Антология современной крымской мифологии..., *op. cit.* Before the annexation, the peninsula consumed a total of more than 1 bcm of water annually, 85% of which comes from the Northern Crimean Canal.

links to radical Crimean Tatar circles³⁸. Moscow has exploited the situation for propaganda purposes, on the one hand by accusing Kyiv of being ineffective and untrustworthy, and on the other by holding a survey in late December 2015 and January 2016 among Crimea's inhabitants as to whether they were in favour of signing a new contract with Kyiv to supply electricity if the contract declares that Crimea and Sevastopol are part of Ukraine (a demand by the Ukrainian side), and whether they are ready for short-term interruptions in the supply of electricity (over a period of three to four months). According to VTsIOM, who carried out the survey, 93.1% of respondents rejected the signing of such a contract, and 94% declared their readiness to accept the temporary difficulties. Although the reliability of these results may raise some doubts, they certainly reflect the prevailing mood among most residents of Crimea³⁹. After the damage was repaired, Ukraine partially resumed energy supplies to Crimea, but after the expiration of the agreement (31 December 2015) no new one was signed.

In May 2016, the fourth and last line of the energy bridge from Russia (via the Kerch Strait) was ceremonially opened. On this occasion, Moscow announced that Crimea had now become completely independent of electricity supplies from Ukraine, and that the peninsula's electricity demands were now being met in full. It is hard to confirm whether this claim is true. In polls conducted earlier as part of the Open Mind project, 22% of respondents stated that the power cuts were a fundamental problem, which suggests that an energy deficit still exists (although the interruptions may also result from the poor state of transmission networks within the peninsula; moreover, the network ran in a north-south direction before the annexation, and now more east-west connections

³⁸ Rafał Sadowski, Jan Strzelecki, Crimea is left without power, CES (OSW), 25 November 2015, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-11-25/crimea-left-without-power>

³⁹ Глава ВЦИОМа отправил критиков опроса Крыму в «учить жену щи варить», <https://meduza.io/news/2016/01/02/glava-vtsioma-otpravil-kritikov-oprosa-v-krymu-uchit-zhenu-schi-varit>

are needed). In turn, according to participants in the Crimean Tatar blockade (which will be discussed later in this chapter), the relatively good electricity supplies to Crimea at this time derive not so much from the energy bridge, as from farms of power generators powered by oil and gas. The cost of 1 kWh produced in this way is alleged to be about 30 roubles (about US\$0.46) for which residents pay (depending on the tariff) between 1.35 and 5.40 roubles (about US\$0.02 to 0.08)⁴⁰. The participants in the blockade treat these figures as evidence of the effectiveness of their actions; they were intended to raise the cost of Russia's support for Crimea, and in this way strike at the Kremlin's finances (it is known that the mobile generators were established after the poles and transmission lines on the 'mainland' of Ukraine were attacked).

The Crimean Tatar blockade and its consequences

In the initial period after the annexation, no obstacles were placed on the import of Ukrainian food and other goods. Export was facilitated by the introduction (under a Ukrainian act of September 2014) to the peninsula of a free economic zone (the Russian authorities set up a similar zone in Crimea). A large amount of these goods were re-exported on to Russia, allowing them to circumvent the embargo Moscow introduced in response to the Crimean and Donbas sanctions announced by a number of states and international organisations⁴¹. This situation changed after 20 September 2015, when blockades were set up on the access roads to Crimea in order to bring a complete halt to all freight transport. The organisers of the blockade - which is still in operation - were Crimean Tatar activists linked to the Mejlis, who are supported by a number of Ukrainian organisations (including the Automaidan,

⁴⁰ OSW (CES) interviews, etc.

