

## The Crimean Tatars: A Quarter of a Century after Their Return

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### Abstract

The article looks at the position of the Crimean Tatars, seventy years after their mass Deportation from Crimea in 1944, and twenty-five years since they were able to begin to return to Crimea in 1989. It concentrates on the politics of their position since Viktor Yanukovich was elected President of Ukraine in 2010, looking at arguments within their ranks and at government attempts to play 'divide and rule'.

### Keywords

Ukraine; Minority rights; Crimea; Crimean Tatars; Political technology

In 1783, when the Russian Empire annexed the peninsula, the Crimean Tatars who had been the leading force in Crimea since the fourteenth century, were still the majority population, at just over 80%. Successive waves of out-migration reduced their number to 19% (218,000) on the eve of their mass Deportation by the NKVD in 1944. Almost half perished during the Deportation and in the difficult years in Central Asia that followed. Unlike many other 'deported peoples', they were not rehabilitated by Khrushchev

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in 1956, and were not allowed to return to Crimea in significant numbers until the end of the Gorbachev era, after 1989.

The pace of return has slowed since the early 1990s. By 2012, there were 266,000 Crimean Tatars back in Crimea, making up 13.6% of the local population. An estimated 100,000 remain in Central Asia, mainly in Uzbekistan, plus several million in the broader diaspora, mainly in Turkey. There are also around 5,000 other 'Former Deported Peoples' (FDPs) - Bulgarians, Armenians, Germans and Greeks - compared to the 100,000 who were deported in the 1940s. Unlike the Crimean Tatars, they have other homelands to return to. The Crimean Tatars are part of the broader family of ethnicities speaking one of the Turkic languages, but, despite historic links to the Ottoman Empire, Turkey is not their original home. They formed a separate national group, absorbing many local influences, in Crimea. Some Crimean Tatars therefore suggest that they should go by the simpler name of 'Crimeans' or *Qırımclar*.

The Crimean Tatars still face many acute difficulties after their return. They are a minority in what they consider to be their historic homeland, with their historical presence largely erased. Ethnic tensions are often acute, in a region of often severe geopolitical tension. Crimea is part of the new independent Ukraine, but Russia's influence and ability to stir up trouble is still considerable, though the Crimean Tatar issue is exploited by all sides, in Moscow, Kiev and the local Slavic majority. The Crimean Tatars themselves continue to face discrimination and often outright hostility on the ground and their socio-economic problems are severe.

### The HCNM Report

In August 2013 the OSCE's High Commission for National Minorities (HCNM) published a 'Needs Assessment' for the Crimean Tatars and the other FDPs in Crimea, for which I was the 'Academic Coordinator'. Interested readers can read the report at [www.osce.org/hcnm/104309](http://www.osce.org/hcnm/104309).

'Needs' were assessed under six headings: the legal and bureaucratic environment, including facilitating the return of remaining FDPs, mainly from Central Asia; socio-economic conditions; land, housing and property; education; language and culture, including religion and cultural heritage; and finally political participation and representation. The findings will be discussed in the second half of this paper. But the one thing that stood out during the preparation of the report was the importance of political problems, many of them artificial. In 2013 Ukraine was chair of the OSCE. May

2014 is the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Deportation in 1944. A commitment to upholding minority rights is the least that one might expect from the chair of the OSCE, but Ukraine, under President Yanukovich, has been dragging its feet and even showing signs of outright hostility to the leadership of the mainstream Crimean Tatar organisation, the Mejlis.<sup>1</sup> The explanation, an obsession with monopoly control of politics, via the corrosive techniques of ‘political technology’, bodes ill for long-term political stability on the peninsula. The authorities are playing with the scarecrow of Islamic radicalism – a phantom which may eventually become real if nothing is done to reverse the neglect of basic socio-economic conditions and cultural demands.

