MEMBER PROFILE

CRIMEAN TATARS

Crimean Tatar “Milli Mejlis”
**Status:** Autonomous Republic of Crimea

**Population:** Crimea: 2.2 million (2014) - Crimean Tatars between 240,000 and 300,000 (between 12%-13% of the peninsula's population)

**Capital City:** Simferopol (Ak Mesjid)

**Area:** 26,100 km²

**Language:** Russian, Ukrainian, Crimean Tatar

**Religion:** Islam (Sunni)

**Ethnic Groups:** Russian (58.3%), Ukrainian (24.3%), Crimean Tatar (12.1%) Belarussian (1.4%), Armenian, Bulgarian, German, Greek, Karaim

**OVERVIEW**

Before the Russian annexation in 2014, Crimea was a parliamentary republic which was governed by the Constitution of Crimea, under the official rule of the Government of Ukraine. The administrative seat of the republic’s government is Simferopol, which is located in the centre of the peninsula. Crimea covers an area of 26,100 square kilometres.

The main branches of the Crimean economy are tourism and agriculture. However, land generates a lot of tension between the Crimean Tatars and other local populations, who are often better represented than the non-participating Crimean Tatars. As a result, Crimean Tatars often face problems with unemployment, access to language, housing, sanitation and overcrowding. Since Moscow’s annexation of the Peninsula human rights violations against the Crimean Tatars have been on the rise.

**POLITICAL SITUATION**

Since 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, Ukraine became an independent state. Then, the Crimean Tatar leadership founded the Qurultay— the National Congress -. Forming the sovereign body over the Crimean Tatars, this Parliament, on the 30th of June 1991, adopted the Crimean Tatar’s national anthem, the national flag, and, remarkably, the Declaration on national sovereignty of the Crimean Tatar people in Crimea.

In the same year the Mejlis, the Crimean Tatar supreme plenipotentiary representative and executive body, was founded. The Mejlis is compounded of 33 members, run by the Chairman of Mejlis, Refat Chubarov. The goal of this local assembly was to restore the national and political rights of the Crimean Tatars and to entrench their right to free national self-determination in its national territory.

The Parliament was intended to act as a representative body for the Crimean Tatars which could address grievances to the Ukrainian central government, the Crimean government, and international bodies. Among others, this was done by allowing the Crimean Tatars to elect 14 Deputies to the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea, which is the unicameral parliament of the Autonomous Region of Crimea. For the first time in over 50 years, the Crimean Tatars had representatives in this 100-member body.
But since 2014, the political condition of Crimean Tatars has changed. In April 2016 Moscow has outlawed the Mejlis for opposing the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea. The traditional assembly has been declared as an “extremist” organization. This ban deprives the ethnic minority group from any legal political representation. Repression applies to anyone who takes part to any kind of activities of elected entities that run communities, nominate representatives and implement decisions regarding the lives of Crimean Tatars.

OVERVIEW

Crimea is located on the northern coast of the Black Sea on the western coast of the Sea of Azov, bordering Kherson Oblast from the North. Originally the region was occupied by the Crimean Tatars, who now make up only 12% of the population. This stark decrease in the number of Crimean Tatars living in Crimea is the result of repeated forceful expulsion to Central Asia by Joseph Stalin’s government when the area was part of the Soviet Union.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, some Crimean Tatars returned to the region. However, they are still not treated as free and equal citizens in the area. The administrative seat of the republic’s government is Simferopol, which is located in the center of the peninsula. Crimea covers an area of 26,100 square kilometers.

These daily problems have surged after the Peninsula’s annexation. Crimean Tatars are specifically targeted by Russian authorities’ repressive policies. Activists condemning the Russian annexation are being imprisoned, persecuted and tortured. Arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, ill treatments and other human rights violations and abuses become commonplace in the Peninsula. Moscow curtails Crimean Tatars’ freedom of movement and expression. Since the beginning of 2017, Russia also added some Crimean Tatars activists to its “Terrorists and Extremists” list.

