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for Changing Nationalisms and Rival  
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# The Crimean Tatar Question: A Prism for Changing Nationalisms and Rival Versions of Eurasianism\*

Andrew Wilson

**Abstract:** *This article discusses the ongoing debates about Crimean Tatar identity, and the ways in which the Crimean Tatar question has been crucial to processes of reshaping Ukrainian identity during and after the Euromaidan. The Crimean Tatar question, it is argued, is a key test in the struggle between civic and ethnic nationalism in the new Ukraine. The article also looks at the manner in which the proponents of different versions of “Eurasianism”—Russian, Volga Tatar, and Crimean Tatar—have approached the Crimean Tatar question, and how this affects the attitudes of all these ethnic groups to the Russian annexation of Crimea.*

Key words: Crimean Tatars, Euromaidan, Eurasianism, national identity, nationalism—civic and ethnic

## Introduction

In the period either side of the Russian annexation of Crimea, the Crimean Tatar issue has become a lodestone for redefining the national identities of all the parties involved. The mainstream Crimean Tatar movement has been characterized by steadfast opposition first to the Yanukovich regime in Ukraine and then to Russian rule. This position has strengthened its longstanding ideology of indigenouness and special rights, but it has also

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belatedly cemented its alliance with Ukrainian nationalism. Meanwhile, Ukraine's would-be new supra-ethnic civic identity draws heavily on the Crimean Tatar contribution. Russia's attempted incorporation of Crimea has been hampered by its unwillingness to give proper space to Crimean Tatar identity, despite its promotion of a rival loyalist Crimean Tatar movement.

The Crimean Tatar issue is also a prism through which rival versions of the resurgent idea of Eurasianism are redefining themselves. Russian Eurasianism is the best known of these, both in general and as a cover story for the annexation of Crimea; but other versions and repudiations of the Eurasian idea have taken new forms in Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian circles, and also among the Volga Tatars of Kazan.

This article is in five parts. First is a brief historical background. Next, the Crimean Tatar issue is discussed as a factor in changing Ukrainian politics and identity debates. There then follows an analysis of debates within the Crimean Tatar movement, especially the conflict between the traditional ideology of indigenous rights and the Crimean Tatar version of Eurasianism. The latter is then compared with all-Russian and Volga Tatar versions of Eurasianism. Finally, the article examines identity debates within Crimea in 2014, finding that during that year, these debates were mainly focused on the doctrine of "Russian historical rights," meaning little space has been found for Crimean Tatar identity in occupied Crimea.

## **Background**

The Russian annexation of Crimea was formally declared on 18 March 2014. In his victory speech, Putin claimed that "in people's hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia," at least since the baptism of Vladimir (Volodymyr) the Great, prince of Kievan Rus', in 988. "Residents of Crimea," he continued, "say that back in 1991 they were handed over like a sack of potatoes," leaving them stranded when "the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders." In independent Ukraine "time and time again attempts were made to deprive Russians

of their historical memory, even of their language and to subject them to forced assimilation,” and in 2014 they were threatened by “terror, murder and riots” organized by the “nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites [who] executed this coup” in Kyiv. Russia’s role, however, was merely to facilitate “self-determination,” to “help create conditions so that the residents of Crimea for the first time in history were able to peacefully express their free will regarding their own future.”<sup>1</sup>

Subsequent studies have confirmed the initial impression that the real coup was in Crimea. The government was changed unconstitutionally after government buildings were occupied by Russian soldiers and the Ukrainian Berkut militia, after their role in the killings in Kyiv.<sup>2</sup> Plans for the coup had been laid through secret contacts with Crimean politicians several months in advance.<sup>3</sup> The crowds outside were organized by the same Crimean politicians,<sup>4</sup> and reinforced by bogus demonstrators flown in from Russia, but “to play the part of ordinary Crimeans.”<sup>5</sup> The referendum of 16 March on joining Russia was conducted under conditions of occupation, and the results were rigged.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to the official claim that 96.8% voted “yes” to union with Russia on a turnout of

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<sup>1</sup> “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” *President of Russia Official Site*, 18 March 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>. Unless otherwise stated, all URLs cited below were accessible on 3 March 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Taras Berezovets, *Aneksiia: ostiv Krym. Khroniky hybridnoi viiny* (Kyiv: Bright Star, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremlin’s Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), 274–79; Daniel Treisman, “Why Putin Took Crimea,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Rustam Temirgaliev, interviewed by Petr Kozlov, “Rustam Temirgaliev o razvitii sobytii, privedshikh k referendumu v Krymu,” *Vedomosti*, 16 March 2015, [www.vedomosti.ru/politics/characters/2015/03/16/esli-eto-imelo-opredelennu-yu-rezhissuru---rezhisseru-nuzhno-postavit-pyat-s-plyusom](http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/characters/2015/03/16/esli-eto-imelo-opredelennu-yu-rezhissuru---rezhisseru-nuzhno-postavit-pyat-s-plyusom).