### **Relations under the Yanukovich Presidency**

There was, ironically, a small window of opportunity to improve relations between Kyiv and the Crimean Tatars after Yanukovich’s election in February 2010. Among outgoing President Yushchenko’s many failings was his neglect of the Crimean Tatar issue. According to the leaders of the Mejlis, “we were surprised by his indifference”,<sup>2</sup> the most plausible explanation for which was Yushchenko’s relative Ukrainian nationalism and his concern that Crimean Tatar demands for sovereignty were a threat to the Ukrainian state-building project on the peninsula.<sup>3</sup>

After 2010 the new head of the Crimean government was a close confidant of Yanukovich, *Vasyl Dzharty*. His first priority was to cement the power of Yanukovich’s Party of Regions in Crimea, but he was also powerful enough to be able to cut deals with the Crimean Tatars, symbolically attending the ‘Appeal to the Descendants’ at the would-be site of the Crimean Tatar mosque in Simferopol in March 2011. Dzharty, however, died in August 2011 and was replaced by *Anatoliy Mohyliov*, an altogether different figure. Mohyliov was in charge of the bulldozers which flattened Crimean Tatar businesses during a notorious confrontation at the disputed holiday/holy site of *Ai-Petri* in 2007, and has publicly referred to the Crimean Tatars as “Hitler’s henchmen” (the official but discredited reason for their Deportation

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<sup>1</sup> The Qurultay is an elected representative body claiming to represent all the Crimean Tatars, with 250 members. The Mejlis is its smaller plenipotentiary equivalent, whose 33 members exercise the Qurultay’s functions between sessions.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mejlis leader *Mustafa Dzhemilev*, 17 January 2010.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Crimean Tatars Dissatisfied with Yushchenko Statement’, 31 May 2005, [www.unpo.org/article/2565](http://www.unpo.org/article/2565).

in 1944).<sup>4</sup> Mohyliov did not have the same power to make compromises as Dzharty; Mohyliov also represented the narrowing of the governing elite in Crimea to a much smaller outsider group from east Ukraine, many from Yanukovych's home town of Makiivka (the newcomers are therefore known as the *Makedontsy*, like the 'Macedonians' from the north ruling the Greeks to the south).<sup>5</sup> Crimea under Mohyliov has also regained its reputation for outlandish corruption.

Even in the summer of 2010, however, the first scheduled meeting between Yanukovych and the Mejlis leaders did not go well. There was a stand-off after Yanukovych invited radical critics of the Mejlis.<sup>6</sup> The underlying issue was that Crimean Tatar voters had overwhelmingly backed his opponents in a closely-fought election (Yanukovych won by less than 900,000 votes). The leaders of the Mejlis stress that they "have always supported the national-democratic camp. We are a pro-Ukrainian force". They even "support integration into the EU and NATO".<sup>7</sup> All of which was anathema to Yanukovych, even before Ukraine's relationship with the EU hit the rocks in late 2013.

In fact, the Crimean Tatars often seem like the only 'pro-Ukrainian force' in Crimea. The local ethnic Ukrainian minority (24%, compared to 58% who are Russian) is highly Russified. It was only thanks to Crimean Tatar votes that a slim majority in Crimea, just 54%, voted to back Ukrainian independence in the crucial referendum in December 1991. In the 2004 election the 'orange' candidate Viktor Yushchenko won 15% in Crimea, helping towards overall victory, but the leaders of the Mejlis claim "12% of that was us".<sup>8</sup> In the 2010 election the Crimean Tatars provided the same bedrock support for Yuliya Tymoshenko's 12% of the vote in round one and 17% in round two (Yushchenko won 1.3% in round one).

The October 2010 local elections in Crimea saw a landslide victory for the Party of Regions, which was also able both to absorb many of the pro-Russian parties of the 1990s and squeeze the remaining centre parties.