GOVERNMENT OF THE AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF CRIMEA

Before 2014, the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was regulated by the Constitution of Ukraine and Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Crimea was an integral part of Ukraine but was the only region which had the autonomy status. Unlike other oblasts of Ukraine, the head of Council of Ministers of Crimea was appointed by the parliament of Crimea with agreement of the President of Ukraine. Crimea also enjoyed more discretion in dealing with some socio-economic and cultural issues autonomously from the Ukrainian government. Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council of Crimea) was the 100-member unicameral Parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The Verkhovna Rada of Crimea was regulated according to a legislation passed by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on February 10, 1998.

The Judiciary was independent of the executive and the legislature branches. It was the responsibility of Ukraine. The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People or Parliament was the supreme executive body underpinned by a network of district and local “mejlisis”, which
were formed in every settlement where the Crimean Tatars live. The Mejilis were elected for 5 years through nationwide voting based on a mixed electoral system. In 2006, the Chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejilis, Mustafa Dzhemilev, was re-elected. In November 2013, Chubarov succeeded Dzhemilev, who was banned from entering to the Peninsula in 2014.

Since the 2014 annexation, the government of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea has not been part of any election in Ukraine. In March 2014 the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea was dissolved by the Ukrainian parliament. After the referendum, the Parliament has chosen to join the territorial jurisdiction with the city of Sevastopol and in this way declared unilaterally its independence from Kiev. The Parliament was renamed the State Council of Crimea. The administrative divisions remain the same. The Crimean Peninsula comprises 25 administrative areas (14 districts and 11 municipalities).

UNPO PERSPECTIVE

UNPO has a resolute commitment to the peaceful and nonviolent campaign for recognition of the Crimean Tatar people as an indigenous people of Crimea, for the full restoration of rights, including their inalienable right to restore the national territorial autonomy of the Crimea.

UNPO believes that the Russian government should stop breaching the human rights of the Crimean Tatars and should proceed immediately towards the full restoration of their rights in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law. Besides the Mejilis of Crimean Tatar People should be restored as it is the sole and legitimate political representative of the Crimean Tatars.

UNPO promotes the engagement of the international and particularly European community to support the process of restoring the rights of the Crimean Tatars.
UNPO MEMBER PERSPECTIVE

The Crimean Tatar people represented by the Milli Mejlis were cofounders of UNPO and continue to maintain an active, nonviolent struggle for their rights, particularly since the unlawful annexation of Crimea by Russian authorities. The Crimean Tatar people believe that the situation of indigenous people can be enhanced significantly by means of effective usage of UNPO’s capabilities. Given the recent events in Crimea and the current disastrous human rights situation in the Peninsula, the Crimean Tatar people believe that UNPO is an important platform for representation and advocacy of the interests of their people in the international arena. UNPO aims at raising awareness on the abuses Crimean Tatars are subjected to.

The Crimean Tatar people - who were brutally deported by Stalin’s regime in 1944 and kept in exile till the collapse of the Soviet Union - are trying to overcome the lack of understanding of their needs and aspirations by many local and international actors and to preserve their cultural identity bluntly quashed by Russian authorities.

Under such conditions it is imperative to use international standards on the rights of oppressed indigenous peoples. The Milli Mejlis hope that in the long run UNPO would become a significant factor in securing the rights of Crimean Tatars on their Homeland in Crimea.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Early History

The Crimean Tatars are the indigenous people of Crimea. The Crimean Tatar ethnicity was formed in the process of synthesis of many Turkic and non-Turkic speaking tribes, which inhabited Crimea centuries ago.
Around 1241, the grandson of Gengis Khan, Batu Khan, conquered the region, a strategic territory for the Mongol Empire, at that time once of the closest trading partner with Moscow.

In 1441, the Crimean Tatars emerged as a nation for the first time, bringing together a variety of ethnic groups together to constitute a single nation. Haci Giray Khan, a direct descendant of Ghengis Khan, established the independent Crimean Khanate as part of the Ottoman Empire. This was the longest lived khanate of the Turkic-speaking Muslim ones and it was among the strongest powers in Eastern Europe until the beginning of the 18th century.

The relationship between the Crimean Tatars and Russia stretches back over centuries (trade, cooperation, intermarriage, cultural exchange). On 8 April 1783, the Russian Empire officially annexed the Crimean khanate as part of Catherine the Great’s vast expansion of the empire. Being part of the Autonomous Soviet Republic, the Crimean Tatars were subject to oppressive policies. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of Crimean Tatars left their homeland in waves of mass emigrations, mostly to Turkey. Almost a century after, the Crimean War (1853-1856) brought about another wide-scale migration of Crimean Tatars.

