

“Homeland vs. Our Land: Crimean Conflicts of Identity and a Way Forward”

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In 1898, Crimean Tatar spiritual, cultural, and intellectual leader Ismail Bey Gaspirali addressed his people in a time of crisis that greatly resembles the current situation of the Crimean Tatars. Writing in *Perevodchik/Terjuman*, a Russian-Turkic journal that Gaspirali himself founded, he stated,

We have for too long existed in a situation where we refuse to consider what may actually help us recover from our present condition. We exist as if we remain stretched out in bed, without arising. Everyone should strive for a set of ideas and ideals that can permit them to achieve the greatest possible accomplishments. Everyone up to now has been satisfied to focus on one or two traditional sets of ideas. We need to have access to a thousand sets of such ideas, to be able to choose that or those that can be most useful for our future. To add new ideas and ideals is not to reject what is good and useful in our national or religious heritage. Those of us who wish really to be able to serve our people must be willing to recognize what is good and useful in other sets of ideas and ideals. Our local leaders, political as well as educational, may well continue to serve Islam by accepting the future. Our *ulema* do not need to focus only on the past. But those who believe that it is right and proper to place all hope and trust in God can nevertheless begin to serve also the needs and aspirations of our nation. The civilized nations are not necessarily Godless in their civilizing activity. But the challenge is great. It will not be easy to persuade our *muftis* and other *ulema* that Islam is not against change.<sup>1</sup>

Although he is regarded as the first Crimean Tatar nationalist, Gaspirali was by no means an exclusivist. Instead of pitting his people against their Russian oppressors, Gaspirali advocated a synergetic and syncretic society wherein not just the Crimean Tatars but also all other Russian Muslims might live in peaceful prosperity with their elder Russian brothers and the other subjects of the Empire. This message and wish is just as applicable to the Crimea of today as it was over a century ago.

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<sup>1</sup> Gaspirali, Ismail Bey. *Terjuman*, no. 60 (1898). In Allworth, 139-140.

Crimea has been—and is—many things to many people: a homeland, a premier vacation destination, a key strategic location, an integral part of independent Ukraine, the jewel in the crown of the Russian Empire, a site of ethnic cleansing, a major battlefield, an idealized monument of multiethnic harmony, lost territory, conquered land, a distant memory, a beauty to behold, a wart on Russia’s nose. Today, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) is the only administrative region of Ukraine with an ethnic Russian majority and a sizable non-Slavic indigenous minority—the Crimean Tatars. Throughout its history, Crimea has always retained a special status, a separate identity, comprised of many other identities. Paradoxically, both its specialness and separateness have been the source of and the means of avoiding conflict. Even today, we see both of these forces at work in Crimea.

This “identity conflict,” if we can call it that, is more a historical anomaly than long-standing tradition. Most of Crimean history is that of a multiethnic, multireligious land. As a premier commercial and military locale, Crimea had been populated by Greeks, Genoese, Ottomans, Tatars, Russians, Armenians, Jews, and others. Competing historiographies of the past century, however—especially those of the Soviets and Crimean Tatars—have created a narrative of the past that overlooks these other groups, transforming the Crimean peninsula into a hotbed of (potential) interethnic conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Following the collapse of the USSR, Western political scientists, working within the theoretical framework of transitology, predicted that Crimea would be the primary source of conflict between newly-independent Ukraine and Russia.<sup>3</sup> As the Crimean Tatars returned from forced exile, interethnic conflict on the peninsula became and continues to be not only a real possibility but also the primary source of potential conflict. However, major conflict has not yet

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<sup>2</sup> Sasse, chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> Sasse, 2.

erupted, even as Ukraine celebrates its twentieth Day of Independence this August. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the potential for conflict has evaporated, or even greatly diminished. This is in part due to the fact that no real compromise has yet been made between the Crimean Tatars and the Crimean Russians because both parties see any concessions to the other as an erosion in part of their own identity. Each side has in effect hardened their respective ethno-cultural identities against the other which makes the give-and-take inherent in compromise and negotiation virtually impossible.

Without real compromise and negotiation, however, the real socioeconomic, cultural, and political grievances of both Tatars and Russians cannot be resolved, which will only lead to instability and conflict. Because these two groups have closed the channels by which a synergetic and syncretic solution can be achieved, a third party must step in to mediate. If the successful—or at least peaceful—resolution of the secession and constitutional crises of the 1990s can serve as a foundation, then the Ukrainian central government in Kyiv is already in position to mitigate the tension and resolve the issues between the Crimean Tatars and Russians. While a true exchange of “ideas and ideals” for the betterment of both groups, as Gaspirali would have it, will not occur overnight or perhaps even in this generation, reaching a sustainable and acceptable compromise between these two groups with the Ukrainian state in a mediating role is in the mutual interest of the nations, region, state, and international community.

## CRIMEAN IDENTITIES

As stated above, the historically complex ethnic structure of Crimea has been glossed over in favor of two national groups: Crimean Russians and Crimean Tatars. There is no doubt that both of these groups have occupied the Crimean peninsula. With modernity, however, came the

modern notion of the nation, what Benedict Anderson terms, “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>4</sup> Imagined and constructed as they are, the boundaries of nations harden with time and the rewriting of the past.

This leads to the present situation in Crimea: two nations—the Crimean Tatars and the Crimean Russians—occupy the same space from which, to varying degrees, their national identity is drawn. While these two identities are not the only ones currently present in Crimea, the political and historical processes of the previous century or so have polarized these two major Crimean ethnic groups into a binary narrative, almost to the exclusion of any other groups on the peninsula. As each new authority moved in, the new legends, images, and symbols of Crimea were only placed on top of the previous layer—sometimes adapting, sometimes aiming to supplant—resulting in the present-day situation of conflicting place identities. In a large measure, this binary only developed in the Soviet period as a result of competing historiographies, which in turn have forged these national identities.

Before delving into the history between these two nations, how this national binary developed and what has come out of that construction, it is necessary to investigate the origins of these national identities.

### **Crimean Russians**

Emma Widdis writes that in its origins, “Russia was a space fought for and contested.”<sup>5</sup> This definition underscores the imperial ambition of Russia, as is evident in the expansionist policies of Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, the Bolsheviks, and Stalin. What became Russia, therefore, was “won” space: to the victor go the spoils. However, with space sometimes came people, who became de facto Russian. This two-forked view of Russian national identity began with Peter the

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Franklin and Widdis, 35.

Great and was best put forth by Pushkin. In his 1835 travelogue, Pushkin described “Russia” as a multinational empire but he also commented on the newly-conquered Caucasus as foreign, exotic, and oriental, thus differentiating the people of the south as part of a nation not ethnoculturally homogenous to what he considered “Russian.”<sup>6</sup> The distinction between “us” and “them,” the sharp contrast between what is Russian and what is foreign, was and continues to be strong in Russian national identity.<sup>7</sup>

Crimean Russians share much with the greater Russian national character, the only major difference being a designation of *space*. The designation as “Crimean” sets this group apart from Russians just across the 4.5km Kerch Strait. The Minorities at Risk project uses the term “Crimean Russian” to separate this group out from other ethnic Russians in Ukraine, where Russians constituted 17.3% of the population in 2001. In Crimea, however, the ethnic Russians there make up the majority of population at 58.3% in 2001,<sup>8</sup> the only region in Ukraine where Russians hold the majority. In addition, Sasse argues that Crimea holds a special place in the myth of Russia, and as such the term has both political and cultural meaning.

Gwedolyn Sasse, author of *The Crimea Question: Identity, Transition, and Conflict*, in fact writes at length to the place of Crimea in the Russian national myth. She states that “the myth of Crimea in the Russian imagination began as an imperial exotica with the journey of Empress Catherine II in March 1787.... Catherine was taken with the climate and beauty of the peninsula, and she recognized both its commercial potential and its geopolitical role in further confrontations with the Ottoman Empire.”<sup>9</sup> The Crimean Riviera was heavily developed and drew comparison to the Côte d’Azul. As mentioned above, it was a favorite spot of Pushkin and

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<sup>6</sup> Franklin and Widdis, 55.

<sup>7</sup> Franklin and Widdis, chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ukrainian Census, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Sasse, 40-1.

of many authors also, including Chekhov, who died there while battling tuberculosis. Crimea was a romantic place for Russians, and that continued well through the Soviet Union and beyond. Because of its exalted place in Russian national identity, very soon after its annexation, Russians relocated to the peninsula and established concentrated settlements where they developed a deep sense of homeland. In this regard, and because of the Russian and Soviet historiographies of Crimea (largely in the case of the latter to erase the Crimean Tatars from Crimean history),<sup>10</sup> the peninsula to Crimean Russians is both “our land” and “homeland.”

### **Crimean Tatars**

The Crimean Tatars have called Crimea home for centuries. Following the demise of the Golden Horde, the Crimean Tatars established the Crimean Khanate. The Crimean Tatars were sovereign rulers of the peninsula and the surrounding steppes until the Ottoman Empire annexed the Khanate. However, even as a protectorate of the Ottoman Empire from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Crimea enjoyed a high level of autonomy. Following the Russian annexation of Crimea, there was still some autonomy, however repressive Russian policies led to waves of Crimean Tatar emigration to the Ottoman Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to the tune of about 400,000 people.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the legacy of that autonomy continues through the present day, primarily due to Crimean Tatar historiography.