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<sup>4</sup> Anatolii Mogilev [Mohyliov], 'V Krymu zreet konflikt po kosovskomu stsenariiu', *Krymskaia pravda*, 24 January 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Yulia Tyshchenko, 'The Crimean Paradoxical Personnel Map: The "Old Crimean" Guard against "New Makiivka" Clans', 23 November 2011, [www.ucipr.kiev.ua/publications/the-crimean-paradoxical-personnel-map-the-old-crimean-guard-against-new-makiivka-clans/lang/en](http://www.ucipr.kiev.ua/publications/the-crimean-paradoxical-personnel-map-the-old-crimean-guard-against-new-makiivka-clans/lang/en). Mohyliov was born in Russia, but worked in the Donetsk police from 1982, and headed the Makiivka police from 2000 to 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Yurii Zushchik, 'Krymskie tatory tak poliubili Yanukovicha, chto raskololis' na dva lageria', <http://vlasti.net/news/98789>.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Refat Chubarov, 17 January 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Effectively there was now a ‘two-party system in Crimea’ – with the Party of Regions and the Mejlis facing off against one another. The Party of Regions had first 48, then 80 seats out of 100 in the local Crimean Assembly,<sup>9</sup> compared to eight for the older pro-Russian parties, five for the Communists, two for the only remaining centre party, Strong Ukraine, and six for the Mejlis.<sup>10</sup> In the 2012 national elections to the Ukrainian Parliament, the Party of Regions won 52.3% in Crimea versus 13.1% for the opposition party Fatherland (which included Tymoshenko’s old party, though she herself was now in prison), the main choice for the Crimean Tatars, and 7.2% for the another opposition party UDAR. The Party of Regions won nine out of ten territorial seats.<sup>11</sup>

Reason number two for the new Ukrainian authorities to oppose the Crimean Tatars is therefore that they do not like two-party system. They would prefer one. Yanukovich has expressly stated this in private to the veteran Mejlis leader Mustafa Dzhemilev: the Mejlis was being punished for voting against him. Conversely, Yanukovich said to Dzhemilev, “Join my team, and all your problems will be over”.<sup>12</sup> More generally, the Party of Regions sees the Qurultay/Mejlis as an alien life form. The Party of Regions dislikes any independent political activity, and apathy is its greatest ally, as opposed to the alternative culture of resistance represented by the Mejlis.

In the scramble for votes in the run-up to the next Ukrainian presidential election in 2015, even the tiniest margin will be vital. The Crimean Tatars are the only independent voters left in Crimea. There were 266,000 Crimean Tatars in Crimea in 2012, about 13% of the population. But higher birth rates mean the percentage of Crimean Tatar schoolchildren in the system is already nearer 20%. The number of Crimean Tatars of voting age is therefore potentially as high as 180,000 (assuming a standard 32% are aged from zero to eighteen), so they will also command nearer 20% of the local vote by 2015. And traditionally their turnout has been high and solid majorities have voted as recommended by the Mejlis.

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<sup>9</sup> Since the constitutional settlement in 1995-6, the local Assembly, full name the ‘Supreme Council of the Republic of Crimea’, has had no powers to make ‘law’ (*zakon*), but can pass ‘decisions and resolutions’ (*rishennia ta postanovy*). See the Ukrainian Constitution at <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254%D0%BA/96-%D0%B2%D1%80>. So it is not a ‘parliament’.

<sup>10</sup> Tetyana Huchakova, ‘Crimean Politics: The Turn of 2011...’, *National Security and Defence*, no. 4-5, 2011 (Kiev), pp. 131–6, at p. 133; at [www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/files/category\\_journal/NSD122-123\\_eng.pdf](http://www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/files/category_journal/NSD122-123_eng.pdf). See also [rada.crimea.ua/structure/factions](http://rada.crimea.ua/structure/factions).

<sup>11</sup> See [cvk.gov.ua](http://cvk.gov.ua).

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Dzhemilev, 15 May 2013.

Finally, the power of the Party of Regions in Crimea is only skin-deep. As mentioned above, its leadership is now dominated by outsiders from Donetsk region. The local party is not well integrated in the national party. Only one local Crimean was high up on the Party of Regions' national party list in 2012.

Exaggerating the threat of the Crimean Tatars is therefore seen as a good way of consolidating support for the sometimes precarious local elite, which also faces a long-term threat from Russia, even though Russia's candidates (or more exactly the candidates seeking Russian support) did not do so well in the 2010 Crimean elections, when Russia spread its bets by backing a wide range of parties and politicians: 'Union', the Russia Block, the Communists, the Hrach-Volga Block, Inna Bohoslovska and Nataliya Vitrenko. But the Kremlin is currently heavily backing the machinations of Viktor Medvedchuk, Kuchma's former chief of staff and his 'Ukrainian Choice' NGO (vybor.ua). Medvedchuk now lives in Crimea. Putin is godfather to his daughter. He has plenty of money, but is not a plausible presidential candidate, other than as a 'spoiler' if Yanukovych is not playing ball. There is a danger that a 'Russian Project' in the Ukrainian elections due in 2015 might only succeed in Crimea, where it could take on more radical overtones.