The Crimean Tatar population, which was estimated to be over five million during the Crimean Khanate rule, decreased to less than 300,000 and became a “minority” in their ancestral homeland. More than a century later, in November 1917, the tsar was overthrown in Petersburg and an independent Crimea was established under the leadership of Noman Chelebijihan. However, this independence did not last as the Republic crumbled following Bolsheviks’ offensive in January 1918, preceding a period of repression. Crimean Tatars were forced to collectivization and suffered the Holodomor, the man-made famine.

In October 1921, the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Crimean ASSR) was established. With a special order from V.L Lenin, the Crimean Tatars lived the ‘golden age’ under Veli Ibrahim. The years between 1923 and 1927 were remarkable for the vigorous renaissance of culture and education of the Crimean Tatars. However, in 1927 this sense of nationalism ended when the leader and his colleagues were arrested and executed for being “Bourgeois nationalists”. In the time following the execution of the leaders, thousands of Crimean Tatars perished during the mass deportation of rich peasants.

The Crimean Tatar alphabet was changed twice, in 1928 from Arabic script to Latin script, and in 1938 from Latin script to Cyrillic script. Also, much of the Crimean Tatar political elite and intellectuals were marginalized and exiled.

Hardships reached a critical point in 1944, when the NKVD (the Soviet Secret Police) published an order “On Measures to Clean the Territory of the Crimean Autonomous Republic of Anti-Soviet Elements” that set in motion the deportation order of 11 May 1944. The 1944 deportation is the greatest trauma Crimean Tatars have experienced in their lifetimes. Stalin sent the entire Crimean Tatar population from Crimea to the Urals, Siberia and to Uzbekistan in Central Asia. Due to hunger, thirst and disease, around 45% of the total
population died in the process of deportation. The 1944 deportation has determined Crimean Tatars’ fate in the following decades.

At Stalin’s death, USSR First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev denounced the deportation waves ordered by his predecessor. Crimean Tatars regained some of their civic rights, yet they were forbidden to come back to their ancestral land. In 1954, Crimea was given to Ukraine by the First Secretary of the Communist Party to commemorate the reunification of Russia and Ukraine.

Only in 1956, many were released from the “Special Settlement Camps”. However, when thousands of Crimean Tatars attempted to return to Crimea in 1967, following an official decree that exonerated the Crimean Tatars from any wrongdoing during World War II, many found that they were not welcome in their ancestral homeland. Thousands of Crimean Tatar families, once again, were deported from Crimea by the local authorities. Only in 1988, was the ban on return lifted. When the Crimean Tatars returned, it was to an independent Ukraine.

**Recent History**

June 26-30, 1991, the Second Crimean Tatar National Qurultay (Parliament) was convened in Simferopol for the first time since 1917. A 33-member executive board, the Crimean Tatar National Mejlis, was formed and Mustafa Dzhemilev was elected as its first chairman. The Crimean Tatar’s national anthem and national flag were adopted. Also, in a special declaration, the Mejlis appealed to all the citizens of Crimea, regardless of religion and nationality, to join them in building a new Crimea.
Two years later, a special Qurultay was convened to decide on participation in upcoming parliamentary elections and in presidential elections. They decided to participate in both elections and elected 14 Crimean Tatar Deputies to the Crimean Parliament.

In 1996, the Ukrainian constitution stated that Crimea would have autonomous republic status, but that legislation must be in keeping with that of Ukraine. Crimea is allowed to have its own parliament and government.

In April 2000, a recommendation was passed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for the return of the deported Crimean Tatar people. The authorities allow the return but do not facilitate a social re-integration into society.

In June 2004, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted a draft law which included provisions for facilitating the social reintegration of the Crimean Tatars but it was vetoed by the President. In the same year, elections were held in Ukraine.

The two main candidates were Yanukovych and Yushchenko. Yanukovych was pro-Russian and strongly supported by the national government. Yushchenko, on the other hand, leaned towards the West. He was supported by the European Union and the United States.