<sup>5</sup> Zygar, *All the Kremlin’s Men*, 279; Sergei Kanev, “Geroi pod grifom ‘Sekretno,’” *Novaia gazeta*, 16 June 2014, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2014/06/16/59974-geroi-pod-grifom-171-sekretno-187>; and Sergei Kanev, “Spetsturisty,” *Novaia gazeta*, 2 July 2014, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2014/07/01/60170-spetsturisty>.

<sup>6</sup> Halya Coynash, “Myth, ‘Observers’ and Victims of Russia’s Fake Crimean Referendum,” *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 16 March 2016, <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1458089893&w=referendum>.

80.4%, the Russian Human Rights Council reported that the turnout was between 30% and 50%, of whom only 50%–60% voted for union.<sup>7</sup> The veteran Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev claimed that the Crimean Tatars' participation was minimal and that only 34% voted in Crimea overall.<sup>8</sup>

That said, there was a baseline of support for joining Russia—41% in a real poll held in early February;<sup>9</sup> and local politicians had pushed for Russian intervention as much as acting as Moscow's puppets (in an effort to save their positions from uncertain politics in Kyiv, but also to get rid of outsiders imposed on them by President Yanukovich).<sup>10</sup> But Crimea has not “always been an inseparable part of Russia.” It was first annexed by the Russian Empire in 1783. It was only “Christianized” or Russified after the Crimea War in 1853–56.<sup>11</sup> Previously, the Crimean Tatar Khanate had been the dominant force in the region for over three hundred years, having separated in the 1440s from the Golden Horde, which itself had conquered the peninsula in the thirteenth century. Kievan Rus' seems to have had no more than colonies in Crimea. Crimea was part of Soviet Ukraine after 1954, and independent Ukraine after 1991. Ukrainian historians

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<sup>7</sup> “Problemy zhitel'ei Kryma,” *Sovet pri Prezidente RF po razvitiu grazhdanskogo obshchestva pravam cheloveka*, 21 April 2014, [http://old.president-sovet.ru/structure/gruppa\\_po\\_migratsionnoy\\_politike/materialy/problemy\\_zhitel'ey\\_kryma.php](http://old.president-sovet.ru/structure/gruppa_po_migratsionnoy_politike/materialy/problemy_zhitel'ey_kryma.php) (though see the subsequent disclaimers).

<sup>8</sup> “Mustafa Jemilev: ‘In Fact 34,2% of Crimean Population Took Part in Pseudo Referendum on March 16,’” *Mejlis official web site*, 25 March 2014, <http://qtm.org/en/news/4373-mustafa-jemilev-in-fact-34-2-of-crimean-population-took-part-in-pseudo-referendum-on-march-16>. In a speech to the UN, he said 32%, “Crimean Tatars: Dzhemilev Fears Violence Under Russian Rule,” *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*, 7 April 2014; <http://unpo.org/article/17022>.

<sup>9</sup> “How Relations between Ukraine and Russia should look like? Public Opinion Polls’ Results,” *Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS)*, 4 March 2014, <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=236&page=1>.

<sup>10</sup> Kimitaka Matsuzato, “Domestic Politics in Crimea, 2009–2015,” *Demokratizatsiya* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 225–56. Unfortunately, Matsuzato bases some of his analysis around the “Korsun massacre,” an alleged attack on Crimeans by Ukrainian nationalists, for which little actual evidence exists.

<sup>11</sup> Mara Kozelsky, *Christianizing Crimea: Shaping Sacred Space in the Russian Empire and Beyond* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010); and Kelly O’Neill, *Southern Empire: The Logic and Limits of Russian Rule in the Crimea* (Yale University Press, forthcoming).



point to a long history of earlier engagement, with local Ukrainian Cossacks having a more intimate interaction with the peninsula than the northerly Muscovite state.<sup>12</sup>

Since the annexation, Ukrainian schools and media have been closed.<sup>13</sup> (At the last census in 2001, 24% of the population was Ukrainian, compared to 58% Russian, and 12% Crimean Tatar).<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Putin promised that the Crimean Tatars would be better treated by Russia than by Ukraine. But between 17,000 and 20,000 Crimean Tatars had left the peninsula by February 2016, according to Crimean Tatar leaders.<sup>15</sup> Disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, and ill treatment in Crimea have been documented by the OSCE,<sup>16</sup> and by the European Parliament. The NGO “Crimea SOS” kept a running count of cases of human rights violations, shown on a map of Crimea—279 as of 24 February 2017.<sup>17</sup>

### Kyiv’s Neglect

But Ukraine did not play its hand well, either. In so far as Kyiv had a “Crimea strategy” between the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and

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<sup>12</sup> Valerii Smoliiy (chief editor), *Istoriia Krymu v zapytanniakh ta vidpovidiakh* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> “Report of the Human Rights Assessment Mission on Crimea (6–18 July 2015),” *OSCE HCNM*, 8 September 2015, [www.osce.org/odihr/report-of-the-human-rights-assessment-mission-on-crimea](http://www.osce.org/odihr/report-of-the-human-rights-assessment-mission-on-crimea).