This is despite Ukraine being tied more closely, economically, to Russia. Russian influence will only grow if Ukraine rejects the Agreements negotiated with the EU. And the Crimean Tatars will be even more isolated.

## **Divide-and-Rule**

Overall, after almost a quarter of a century back in Crimea, progress in integrating the Crimean Tatars and other FDPs has been frankly slow. Politically, the lack of progress might have been expected to produce more of a backlash and the growth of a more radical fringe. In fact, at the time of writing in late 2013, it is still the relative unity of the Crimean Tatar movement that stands out. This should be borne in mind, as the Yanukovych administration has been trying to create the opposite impression that the Crimean Tatar community is increasingly divided and the Qurultay is only one voice among many.

The authorities in Kyiv have returned to a hard-line policy of denying the claim of the Qurultay to be a quasi-parliament. Admittedly, the claim is a potential challenge to the sovereignty of any state, particularly as the Qurultay also passed a 'Declaration of National Sovereignty of the Crimean

Tatar People' back in 1991, which claims that 'Crimea is the national territory of the Crimean Tatar people, on which they alone have the right to self-determination'. The Qurultay has also often declared itself to be the only legitimate voice of the Crimean Tatar people. But a formula was found for circumventing this problem back in 1999. A 'Council of Representatives of the Crimean Tatar People attached to the President of Ukraine' was set up to give advice to the said president, and it just so happened that most of its members were leaders of the Qurultay/Mejlis. The Council met four times when Leonid Kuchma was President (until 2005), but only once under Yushchenko (2005–10).

But, as previously stated, Yushchenko's policy was basically one of neglect. Yanukovich's team has been reviving the corrosive practices of 'political technology' once thought buried by the Orange Revolution in 2004, both in Crimea and in Ukraine as a whole to actively 'manage' politics and disable challenges to their power. The trend is new, but the tactics are old (and obvious): divide-and-rule, the creation of scarecrows (*pugal*) and fake oppositions.

In August 2010 Yanukovich cut the size of the Council of Representatives from 33 to 19, only eight of whom were now members of the Mejlis. Dzhemliev was deposed as chair. But three places were suddenly given to the Milli Firka ('National Party').<sup>13</sup> The latter has been around since official registration in 2007, and takes its name from the first Crimean Tatar party originally established in 1917, but is widely seen as an artificial Uncle Tom party covertly playing the authorities' line. Moreover, a whole host of other projects have been launched in a spirit of divide-and-rule: the Crimean Tatar Popular Front in January 2012, the NGO *Sebat* and New Generation, all peddling either a collaborationist or faux-radical line.<sup>14</sup>

Pro-Russian Crimean Tatars are known locally as the 'Kazan Party', as they argue that everything is better for the Volga Tatars in Kazan. According to the Milli Firka leader Vasvi Abduraimov, for example: 'Russia has its Tatars, Ukraine has its [Tatars]. Only the attitude to them is different, for some reason. Crimean Tatars even in their homeland, in the Crimea, are not recognised as the titular nation.'<sup>15</sup> Abduraimov published a notorious

<sup>13</sup> 'Yanukovich Reduced the Composition of the Council of Representatives of the Crimean Tatar People by Almost Half', *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, 26 August 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Anvar Derkach, 'A New Crimean Front', *The Ukrainian Week*, 7 March 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Oleksandr Bohomolov, Serhiy Danylov and Ihor Semyvolos, 'The Crimean Political Space: Between the Russian and Islamic Worlds', *National Security and Defence*, no. 4-5, 2011 (op. Cit.), pp. 53–8, at p. 56. Original in Abduraimov, 'Tatarskie druž'ia i vrugi', *Poluostrov*, 29 October 2007.

open letter in September 2008, just after the war in Georgia, to Medvedev, Putin and Shaimiev, the then leader of Tatarstan, asking them ‘to defend the indigenous and other small ethnic groups in the Crimea from the nationalist-leaning official authorities in Ukraine’ – a fake threat if there ever was one.<sup>16</sup>