⁴¹ According to some estimates, up to 200 trucks of food entered Crimea daily during that period (20 trucks would have been sufficient). OSW (CES) interviews, etc.

the Maidan Self-Defence and Right Sector). The blockade was coordinated by Lenur Islamov, an entrepreneur and political activist, who in April and May of 2014 was the Deputy Prime Minister of the 'Republic of Crimea' on behalf of the Mejlis⁴². The intention of the blockade's organisers was to express opposition to the annexation, and to put pressure on the authorities in Kyiv to redouble their efforts to reclaim the peninsula. The blockade, which took the form of highway checkpoints (its participants resided in camps pitched nearby), contributed to the adoption by the Ukrainian government on 16 December 2015 of legal provisions on the prohibition of supplies to and from Crimea of goods and services (with a few exceptions)⁴³. Exports from 'continental' Ukraine have been reduced, but not cut off: for example Ukrainian food is still sold on the peninsula, although its prices are higher than in 2014-15, because of increased logistic and transport complications (some goods are reloaded at the 'border' into private passenger cars), which generate more costs (due to the necessity of paying bribes, among other things)⁴⁴.

⁴² In the first weeks after the annexation, Mejlis activists were hoping for an agreement with Moscow (more on this later in the text). Islamov is a controversial figure in Ukraine, among other reasons because he has not renounced his Russian citizenship. In December, 2015 Islamov announced the formation of the *Asker* (warrior) volunteer battalion named after Noman Çelebicihan, and began efforts to incorporate it into the Ukrainian army, to which Kyiv does not want to agree; the Ukrainian government realises that it would have only limited control over the battalion – but they tolerate Islamov's actions, in order not to offend those Crimean Tatar groups which sympathise with him. Members of the *Asker* battalion drive around areas adjacent to Crimea with cars numbered 'Asker 001', '002', etc. (from the legal point of view, this type of registration plate is illegal). This carries the risk of all sorts of provocation, which could for example adversely affect Crimean Tatar/Ukrainian relations on 'continental' Ukraine.

⁴³ <http://interfax.com.ua/news/economic/311865.html>

⁴⁴ <http://ru.krymr.com/a/news/27792119.html>. Lenur Islamov asserts he was offered a bribe to lift the blockade amounting to several hundred thousand US dollars.

IV. THE EMPTY BEACHES OF SUDAK

The annexation has significantly affected the tourism sector, which has hitherto been the main engine of the peninsula's economy. According to Crimea's Russian authorities, the number of tourists was around 4 million in 2014, and around 4.6 million in 2015⁴⁵. This is much lower than in the years preceding the annexation, when an average of 6 million visitors visited Crimea annually. In addition, the composition of the visitors' nationalities and the structure of their arrival have changed: previously, about two-thirds of them were Ukrainians, and 70% of all visitors (of whom individual tourists made up a large group) arrived by train. In 2014-2015, Russians and organised groups had come to dominate, arriving mainly by air (44%) and ferry across the Kerch Strait (39%). These changes have adversely affected the income of small and medium businesses above all (hoteliers, restaurateurs, manufacturers and souvenir sellers), as well as people for whom the support of tourists was a source of extra income (taxi drivers, owners of private accommodation, shopkeepers). Such activities were mainly the province of Crimean Tatars, and it is they who have lost the most from the departure of individual tourists from Ukraine: the participants in organised activities who come from greater distances tend as a rule to spend less money, are less likely to use the catering facilities, etc. The scale of the phenomenon is demonstrated by the fact that although only 5% of the economically active population of Crimea were working on a permanent basis in the tourism industry, casual employment in this sector amounted to about 20%, and in the most attractive tourist areas, this percentage increased to 37%⁴⁶. The annexation had least effect on the sanatoria, i.e. the post-Soviet health and rest complexes,

⁴⁵ http://www.gazeta.ru/lifestyle/news/2014/12/30/n_6792909.shtml; http://mtur.rk.gov.ru/file/vochnaya_informatsiya_o_kolichestve_turistov__poveshivshih_respubliku_krim_za_2015_god.pdf. In addition, due to the 'Crimean' sanctions, Crimean ports have ceased to receive foreign cruise ships, whose passengers are usually very well-off tourists.