<sup>14</sup> See <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/>.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mustafa Dzhemilev, *RBK Ukraina*, 10 February 2016, [www.rbc.ua/rus/interview/dzhemilev-voprosu-deokkupatsii-kryma-udelyaets-ya-1455039385.html](http://www.rbc.ua/rus/interview/dzhemilev-voprosu-deokkupatsii-kryma-udelyaets-ya-1455039385.html).

<sup>16</sup> OSCE HCNM, “Human Rights Assessment Mission in Ukraine. Human Rights and Minority Rights Situation,” The Hague/Warsaw, 12 May 2014, [www.osce.org/odihr/118476](http://www.osce.org/odihr/118476). For other reports on the human rights situation in Crimea, see OSCE HCNM, “Report of the Human Rights Assessment Mission on Crimea (6–18 July 2015),” *OSCE HCNM*, 8 September 2015, [www.osce.org/odihr/180596](http://www.osce.org/odihr/180596); Andrii Klymenko, “Human Rights Abuses in Occupied Crimea,” *Freedom House/Atlantic Council*, March 2015, [www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/human-rights-abuses-in-russia-occupied-crimea](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/human-rights-abuses-in-russia-occupied-crimea); and “The Human Rights Situation in Crimea, in particular of the Crimean Tatars,” 3 February 2016, [www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P8-RC-2016-0173&language=EN](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P8-RC-2016-0173&language=EN).

<sup>17</sup> See the map at <http://crimeamap.krymsos.com/eng/map.html>.

Russian annexation in 2014, it was largely a defensive one. Russian-based separatism was seen as the main threat. Even this policy was myopic, however, as it assumed this would come in the form of a locally based movement, rather than external attack. Kyiv therefore concentrated on buying off that movement by turning a blind eye to the criminalization of the local elite—and was reluctant to push the Crimean Tatar issue too hard for fear of gifting that elite a mobilizational issue. Even when the supposedly Europeanizing Viktor Yushchenko was Ukrainian president from 2005 to 2010, according to Mustafa Dzhemilev, “we were surprised by his indifference.”<sup>18</sup> At their first official meeting in 2005, Yushchenko even asked the Crimean Tatars to drop their 1991 Declaration of Sovereignty—an exclusive historical claim to self-determination in Crimea (see below)—as less important than, and a threat to, Ukraine’s legal sovereignty.<sup>19</sup>

Ironically, it was Yushchenko’s successor, the Russian-speaking Viktor Yanukovych, who helped revive autonomist sentiment in Crimea before 2014 by so forcibly putting his own guys in charge. Everyone, including local Russian nationalists, Crimean Tatars, and Ukrainophiles, resented the rule of the so-called *makedontsy* (the “Macedonians,” the rulers from the north, a pun on the town of Makiivka in Yanukovych’s home region of Donetsk). According to Rustam Temirgaliev, Deputy Head of the Cabinet of Ministers of Crimea in the first half of 2014, there were two trends in Crimea over the winter of 2013-14: the first, “the wave that removed the ‘donetskies’ was bound up with the second trend—reunification with Russia.”<sup>20</sup> Resentment against the *makedontsy* shaped local politics more than the largely mythical threat of “Ukrainian fascism,” until Russian intervention shaped the final outcome.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Author’s interview with Mustafa Dzhemilev, 17 January 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Diliaver Osman, “Kryms’ki tatory i Ukraina: robota nad omylkamy,” *Krym. Realii*, 13 August 2014, <http://ua.krymr.com/a/2652910.html>.

<sup>20</sup> “Rustam Temirgaliev o razvitii sobytii.”

<sup>21</sup> Temirgaliev was a Volga Tatar, but with a Crimean Tatar wife, who tried to steer a middle course, compromising with the occupying authorities, in the spring of 2014; but Russia soon lost interest in such policies.

Kyiv's neglect of the Crimean Tatars was a multiple error. Mainstream Crimean Tatar ideology was based on the same underlying principle of indigenous rights as Ukrainian nationalism. Clearer support for their cause would have helped to deflate the grandiose and ahistorical Kremlin narrative about "eternal Russian" Crimea, and to combat broader Russian attempts to undermine Ukrainian identity and history as a whole. The Crimean Tatars were also the best organized political force on the peninsula—their 12% (13% by 2014) of the population made much more impact on local politics, at both governmental and street level, than the 24% who were Ukrainian but highly Russified.