Although the Crimean Tatars are of the same descent as other Tatar groups—such as those in Russia and in other Former Soviet Republics—the centuries of relative isolation have differentiated the Crimean Tatars. Crimean Tatar is recognized as a distinct language in the Turkish family. Indeed, one of the major issues in Crimea today is the status of the Crimean Tatar language and the desire to build Crimean Tatar-language schools. Gaspirali even went so

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<sup>10</sup> Sasse, 68-69.

<sup>11</sup> Sasse, 75.

far as to try to establish a single language for all Russian Muslims based on Ottoman Turkish, for in his view was “in agreement with democratic principles, but it is harmful for the future.”<sup>12</sup>

His linguistic efforts were not widely accepted.

Religion has also played a very large role in the development of Crimean Tatar identity. Shortly after arriving in Crimea, the Tatars adopted Islam. Hundreds of mosques and religious schools were built over time, especially during the Ottoman period. The large majority of these buildings have been destroyed, but the Crimean Tatar community and other Muslim groups in Ukraine continue to build mosques and register religious communities. Gaspirali, writing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, placed the greatest emphasis on the religious identity of the group, rather than a cultural or linguistic one. His major work, *Russian Muslims*, called for religious unity within the greater Russian Muslim community and also greater harmony with their Orthodox Christian neighbors. Gaspirali maintained that the Crimean Tatars’ and Russian Muslims’ greatest source of strength was the religious community, not language, ethnicity, or political organization.<sup>13</sup> The Islamic religious identity of the Crimean Tatars has indeed remained intact; in a 2008 poll, 86.6% of Crimean Tatars in Crimea affiliated with Islam.<sup>14</sup>

Crimean Tatar identity has a long history and many components. It has a well-developed and defined culture and a long religious tradition, but paradoxically, the connection to the land, the space, of Crimea as a homeland for Crimean Tatars was largely a product of Soviet national policies. Brian Williams stated that, “it was the Soviet state that completed the development of a secular Crimean Tatar national identity... and the construction of the Crimea as a homeland.”<sup>15</sup>

This, in conjunction with the national cultural development that occurred in diaspora and in

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<sup>12</sup> Gaspirali quoted in Allworth, 39.

<sup>13</sup> Allworth, 23.

<sup>14</sup> NSD 104, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Sasse, 75.



resettlement, had more to do with the creation of a Crimean homeland identity than a strengthening of that identity. Nevertheless, this narrative has served the Crimean Tatars as they attempt to reclaim what was once just “our land.”

## HISTORY OF INTERACTION

Sasse’s *The Crimea Question* explores the idea that Crimea’s situation is a threefold “conflict that did not happen.”<sup>16</sup> The three avoided conflicts were between Russia and independent Ukraine; amongst the various ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups (including divisions within these groups); and the center-periphery relationship within Ukraine.<sup>17</sup> Sasse admits, however, that while these three conflicts were avoided, the issue of the Crimean Tatars has yet to be resolved. A brief discussion of the history of the interactions between the Crimean Tatars and the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and Ukraine helps to frame the discussion of the Crimean Tatar issue.

### **Crimea in the Russian Empire**

To be sure, the Crimean Tatars were not the first inhabitants of Crimea, nor were they ever the only inhabitants. However, from the time the Tatars arrived on the peninsula in the 13<sup>th</sup> century they were the majority presence there until the arrival of the Russian Empire. The Tatars continued their raids on the surrounding Russian lands through the reign of Peter the Great, and after the Russo-Turkish War, the peninsula was transferred to the Russian Empire. As mentioned previously, Crimea quickly obtained a place in myths and identity of Russia: Catherine the Great was enamored of the place, Pushkin spent his “happiest minutes” in then-Taurida, emperors built palaces along the cliffs and beaches, and as the “South,” Crimea was the premier vacation spot

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<sup>16</sup> Sasse, 261.

<sup>17</sup> Sasse, 261-2.

for both wealthy Russians (and later, Soviet citizens). Although the territory of Crimea was highly prized and contested, its inhabitants lived in a kind of peaceful coexistence.

One of the uniting myths of both Crimean Tatars and Crimean Russians is that of Crimea's special status—although the land has been part of various empires and states, it has always held onto and prized its autonomy, as alluded to above.

As the Ottoman Empire's border region with Russia, the vassal Crimean Khanate felt its share of the various Russo-Turkish Wars of the 18th and 19th centuries. Following the Ottoman defeat in the 1768-1774 war, the Crimean Khanate was granted independence but soon came to rely on Russia for support, in effect becoming a satellite state of the Russian Empire. In 1783 Russia officially annexed the Crimean Khanate and established the province of Tavrida, harkening back to the old Greek name for Crimea, centered on the peninsula. Three years later Catherine II the Great made her official tour of the province. On this tour, the Empress remarked on the beauty of the land. The tour, of course, was an elaborate show put on by General Potemkin, designed to show off the docile natives about their agriculture and the exotic Islamic villages with their fountains. It was the beginning of the Russian romantization of Crimea.

The Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774 was by no means the Russian Empire's final use of Crimea as a battlefield and naval base, including a further four Russo-Turkish wars. By the end of the historically significant Crimean War of 1853-1856, fought primarily on Crimean soil, Russia has completed its cultural colonization of Crimea. Catherine had laid the foundations in her official visit, Pushkin had immortalized it in verse, and Tolstoy completed the cycle by making Crimea alive and accessible in his Sevastopol Stories.

Long before the cultural colonization of Crimea was accomplished, the peninsula had been completely physically and politically colonized by the Russian Empire. The waves of

Crimean Tatar emigration and removal began shortly after annexation and continued through the end of the Empire. Early émigrés left for fear of religious persecution and headed for Ottoman territories at first in the North Caucasus and Bessarabia, until those lands were too conquered by Russia. In all, an estimated one million Tatars left Crimea between 1783 and 1914 as a reaction to oppressive Russian colonization policies.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, most Crimean Tatar emigrants from the Russian Empire ended up in what is now Turkey where there are an estimated 4-6 million Crimean Tatars in diaspora,<sup>19</sup> many times over the current Tatar population of Crimea. Aside from Gaspirali, the major creators of the Crimean Tatar national culture—artists, playwrights, poets, songwriters, and intellectuals—produced much of their works in diaspora and/or exile. This part of the narrative frequently gets overlooked, but it is important as it illustrates that the majority of Crimean Tatar national development occurred outside of Crimea.

As the Great War turned into the Revolution and then the Civil War, Crimea became the site of a four-way battle for control of the extremely geostrategic peninsula. As the Crimean Tatars sought to retain the level of autonomy that they and the territory enjoyed before the war, Ukrainian nationalists endeavored to incorporate Crimea into an independent Ukraine, the Bolsheviks tried to grab up as much land as they could, and White Russians hoped to transform Crimea into an anti-Bolshevik stronghold.<sup>20</sup> After a very brief period of independence and the first German occupation, at the end of the war the Bolsheviks had won the territory and in 1921 established the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as part of the USSR. By decree of the Supreme Soviet, the official languages of the Crimean ASSR were Crimean Tatar and Russian (the importance of which continues to be a hot issue). This language policy was justified

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<sup>18</sup> Fisher, Alan. *The Crimean Tatars*. Stanford: Hoover (1978), 78 and S. A. Sekerinskij. "Iz ètniceskoj istorii Kryma i Severnoj Tavrii (vtoraja polova XVI - nacalo XX v.", *Sovetskaja Tjurkologija* 4 (1988), 87-97.

<sup>19</sup> Sel, 11-12. Via <http://www.iccrimea.org/scholarly/jankowski.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Sasse, 84.

as, according to government documents, Crimean Tatars made up over a quarter of the population.<sup>21</sup> Whereas the Crimean Tatars constituted a majority population in Crimea in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, this statistic highlights the fact that hundreds of thousands of Crimean Tatars had indeed left the peninsula.

The situation on the peninsula quickly soured over the next twenty five years. Crimea suffered two famines—a natural one in 1922-3 and the Holodomor<sup>22</sup> of 1932-33—and was the site of many fierce and bloody battles in the Second World War. The Nazi army gained control of most of Crimea in 1941 (Sevastopol being the holdout until its capture in 1942) and administered the region until the Soviet army expelled them in May of 1944. This second occupation of Crimea would indeed have dire consequences—only nine days after the Nazi forces were expelled, the entire Crimean Tatar population was exiled to Central Asia by order of Joseph Stalin.

Stalin ordered the forced resettlement of the Crimean Tatars (and other non-Russians) primarily into Uzbekistan on allegations of colluding with the Nazis. While there were many Crimean Tatars who fought in the Red Army, others, including high-ranking religious and political leaders, had indeed thrown in with the Germans in the Tatar Legion. As a result, the entire population was resettled in Uzbekistan. En route, an estimated 46% of Crimean Tatar deportees—who were given at best a few hours' notice to pack and prepare—perished.<sup>23</sup> It was not until 1967 that the Crimean Tatars' citizenship was restored (albeit in Uzbekistan), but permanent relocation back to Crimea was impossible until the late 1980s.