There was a stark contrast in voting patterns between the eastern and the western regions of Ukraine. The Crimean Tatars voted predominantly for pro-West Yushchenko, 82% Crimea voted for Yanukovych (pro Russia) due to a large number of ethnic Russians on the peninsula. Yanukovych won the election, but following great international pressure and accusations of vote rigging, a repeat vote was held and Yushchenko became the President of Ukraine. He stayed in power until 2010. In May 2006, the Program of the settlement of the deported Crimean Tatars and persons of other nationalities returning to Ukraine was adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. This means that the adaptation and integration of Crimean Tatars deported in earlier centuries into the Ukrainian society were safeguarded until 2010.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia has maintained its presence in Crimea. The port of Sevastopol is a major naval base and hosts the Black Sea Fleet controlled by Russians and Ukrainians. The presence of the Russian fleet has caused strained relations between Ukraine and Russia. In 2008, Yushchenko forbade Moscow to use the Black Sea Fleet to wage its conflict with Georgia.

In 2010, following a long and complicated campaign, Viktor Yanukovych, from the pro-Russian Party of Regions, has been elected President of Ukraine. The results were contested by the principal opponent Yulia Tymoschenko. In October 2010 Yanukovych modified the Constitution so as to increase its presidential power and to turn the country into a crony state. Independent media started to be oppressed.

In 2012, a law on languages status was voted. The law conferred Russian language a new status: “regional language”. This linguistic reform triggered harsh confrontations between Ukrainian nationalists and pro-Russians. The law was applied in the Sevastopol region of the Crimean Peninsula.

On November 2013, Yanukovych stepped back and refused to sign the far-reaching Association Agreement with the European Union at the last moment, following pressure from Moscow. This unexpected move provoked a massive wave of protests by Ukrainian citizens for several months. Yanukovych eventually fled the country in February 2014. Crimea. In Crimea tensions have greatly escalated.

**Crimea's illegal takeover**

On 26 February 2014, local government buildings in Simferopol were taken over by armed men and Russian flags were raised on the roofs, marking the beginning of a Russian invasion of Crimea, justified by Moscow through its ‘just cause’ of defending minority rights.
On 6 March 2014, shortly after the vote for a new pro-Russian government 78 out of 81 Members of the Crimean Parliament voted to join the Russian Federation, a decision sanctioned with a local referendum 10 days later. The referendum marked the secession of Crimea from Ukraine, despite several international warnings.

On 21 March 2014 the Russian Parliament ratified the treaty formalizing the annexation of Crimea. The illegal takeover constituted a dramatic change for Crimean Tatars. They hoped that the process of ratification of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement would be finally completed. Crimean Tatars were forced to accept being part of Russia and accept the laws or flee from their ancestral homeland.

Since 2014 about 30 000 left the Peninsula, seeking refuge in the western part of Ukraine, Turkey and Poland due to the constant repression and discrimination they face. Moscow began to establish a Policy of “russification” of the Peninsula.

On 5 March 2015, Freedom House released a new report which documents the situation in occupied Crimea, where residents increasingly face civic, political and human rights violations. The document highlights how the Crimean Tatar population is particularly affected by unreported infringements and intimidations taking place in the Peninsula.

On 17 August 2015, Vladimir Putin warned the Tatar community during his three-day visit to Crimea not to seek a special status on the Peninsula. Meeting with representatives of various minorities, President Putin said that Crimea is a “mirror of multi-ethnic Russia” and discouraged speculations on the potential recognition of special rights for a particular ethnicity in the Peninsula. Moscow continued to reaffirm its accusations that foreign countries are funding human rights activists to “destabilize the situation” in Crimea.

On 12 November 2015 the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian Parliament) has voted to officially recognize the 1944 mass deportation of more than 200,000 Crimean Tatars by the Stalin regime as genocide. The event is commemorated annually on 18 May and an important part of the Tatars’ collective memory. Ten days after, Russian authorities declared a state of emergency in Crimea after the destruction of two pylons carrying electricity from Ukraine to Crimea had left close to two million people on the Peninsula without power.

On April 2016, the Russian and Crimean supreme courts have formally banned the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, considered to be an extremist organization and all further activities of this body were prohibited.