⁴⁶ Антология современной крымской мифологии..., *op. cit.*

which unlike the guest houses, which are usually active only in the summer season (numbering around 4500), receive guests throughout the year.

Under the conditions described, the fact that tourist traffic has decreased by only between a third and a quarter in the years 2014-2015 should be linked to the intense propaganda campaign conducted by the Russian authorities (who advertise holidays on the 'recovered' peninsula as an act of patriotism), together with pressure on government offices and state-owned enterprises to send their employees there on leave (according to independent Russian media, specific institutions were even assigned 'quotas' of specific numbers of people to go there; there have also been rumours, hard to verify, that false certificates of having been to Crimea were being traded). In the first months after the annexation, airline tickets to Simferopol were subsidised, which could have also encouraged visits by a certain number of individual Russian tourists curious to see the 'exotic recovered territories.'

According to an announcement by the head of *Rosturizm* (the Russian Federal Agency for Tourism), the number of tourists visiting Crimea should reach 5.5-6 million for all of 2016, which would be close to the state of things before the annexation (in the summer season, over 3 million people had already come to relax on the peninsula)⁴⁷. In turn, according to Ukrainian officials responsible for tourism, guests will have numbered about one and a half million at most. Even though we can see many stories, photos and film clips in the Russian and Ukrainian blogosphere and social media showing almost empty beaches at the height of the season⁴⁸, however, this figure seems to be an underestimate, for two reasons. First, the airport in Simferopol and the ferry route have seen

⁴⁷ Elena Platonova, Туристы выбирают родное [Tourists go native], *Gazeta.ru*, 13 September 2016, <https://www.gazeta.ru/business/2016/09/12/10190135.shtml>

⁴⁸ See, for example, the post by the well-known Russian blogger Ilya Varlamov: <http://varlamov.ru/1818731.html>

a steady increase in the number of passengers (in 2014, 2.8 million people passed through the airport, and over 5 million in 2015; the ferries transported 4.7 million people in 2015⁴⁹ – although of course, not all the travellers are tourists); secondly, tourists from Ukraine are slowly returning to Crimea, especially people who had previously been in the habit of spending their annual holidays there. In 2015, according to official Ukrainian estimates, there were about 100,000 such visitors, and this number is expected to rise by several times in 2016⁵⁰. The popularity of Crimea as a travel destination is demonstrated by the large number of adverts offering travel and leisure in Crimea, which are a distinctive feature in Ukrainian cities, especially around train stations.

Further development of tourism on the peninsula is hindered by the following factors:

- ideological-nationalist motivations. Many people, especially Ukrainians, do not want to travel to the ‘occupied areas’ and financially support a hostile state;
- formal and legal obstacles. According to Ukrainian law on safeguarding the rights and freedoms of citizens, and the legal system concerning the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine, all citizens of Ukraine may freely enter Crimea by land, while foreigners need to get a pass from Ukrainian authorities to do so (it is difficult to obtain and formally it is not meant for tourist purposes). Technically, foreigners can reach Crimea by plane or by ferry from the territory of Russia, but Ukrainian law treats this as illegal crossing of the border, hence any such crossing may result in a ban on entry to

⁴⁹ <http://www.gazeta.ru/business/2015/03/09/6450057.shtml>; <http://www.gazeta.ru/business/2016/05/26/8265989.shtml>; http://www.gazeta.ru/auto/2016/06/14_a_8307707.shtml

⁵⁰ <http://ru.krymr.com/a/27957594.html>

Ukraine. Inevitably, this limitation does not apply in practice to citizens of the Russian Federation;

- logistical questions. Despite the increase in capacity of the ferry crossing in the port of Kavkaz (in Russia's Krasnodar Krai, on the eastern shore of the Kerch Strait), long queues build up regularly (and the crossing does not operate in stormy weather), and people travelling in cars must plan for extended journey times. Travelling by public transport (except aircraft) thus requires three transfers: one must catch a train to Krasnodar or Anapa, then a bus to the port of Kavkaz, the ferry to Kerch, and once again by bus to one's final destination (although this is possible on the basis of a single ticket issued by Russian railways⁵¹);
- the unfavourable relationship between the price and the quality of the services, as well as rising prices in Crimea. The price of an air ticket to Crimea from many Russian cities is comparable to that for flights to Turkey or Thailand (in the cases of Siberia or the Far East). Resorts in Turkey (when that market opens up again to Russian companies) offer the same prices as in Crimea, with more comfortable accommodation and better food.