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<sup>21</sup> In Sasse, 275. The data for the table in her appendix is taken from *Naselenie Krymskoi oblasti po dannym perepisi* (Simferopol, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Literally translated, Holodomor means “killing by hunger.” Recognized as a Soviet genocide by thirteen states.

<sup>23</sup> Subtelny, 483

### **Crimea without Tatars, Tatars without Crimea**

In the decades of the Crimean Tatars' absence, Crimean Russians and Ukrainians seized the then-emptied land and property. The cadaster was not the only part of the map changed while the Tatars were in absentia. Many place names were changed, the old Tatar names replaced by Russian or Soviet ones, and Soviet historiography removed the Crimean Tatars from Crimean history in the aftermath of the deportation of 1944. Sasse states that “although some of the most blatant historical bias and error of Soviet-era historiography has been abandoned, the predominant post-Soviet perspective on Crimea remains Russocentric.... Popular history is void of references to the [largely fair] imperial policies towards the Crimean Tatars.”<sup>24</sup> In 1936, a Soviet edition of edited and distorted Crimean Tatar legends was published, but even that disappeared with the Tatars. When the book was republished unchanged and unupdated in 1992, it curiously retained even the Stalinist view of national culture in the preface.<sup>25</sup> This only serves to point out that the removal of Crimean Tatar culture from Crimea—which only lasted about 45 years—indelibly transformed the idea of Crimea, namely, what was part of the imagined and shared history, and what was not.

Also during the Crimean Tatars' absence, the political situation of Crimea changed as well. In 1945, the Crimean ASSR was abolished and in its place was established the Crimean oblast, or province, of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), a much less autonomous administrative region in the Soviet structure. Nine years later, Khrushchev transferred the Crimean oblast to the Ukrainian SSR on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pereiaslav Treaty, when in 1654 Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi—leader of the Ukrainian Cossacks—entered a

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<sup>24</sup> Sasse, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Sasse, 55. This book is Kotsiubinskii's *Skaski i legendy Tatar Kryma*.

treaty with the Russian tsar, uniting the Ukrainian and Russian lands.<sup>26</sup> This act—called a “gift,” and always so in quotation marks—remains at the center of Crimean separatists’ argument that the peninsula should not be a part of Ukraine. Six months prior to Ukraine’s independence however, Crimea was reinstated as an ASSR, which only served to complicate issues of autonomy which, although calmed considerably since the early and mid-1990s, still persist in Ukraine-Crimea dynamic.

While in exile, many Crimean Tatars endeavored to preserve and in some instances define their national culture. Building on Gaspirali’s work and a smattering of traditional folk songs, the emergent Tatar intelligentsia evoked nostalgia for the lost homeland. Indeed I would postulate that many Crimean Tatars did not think of Crimea itself as an ethnic homeland—as opposed to simply “their land”—until they were removed from it. It was also in exile that Mustafa Jemilev, current head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, began his political career, which in the 1960s and ‘70s meant trials and prison sentences. It is no stretch to say that his many years of struggling against authority on behalf of his people have shaped his antagonistic view toward the current Russian government in Crimea.

## **Return**

As part of Gorbachev’s liberalizing policies, on 14 November 1987, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR declared the deportation of the Crimean Tatars a criminal act of repression and two weeks later, the Supreme Soviet agreed to let the Crimean Tatars return to Crimea.<sup>27</sup> The plan worked out by a special commission envisioned a gradual relocation over a dozen years, but the slow bureaucratic processes limiting the implementation of that plan, the excitement of the Tatars to return, and an increasingly hostile environment in Uzbekistan led to a huge wave of

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<sup>26</sup> Sasse, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Sasse, 150.

immigration in the late 1980s and early '90s. In 1989 there were approximately 38,000 Crimean Tatars in Crimea;<sup>28</sup> by 1993 there were an estimated 257,000.<sup>29</sup>

The huge influx of impoverished, homeless, and jobless returnees posed an immediate problem to the Crimean and Ukrainian governments. Because the mass return of the Crimean Tatars caught both the regional and central governments off-guard, there was no real plan in place to accommodate hundreds of thousands of effective refugees. The Crimean Tatars were gone for more than forty years, and in that time, their claims land, jobs, and infrastructure had been destroyed. The experience in exile, however, had tempered the Crimean Tatars into one of the best organized and politically mobilized groups in the former USSR, and the conditions they found themselves in upon their return only strengthened their resolve to create a new life for their community.<sup>30</sup>

## POST-SOVIET CRIMEA

The Crimea and Ukraine that the Crimean Tatars returned to were in a period of great political and economic transition. Newly independent Ukraine was hard at work trying to draft a constitution (which it did not finish until 1996) and the relationship between Kyiv and Simferopol was still unclear. The transition from a command to a market economy led to the rise of extremely wealthy oligarchs across the former Soviet Union: Ukraine and Crimea were no exception. The uncertain political and economic conditions in 1991-1992 Crimea led to instability, legal conflict, and crisis.

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<sup>28</sup> Sasse, 275.

<sup>29</sup> Allworth, 282.

<sup>30</sup> Sasse, 149-150.

## Secession and Constitutional Crises

Sasse contends that the peaceful resolution of the secession and constitutional crises, which came to a head between 1992 and 1994, is a textbook example of a “negotiated elite pact of transition,”<sup>31</sup> meaning that it largely because of the efforts of individual political elites was conflict avoided. The circumstances by which these crises were resolved look rather similar to those currently extant in Crimea, and as such, the experience of 1992-1994 serves as a model by which current tensions can be resolved.

After the initial referendums on Ukrainian independence in 1991, it was decided that Crimea would remain a part of Ukraine and retain its autonomous status. The definition of that autonomy, however, was left quite vague. This was in part due to the fact that the government in Kyiv had other, more pressing issues than the Crimea question. In Crimea, however, it appeared that Kyiv was stalling in regards to the ARC. Because of the lack of structure in the Crimean government, and in reaction to President Leonid Kravchuk’s stated Ukrainization policies, radical separatist groups of Crimean Russians mobilized.<sup>32</sup>

Mykola Bahrov, the first political figure to take advantage of the ambiguous political situation, pushed forward a Crimean constitution which would establish a Crimean Presidency and a parliamentary structure based on national quotas—a concession to the Crimean Tatars who lobbied hard for that stipulation. As such, Bahrov and his oligarch-backed party, PEVK, enjoyed support from the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian minorities. His major contender, however, Yurii Meshkov, “represented a new dynamic Russian nationalist style in regional politics” which

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<sup>31</sup> Sasse, 130.

<sup>32</sup> Sasse, 154.



appealed more to the undercurrent of pro-Russian sentiment among many Crimean Russians.<sup>33</sup> This led to Meshkov's landslide victory in the 1994 presidential elections. As president of Crimea, Meshkov embarked on an aggressive policy towards Kyiv although he had no real idea of how to implement the vague pro-Russian feeling that got him elected.<sup>34</sup> In response to Meshkov's grab for power and increased support from the Crimean Russian movement, Kyiv declared Crimea's constitution and many of the ARC's laws invalid. This legal conflict between Kyiv and Simferopol quickly shifted in Kyiv's favor for two reasons. The first was the Ukrainian presidential election of 1994 that swept Leonid Kuchma into power. Like Meshkov, he ran on a platform of federal regionalism which greatly appealed to Crimean Russians. The second reason was the economic situation: Crimea was dependent on Ukraine's supply of water, gas, and electricity. Ukraine used this leverage to assert political control over Crimea, which led to a swift negotiation process between Meshkov and Kuchma.

The high-level talks which almost overnight stopped the separatist movement almost completely neglected the Crimean Tatars. Whereas the 1992 Crimean Constitution granted quota-based representation, after that system was abolished by Kyiv, the Crimean Tatars were faced with a disadvantageous direct-electoral system. The new Crimean constitution, adopted by both Simferopol and Kyiv in 1998, established that Crimea's autonomy existed only as far as Ukrainian law allowed, limiting Simferopol's authority, but as a compromise, recognized Russian in the ARC as an official language. The Crimean Tatar language received no such recognition despite much lobbying and protests.

Although crisis was averted and the separatist movement abandoned, the constitutional compromises of the mid 1990s have not completely satisfied the needs and desires of any of the

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<sup>33</sup> Sasse, 158.

<sup>34</sup> Sasse, 160.

groups involved, particularly those of the Crimean Tatars. Including the Crimean Tatars in further negotiations is imperative, however, in addressing at the very least the socioeconomic needs of a substantial portion of the Crimean population. The unresolved tension, however, has had over a decade to stew and has in some respects placed the Crimean Tatars at an even greater risk.

### **“Minorities At Risk”**

The Minorities At Risk (MAR) program<sup>35</sup> at the University of Maryland's Center for International Development and Conflict Management tracks 283 non-state communal groups with "political significance" in the world and the state(s) in which they are located for the purpose of measuring the conflict potential of a group. Included among these 283 are the Crimean Tatars and the Crimean Russians.<sup>36</sup> The MAR data sets are gleaned from secondary sources, statistics, the census, and news reports, cited on the webpage. The assessments of both groups were completed in 2006 yet despite their age, these reports provide a good starting point for examining the current situation in Crimea. These assessments are especially valuable in that they place the minority groups geographically within the greater context of the Ukrainian state and chronologically over the past few hundred years.