On 29 September 2016, the ban of the Mejlis has been put into force. With this decision, Russia destroyed Crimean Tatars’ most important institution. The ethnic minority is not politically represented and becomes more vulnerable. Repressive measures – such as massive identity checks ‘non-Slavic’-looking people – enables Moscow to stigmatize the Crimean Tatars as ‘extremists’ and ‘Islamists’, suggesting that they might be a threat to peace on the Peninsula. In 2016, the Society for Threatened People registered four cases where Crimean Tatars were charged, without real evidence, of being members of the Muslim organization “Hibut Tahrir”, a movement banned in Russia but not in Ukraine. This happened before 32 new criminal proceedings were opened within the same year. Seven people were forced to undergo psychiatric examinations, including the prominent Crimean civil rights
activist Ilmi Umerov. More than 177 people were arrested and submitted to criminal identification, more than 90 per cent of them were Crimean Tatars. The secret service and the police carried out 50 searches of houses and apartments (mostly belonging to Crimean Tatars), mosques, and other buildings.

On November 2016, Ukraine addressed a resolution to the UN, which obliged Kyiv to be in charge of the human rights protection of the people of Crimea, in order to stop any violation of the rights of Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians and any other ethnic minorities living in Crimea. 38 countries including the USA, the UK, France supported the resolution. Three years after the Moscow’s illegal takeover of Crimea, approximately 280,000 Crimean Tatars are living on the Peninsula and are still suffering from persecution, discrimination, and fear. Human rights organizations condemned Moscow’s ruthless occupation of Crimea.

CURRENT ISSUES

1. The Role of Russia

Russia has always played a significant role in the region since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Crimean Peninsula contains a high proportion of ethnic Russians who have often felt they have more in common with Russia than with Ukraine, the Tatars or the rest of Europe. For a long time, this manifested in discrimination directed at Crimean Tatars from ethnic Russians, but after the invasion of the Peninsula by Russia in 2014, this informal threat has turned into institutionalised persecution.
Although international economic sanctions were imposed on Russia in retaliation for its ‘illegal’ occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, the Russian government ratified a treaty declaring its annexation ‘legal’. This has left Tatars in the Crimean Peninsula in a precarious position: accept the de facto control of Russia in the region, along with its diminutive view of the Crimean Tatar people, or flee their home on the Peninsula which they have only recently started to return to en masse. Thousands have already chosen the latter option, fleeing to Ukraine, Turkey, Poland and elsewhere in order to avoid oppression at the hands of the annexation authorities.

The immediate threat to ethnic minorities on the Peninsula has already been recognised by international actors. In early 2015, the Parliamentary Assembly for the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution condemning the deteriorating situation in the Crimean Peninsula and the adverse effect this has for the protection of human rights, particularly among vulnerable ethnic minorities. In the same line, on February 2016 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in the Crimean Peninsula, which condemned the targeted abuses on Crimean Tatars. Supported by five parliamentary groups and authored by more than a hundred MEPs, the resolution urged Russia to immediately stop the systematic persecution of indigenous Tatars, to respect their cultural and religious rights, and to release the people who were illegally detained.

The European Parliament also urged the Russian authorities to allow international institutions and human rights observers to enter the Peninsula. On December 2016, the UN General Assembly have voted a resolution condemning Russia’s occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and the abuses and discrimination towards Crimean Tatars and other ethnic groups. The UN have officially recognised Crimea as “temporarily occupied” by Russia. The General Assembly urged the end of all abuses against citizens living in Crimea. Recently, on 19 April 2017, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) pressed Russia to put an end to discrimination against Crimean Tatars.

Russian authorities have been accused of using disproportionate and excessive force against Crimean Tatars who they claim to be a threat to regional security. Searches and checks are regularly carried out by armed forces and masked members considered to be agents of Russia. These agents have been involved in the systematic undermining of Crimean Tatar political, religious and cultural identity; attacking and banning the Mejlis (House of the Tatar representatives), religious institutions, businesses and private residences.

Many people are drawing parallels between the current Russian regime in Crimea and the Soviet Union under Stalin with regards to its treatment of and tactics used against Crimean Tatars. Enforced disappearances, abduction, forced exile and systematic intimidation have been used against the Tatars in a bid to destabilise their position on the Peninsula.