⁵¹ http://pass.rzd.ru/static/public/ru?STRUCTURE_ID=5282

V. ALL OF US, ALL OUR SIMPLE NATION, WE ARE FOR PUTIN

Despite the serious economic and social difficulties mentioned above, the vast majority of the population of Crimea supports the annexation, and they tend to blame problems on the sanctions policy of the West or sabotage by Ukraine (the economic blockade of the peninsula). This is due to the Crimean people's traditionally pro-Russian sympathies, the failure to integrate the peninsula with Ukraine (especially in cultural terms) between 1954 and 1991, and especially 1991-2014, as well as Russian propaganda's depictions of the benefits of Crimea's integration with Russia.

The population of Crimea before the annexation

In Crimea, ethnic Russians were and still are a consistent two-thirds majority of the residents. In practice, outside the compact aggregates of Crimean Tatars in rural areas, Crimean cities and towns are almost purely Russian. According to the Ukrainian census of 2001, Russian was deemed to be the native language of up to 77% of the population of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (11.4% of respondents named the Crimean Tatar language, and 10.1% Ukrainian). In the separate city of Sevastopol, Russian domination was even more pronounced; 90.6% of the population there declared it as their native language, and 6.8% Ukrainian (as a rule the Tatars did not settle in Sevastopol at all). For comparison, in the Donetsk oblast these proportions were 74.9% Russian to 24.1% Ukrainian, and in Luhansk 68.8% to 30% respectively. In the supposedly heavily Russified Odessa oblast, Ukrainian actually had a slight advantage (46.3% to 41.9%)⁵². In the Autonomous Republic of

⁵² <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/language/crimea/>,
<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/language/sevastopol/>,
<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/language/donetsk/>,
<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/language/lugansk/>,
<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/language/odesa/>

Crimea, Russian was an official language next to Ukrainian, and its status was guaranteed by appropriate items in the Constitution of the ARC (some documents, such as birth certificates, were completed in both languages).

The Russian domination of Crimea's cultural sphere is demonstrated by information about the language situation in teaching and the media. In 2013, 89.4% of students in Crimean schools pursued their studies in Russian, 7.4% in Ukrainian, and 3.1% in Crimean Tatar. Of the roughly 600 schools operating on the peninsula, only 8 had Ukrainian-speaking status, and 14 were Crimean Tatar-speaking. Only 5% of academic subjects were taught in Ukrainian in Crimea (all the others used Russian); only two faculties trained teachers in Crimean Tatar language and literature. More than 80% of titles of the Crimean press were published in Russian alone, and only one newspaper was published in Ukrainian (although a certain number of titles appeared in two languages). Only 7% of programmes produced by Crimean state television were in the Crimean Tatar language⁵³.

Among the Russian-speaking population of Crimea, regardless of its numerical advantage, there are proportionally many more retired Soviet military officers (and retired from the law enforcement apparatus) resident there than in other parts of the former Soviet Union, who settled on the peninsula after retiring from the service⁵⁴. The views of these individuals, who have few ties to Crimea itself, were characterised by typically conservative, nationalist and great-power overtones, which

⁵³ Антология современной крымской мифологии..., *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Many of them retained Russian citizenship or adopted it later. In the elections to the Russian State Duma in 2011, 5 stationary and 4 mobile polling stations were run in Crimea. Throughout the rest of Ukraine there were 4 stationary and 7 mobile polling stations; <http://www.edinaya-odessa.org/ksors/37550-vybory-deputatov-gosdumy-rossii-4-dekabrya-2011-goda-adresa-isbitratelnyh-uchastkov-i-punktov-golosovaniya-na-ukraine.html>

further impeded the integration of Crimea with Ukraine. This spirit was apparent even before the Russian annexation – for example, in the Museum of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, which displayed a range of Russian arms from when the peninsula was first joined to Russia to the Chechen wars (soldiers of the Fleet participated in them as part of ‘official delegations’, as a series of separate noticeboards stated).