### Risk

The initial risk assessment establishes that there is a very high conflict potential particularly between the Crimean Tatars and the Crimean Russians. The reports state that the Tatars exhibit “four of the five factors that encourage rebellion: persistent protest; territorial concentration; high levels of group organization and cohesion; and recent regime instability

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<sup>35</sup> The website for the MAR program can be found at <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/>

<sup>36</sup> The MAR assessments are included in Appendix A. All citations from the MAR data sets and assessments are included in the appendix.

during the Orange Revolution of November 2004 - January 2005.” The one missing factor is current rebellion. The report on the Crimean Russians reads very similarly: the same reasons are present and the paragraph which notes that the “highest risk for violence” is between the Crimean Russians and Tatars—and that violent incidents are bound to increase proportional to the increase in the Crimean Tatar population—is copied verbatim in both assessments.

The major difference in the reports between these two groups is the acknowledgement that “the high degree of autonomy granted to the Crimean government by Ukraine and the fact that Crimean Russians are subject to no state repression and very little societal discrimination have served to alleviate some grievances” of the Crimean Russians. Therefore, because of Crimea’s autonomy, and because the Crimean Russians constitute a ruling majority in the ARC, the conflict potential of the Crimean Russians and the Ukrainian state is significantly diminished. Not all of the Crimean Russians’ concerns, especially socioeconomic, have been met, but through the negotiating efforts in the 1990s as discussed above, the Russian irredentist and separatist movements in the ARC have largely waned. Unfortunately for the Crimean Tatars, this only grants the ruling ethnic Russians a greater share of power. On the other hand, because the Crimean Russians are in the position of power on the peninsula, Kyiv and various international organizations—including the United Nations, NATO, and the OSCE—place a greater measure of scrutiny on the ruling group’s mishandling of that power: with greater sovereign power comes greater international responsibility.

As I alluded to earlier, the MAR data also suggests that any conflict will likely be over socioeconomic issues, such as land, housing, and jobs, and political representation and control in the ARC. The importance of Kyiv's political influence is stressed more than once. Because of the growing number of Crimean Tatars through continues resettlement and a growing birthrate—

while the number of Crimean Russians is declining, as much of that population is made up of retirees—the potential for conflict also grows.

### Reading the Assessment

Assessments in the MAR are coded; because a reading of these codes is meaningless without references or knowledge of the codes, I will endeavor to go through these assessments explaining the codes and their values and contrasting the data of the two groups.<sup>37</sup> As a general rule, higher values represent higher risk to the minority groups (although some values are merely markers and do not necessarily correlate to risk factors).

A casual glance at the two reports reveals that the one on Crimean Russians is significantly shorter than and contains much less data than that of the Tatars. This is in part because of the deferential treatment the Russians enjoy with Crimea's autonomous status. The difference in ethnic makeup between Crimea and Ukraine as a whole also plays a role in the treatment of Crimean Russians in comparison to the other ethnic Russians scattered across Ukraine, which constitute approximately 18% of the total population.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to ethnic Russians in Ukraine, the overwhelming majority of Crimean Tatars are concentrated in Crimea and not spread across Ukraine, which leads to the *group spatial distribution* (GROUPCON) value of 3, or concentrated in one region (highest value). The report continues, the "Crimean Tatars differ from the majority Ukrainians racially, religiously, and linguistically." Here again, there are no values given for Crimean Russians as Russians and Ukrainians are, in the MAR data set, indistinguishable ethnic groups.

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<sup>37</sup> The MAR Handbook, which explains the codes, can be found online at [http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/data/mar\\_codebook\\_Feb09.pdf](http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/data/mar_codebook_Feb09.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> 2001 Ukrainian census.

However, two of these coded values—RACE and LANG—conceal some issues. RACE = 1 means that the group in question is a physically distinguishable subtype of same racial stock of the majority; because the MAR follows the concept of continental or geographic race, there are only 5 “racial stocks:” Asiatic, African, Europoid, Indio, and Oceanic. These groups are too large of supertypes and can potentially hide any racial tension. The Europoid supertype, for example, includes “European peoples, indigenous peoples of North Africa (Berbers, Egyptians), Middle Eastern peoples (Arabs, Persians), [and] some Central and South Asian peoples (Pashtuns, Baluchis).” Therefore, even though the Crimean Tatars are only given a value of 1 for RACE, that is by no means an empty value. For LANG, or *different language group*, the Crimean Tatars are given a 1 as well, signifying that the group speaks multiple languages, at least one different from plurality group. Here also, one must not write off a value of 1, because language rights are one of the most heated issues between the Tatars and the Crimean government, which I will discuss later. The BELIEF value of 2 (highest value) indicated that the minority group has a different religion than the plurality group, namely the Islam of the Crimean Tatars and the Russian Orthodox of the Russians.

AUTLOST, or the index of lost political autonomy, also unique to the Crimean Tatars, is a formula comprised of three separate values and equated thusly:  $AUTLOST = (MAGN + PRSTAT - 1) / YEARWT$ , where MAGN stands for magnitude of change on a 0-3 scale; PRSTAT is group status prior to change, a scale of 0-4, from no history of autonomy to full statehood; and YEARWT, a scale of 0-5 based on how long ago autonomy was lost. From the narrative of the assessment and to the best of my abilities, I have arranged the following values to complete the formula above:  $1 = (3 + 3 - 1) / 5$  (MAGN = 3: loss of long-term autonomy, owing to the long-standing history of Crimea as its own space; PRSTAT = 3: traditional

centralized authority and autonomous people under colonial rule, because although there was a short-lived independent Tatar state in the 15th century, Crimea has been since the Ottoman takeover of the peninsula an autonomous region under colonial rule; YEARWT = 5: >100 years ago, owing to Crimea's 600+ years as an autonomous region). To be sure, this is only one configuration, as there are many other solutions to that formula.

The various PROT, *protest*, values are separated by years, hence the 60X, 65X, 70X, and 99-00, etc. The values range from none, 0, to large demonstrations, 5. All values are represented in both groups, and their values are as follows:

- 0, None reported
- 1, Verbal opposition: Requests by a minority-controlled regional group for independence (public letters, petitions, posters, publications, agitation, court action, etc.).
- 2, Symbolic resistance: Sabotage, symbolic destruction of property OR political organizing activity on a substantial scale (e.g. sit-ins, blockage of traffic).
- 3, Small demonstrations: A few demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and/or riots, the largest of which has total participation of less than 10,000
- 4, Medium demonstrations: Demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and/or riots, the largest of which has total participation between 10,000 and 100,000
- 5, Large demonstrations: Demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and/or riots, the largest of which has total participation over 100,000

Each group has established a legacy of protest, which reveals two noteworthy points: firstly, both groups are well organized and politically literate. Each has demonstrated the ability to hold and sustain large protests in a politically acceptable manner, which nominally means non-violent, but that does not preclude automatically outbreaks of violence. Secondly, because these values have remained consistently high according to the MAR data, the continued tension as a result of sustained protest heightens the possibility of violence.

The ECDIS and POLDIS codes stand for *economic* and *political discrimination* respectively. Once again, these markers only apply to the Crimean Tatars—as Crimean Russians hold administrative power in the ARC, they do not seek to discriminate themselves. The ECDIS

value of 1 means that “significant poverty and under-representation in desirable occupations due to historical marginality, neglect, or restrictions. Public policies are designed to improve the group's material well being.” While both Kyiv and Simferopol have passed remedial policies for the benefit of the Crimean Tatars, their effectiveness is another matter altogether. Effectiveness, however, is not a part of this particular value. POLDIS = 1 carries a similar definition to the previous one, recognizing that there is substantial under-representation in political office and participation, but again, there are remedial public policies in place. I have the same reservations about the effectiveness of these policies that I do concerning the economic ones.

GOJPA measures the *group organization for joint political action*. The value of 1 signifies that the group's interests are promoted by umbrella organizations. While the Kurultay of the Crimean Tatars is recognized as a representative body (albeit without any real power and not as a political party), the Mejlis has no official recognition. In addition, the Tatar community receives support from various Islamic support organizations and from the sizeable diaspora community in Turkey. For Crimean Russians, the GOJPA value of 2 in 1998 signifies that the group's interests are “promoted by one or more conventional political parties or movements” and the 3 from 2000 to 2006 for Crimean Russians means that in addition to the support from conventional political parties, the group also receives support from some militant organizations, albeit in a limited manner. That various militant organizations support the Crimean Russians changes the dynamic between the Russians and the Tatars, who—in the terribly unfortunate event that these militant groups take up arms against the Crimean Tatars—would be at a disadvantage to defend themselves. This, however, is not a suggestion that the Crimean Tatars should abandon their non-violent protests for a more extreme version: in fact, these militant groups should be under careful watch if not disbanded entirely.