In fact, Kyiv had abdicated so much power on the peninsula by the 2010s that Crimean Tatar leaders could claim "we are a pro-Ukraine force... sometimes we are the only pro-Ukrainian force."<sup>22</sup> The constitutional mechanisms that Kyiv introduced in the 1990s to subordinate local political institutions proved ineffective in 2014, when a majority of local politicians and bureaucrats simply swapped sides. Mustafa Dzhemilev complained that the local security forces had "mostly been trained to fight Crimean Tatars" rather than Russian separatists.<sup>23</sup> Dzhemilev's successor Refat Chubarov summed up his view of the situation in May 2016: twenty-three years of neglect had "led to the [paradox] that the positions of the Ukrainian authorities on the peninsula were the weakest [of all]. Russia took advantage of this."<sup>24</sup>

By contrast, Kyiv kept the main Crimean Tatar political institution at arm's length. The Qurultay, and its smaller plenipotentiary body the Mejlis, was chosen in well-organized elections every five years from 1991. But Kyiv argued that a de facto parliament challenged the authority of the Ukrainian state. President Leonid Kuchma devised a compromise in 1999, setting up a "Council of Representatives of the Crimean Tatar People Attached to the President of Ukraine"—a formulation that disguised the fact

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<sup>22</sup> Author's interview with Refat Chubarov, 17 January 2010.

<sup>23</sup> "Mustafa Dzhemilev: We are Being Trapped," *Kyiv Weekly*, 16 May 2014.

<sup>24</sup> "Chubarov nazval prichinu poteri Ukrainoi Kryma," *Lenta.ru*, 19 May 2016, <https://lenta.ru/news/2016/05/19/chubarov/>.

that its membership was basically the Mejlis. The Council concentrated mainly on practical issues like citizenship and education, but Kyiv felt unable to commit many resources to addressing the returnees' greatest everyday concerns, which were land and housing.

### Debating Ukrainian Crimea

Nor did Kyiv ever make a strong case for the Ukrainianness of Crimea. As a result, Kyiv had no strong narrative to back up the principle of the inviolability of state borders when Russia violated it in 2014. Only since the annexation has there been a rediscovery of the earlier writings on this issue, which was first raised by Ukrainian intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As these earlier texts show, the twin issues of Crimea and the Crimean Tatars have long been a part of Ukrainian identity debates, though not always pulling in the same direction.

For the historian Mykhailo Hrushevskyi (1866–1934), Crimea was the third Ukraine. The first two Ukraines were Galicia in the west, which connected Ukraine to Germanic Europe, and the central Dnipro region, with its historical ties to Russia. The outlet to the south via Crimea, and the north–south axis in general, were the key factors encouraging the consolidation of the other Ukrainian elements, which, once they were a consolidated part of an independent Ukrainian state, would allow Ukraine to become a regional leader rather than an object of struggle between east and west.<sup>25</sup> For the geographer Stepan Rudnytskyi (1877–1937), Crimea and the Black Sea completed the natural geographical space of Ukraine's north-south river systems: “the whole Ukrainian nation took its way southeast along the Ukrainian rivers. To this day [writing in 1918] the national territory of the Ukraine is advancing irreversibly in that direction.”<sup>26</sup> Without the Black Sea, Ukrainian

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<sup>25</sup> Hennadii Korol'ov, “Nova Ukraina bez Rossii: chornomors'ka oriientsatsiia u pohliadakh Hrushevs'koho,” in his *Federalizm Mykhaila Hrushevs'koho: mify, uivlennia, proekty* (Kyiv: Institute of History, 2012), 167–85.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Rudnitsky, *Ukraine. The Land and its People* (New York: Ukrainian Alliance of America, 1918), 230–31.

civilization would be circumscribed, pressed back north into the forest zone.

For the nationalist geographer Yurii Lypa (1900–44), Ukraine was a natural “vault,” the northern shore of the “Black Sea fortress.”<sup>27</sup> Crimea was therefore the key to a future Ukrainian geopolitics. The “integral nationalist” thinker Dmytro Dontsov (1883–1973), writing in 1919, likewise argued that “Sevastopol with Crimea is the key to [potential future Ukrainian] rule over the [then Russian] Hinterland,” that is, the interiors of Eurasia, “which in 1855 [before the Paris Conference that ended the Crimean War] was Russia and is now Ukraine.”<sup>28</sup> For Lypa, Crimea and the Black Sea were also the link to a wider world and a future chain of alliances in the Caucasus, Turkey, and the Middle East. Russia’s apparent domination of Eurasia would not last: in the not-too-distant future a Ukrainian quadrant in south-west Eurasia would be a natural ally of a Central Asian quadrant, while the Chinese pushed towards Siberia—Russia would be left with historical Muscovy in the north-west.<sup>29</sup>