2. Return to Crimea
The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a recommendation in 2000 for the return of the deported Crimean Tatars. The Assembly states that “the problems confronting returnees remain complex and multifaceted. They include difficulties in securing citizenship, employment, housing, social protection, and cultural revival. Until these problems are solved, the full national identity of returnees...
Crimean Tatars cannot be restored’. In short, the authorities allow the return but do not facilitate a social re-integration into society.

Indeed, the integration programs that were set up by the Ukrainian Government had to be scaled down significantly and were underfunded as a result of an economic crisis in Ukraine. Consequently, many of the returnees have long lived without access to basic needs such as housing and infrastructure. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe states that ‘to avoid social erosion of the returnee Crimean Tatar community, education and job creation schemes need to be launched and intensified’.

Indeed, on 11 May 2006 a program of the settlement of the deported Crimean Tatars and persons of other nationalities returning to Ukraine, their adaptation and integration into the Ukrainian society until 2010 was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. This happened after a veto issued by the President of a draft law adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament in June 2004. The Ukrainian parliament has not yet passed laws aimed at regulating the Crimean Tatars’ status despite calls from the UNPO, the Minority Rights Group International and Ukrainian MP Heorhiy Lohvynsky. The Tatar’s return to Crimea is slow mainly due to the individual costs concerned: only 250 to 4,000 Crimean Tatars return every year. As a result, 100,000 of the 260,000 deported people still remain outside Ukrainian borders. On a more positive note, 98% of the Crimean Tatars who returned to Ukraine have received citizenship. After occupation by Russia in February 2014, the situation for Crimean Tatars on the Peninsula has deteriorated rapidly. They find themselves at the heart of a geopolitical conflict in which minorities, particularly those which have been historically targeted by Russia, have found themselves among the most vulnerable in the region. This continues to discourage more Tatars from returning to Crimea.

3. Access to education and protection of language

The Crimean Tatars suffer from a shortage in the number of schools and limited access to education. The OSCE pointed out in 2007 that 3,472 pupils study in 15 schools in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, where the language of instruction is Crimean. Besides this, in 33 general educational institutions with Russian as the main language of instruction, 1,029 pupils study in Crimean.

This leaves a significant portion of the 40,000 children of school age who are not able to study the Crimean language. There are only 14 centers for children offering extracurricular activities in the Crimean Tatar language. In 2012-2013, only 10.5% of the pupils in Crimea studies in Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages. This figure fell to around 3% for the 2015-2016 period.

After Moscow’s 2014 annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula the Crimean-Tatar language was accorded the status of a “state” language for the first time in Crimea. In the formal proclamation of Russian control over Crimea signed by President Vladimir Putin, Crimean-Tatar was designated one of three “state languages” on the Peninsula, alongside Russian and Ukrainian. Prior to the annexation, Crimean Tatar had been designated a “regional language” under a controversial
2012 language law enacted by the Ukrainian government. Many Crimean Tatars say this recognition remains largely symbolic, and that it is outweighed by what they call a campaign of systematic repression against the minority ethnic group under Moscow’s rule.

Use of Russian as the language of instruction is increasing. Indeed, calls and pledges have been made to make Russian an official language of Ukraine. In Crimea, 80% of the media outlets are in Russian. Courses are taught in Crimean Tatar for only the first 4 years, they are then exclusively given in Russian. In Simferopol, there are only two universities in which teachers can teach Crimean Tatar literature.

The UNDP Crimea Integration and Development Programme has been active in trying to ensure the protection of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages and there are two state-funded newspapers in the Crimean Tatar language “Kyrym” (Crimea) and “Yany diunia” (New world).

The state television company, “Crimea”, reserve 7% of the total broadcasting time for Crimean language programmes. However, the deficiency in education opportunities dissuades political participation. A vicious circle forms whereby the Crimean Tatar minority are subsequently less likely to exercise their rights to increase the provision of instruction in their native language.