The three remaining codes—POLGR, ECGR, and CULGR—deal with the highest levels of political, economic, and cultural grievances of the minority group. The definitions of the values for the Crimean Tatars are: POLGR = 3, the political grievances focused on creating or strengthening autonomous status; ECGR = 2, the economic grievances focused on creating or strengthening remedial policies (highest value); and CULGR = 1, the cultural grievances focused on ending discrimination. These values represent the Crimean Tatar's desires for Crimean autonomy, which is also a political and cultural goal for the Crimean Russians. POLGR = 4 signifies the group's autonomy grievances with the intent to create a separate state or a revanchist change in the border. The value of 2 for CULGR represents the ethnic Russians' agitation for increased cultural rights, specifically in regards to the Russian language. It is interesting to note, however, that the foci of these grievances are divergent, though both values are high: while the Crimean Tatars support more autonomy within Ukraine, a nod toward Kyiv rather than Simferopol in reaction to the local government's ineffective policies, the Crimean Russians look towards a Moscow-based autonomy, a Crimea as part of the Russian Federation.

The Crimean Tatar assessment ends here, but there is a final value for Crimean Russians: INTERCON = 1, that there is intercommunal conflict for the years specified, in this case 2004-2006, the year in which this data was compiled, although presumably this would also apply to the present situation. This comes both from conflict with the central government in Kyiv and a fear of the Islamic traditions of most Tatars and their higher birthrates, which I mentioned earlier. Because of these fears, there has been recurring but small-scale violence between the Crimean Russians and Tatars particularly as Russians “have sought in some instances to limit Tatar access to housing, land and jobs.” This directly translates into friction between these groups on not only the issues of housing, land, and jobs, but also political representation, religion, and geography,



all of which are current and hot issues in the continuing negotiations between the Crimean Tatars and Russians.

The purposes behind going into such detail over these reports are two-fold. First, the MAR assessments provide a measured examination of the Crimean Tatars and Russians which affords some kind of standardized comparison. It is evident from the data that there are real grievances and issues between these two groups. However, leading into the second reason in examining these reports, there are inaccuracies in their coding system which not only obscure or heighten points of conflict between these groups, as mentioned above, but also contribute to the identity binary narrative. Both MAR assessments refer to the conflict between the Russians (historically and contemporaneously in Crimea) and Crimean Tatars, but neither acknowledge the presence of Ukrainians—let alone any other ethnic groups—on the peninsula. Whether oversight or not, it is very curious that in the discussion of minority groups within a state, there is no mention of the majority group. This omission is doubly reductive, bolstering the idea and legacy of Crimean autonomy and reinforcing the counterproductive “us vs. them” mentality and narrative of the Crimean Tatars and Russians.

#### CURRENT ISSUES IN CRIMEA

When the Crimean Tatars returned en masse beginning in the 1990s, they were met with fierce opposition by the Crimean Russian majority in the ARC. The Crimean government did not recognize Crimean Tatars' claims to land and property, and because the Ukrainian constitution did not allow dual citizenship, there was no recourse from the central government. This led to the Crimean Tatars singling out the difficulty in obtaining land as “the most severe among ‘a

thousand different hardships' they suffered on returning to Crimea."<sup>39</sup> As a result, many returning Crimean Tatars constructed crude new homes on undeveloped or abandoned property, often without functioning indoor plumbing, electricity, or gas (which meant that there was no heat for warmth or cooking except for fires they made themselves), paying a markedly higher rent for grossly overcrowded living accommodations.<sup>40</sup>

Even the current Crimean Chairman Vasil' Dzharty acknowledged in an interview with Radio Liberty that the land problem in Ukraine is in a terrible state, calling it a "Bacchanalia," admitting wide-spread corruption in the buying and selling of land by both governmental and private entities. Although he also stated that he wishes to work with the Mejlis and the Kurultay of the Crimean Tatars in trying to meet their needs, he nevertheless intoned that if they could not come to an understanding on this land issue, he would have to enforce the laws in his capacity as head of the ARC, meaning he would evict the Tatars who are squatting on what he calls "illegally seized land."<sup>41</sup> The doling out of this ultimatum, however, undermines any sincerity Dzharty has in looking to work out a compromise, in the full sense of the word, with the Crimean Tatars.

These land issues will not go away soon. There is simply too much money to be made—both legitimate and under the table—in selling and developing the land rather than granting it to a minority group. The corruption that Dzharty alluded to above includes enormous land sales into the thousands of hectares by companies and politicians to rich investors and developers.<sup>42</sup> This has muddled the cadaster to the point where one analyst stated that the map of the land of

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<sup>39</sup> Allworth, 21.

<sup>40</sup> Allworth, 21-22.

<sup>41</sup> Пригула, Володимир and Олеся Бортняк. "Василь Джарти: земельна проблема в Криму – це вакханалія." 18 February 2011. <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/2313992.html>

<sup>42</sup> Tuchynska, Svitlana. "Tatars carry on decades-long struggle to reclaim Crimean land taken away." 4 February 2011. <http://www.kyivpost.com/news/nation/detail/96308/>

Crimea is “probably the most secret document on the peninsula.”<sup>43</sup> The well-established yet still-growing tourism industry, which pushed the returning Crimean Tatars from their traditional and former population centers along the coasts into the steppe land, continues to fuel land-grabs and billion-dollar development deals along the Crimean Riviera. With tourism expected to rise 5% from last year, the Crimean government has allocated even more funds to infrastructure and hotel development in the coastal resort areas and is preparing to auction off several more land plots to spark private investment.<sup>44</sup> Because tourism is the largest sector of the ARC’s struggling economy, there is an obvious reluctance on the part of the government to spend money on valuable land which otherwise might turn a substantial profit.

Clearly, the land issue is a contested one and it has only festered these past twenty-odd years. Had a policy been in place from the beginning of the return of the Crimean Tatars, the most pressing issue and point of conflict between the Tatars and Russians would have been resolved long ago. While it is easy to say that the simplest arrangement would be for the Ukrainian government to issue and enforce a land-grant mandate, that would only spark anti-Ukrainian sentiments among the Crimean Russian population and could produce another secession crisis.

Related to the land issue is that of the difference of religious traditions. When the Tatars returned, they found that virtually all of their former mosques and madrasas had been either demolished or repurposed. This issue of religious property has evolved into a political one. The Mejlis and the Kurultay—representative bodies of the Crimean Tatars—having received little help from the local governments, have turned to Turkey, where perhaps over a million Crimean

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “Crimean Tourism Minister: Crimea expects to host 6 million tourists this summer.” 25 March 2011. <http://www.kyivpost.com/news/nation/detail/100849/>

Tatars live in diaspora, for monetary aid in building homes, schools, and mosques.<sup>45</sup> With the promise of economic aid from Turkey also came a statement from Simferopol that land on the outskirts of the city would be available for the construction of a large, central mosque. However, in 2004 this land was already allocated for the exact same purpose but was later annulled by Simferopol authorities.<sup>46</sup> While construction has not yet begun and there is still much red tape to cut through, many Crimean Tatars remain hopeful that it can begin soon.

Aside from religious property, the perceived incompatibility between the Islam of the Crimean Tatars and the Orthodox of the Crimean Russians has also caused significant tension. Clearly the world that Gaspirali envisioned where Russia's Muslims coexist with their Orthodox brothers has not materialized, especially in the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghanistan War, the Chechen Wars, and the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the so-called Global War on Terror. Both groups accuse the other of discriminatory policies, speech, and actions. Vitalii Khramov, leader of the Russian-nationalist separatist group "Sobol," a veteran of anti-Islamic (and anti-Ukrainian and anti-Jewish) hate speech, is once again on trial, this time for inciting ethnic and religious hatred after showing an inflammatory video presentation at the funeral of a boy whom Khramov attests was killed by Islamic extremists.<sup>47</sup> Khramov and his associates have been repeatedly denounced and defamed by the Tatar community.

Last summer, reports began appearing about an Orthodox youth camp called Crimea-Sich, invoking the memory and legacy of the Don (Russian) Cossacks. The camp attracts 10-18

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<sup>45</sup> Tuchynska, Svitlana. "'Life changed for the worse' under Yanukovych, says Crimean Tatar leader." 28 February 2011. <http://www.kyivpost.com/news/politics/detail/98553/>

<sup>46</sup> "Simferopol authorities allocate land for central mosque." 15 February 2011. [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/other\\_confessions/islam/40741/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/other_confessions/islam/40741/)

<sup>47</sup> "В Симферополе продолжается суд над лидером казачьей общины «Соболь» по обвинению в разжигании межнациональной и религиозной вражды." 30 March 2011. [http://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian\\_news/9158-v-simferopole-prodolzhaetsya-sud-nad-liderom-kazachej-obshhiny-sobol-po-obviniyuv-razzhiganiy-mezhnacionalnoj-i-religioznoj-vrazhdy.html](http://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian_news/9158-v-simferopole-prodolzhaetsya-sud-nad-liderom-kazachej-obshhiny-sobol-po-obviniyuv-razzhiganiy-mezhnacionalnoj-i-religioznoj-vrazhdy.html)

year olds from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus and teaches them to shoot submachine guns and the Kadochnikov style of hand-to-hand combat for 15 days. The pictures accompanying the article depict young men and children in camouflage and skullcaps holding machine guns marching down a mountain in formation. The camp itself is located near places holy to the Crimean Tatars, perhaps to “resist attacks of Islamists.” It appears that the opening of the camp was a deliberate move to incite separatist sentiment and ethno-religious confrontation.<sup>48</sup>