The Mejlis boycotted the new Council of Representatives after 2010, but Kyiv upped the ante in 2013 by parachuting in a Yanukovych loyalist, Lentun Bezazyev, to take it over. His deputy was Vasvi Abduraimov, head of the Milli Firka, who have called for the boycotting Mejlis representatives to be kicked out.<sup>17</sup>

The role of the Crimean Tatars in local government is also decreasing. In 2012–13 leading supporters of the Qurultay were removed from key positions in the Crimean Assembly and Cabinet of Ministers. The Mejlis deputy chair Remzi Ilyasov was replaced as head of the Crimean Assembly’s ‘Commission on Interethnic Relations and the Problems of Deported Citizens’ by Enver Abduriamov, a local ‘businessman’. Eduard Dudakov, head of the Republican Committee on Interethnic Relations, which oversees the FDP budget, was replaced by Refat Kenzhaliyev, former deputy head of the Crimean police and a close ally of Mohyliov.<sup>18</sup> The State Committee for Nationalities and Religion was disbanded in 2010.

The shift away from a more proportional election system also damages the Crimean Tatars. Currently, they have only one national MP in Kiev (out of 450), and only five in the Crimean Assembly (out of 100, one defected). Seats are more winnable at a local Crimean level; but Crimean Tatars are still under-represented, holding around 10% of seats on Crimean local councils. Less than 5% of local administration officials are Crimean Tatars, excluding the special case of the Nationalities Ministry (*Reskomnats*).

## The New Qurultay

Pressure from above and from the radical ‘opposition’ led to important changes for the election of the Crimean Tatars’ own elected body, the

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<sup>16</sup> Halya Cornash, ‘The Crimea’s Interests not Represented’, 15 September 2008, <http://www.khpg.org/index.php?id=1221486403>.

<sup>17</sup> “Milli Firka” calls on the President of Ukraine to renew the Membership of the Council of Representatives’, 27 August 2013, <http://krymtatar.in.ua/index/artstr/id/976>.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Mogilev [Mohyliov] “zachishchaet” krymskuiu vlast’ ot predstavitelei Medzhilisa’, 24 February 2013, [http://zn.ua/POLITICS/mogilev-zachischaet-krymskuyu-vlast-ot-predstaviteley-medzhilisa-117569\\_.html](http://zn.ua/POLITICS/mogilev-zachischaet-krymskuyu-vlast-ot-predstaviteley-medzhilisa-117569_.html).



Qurultay, in 2013. This was the sixth Qurultay. The first Qurultay was held in 1917; the revival Qurultay in 1991 was therefore deliberately named ‘the second’. New elections have been held every subsequent five years (the change of system meant the 2013 elections were a year late). With the authorities pressing to make the Qurultay look illegitimate, the new system was designed to make it more effective, more legitimate, and even more quasi-‘parliamentary’, as well as bringing in ‘new blood’.<sup>19</sup> The indirect elections of the past would now be replaced with direct votes (the idea was even floated to compress the old convoluted voting process into a one-day and headline-making Crimean Tatar ‘general election’, but deemed impractical). Two hundred delegates would now be elected from territorial constituencies (nearly all in Crimea, four elsewhere in Ukraine, one in Uzbekistan) and fifty on a PR basis for political parties and blocks. The Crimean Tatars organised their own ‘Central Election Commission’ to oversee the process, and worked with outside observers, including from the IRI.

The turnout was 50.5% (90,850 Crimean Tatars voted).<sup>20</sup> This might be a long-term decline from the higher levels of political engagement in the early 1990s, but worse had been feared. The turnout was also higher than that among all Ukrainian voters in the 2012 national Ukrainian parliamentary elections, which was only 49.4% in Crimea - the lowest vote for any region in Ukraine, where the national turnout was 58%.<sup>21</sup>

The main pro-Mejlis block Milliy Haq, which was headed by Dzhemilev’s long-time deputy Refat Chubarov, came first. The Crimean Tatar National

**Table 1** Elections to the sixth Qurultay, 2013 (PR vote)

Block	29,376 votes	18 seats
Milliy Haq Block		
İnkışaf	11,861	8
CTNMO	8,382	6
Qardaşlıq-Qarasu - Crimean Tatar Youth Centre Block	6,901	5
Crimean Federation of National Wrestling Kureş	6,728	5
Adalet	5,197	4
Maarifçi	4,587	4