Lypa’s doctrine was more of a claim to Crimea than recipe for a healthy relationship with the Crimean Tatars. Rudnytskyi and Lypa were strong opponents of Russian imperialism and claimed not to believe in any Ukrainian equivalent; but they did approve of a form of Ukrainian colonialism, that is, the supposedly “natural” expansion of Ukrainian settlement into neighboring lands. In Lypa’s case this involved the explicit threat of displacing the Crimean Tatars.<sup>30</sup> “In Crimea the Ukrainians are winning the battle of blood. The Tatar population is no more than a quarter,” he wrote in 1941, before the Deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944. “Experiments with blood and anthropological measures,” he continued, “show that the Tatars long ago lost their anthropological identity in Crimea

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<sup>27</sup> Yurii Lypa, *Chornomors’ka doktryna* (Odesa: Ukrainian Black Sea Institute, 1942), 9.

<sup>28</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, “O hranytsiakh Ukrain’skoi derzhavy pid vzhliadom politychnym,” 1918, reprinted in *Istoriia Krymu*, 314.

<sup>29</sup> Yurii Lypa, *Rozpodil Rosii* (L’viv: Instytut Narodoznavstva, 1995—reprint of the 1941 edition), 52 and 61.

<sup>30</sup> Lypa, *Chornomors’ka doktryna*, 15–17.

and have become Ukrainians by blood, leaving only the Tatar language.”<sup>31</sup>

## Ukrainian Orientalism

There is a Ukrainian version of Orientalist scholarship, however, which has been characterized by more understanding of and support for the Crimean Tatar cause.<sup>32</sup> The Ukrainian Orientalist tradition is less well known than its Russian “Eurasian” counterpart. Part of its *raison d’être* is to deny the claims of the Russian version; consequently, unlike its Russian counterpart, it does not make universalist claims for the whole of Eurasia,<sup>33</sup> and is more concerned with cultural and historical links than geopolitics.

For the founding father of Ukrainian Oriental studies, Ahatanhel Krymskyi (1871–1942), whose surname indicates his partly Crimean and Lipka (Lithuanian) Tatar origins, Crimea was a channel for healthy cultural synthesis between Ukraine and the east. Thomas Prymak, Krymskyi’s second-generation disciple, has argued that “interactions between Ukraine and [broadly] Turkey have played a large role in the formation of modern Ukrainian culture, in which the Cossack era is so prominent.”<sup>34</sup> According to a series founded by Likbez, an online and publishing project aimed at Russian speakers, in 2016:

Traditional Ukrainian historiography (history writing) usually centers on the history of just the Ukrainians. But the existence of nomads, the Golden Horde and the Crimean Khanate are also important for us. The Crimean Tatars are, apart from the Ukrainians, the only people in contemporary Ukraine who have their own separate state history here. It was precisely the

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<sup>31</sup> Lypa, *Rozpodil Rosii*, 73–74.

<sup>32</sup> Dmitri Shlapentokh, “From Russian to Ukrainian Eurasianism: The New ‘Historical’ Friends and Enemies,” *Asian Ethnicity* 14, no. 4 (2013): 449–66.

<sup>33</sup> Tatiana Zhurzhenko, *Borderlands into Bordered Lands: Geopolitics of Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2010), 53.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Prymak, “Slightly Slanted Eyes? Ukrainians, Turks and Tatars,” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 23 October 2011, updated in December 2015 at [www.slideshare.net/ThomasMPrymak/slightly-slanted-eyes](http://www.slideshare.net/ThomasMPrymak/slightly-slanted-eyes).

Crimean Tatars who activated and stimulated the appearance of Ukrainian Cossackdom, which began the creation of modern Ukraine.<sup>35</sup>

This inter-relationship supposedly outweighed religious tensions. According to the historian Valerii Vozgrin (see below), “Crimea played for the Sich [the Cossacks’ military base] the very important role of natural counterweight to powerful ‘fraternal’ Christian states.”<sup>36</sup> And vice versa: the Cossacks fought for, or alongside the Crimean Tatars: “the Litva-Rus state supported the establishment of the Crimean state.”<sup>37</sup> A recent popular series of books on military weapons and uniforms has sections on both Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars, depicting them fighting together against common enemies more often than against each other.<sup>38</sup> It has been argued that this tendency towards mutual influence and mutual aid happened “spontaneously, without any prior arrangement, in a neighborly, human manner.”<sup>39</sup> More likely, it served political and military purposes.<sup>40</sup>

The modern-day emphasis on a historiography of “partnership” was most evident in a book published by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory ([memory.gov.ua](http://memory.gov.ua)) in 2016. The book is entitled *Nash Krym* (“Our Crimea”), a clear rejoinder to the Russian nationalist slogan *Krym nash!* (“Crimea is ours!”). Key chapters talk of “How the Cossacks with the Crimean Tatars defended Crimea from the Turks” in the seventeenth century; parallel fates in the eighteenth century, when “both peoples [the

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<sup>35</sup> Olena Bachyns’ka et al., *Lytsari dykoho polia. Pluhom i mushketom. Ukrains’kyi shliakh do Chornoho moria* (Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2016), 3–4. “Litva” is normally mistranslated as the medieval Grand Duchy of “Lithuania.” The author calls it “Litva-Rus” to stress the Slavic influence in the state. The series grew out of the online project at [likbez.org.ua](http://likbez.org.ua).