The lack of minority protection from governments both in Kyiv and Simferopol has caused disappointment and anger among the ranks of the Crimean Tatars. In various interviews over the past few months, Mejlis head and member of the Ukrainian parliament Mustafa Jemilev has laid out many of the grievances that the Crimean Tatars hold.<sup>49</sup> He said that in the past 20 years of Ukraine’s independence—of which Crimea has been a part—“there was nothing good about it for Crimean Tatars.”<sup>50</sup> Beside more general issues like various politicians’ maneuverings towards Russia, he also cites specific issues. He says that “there is not a single Tatar in [the Security Service of Ukraine] and not a single judge,” and other Tatar officials in Crimea were being removed from their positions, replaced by—in one case—a deputy minister from the Donetsk oblast, not even in Crimea.<sup>51</sup> Political representation in Crimea is also an issue, as there is no current system of “quota-based representation of the indigenous population in the Crimean parliament,” and because of the community’s small numbers, Crimean Tatars have virtually no chance of being elected to the Crimean parliament.<sup>52</sup> This statement is corroborated by data from a Razumkov Center poll showing that Crimean Tatar representation even in local governments is

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<sup>48</sup> “Ukrainian political studies expert: Security Service should check activity of Orthodox camp.” 20 September 2010. [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all\\_news/community/vandalism/37998/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/community/vandalism/37998/)

<sup>49</sup> RIA Novosty. “Crimean Tatar leader: ‘We don’t want that kind of republic.’” 3 February 2011. <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20110203/162440136.html> and Tuchynska, “Life changed.”

<sup>50</sup> RIA Novosty.

<sup>51</sup> Tuchynska, “Life changed.”

<sup>52</sup> RIA Novosty.

across the board of a substantially lower part than the part of those populations that are Crimean Tatar.<sup>53</sup>

Within the Tatar community itself there has also been strife. Dissatisfied with the lack of results and with Jemilev's hegemonic rule—he has been the head of the Mejlis since its founding in 1991 after a long career of fighting for Crimean Tatar rights, repatriation, and restoration in the Soviet Union. Jemilev has joked in interviews that he has been in power “for so long that it has become undemocratic. There should be a change of leaders. I even threatened members of Mejlis that I will arrange for myself to be brought down like Mubarak.”<sup>54</sup> Glib or not, there has been a definite increase in tension both within the Crimean Tatars and the greater Ukrainian Muslim community to the extent that there have been Tatar groups picketing in front of the Mejlis building against Jemilev. Server Kerimov, a member of the Coordinating Council of Socio-political Forces of the Crimean Tatar People accused the Mejlis and Jemilev of corruption and of assuming too much power.<sup>55</sup> The Mejlis leader expressed his displeasure with the protest and criticizing its members for not actually trying to resolve any issues or problems. Various news agencies link this protest to the growing rift between the Muftiat of Crimea—aligned with the Crimean Tatars—and the Spiritual Administration of Ukrainian Muslims (DUMU) in Kyiv.

At the end of February, the DUMU sent a mufti from Kyiv to Crimea. This sparked an immediate angry response from Crimean Tatar muftis, calling the followers of the DUMU's mufti cultists and directly attacked Ridwan Veliyev (the DUMU mufti sent to Crimea) as a

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<sup>53</sup> NSD 109, 42-43.

<sup>54</sup> Tuchynska, Svitlana. “Life ‘changed for the worse’ under Yanukovych, says Crimean Tatar leader.” 28 February 2011. <http://www.kyivpost.com/news/politics/detail/98553/>

<sup>55</sup> “Оппозиционные Меджлису крымско-татарские организации выразили недовольство его деятельностью.” 16 March 2011. [http://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian\\_news/8865-oppozicionnye-medzhlisu-krymsko-tatarskie-organizacii-vyrazili-nedovolstvo-ego-devatelnostyu.html](http://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian_news/8865-oppozicionnye-medzhlisu-krymsko-tatarskie-organizacii-vyrazili-nedovolstvo-ego-devatelnostyu.html)

cowardly opportunist and without any authority to even call himself mufti.<sup>56</sup> The move by the DUMU in Kyiv to send down their own religious representative displays a misunderstanding of the Crimean Tatar religious culture and political situation. At the worst, this is an intentional schismatic move. Regardless, this issue is laden with conflict and it only serves to undermine Kyiv's role as a mediator between the Crimean Tatars and Russians.

Clearly, the Crimean Tatar population feels at a disadvantage and discriminated against. As these trends continue, however, the level of tension between the Crimean Tatars and Russians remains elevated. Such a high level of tension, however, cannot be sustained indefinitely: the tension must be resolved, either by peaceful resolution, or by snapping.

#### NEGOTIATING A PEACEFUL COMPROMISE

In many ways, the current situation in Crimea is much like it was during the four-way battle described above. While some of the players have changed, the narrative remains the same. The Crimean Tatars, returned from exile, still seek autonomy, although now as part of the Ukrainian state; Ukraine's central government in Kyiv recognizes the significance of the peninsula and does not want to lose it; Russian leaders like former Moscow Mayor Luzhkov have expressed their desire to see Crimea brought into the Russian Federation; and among much of the Russian population there still exists a feeling of separatism, that their future belongs with Russia and not Ukraine. The last twenty years, however, have evidenced that there is as yet no clear victor. It is clear from recent history that left to themselves, the Crimean Tatars and Crimean Russians will not be able to reach a compromise that satisfies each groups' needs while maintaining distinct

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<sup>56</sup> "Между муфтиятом Крыма и Духовным управлением мусульман Украины разгорелось противостояние." 28 February 2011. [http://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian\\_news/8570-mezhdu-muftiyatom-kryma-i-duhovnym-upravleniem-musulman-ukrainy-razgorelos-protivostoyanie.html](http://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian_news/8570-mezhdu-muftiyatom-kryma-i-duhovnym-upravleniem-musulman-ukrainy-razgorelos-protivostoyanie.html)

cultural identities. Therefore, it is up to a third party—in this case, Kyiv—to mediate between the groups. There are two major hurdles, however, in accomplishing this type of compromise:

Crimean Russian separatism and Crimean Tatar socioeconomic inequality and discrimination.

The rise of Crimean separatism reached its high point in the early 1990s but has petered out to only a general but latent feeling among the majority of the Crimean Russian population after 1994.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, in a 2008 study, the Razumkov Center revealed that Crimea's secession from Ukraine and joining Russia was supported by 75.9% of Crimean Russians, 55.2% of Ukrainians in Crimea, and only 13.8% of Crimean Tatars. In contrast, 17.9%, 27.9%, and 28.3% of Crimean Russians, Ukrainians, and Crimean Tatars respectively responded that Crimea should stay a part of Ukraine with the same rights and powers. Those numbers rise to 53.0%, 54.7%, and 57.6% respectively for Crimea's increased autonomy within the Ukrainian state.<sup>58</sup> These numbers demonstrate two trends: there is a definite difference of opinion along ethnic lines as to the question of Crimean secession, and that while there is a strong feeling for separatism, over half of the Crimean population as a whole would support increased Crimean autonomy within Ukraine.

This not only bodes well for Kyiv, but also provides the justification for the central Ukrainian government as a mediator between the Crimean Russians and Crimean Tatars. Indeed, in the mid-1990s when separatism was at its height, Sasse contends that it was Kyiv's negotiating process with these two groups that prevented both the outbreak of violence and the secession of Crimea.<sup>59</sup> The precedent has therefore been set for Kyiv to lead this process.

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<sup>57</sup> Sasse, 170.

<sup>58</sup> NSD 104, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Sasse, 8. This is a major premise of the book.



In overcoming the socioeconomic inequality and discrimination of the Crimean Tatars is a much larger obstacle. This is the arena in which the most sacrifice will need to be made from all sides. As mentioned previously, the political and historical processes of the previous century or so have polarized the two major Crimean ethnic minorities into a binary. This, however, is a false perception; nevertheless it is perpetrated by both Crimean Russians and Crimean Tatars. The narratives of both groups have reduced their arguments to an unfortunate “us-or-them” mentality, all or nothing. Providing land, cultural, and socioeconomic concessions and political reforms favorable to the Crimean Tatars somehow undermines the constructed identity of the Crimean Russians, whether that be in profitable land, political power, or a de-Russification of the peninsula (for example with place-names). For the Crimean Tatars, simply standing down to the group in power, relinquishing their lobbying efforts for language recognition, religious equality, and political representation will inevitably result in an eventual but utter decimation of the Crimean Tatar identity in Crimea.

This binary is unfortunate because it first makes the process of compromise more difficult and more painful, and second, it discounts the sizeable Ukrainian population and other ethnic minorities in Crimea, such as Pontic Greeks and Jews. Although the territory of Crimea was essential in forming Crimean Tatar and Crimean Russian identity, by no means are those the only two groups that can call Crimea home or strongly identify with the peninsula.