<sup>19</sup> Martyn Bohun, ‘Krim’ki [sic] tatory stvoriuiut’ paralel’ni derzhavni struktury. Kurultai pratsiuvatyme yak parlament’, 15 February 2013; [http://texty.org.ua/pg/article/LPB2/read/43478/Krymki\\_tatory\\_stvorujut\\_paralelni\\_derzhavni\\_struktury\\_Kurultaj](http://texty.org.ua/pg/article/LPB2/read/43478/Krymki_tatory_stvorujut_paralelni_derzhavni_struktury_Kurultaj).

<sup>20</sup> ‘Results for Elections to Qurultay Known’, 19 June 2013, <http://qha.com.ua/results-of-elections-for-qurultay-known-127731en.html>.

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2012/wp063?PT001F01=900>.

Movement and Adalet ('Justice') party are also largely pro-Mejlis, as is the education NGO Maarifçi ('Educator'). Kureş was backed by the businessman Lenur Islıamov, who launched the Crimean Tatar mini-media project ATR (he also supported the film *Haytarma* – see below). The 'Youth Centre' claimed to be a constructive opposition.

İnkışaf ('Development') was in theory also a 'constructive opposition' based in Saksii region, backed by businessman Eskender Bilialov. However, it was accused of being a pro-Mohyliov front, via Crimean Vice Premier Aziz Abdulaiev, who was using 'administrative resources' (state pressure) to enlist support. İnkışaf's main purpose was supposedly to undermine the Mejlis where it was most vulnerable, by siphoning off business supporters and even businesses linked to leaders of the Mejlis.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, its campaign budget was large.<sup>23</sup> İnkışaf only won eight seats, but at least it made the elections more competitive, which might strengthen the Qurultay in the long run. Other elements of the Crimean Tatar 'opposition', like Milli Firka, boycotted the vote.

The first session of the new Qurultay in October 2013 led to a change of leader, with the retirement of veteran leader Mustafa Dzhemilev, born in 1943, whose youngest son was caught up in a murder case in May 2013, and his replacement by Refat Chubarov, who beat his rival Remzi Ilyasov, who is allegedly close to Aziz Abdulaiev, by 126 votes to 114. The new Mejlis was clearly more pluralistic, if not in a way of which old-style Mejlis leaders necessarily approved.

### The Needs Assessment

The first step towards a proper needs assessment is to be precise about facts and figures. Even the very size of the FDP population is disputed, in part because of the unclear legal environment. Ukraine has only held one post-Soviet census since the last all-Soviet census in 1989, and that was late, in 2001. Its successor is even later, still unscheduled in 2013. But we can say that the Crimean Tatar population has grown, albeit not at the rate expected during the early 1990s. The verified number is now 266,000, which is a

<sup>22</sup> Andrei Latinin, 'New Crimean-Tatar Project "Under Mogilev" is designed to keep the business of the Mezhlis and its "purse-holders"', *Novyi Region-Krym*, 31 May 2013, [www.nr2.ru/crimea/441532.htm](http://www.nr2.ru/crimea/441532.htm). Cf 'İnkışaf is not a project of Mohyliov, NGO's leader', 4 July 2013, <http://qha.com.ua/inkisaf-is-not-project-of-mohyliov-ngo-s-leader-128264en.html>.

<sup>23</sup> One source said 300,000 UAH (\$37,000), İnkışaf leaders claimed 40,000 UAH; İnkışaf is not a project of Mohyliov.

higher overall percentage, 13.6%, of the overall population of Crimea, as the latter has shrunk to under two million. Higher birth rates mean that the Crimean Tatar population is still expanding at +0.9% per annum, while the overall population of Crimea is declining by -0.4%. As already stated, Crimean Tatar children already make up 20% of the school population.

On the other hand, the number of other FDPs (Armenians, Bulgarians, Germans and Greeks) has not gone back to the levels of the 1940s, when just over 100,000 were deported, and stands at just under 5,000.