<sup>36</sup> Valerii Vozgrin, *Istoriia krymskikh tatar. Ocherki etnicheskoi istorii korennykh naseleniia Kryma v chetyrekh tomakh* (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2013), vol. 1, 633.

<sup>37</sup> Bachyns’ka et al., *Lytsari dykoho polia*, 3–4.

<sup>38</sup> See, pre-eminently, K. A. Lypa and O. V. Rudenko, *Viis’ko Bohdana Khmel’nyts’koho* (Kyiv: Nash chas - Ukrains’ka militarua istoriia/Zhyva istoriia, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Vozgrin, *Istoriia krymskikh tatar*, vol. 1, 635.

<sup>40</sup> Communication with Professor Paul Robert Magocsi, 28 February 2017.

Cossacks and the Crimean Tatars] lost their independence”; and the “Ukrainian-Crimean Tatar union of the revolutionary era” in 1917.<sup>41</sup>

In another Ukrainian book published in 2017, *Russian Myths about Ukraine and her Past*, a whole section is devoted to debunking common Russian tropes about the Crimean Tatars, and exposing them as divide-and-rule tactics. One myth was that “Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars are irreconcilable neighbors, between whom there neither was nor is any alternative to fierce competition.” Another was that “Turks and Tatars strove to enslave Ukrainians and convert them to Islam. The switch to Russia’s supremacy saved Ukraine from Turkic-Tatar expansion.” Third was the Russian myth that “Ukrainian Cossacks led a sacred religious war as Christians against Turks and Tatars.”<sup>42</sup> On the contrary, the two were natural allies against Muscovy, and “the Crimean Khanate had neither the strength nor any plans to absorb Ukrainian lands.” “Throughout its history,” the Khanate was always open to, and tolerant of, Cossack settlers—a “free Ukrainian population” existed in Crimea “since the times of Kievan Rus’.”<sup>43</sup>

As well as mutual stimulus, there was cultural intermingling. According to Prymak again, “there are about 4,000 current Ukrainian words of Turkic origin, about the same as the number of Arabisms in modern Spanish.”<sup>44</sup> Contrary to Lypa’s abovementioned claim of a one-way process of Crimean Tatar assimilation, there has in fact been centuries of ethnic intermingling and mutual influence (even if this was partly because of the Crimean Tatars’ role in the local slave trade). According to Prymak, “Islamic slavery was never quite the same as plantation slavery in the ancient world or in America”; manumission was common and “integration and assimilation were not the exception, but rather the rule... Among the

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<sup>41</sup> Yaroslav Antoniuk *et al.*, *Nash Krym: nerosiis’ki istorii ukrain’skoho pivostrova* (Kyiv: KIS/Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, 2016), 11, 10 and 131.

<sup>42</sup> “Mify pro Krym,” in Viktor Brekhunenko, *Viina za svidomist’: Rosiis’ki mify pro Ukrainu ta ii mynule* (Kyiv: Ukrainian Institute of Archaeology, 2017), 229–52.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 237 and 242.

<sup>44</sup> Prymak, “Slightly Slanted Eyes?”



present-day Crimean Tatars, there is most certainly a good dose of Slavic and Ukrainian blood.”<sup>45</sup>

For some Ukrainians, the need for a common front with the Crimean Tatar cause was clear before the 1944 Deportation (in Crimean Tatar, *Sürgünlük*), especially after their separate attempts to establish independent statehood both ended in failure after 1917. Oleksandr Shul’hyn (Shul’gin/Shulgin, 1889–1960), the former foreign minister of the short-lived Ukrainian National Republic, reflecting on the issue in 1934, argued in favor of overcoming historical tensions:

Crimea—a land of mixed population where no one has a majority—was once a stronghold of the Crimean Tatars, our historical enemy-allies but now our friends. Ukraine has always respected and will respect the national rights of the former state rulers of Crimea, and we are certain that Ukraine has and will be the surest friend of the Tatars in the struggle for the freedom of Crimea from foreign pretensions.<sup>46</sup>

That said, the Ukrainian nationalists of the 1930s were largely based in inter-war Poland; and were unable to influence wartime events in Crimea in 1941–44. Later, however, a handful of Ukrainian dissidents of the 1960s and ‘70s like Petro Grigorenko agitated for the Crimean Tatar cause alongside the Ukrainian. The idea of *parallel statehood* began to develop.<sup>47</sup> Because the Crimean Tatar state-building project had historically proceeded in tandem with the Ukrainian project, it was its natural ally in the present day. Some form of self-rule for the Crimean Tatars in Crimea was therefore not an alternative to Ukrainian rule over the peninsula, but was in fact the best means of securing that rule.<sup>48</sup> Claims to a truly *Ukrainian* statehood in Crimea have to rely on Hrushevskyy’s argument that Kievan Rus’ was

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<sup>45</sup> Prymak, “Slighted Slanted Eyes?”; and Paul Robert Magocsi, *This Blessed Land: Crimea and the Crimean Tatars* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 48.