Nevertheless, in another Razumkov poll, the issues of most concern were socioeconomic, and not identity based. When asked to answer which problems bother the Crimean population most of all, 66.7% indicated the general decrease in living standards, 44.6% the problems of employment and unemployment, 39.3% the general economic situation, and 37.1% delayed payment of wages and pensions. Only 1.7% responded that confessional conflicts were of the

most pressing problems.<sup>60</sup> This poll shows that members of every group—Russians, Tatars, Ukrainians, and others included—could stand to gain from socioeconomic improvements. Therefore, it would once again be in everyone’s best interest to focus on resolving these most pressing issues first. Once basic socioeconomic equanimity is achieved, then headway can be made toward political, cultural, and religious equanimity.

Obviously the Ukrainian government wants to see a stable Crimea. Because of Crimea’s unique issues, it is the region of Ukraine with the greatest potential for conflict. In National Security and Defense, the Razumkov Center’s magazine, the editors attest that “In the conditions of political instability in the country lasting for years and serious foreign political challenges... the Crimean specificity, first of all, its socio-cultural, ethnic and confessional variety, make it especially vulnerable to internal conflicts. Given the special status of Crimea in Ukraine, such conflicts pose a potential threat to stability in Ukraine as a whole.”<sup>61</sup> This fact is also evident to Moscow, where many Russian politicians—and indeed some Russian separatists in Crimea—would like to see an unstable Crimea and therefore Ukraine in order to increase Moscow’s sphere of political influence. Here, Kyiv has already taken some steps—the Security Service of Ukraine has banned former Moscow mayor Luzhkov from Ukraine for threatening Ukraine’s interests and territorial integrity.<sup>62</sup> That is not to say that Russian influence is the only motivator—politicians and businessmen alike have come under investigation for giving away or selling Crimean land on the cheap for personal gain.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> NSD 16, 15.

<sup>61</sup> NSD 104, 2.

<sup>62</sup> “Moscow mayor Luzhkov barred from Ukraine.” 12 May 2008. <http://en.rian.ru/world/20080512/107142320.html>

<sup>63</sup> Tuchynska, Svitlana. “Tatars carry on decades-long struggle to reclaim Crimean land taken away.” 4 February 2011. <http://www.kyivpost.com/news/nation/detail/96308/>

The long-term stability of Crimea and Ukraine lies primarily in the hands of Kyiv. Both Sasse and the editors of *National Security and Defense* recognize that the central government—both the presidential administrations and the Ukrainian parliament—has not done enough to normalize the relationship between the ARC and Ukraine in matters of politics, religion, and socioeconomics.<sup>64</sup> There are already signs that Kyiv is moving in this direction. As recently as early April of this year, President Viktor Yanukovich has signed bills into law that would increase the autonomy of Crimea<sup>65</sup> and recent normative acts passed by Crimean Chairman Vasil' Dzharty seem to be addressing some of the Crimean Tatars' land concerns,<sup>66</sup> and Prime Minister Azarov has stated that Kyiv is “ready for dialog with Crimean Tatars,”<sup>67</sup> but only time will tell if these actions alone are enough to effectively prevent conflict in Crimea. Without the mediation of the central Ukrainian government in Crimean affairs, the rising (or at least steady) tension will cause the situation to snap.

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<sup>64</sup> Sasse, 260-262. NSD issues 16, 102, 104.

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.kyivpost.com/news/nation/detail/101835/>

<sup>66</sup> Притула and Бортняк, “Василь Джарти.”

<sup>67</sup> Притула and Бортняк, “Василь Джарти.”

## APPENDIX A

**Assessment for Crimean Tatars in Ukraine<sup>68</sup>**Risk Assessment

Crimean Tatars exhibit four of the five factors that encourage rebellion: persistent protest; territorial concentration; high levels of group organization and cohesion; and recent regime instability during the Orange Revolution of November 2004 - January 2005. Crimean Tatar protest will likely remain at fairly high levels because key political and economic grievances are not being addressed by the regional or central government. While most returnees from Central Asia have now received citizenship, contention remains concerning issues such as provision of land, housing, and jobs. The political contest between Crimean Russians and Crimean Tatars over who controls the governance of the peninsula is also likely to continue through the coming years.

The highest risk for violence in Crimea is between ethnic Russian and Tatar groups. Limited incidents of violence between these groups have occurred sporadically in recent years. With the increase of the Tatar population, these incidences are likely to increase, barring more vigorous intervention by the central government or other actors.

Analytic Summary

Concentrated on the Crimean Peninsula (GROUPCON = 3), the Crimean Tatars differ from the majority Ukrainians racially, religiously, and linguistically. The Crimean Tatars are a Turkic people, whereas the majority Ukrainians are primarily a Slavic people (RACE = 1). Additionally, Crimean Tatars are predominantly Sunni Muslims, while Ukrainians are primarily Orthodox Christian (BELIEF = 2). Though group members speak primarily Crimean Tatar, many Crimean Tatars also likely speak Russian given its status as the main language of communication, business, and education in Crimea (LANG = 1).

The ancestors of today's Crimean Tatars began settling the northern plains of the peninsula in the mid-13th century. These settlers were Seljuk and Orguz Turkish clans who remained behind after the Mongol invasions of the steppes. The Crimea formed an independent state for the first time in the 1440s under Hacı Giray Khan. Shortly after this (in the 1470s), the Ottomans invaded and brought the peninsula into the Ottoman domain. The sultans set Crimea up as an autonomous state under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire; the amount of autonomy exercised by the Crimean Tatars during this period is a matter of debate. Throughout the 10th to 17th centuries, Crimean Tatars raided Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian towns.

By the end of the 17th century, Russia had come to the forefront of major powers in the region and began to challenge the Ottomans for control of the Black Sea region. In the spring of 1771, Russia began what would end up being a long, bloody path to the eventual annexation of Crimea in 1783. From 1772 to 1783 (when Russian conquest of the peninsula was completed),

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<sup>68</sup> This assessment is a copy of the original posted by the Minorities At Risk Project, located online at <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=36904>

Crimea was again an independent state, though dependent on a major power for its security (AUTLOST = 1).

This period saw the beginnings of Russian and non-Russian Slavic colonization of the peninsula. While the colonization was small-scale, soon the population balance would begin to shift significantly due to other forces. From 1783 to 1854, there were small-scale Tatar emigrations to parts of the Ottoman Empire. However, following the Crimean War of 1854-1855, Russian policy was designed to encourage Tatars to leave. The Crimean Tatars were accused of having collaborated with the English and French during the war. Fear of Russian anger over their loss in the war and economic deprivation caused a major exodus of Tatars. The pre-war population of Tatars was estimated at 150,000; by 1860 there are estimated to have been fewer than 100,000 remaining. At that point they were still a majority, and the 1926 census counts 186,024 persons speaking the Tatar language. In 1944, Stalin expelled Crimean Tatar populations to Central Asia, as punishment for supposed Tatar collaboration with the Germans. These expulsions decimated Tatar populations; the 1989 census counted only 89,600 Tatars in the Ukraine.

Prior to the deportation, Crimean Tatars primarily resided in the southern resort areas and in urban centers. Small-scale resettlement began after 1967, but because of the high demand on the resort areas of the Crimea, the Crimean Tatars were forced to settle mainly in the steppe regions. Crimean Tatar protests in the USSR also began in this period, as they began agitating for the right to return to the Crimea (PROT60X = 1; PROT65X = 3). Crimean Tatar protests continued throughout the duration of Soviet rule (PROT70X, PROT80X = 2; PROT85X = 3) and have remained at a consistently high level since Ukrainian independence (PROT 90X, PROT98X = 3; PROT99-00 = 4; PROT01-03 = 3; PROT04-06 = 4).

The return of the Crimean Tatars has created many problems. A massive influx of Crimean Tatars from Uzbekistan has led to an overcrowding of limited housing and greater pressure on formerly Tatar lands that are now occupied by other groups. Further, poor health relative to other groups in Ukraine continues to plague the Crimean Tatars. The economic situation of Crimea and Ukraine has had difficulty supporting this influx, and sufficient funds have not been made available for effective resettlement. In 2006, only 90% of Tatar settlements had electricity, 70% water, and 25% paved roads. However, in May of that year, the Cabinet of Ministers approved a five-year, \$130 million assistance program for returning Tatars (ECDIS04-06 = 1). On the political front, the 1997 amendment to the Citizenship Law waived some of the usual residence and language requirements for returning deportees, thus expediting the acquisition of citizenship by Crimean Tatars. Specifically, it allows deported Crimean Tatars to acquire citizenship without the mandatory 5-year term of residence in Ukraine and without proficiency in the Ukrainian language. The Citizenship Law was further amended in 1999 to allow deportees and their descendents who have lived in Ukraine for at least 5 years to acquire citizenship automatically without having to renounce any foreign citizenship (POLDIS04-06 = 1).

Ethnic Russians in Crimea have consistently raised concerns about the returning Crimean Tatars, objecting to privileges such as special access to housing or quotas for political representation. One result has been violence between the two groups. Intercommunal conflict between these two groups has remained largely at the level of political agitation, though in recent years sporadic violence has occurred (INTERCON04-06 = 1). Specifically, during January-May

2004 and July-August 2006, hundreds of Crimean Tatars and Crimean Russians clashed over land issues, leaving several injured and at least one Russian man dead.