3 April 2015: The European Union and Ukraine denounced the Russian crackdown on Crimean Tatar media, stressing that this constituted an evident violation of the right to freedom of expression and unrestricted access to the plurality of media. Ukraine’s President, Mr Petro Poroshenko, vowed to re-establish the ATR services on mainland Ukraine. The ATR television broadcaster and several other Crimean-Tatar outlets were forced off-air after 1 April 2015, deadline for renewing their operating licenses with Russia’s media regulator. Silencing this critical media voice highlighted the growing pressure exerted on the Crimean Tatar community in occupied Crimea.

2 April 2015: Russia shut down ATR, the only Crimean Tatar Channel, despite its strong relationship with Russia, Turkey’s Foreign Minister has demanded Russia to allow the broadcast of ATR Channel, and stated that after this issue is solved, an unofficial delegation will be sent to the Peninsula to investigate the ongoing human rights violations that the Crimean Tatars are facing.

1 April 2015: Tatar TV and radio stations were progressively forced to close; the last TV station ATR broadcasting in the Crimean Tatar language saw its application for a new Russian license rejected by Roskomnadzor, Moscow’s media regulator.

9 March 2015: The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe denounced the extensive media censorship in Crimea. Ms Dunja Mijatovic, OSCE media freedom representative, criticized the crackdown on independent media, citing that at least 13 journalists have suffered from physical attacks and threats, while six media organizations on the peninsula have been raided.

16 April 2015: Following ATR’s forced shut down on 1 April 2015, Russia replaced the channel with its own Government-sponsored TV station, continuing the country’s
longstanding practice of silencing opposition views and cracking-down on freedom of expression.

15 March 2017: Crimean journalist Mykola Semena, based in Simferopol, risks 5 years of imprisonment for not agreeing to follow the editorial policy of the Crimea-based media outlets managed by pro-Russian directors. Officially he is accused of “violating the territorial integrity of Russia” and will be tried on 20 March 2017. Semena has been a journalist for 50 years.

CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Language

The Crimean Tatar language, which is also known as Crimean or as Crimean Turkish, is the language most often spoken by Crimean Tatars. It is spoken in Crimea as well as in the Crimean Tatar Diasporas, largely concentrated in Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria.

According to the constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Crimean Tatar has ‘protected’ status. This means that every citizen is entitled, at his request, to receive government documents, such as a passport or a birth certificate in Crimean Tatar. However, according to the constitution of Ukraine, Ukrainian is the only official language in all of Ukraine. So, the recognition of the Crimean Tatar language is a matter of political and legal debate.

Currently, high school pupils in the occupied Crimea have the opportunity to receive a Ukrainian certificate through distance learning in the International Ukrainian School in Kiev. Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine reports the following: Citizens of Ukraine residing in the temporarily occupied territory have a right to engage distance education and to pass the certification externally. We hope that the students from Crimea who graduate this year will study in legitimate educational institutions of Ukraine. We also want to add that from our side we are looking for an opportunity to train our students abroad in prestigious educational institutions of the West. It is one of the areas in which we can collaborate with colleagues from abroad.

The principal religion of the Crimean Tatars is Islam. As Muslims, they are Sunnis of the Hanafi school. The Crimean Tatars adopted Islam during the tenth through twelfth centuries and it became the state religion under the Crimean Khanate.

However, during the Stalin era, hundreds of mosques were closed, clergy were executed, and celebrating Muslim holidays was banned. Because the alphabet had been changed, many Crimean Tatars lost the ability to read the suras or verses in their Qur’an. Crimean Tatars nevertheless resisted the repression of religion. At the moment of deportation, many Tatar families thought to take their copies of the Qur’an.
Nature & Environment

Crimea is a unique region of Ukraine in geographical, climatic, geological and historical respects. The main resources are coal, iron, manganese, oil, gypsum and alabaster. However, the environment is severely suffering from economic inefficiency in accounting for natural resource use and the Soviet focus on increasing the gross national product and achieving industrial and military targets at any cost.

This resulted in low industrial and agricultural efficiency, the absence of effective environmental regulation and significant pollution.

Still, food production remains the main economic activity in the Crimea. The economy is based on farming, fishing, metallurgical industries and coastal tourism.

Under the czars, the Crimean Tatars already concentrated their economic activity in animal husbandry and vegetable farming. Some began to plant grain, especially wheat, in the north, whereas others took up viticulture and tobacco growing in the south.