<sup>46</sup> Oleksander Shul’hyn, *Bez terytorii: ideolohia ta chyn Uriady U.N.R. na chuzhyni* (Paris: Mech, 1934), 102.

<sup>47</sup> “Parallel statehood” is a key theme in the book by the Kapranov brothers, *Mal’ovana istoriia Nezalezhnosti Ukrainy* (Kyiv: Hamazyn, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> The Crimean “Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic” was part of the Russian Republic when Lypa *et al.* were writing in the 1930s and early 1940s.

really Ukraine–Rus’, or go back to earlier periods like the Scythian era.<sup>49</sup> According to one far-from-nationalist commentator, Kost’ Bondarenko, “the Khans of the Giray dynasty [the Crimean Khanate’s ruling family, direct descendants of Genghis Khan] are just as much ‘our’ national heroes as the Cossack Hetmans.”<sup>50</sup> But it took the events of 2013–14 to really accelerate the process.

### The New Civic Ukraine

It has become commonplace to talk of the emergence of a new Ukrainian civic nationalist identity associated with the Euromaidan and the war in the east. But there has been much debate as to whether it was cause or consequence, and came before or after Russia’s interventions. Ukraine has also seen a parallel rise in *both* a new civic and ethnic nationalism.<sup>51</sup> The new Ukraine has embraced multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional realities that were often seen as a source of weakness in the past. The Crimean Tatars are a key part of this new positivity towards pluralism. In fact, given the centrality of the Crimean issue, they are arguably the key part. But at the same time, there has been a reinvention, even a “Europeanization” of some strands of Ukrainian nationalism, i.e. the growth of an anti-Islamic animus more typical of the Front National in France or the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands.<sup>52</sup>

There were positive attitudes towards Crimean Tatars in Ukrainian “liberal circles” before 2014, but at a mass cultural level it was only “after the annexation of Crimea that everyone in mainland

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<sup>49</sup> Mykhailo Videiko, *Ukraine from Trypillia to Rus* (Kyiv: Krion, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Kost’ Bondarenko, *Istoriia v profil’* (Kyiv: Znannia, Fund of Ukrainian Politics, 2012), 11.

<sup>51</sup> For example, Volodymyr Kulyk, “National Identity in Ukraine: Impact of Euromaidan and the War,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 4 (June 2016): 588–608; and Winfried Schneider-Deters, “Euromaidan, Rebirth of the Ukrainian Nation, and the German Debate on Ukraine’s National Identity,” *Euromaidan Press*, 27 November 2015, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/11/27/the-euromaidan-the-rebirth-of-the-ukrainian-nation-and-the-german-debate-on-ukraines-national-identity/2/>.

<sup>52</sup> Tadeusz A. Olszański, “Ukraine’s Wartime Nationalism,” *OSW Commentary*, no. 29, 28 August 2015, [www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary\\_179\\_o.pdf](http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_179_o.pdf).

Ukraine started to adore and love [sic] Crimean Tatars,”<sup>53</sup> with a fashion for Crimean Tatar cuisine being matched by the success of films such as the big-budget *Haytarma* (“Return”) (2013), by Akhtem Seitablaiev, about a Crimean Tatar pilot in the Soviet air force at the time of the 1944 Deportation, and *Return with the Dawn* (2013) and *Sensiz* (“Without You”) (2016) by the young director Nariman Aliev. The Deportation is now commemorated in mainstream Ukrainian media in a spirit of solidarity. The Crimean Tatar singer Jamala was chosen to represent Ukraine in the 2016 Eurovision Song Contest with her song “1944,” partly to further this process, and won.