The organization that primarily represents Crimean Tatar demands is Majilis, the self-styled parliament of the Crimean Tatars (GOJPA04-06 = 2). In terms of grievances, Crimean Tatar leaders continued to call for changes in electoral laws that would enable them to achieve greater representation in the Crimean parliament, while some elements of the Crimean Tatar community call for national Crimean Tatar autonomy (POLGR04-06 = 3). In the economic domain, Crimean Tatar leaders continued to complain that Tatars returning from exile receive inadequate assistance for resettlement from the national government (ECGR = 2). Crimean Tatar leaders also continued to demand that the Crimean Tatar language be given equal status to Russian in Crimea (CULGR04-06 = 1).

In the long run, the situation of the Crimean Tatars in Ukraine will depend to a large degree on the economic situation in the country, so that economic funds can be freed up to better their living conditions without taking resources away from Russians and Ukrainians, and on the political leadership in Kiev and Simferopol.

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### **Assessment for Crimean Russians in Ukraine<sup>69</sup>**

#### Risk Assessment

Crimean Russians exhibit four of the five factors that encourage rebellion: persistent protest; territorial concentration; high levels of group organization and cohesion; and recent regime instability during the Orange Revolution of November 2004 - January 2005. However, the high degree of autonomy granted to the Crimean government by Ukraine and the fact that Crimean Russians are subject to no state repression and very little societal discrimination have served to alleviate some grievances. Furthermore, while there is some sentiment in both Russia and Crimea for Russia's annexation of Crimea, it is unlikely that Russia's central government will pursue this goal.

Ethnic Russians in Crimea are likely to continue to protest at moderate levels. There is little indication that the central government is going to change unfavorable policies (e.g. state-level language laws and policies regarding Tatar immigration) in the near future.

The highest risk for violence in Crimea is between ethnic Russian and Tatar groups. Limited incidents of violence between these groups have occurred sporadically in recent years. With the increase of the Tatar population (and hence increased pressure on the Russian

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<sup>69</sup> This assessment is a copy of the original posted by the Minorities At Risk Project, located online at <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=36905>

population and on economic resources), these incidences are likely to increase, barring more vigorous intervention by the central government or other actors.

### Analytic Summary

PLEASE NOTE: The Minorities at Risk Project treats Russians in Crimea separately from other Russians in Ukraine. This is because Crimea holds constitutional autonomy within the Ukrainian state, which leads to differential treatment of Russians. Additionally, the political situation of ethnic Russians in the Crimea, where they constitute approximately 67 percent of the population, is markedly different from the political situation of ethnic Russians in the remainder of the Ukraine, where they constitute approximately 18 percent of the population. For additional information on ethnic Russians outside Crimea, see the file “Russians in Ukraine.”

Russian armies first invaded the Crimean peninsula in 1736, and in 1783 Catherine II annexed the peninsula. This began a period of Russian and Slavic immigration to the peninsula and Tatar emigration. After the Bolshevik revolution, Crimea briefly became independent, but was soon occupied by German forces. In 1921, it was annexed to the Soviet Union as the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. During World War II, it was occupied again by German forces. The composition of the population was altered dramatically at the end of the war, when Stalin deported almost the entire Crimean Tatar population (resident on the peninsula since the 15th century) to parts of Central Asia. The end of the war also saw Crimea incorporated in the Russian SSR. In 1954, the peninsula was transferred to Ukraine. In 1989, Crimean Tatars were allowed to begin returning to the peninsula.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia and Ukraine engaged in intense negotiations over the status of Crimea. In 1992, the Russian-dominated government made an abortive attempt to declare independence. In Crimea, irredentism is strong among the Russians owing to the overwhelming majority of Russians there and the relatively strong historical link between Crimea and Russia. Most Russians in Crimea identify themselves not with Ukraine, Crimea, or even Russia, but with the Soviet Union. Many are veterans of the Soviet military and wish to go back to the simpler and more secure days of Soviet rule. However, their current identification falls more closely with the military and political successor to the USSR, Russia, than with Ukraine. Politicians in Russia who regularly call for Crimea to rejoin Russia nurture this attitude.

Ethnic Russians in Crimea have a strong sense of identity and are politically organized (GOJPA98 = 2; GOJPA00-06 = 3). Since Ukrainian independence, they have also consistently mobilized to protest, in particular in opposition to remedial policies in place for Crimean Tatars (PROT90X = 4; PROT98X = 3; PROT99-02 = 2, PROT02-06 = 3). In addition to autonomy grievances (POLGR04-06 = 4), ethnic Russians also agitate for increased cultural rights, particularly in regards to language (CULGR04-06 = 2).

Crimean Russians find themselves not only in conflict with the central government of Ukraine but also with Crimean Tatars who have returned in significant numbers from Central Asia. Ethnic Russians feel threatened by the religious (Islamic) traditions of most Tatars and by their higher birthrates (which many Russians fear could, in time, reduce them to a minority). One result of such fears has been recurring violence between the two groups, particularly as Russians have sought in some instances to limit Tatar access to housing, land and jobs (INTERCON04-06



= 1). Ethnic Russians also vociferously objected to former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma's recommendation that Tatars be guaranteed representation in the Crimean government.

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APPENDIX B

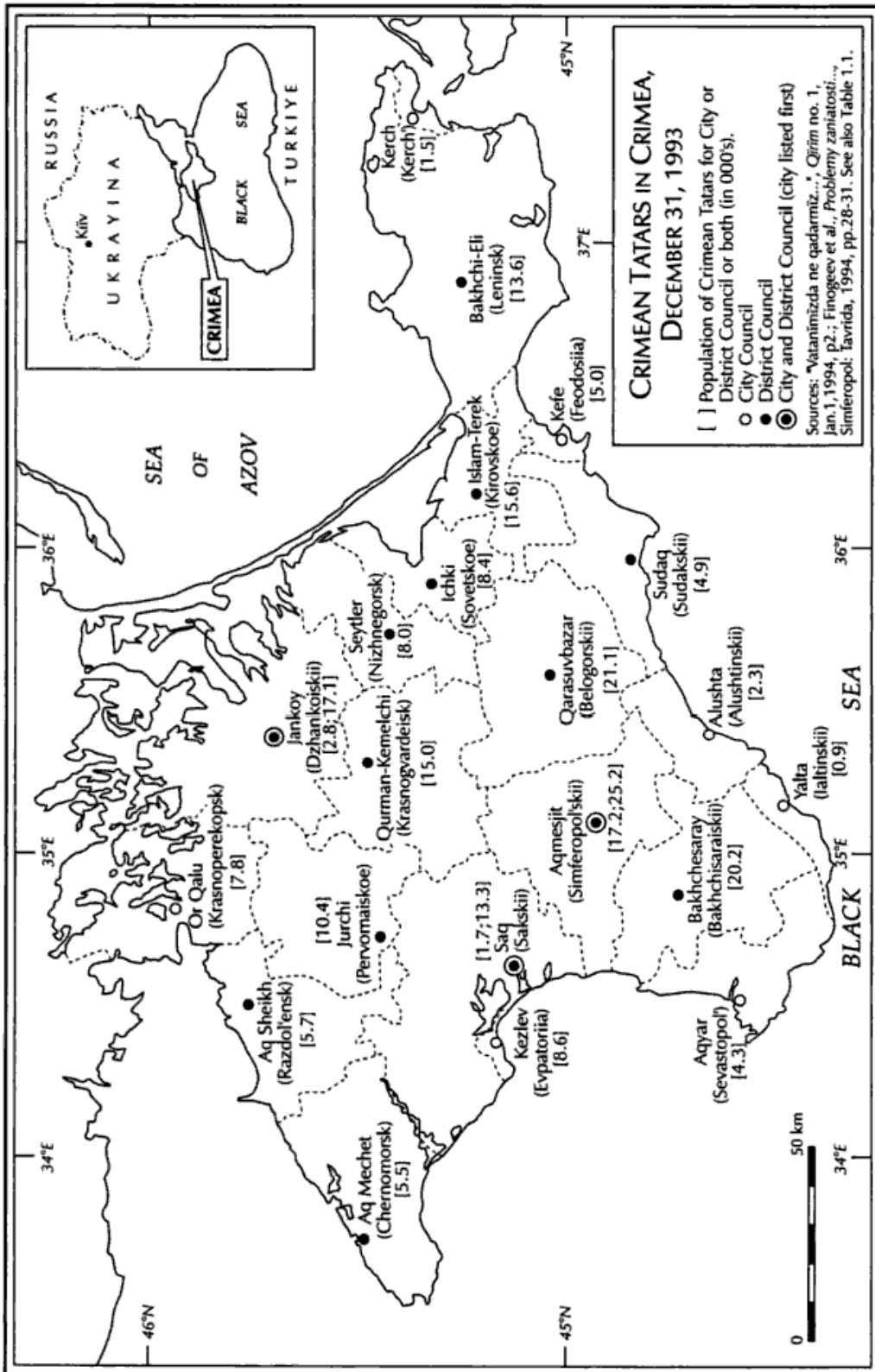


Image showing Crimean Tatar place-names and population density in 1993. From Allworth, xvi.

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