Legal status is the second key existential question after numbers, but there is no real legal mechanism to define the status of FDPs (the last attempt was vetoed by President Kuchma in 2004). The 1996 Ukrainian Constitution refers vaguely to the rights of 'rooted [indigenous] peoples', but does not say who they are (the rights of ethnic Ukrainians are separately defined). A mooted 'Law on Rooted Peoples' has never made much progress, but a Law on the 'Restoration of the Rights of Deported People on Ethnic Grounds' was passed by the Verkhovna Rada at first reading in June 2012, only for further progress to be stalled.

Other legal problems include the bureaucratic hurdles and high transfer costs that hinder the return of remaining FDPs, particularly from Uzbekistan. The 1993 Bishkek Agreement regulating conditions for the return of FDPs ran out in May 2013, and the Ukrainian authorities have not yet undertaken any efforts to renew it, despite the recommendations of both the Mejlis and the parliamentary Human Rights Committee.

Back in Crimea, land ownership needs to be properly legally defined, and a registry of ownership drawn up.

Ukraine's 2012 Law on Languages, which legalises the use of minority languages in areas with 10% or more minority population, was designed to expand the use of Russian, but has had paradoxical effects in Crimea. The proposal to raise the threshold to 30% would exclude the Crimean Tatars, who make up around 13% of the Crimean population. The Crimean Assembly refused to discuss the issue before the October 2012 elections.

Crimea is Ukraine's most uniformly Russian-speaking region - there are also severe problems with the use of Ukrainian as the state language. Crimean Tatar children are mainly taught in Russian, although some children of the elite study in the small number of Ukrainian schools. Crimean Tatars make up over 13.6% of the general population and 20% of the school-age population, but only 3% of children are taught in the Crimean Tatar language (though twice as many take it as an elective), and usually only for the first four years. After half a century in Central Asia, most Crimean Tatars are highly Russified. UNESCO categorises Crimean Tatar as an 'endangered

language'. There are only fifteen Crimean Tatar schools in Crimea; between 75 and 80 are needed. Crimean Tatar media is under-developed, and the infrastructure of cultural heritage is badly neglected. Place names were changed overnight in 1944 and have not been changed back. Attacks on Crimean Tatar mosques and cemeteries are frequent. The Kebir Cami Mosque in Simferopol has been returned to active use, but the building of the future Central Mosque on Yaltinskaya Street has been endlessly delayed.

The politics of memory still leads to culture wars in Crimea. Many local Slavs (both Russians and Ukrainians) still believe the 1944 Deportation was justified, because they still believe the discredited charges of collaboration with the Nazis. A textbook published in 2013 once again recycled these myths<sup>24</sup>; in contrast to a much more academic, but allegedly 'anti-Russian', four-volume history of the Crimean Tatars by the Russian scholar Valeriy Vozgrin, a former member of the Mejlis, also published in 2013.<sup>25</sup> Also released in 2013 was the path-breaking film *Haytarma*, which gave a harrowing account of the 1944 Deportation by dramatising the life of Amet-Khan Sultan, a Crimean Tatar who fought in the Soviet Air Force, to rebut the collaboration myth (the Mejlis has called for Simferopol Airport to be named after him).<sup>26</sup> The Russian Consul General to Crimea Vladimir Andreiev was eventually forced to resign after criticising the film. A similar row broke out when Russian actor Aleksey Panin used similar words to Mohyliov in 2008, attacking Crimean Tatars "whom Stalin had not finished off in 1944", after a road-rage incident in August 2013.<sup>27</sup>

There are also increasing divisions in the religious sphere, although many Crimean Tatars again claim they are artificial. Most Crimean Tatars belong to Sunni 'Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea' (DUMK), which is close to the Mejlis. Only about 10% of registered Islamic organisations are outside the DUMK, including various strains of radicalism;<sup>28</sup> but Mejlis leaders admit that the loss of religious and cultural traditions during the long years of exile often means that the young in particular are not