According to a study of the ‘Open Mind’ project, 43% of respondents interviewed about their ‘civic identity’ defined themselves as ‘a resident of Russia’, and 35% as ‘Crimean’. This strong regional component can be explained by the sense of distinctiveness which formed on the peninsula when it was included into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and in the period from 1991 to 2014 this sentiment only rose in strength (only 1% of inhabitants identified as ‘a citizen of Ukraine’). According to studies carried out at a similar time in the above-mentioned VTsIOM research, 74% of respondents expressed the opinion that the process of integration with the Russian Federation had in general been successfully completed (regardless of the number of issues that still require solutions), whereas 25% felt that the majority of matters relating to integration had not yet been solved.

This fossilisation of pro-Russian (and pro-Kremlin) sentiment was reinforced by the aforementioned departure of groups of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians, and the arrival to work in Crimea of about twenty thousand officials and officers of the army & law enforcement agencies – citizens of the Russian Federation (in the short term, the appearance of these new residents has generated local conflicts, although these mainly relate to the business sphere). The peninsula is also now home to several Ukrainian politicians linked to the deposed former President Viktor Yanukovich, including Pavel Lebedev (the former defence minister) and Vadim Kolesnichenko (a former member of the Party of Regions). Viktor Yanukovich and former Prime Minister Mykola Azarov also have residences in Crimea.

According to official data, in the first Russian parliamentary elections held on the peninsula (18 September 2016), turnout in the ‘Republic of Crimea’ reached 49.1%, and 47.0% in Sevastopol city (the total figure for Russia was 47.8%), and the ruling United Russia party won 72.8% and 53.8% support respectively (54.2% throughout Russia). The results would seem to indicate much greater support for the ‘party of power’ than elsewhere, but according to estimates provided in the independent Russian media, United Russia won far fewer votes (even though it won). The aim of the electoral fraud would have been to demonstrate consensus among the Crimean people, and confirm that the annexation was the fulfilment of the will of the people.

Regardless of such possible electoral fraud, the inhabitants of Crimea *en masse* display a high degree of loyalty to the Kremlin; one illustration of this attitude may be the statement by Zinaida Denisovna, the grandmother of Russian blogger Ilya Varlamov, which he posted on the Internet on 31 March 2016 (she is 84 years old, and has been living in Crimea in Simferopol since 1957):

Once again I have begun to be proud of my country, that’s most important! For 23 years I’ve had no homeland [...] and now I’m in Russia. [...] All of us, all our simple nation, we are for Putin. Putin holds the country together, otherwise everything would have fallen apart. There wouldn’t be any Russia. We need our country to be great. We are proud that we come from the Soviet Union. [...] And then what? Ukraine, which we don’t even want to mention! For 23 years we were living as if we were in a terrible dream. You don’t even understand what happiness this is – to feel that you’re living in a great country.⁵⁵

Attitudes of this kind are perpetuated by Russian propaganda that presents the annexation as an act of historical justice, saving

⁵⁵ <http://varlamov.ru/1630703.html>, the entry titled ‘Важное мнение моей бабушки о ситуации в Крыму’ [My grandmother’s important opinion on the situation in Crimea].

the peninsula from chaos and banditry (which the rest of Ukraine is allegedly involved in). This narration has been reinforced by statements from leading Russian politicians claiming that the only viable alternative to Crimea joining the Russian Federation would have been mass bloodshed⁵⁶.

The domination of Russian media (only internet users and owners of satellite dishes have access to Ukrainian media) is fostering the further integration of the peninsula with Russia. Already, the degree of this integration in the social and cultural spheres must be assessed as higher than the level of integration with Ukraine in the years before the Russian annexation. In the Open Mind opinion poll, respondents responded to the question of where they primarily derived their information about events in the country and in the world as follows:

- from Russian television 84%
- from conversations with relatives, friends and acquaintances, 66%

⁵⁶ For example, <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2016/01/26/nikolay-patrushev-mirovov-soobshhestvo-dolzno-skazat-nam-spasibo-za-krym.html>. Cf. also the story from the book 'Ani żadnej wyspy. Rozmowy o Rosji i Ukrainie' [Nor any island. Talks about Russia and Ukraine] (ed. Piotr Brysacz and Jędrzej Morawiecki, 2016, p. 109): I'll tell you a story that I heard from the leader of the Kharkiv Euromaidan, a young Ukrainian woman from Kerch in Crimea. She came to Kharkiv to study, then for a time moved to Lviv, where she did a doctorate and learned to speak Ukrainian, then she came back to Kharkiv, took a job at the University, and her parents, Russian-speaking Ukrainians, still lived in Kerch. She told me that she calls her mother daily, simply because she was worried (we were speaking several days after the annexation of Crimea). On the day we met, she also called her mother as usual to ask what's up, and it slipped out that soon she was going to Lviv, to which the mother reacted hysterically: 'My daughter, but there are Banderites there, Nazis, they'll rape you straight away, they'll kill you!'. She said, 'Mum, I spent a few years there, I have friends there', and her mother, more and more scared, answered, 'But you don't know what's going on out there right now! Every day your father and I watch TV and we know! You can't speak in Russian there, and even if you speak Ukrainian, if you've got a foreign accent, then...'. 'But mum, what are you talking about?' she replied. 'My daughter, you don't know anything, your father and I can see what's going on there!'. The mother could never be told differently. The girl couldn't shake the impression that her mother trusted the television - of course, Russian TV - more than her own daughter.

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| – from Crimean local TV | 47% |
| – from pages on the Internet | 46% |
| – from the Crimean press | 35% |
| – from social media | 34% |
| – from Russian radio | 29% |
| – from local Crimean radio | 27% |
| – from Russian newspapers | 19% |
| – from Ukrainian television | 16% |
| – from Ukrainian radio | 2% |

The idea that time is working in favour of Russia, and that ties with Ukraine will be loosened further, is reinforced by the fact that graduates of Crimean schools do not have automatic access to universities in Ukraine, because the (Russian) school-leaving certificate they receive does not correspond to the Ukrainian equivalent. To overcome this, an additional test must be passed, which about 70 people decided to do in 2015 (out of more than ten thousand graduates). In this situation, which in practice guarantees a place at a Russian university (until 2016 school leavers could take advantage of a simplified recruitment system), the vast majority of graduates will certainly study in Russia, binding Crimea even more closely to it⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ OSW (CES) interviews, etc.

VI. THE CRIMEAN TATARS: FOR, OR EVEN AGAINST IT

In the face of the above situation and the prevailing sentiments, the most important challenge for the Russian authorities remains the matter of the Crimean Tatars. The group most opposed to the annexation comes from within this community: according to the report 'The Crimean Tatar ego' prepared by the Russian newspaper *Kommersant*, about 70% of them boycotted the referendum held on 16 March 2014 to join the peninsula to Russia⁵⁸. This was linked to the memory of the mass deportations of their community to Central Asia in 1944, and the identification in the people's collective consciousness of the Soviet Union with its successor, the Russian Federation. Almost identical data were obtained in the Open Mind study: 72% of respondents of Crimean Tatar nationality claimed that they had not voted (overall 24% of Crimean respondents said they had abstained). According to the official results, turnout in the ARC was 83.1%, and 89.5% in Sevastopol; 96.8% and 95.6% respectively voted for Crimea and Sevastopol to join Russia (according to unofficial information, the turnout in the ARC was about 30%, and about 50% of the electorate actually voted for the annexation)⁵⁹.