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<sup>24</sup> Vladimir and Maria Shirshovii, *Memory Book of Eastern Crimea. They asked to remember*, (Kirovskii, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Valeriy Vozgrin, *Istoriia krymskikh tatar*, (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Oksana Grytsenko, 'Haytarma', the first Crimean Tatar movie, is a must-see for history enthusiasts', *Kyiv Post*, 8 July 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Claire Bigg, 'Russian Actor in Trouble Over Crimean Tatar Remarks', *Radio Liberty*, 23 August 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russian-actor-offends-crimean-tatars/25084413.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Ali Tatar-zadeh, 'Four Islamic Lions on the Crimean Savanna', *Media Krym*, 4 July 2011, [http://risu.org.ua/en/index/studios/studies\\_of\\_religions/45605/](http://risu.org.ua/en/index/studios/studies_of_religions/45605/).

insulated against the leap straight into radicalism. The dominant Church in Crimea overall is the Moscow Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church, which is part of the parent Church in Moscow and is often openly hostile even to mainstream Islam (and not just to Islam, but to the rival Kyivan Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church). As of 2013, there were only 180 mosques in Crimea, compared to 3,000 before 1917.

The Crimean Tatars are not integrated economically. Unlike the population pattern before 1944, settlement in the southern coastal tourist zone is nowadays minimal. Three-quarters of the Crimean Tatar population is still rural. An estimated 75,000 FDPs are still living in temporary, uncompleted homes without any basic infrastructure. Between 8,000 and 15,000 still live in 'unauthorised settlements'. Conflicts over 'squatting' (*samozakhvaty*) are still frequent and often violent.

This is one area where money can make a basic difference. The Crimean Tatars' 'irregular constructions' still lack many basic amenities, particularly gas, water and sewage. They often live too far from public services in urban areas. Funds are badly needed for new schools, for the uncompleted Crimean Tatar University in Simferopol and for basic teaching materials.

A local building programme would also help with employment. Unemployment is not as high as might be expected, but the Crimean Tatars are highly dependent on self-employment. They are entrepreneurial, often because they face discrimination in mainstream public and private-sector employment, but their small trading economy is highly vulnerable in Crimea's highly criminalised economy and its numerous protection rackets.

Turkey has played an increasing role,<sup>29</sup> though one that was handicapped until recently by Kyiv's reluctance to give formal approval to the activities of the Turkish aid agency, TIKA. However, Ukraine's deteriorating relations with the EU and pressure from Russia, plus an unspoken desire to be another powerful state on the margin of Europe, has led to a rapprochement between Kyiv and Ankara since 2012. Despite propaganda about the influence of 'foreign Islam', Turkey is a more important force in Crimea than Saudi Arabia or the Gulf States. The Turkish Diyanet (the official 'Presidency of Religious Affairs') supports the mainstream Islam of the DUMK. If Ukraine continues to distance itself from the EU, the Crimean Tatars will inevitably look to Turkey even more.

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Goble, 'Turkey's Crimean Tatars Reach out to Their National Homeland', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 10, no. 120, 25 June 2013.

## **An International Forum**

Various sources estimate that between \$160 million and \$300 million has been spent in the national Ukrainian and Crimean budgets on the reintegration of FDPs since 1991, which is a substantial sum but still inadequate for the socio-economic situation in Crimea.

Since 2010 the Mejlis has been pushing the idea of an International Forum to provide a broader hearing for the problems of the Crimean Tatars. Such a Forum, in whatever format, could also serve as a donors' conference to raise money for the practical needs of FDPs. The Ukrainian authorities have not formally said either yes or no, but have stonewalled on the issue. Little progress was made in 2013, but a date nearer the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Deportation in 2014 would carry symbolic weight.

## **Conclusions**

Progress towards integration has been slow in the quarter of a century since mass return to the peninsula became possible in the late 1980s. Unlike so many other post-Communist movements, the discipline of the Mejlis has helped to keep the Crimean Tatar movement relatively united and relatively moderate, keeping the rise of the radical and faux-radical fringe at bay. All that may be under threat in the next quarter century. A more divided politics will make solving practical tasks that much harder.

## **Recent Developments**

This article was completed before Russia's annexation of Crimea, but can hopefully help shed light on the events. Putin has promised to upgrade the Crimean Tatars' status in a Russian Crimea, but the article explains why the leaders of the Mejlis are so sceptical. Crimea is now run by their Russian nationalist opponents, who have been demonising them since 2010 (and earlier). They fear that the pro-Russian 'Kazan Party' will be favoured by the new authorities and that the Mejlis could even be repressed after urging a boycott of Putin's 'referendum'.