Initially Moscow wanted to win the favour of the Tatars, offering them positions in the government of Crimea, which was accepted at an extraordinary session of the Kurultai (a type of parliament whose tasks include the selection of the members of the Mejlis). When it turned out that the Kurultai and the Mejlis – which had

⁵⁸ <http://kommersant.ru/projects/crimeantatars>. Mejlis activists argue that the referendum was boycotted by almost 100% of the Crimean Tatars (OSW (CES) interviews, etc.).

⁵⁹ This data appeared for a while on the webpage of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights. The case was revealed and publicised by Paul Roderick Gregory, a journalist for the US edition of *Forbes*: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2014/05/05/putins-human-rights-council-accidentally-posts-real-crimean-election-results-only-15-voted-for-annexation/#6cbc9d2310ff>.

not been officially recognised in Ukrainian legislation, although informally the authorities had respected the opinion of these bodies – would not receive official status in the new situation either, and that the Crimean Tatars would not obtain the status and rights of indigenous people, the majority of Crimean Tatar activists and the community as a whole declared that they would not cooperate with the Russians. A strongly pro-Ukrainian stance was adopted by the Tatars' leaders, headed by Mustafa Jemilev, the longtime leader of the Mejlis (which had previously supported the Euromaidan movement)⁶⁰; they explained their initially ambiguous reaction to the annexation in terms of concern for the survival of the nation.

After unsuccessful attempts to subjugate the Crimean Tatar authorities – only a few people have agreed to collaborate out of the 33 members of the Mejlis – Moscow decided to create alternative, newly-established institutions (this primarily involves the *Krym* movement, headed by Mejlis member Remzi Ilyasov), as well as to support activists loyal to it (in this group Emir Ali Ablayev, the Crimean mufti and also a member of the Mejlis, enjoys the greatest authority). At the same time the repression of the pro-Ukrainian Crimean Tatar elites began. Several people, including Jemilev and Refat Chubarov, the current leader of the Mejlis received a five-year ban on entering Russia (including Crimea), and several others who left Crimea have had their criminal cases reopened, which in practice prevents them from returning to the peninsula. In April 2016 the Russian Ministry of Justice added the Mejlis to the list of extremist organisations (this step was condemned by the Council of Europe), which prevents it from carrying out any activity on the territory of the Russian Federation, and gives then an excuse to stop each Tatar who has a Mejlis pendant or flag in their car, as such a person can be accused of promoting

⁶⁰ See Tadeusz A. Olszański, Crimean Tatars after Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, *OSW Commentary*, #141, 30 June 2014; <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2014-07-02/crimean-tatars-after-russias-annexation-crimean-peninsula>

extremism. The new authorities have also torpedoed any independent Crimean Tatar initiatives; for example, they do not allow demonstrations to commemorate the deportation of 18 May 1944.

Violations of human rights recorded in Crimea affect the Crimean Tatars to the greatest extent. Even though the scale of these violations is limited, and do not constitute the persecution of the whole nation, they have sometimes been very dramatic. By the end of August 2016 18 Tatars were in prison (including three people jailed for taking part in the pro-Ukrainian demonstration of 26 February 2014, i.e. even before the annexation); some of them have been accused of participating in extremist organisations, including the Islamic Hizb ut-Tahrir Party. About twenty cases of disappearances are known (at least one case can be 100% confirmed as a kidnapping because the event was recorded by a camera monitoring from a nearby store). Persons involved in the activities of the national Mejlis and local *mejlisler*, which operate in towns inhabited by Tatars, are stopped and questioned more commonly than others, and their homes are raided (by officers looking for drugs, weapons and forbidden literature), although the number of such cases is impossible to estimate⁶¹. The Crimean Tatar TV channel ATR was denied renewal of its operating licence. As noted by one of the Mejlis activists, “Under Ukraine they used to break our laws, but at least we could talk about it, and now we don’t even have the possibility of protesting.”⁶²

Against this background, attention must be paid to such Russian legislation as is favourable to the Crimean Tatars; soon after the annexation, under a decree by President Putin the community was included under the 1991 act on the rehabilitation of ‘repressed nations’, and another decree established the Crimean Tatar language as one of the three national languages of the ‘Republic of

⁶¹ According to estimates by Mustafa Jemilev, 95% of these raids took place in the homes of Tatars. Polowanie na Tatara, *op. cit.*

⁶² OSW (CES) interviews, etc.

Crimea' (next to Russian and Ukrainian; during the period of the Ukrainian Autonomous Republic of Crimea this language had no special status, although in practice it was used, for example, in education). Such legislation, however, is merely formal in character. The real test of the Russian authorities' attitude to the issue of the Crimean Tatars will be how they resolve the problem of unregulated building work in Crimea. Tatars who returned spontaneously to the peninsula since the late 1980s had no opportunities to be officially allotted land; they then spontaneously occupied empty plots of land and built homes on them, and the Ukrainian authorities proved unable to resolve the issue. After the Russian annexation it was estimated that illegal buildings occupy 1451 hectares of land; of the 300 compact Crimean Tatar settlements, 40% do not have running water, electricity or gas, and 90% lack paved roads⁶³. Legalising the status of at least some of these buildings and issuing deeds of ownership would give them a sense of stability, which could in turn lead to an increase in pro-Russian sympathies, especially as the majority of Crimean Tatars do not – regardless of the circumstances – intend to leave the peninsula, which they consider as their homeland, and who by *force majeure* consent to the current political situation.

⁶³ <http://kommersant.ru/projects/crimeantatars>

SUMMARY

More than two and a half years after the annexation, Crimea resembles more an island than a peninsula, and its limited (in different dimensions) access to the mainland affects its conditions and standards of living. The predominant attitude among the inhabitants of Crimea (the great majority of whom have chosen to remain on the peninsula) is to adapt. This attitude is favoured by Russia's policy of 'facts on the ground' and its tough rhetoric, ruling out any change in the *status quo*, as well as Kyiv's lack of determination to try and restore control over Crimea.

If this situation is not changed, within the perspective of a generation the peninsula will be completely integrated with the rest of the Russian Federation (a smaller percentage of the population will declare a local Crimean identity for itself). This will be boosted by infrastructure projects (especially the bridges across the Kerch Strait) and sharing a common media and cultural space with Russia, including large-scale departures by graduates of Crimean schools to study in Russia. Opinions are regularly expressed in the Ukrainian media that the population of Crimea regrets the annexation and wishes to return to the *status quo ante*, but these should be considered as wishful thinking which has no basis in reality.

The Crimean Tatars, who are a minority on the peninsula, have very little chance of real self-determination, even in socio-cultural terms, and in the future the only differentiator of their distinctiveness – beyond their cultural Islam and knowing their language at an elementary level (about four-fifths of Crimean Tatar children receive their education in Russian) – could be a superficial kind of folklore. This situation will not be changed by the quasi-autonomy (the so-called national-cultural autonomy) organised in some regions of Russia along the lines of 'autonomy' of other nations under the aegis of the Russian authorities. This name does not correspond to reality, as this is simply a social

organisation, a kind of club, and an informal consultative forum (this 'autonomy' already operates in Crimea itself).

Although it is difficult to expect that the international community will recognise the *de iure* annexation in the foreseeable future, in the perspective of the next few years, its *de facto* recognition is possible, for example in the gradual easing of the sanctions imposed by the West. This will be possible in the case of electoral victories in Western countries (France, Austria, the Netherlands) of nationalist groups seeking to strengthen their cooperation with Moscow.

WOJCIECH GÓRECKI

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