The Crimean Tatars were also a useful fit for the manner in which many Ukrainian intellectuals sought to characterize the Euromaidan. The “revolution and the nation it forged,” it has been argued, “should not be conceptualized in terms of fixed identities,” but through “publicly expressed ideas and values.”<sup>54</sup> Crimean Tatars could therefore fight for, and even symbolize, the new multi-ethnic cause. Mustafa Dzhemilev agreed: “Only in Ukraine, can ‘Banderites’ protect synagogues, Jews create self-defense hundreds [the name for decentralized groups of self-organized protestors in the Euromaidan events], Russians become Ukrainian nationalists and Crimean Tatars shout: Crimea—is Ukraine!”<sup>55</sup>

Optimists like the analyst Abdulla Rinat Mukhametov claim a unique role for the Crimean Tatars in “today’s Ukraine as a special subject,” and as a leading part of the new Ukrainian “political nation.”<sup>56</sup> This is supposedly in sharp contrast to Russia, where “the specific interests of Muslims and particular Muslim peoples are not represented at the federal level.” Mukhametov paints a possibly one-

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<sup>53</sup> Emine Ziiatdinova, “Kak menialas’ identichnost’ krymskikh tatar,” *Lb.ua*, 11 July 2016, [http://blogs.lb.ua/dictaphone/339926\\_menyalas\\_identichnost\\_krimskih.html](http://blogs.lb.ua/dictaphone/339926_menyalas_identichnost_krimskih.html).

<sup>54</sup> Ilya Gerasimov, “Ukraine: The First Postcolonial Revolution,” *Aspen Review*, no. 3 (2015), [www.aspeninstitute.cz/en/article/3-2015-ukraine-the-first-postcolonial-revolution](http://www.aspeninstitute.cz/en/article/3-2015-ukraine-the-first-postcolonial-revolution).

<sup>55</sup> Quoted by Sergei Naumovich on Facebook, 13 August 2015, [www.facebook.com/sergonaumovich/posts/449816821864692](http://www.facebook.com/sergonaumovich/posts/449816821864692).

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Paul Goble, “I’m Proud to Be a Ukrainian,” Crimean Tatar Leader Says,” *Window on Eurasia*, new series, 26 February 2016, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.co.uk/2014/02/window-on-eurasia-im-proud-to-be.html>.

sided picture of the Crimean Tatars' "loyalty and patriotism toward Ukraine."<sup>57</sup>

The logo of the "Free Crimea" NGO (Figure 1, below) depicts this new symbolic unity by intertwining the two national symbols—the Ukrainian trident and the Crimean Tatar *damğa*—as reverse images of one another in the same family tree. According to the logo's designer, artist Andrii Yermolenko,

The tree that symbolizes the Tatar genus [*rid*] grows from these powerful roots. So does the Ukrainian. I painted this family tree on the logo. Tatar Crimea and Ukrainian Crimea grow from the same root. I wanted to show that Crimea is Ukrainian, and that Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians are one political nation.<sup>58</sup>



Figure 1. Logo for the "Free Crimea" NGO, by Andrii Yermolenko. Source: [freecrimea.com.ua](http://freecrimea.com.ua).

Crimean Tatars were increasingly prominent in Ukrainian politics and society after 2014. Sevhil Musaieva was editor of the leading internet site *Ukrains'ka Pravda*. Emine Dzheppar was the First Deputy Minister for Information Politics. Crimean Tatar leaders Mustafa Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov were resident in Kyiv after having been banned from Crimea for five years. But the

<sup>57</sup> Goble, "I'm Proud."

<sup>58</sup> "Andrii Yermolenko: Kryms'ki Tatory i Ukraintsi—tse odna politychna natsiia," *Islam v Ukraini*, 9 February 2015, <http://islam.in.ua/ua/novyny-u-krayini/andrii-yermolenko-krymski-tatory-i-ukrayinci-ce-odna-politychna-naciya>.

brain drain also arguably increased the self-isolation of the Crimean Tatars left in Crimea, particularly given their association with the Ukrainian national cause.

Official policy in Kyiv towards the Crimean Tatars has shifted belatedly since the annexation—but not as far as many would want. In March 2014 the Ukrainian parliament recognized the Crimean Tatars as a “rooted people” (see below) and the Mejlis as the “higher representative organ of the Crimean Tatar people.”<sup>59</sup>

In November 2015 parliament classed the 1944 Deportation as “genocide.”<sup>60</sup> But parliament has yet to follow through with a detailed law on Crimean Tatar rights. There are signs that this situation may change, however; in 2016, an official conference was held under the slogan “One root—three peoples,” that is, accepting that the Crimean Tatars, Krymchaks, and Karaim are the three native peoples of Crimea (on which more below).<sup>61</sup> A similar slogan, “Three Peoples—One Root: Karaim, Crimean Tatars, and Krymchaks” was used in official promotional materials produced for the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, on 9 August 2017, providing some belated recognition of the claim to “rootedness” (see Figure 2 below).

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<sup>59</sup> See the law at <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1140-vii>.

<sup>60</sup> See the law at <http://zakon5.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/792-19>.

<sup>61</sup> “MIP predstavil rolik ‘Odin koren’—tri naroda’ (VIDEO),” *QHA*, 8 August 2016, <http://qha.com.ua/ru/obschestvo/mip-predstavil-rolik-odin-koren-tri-naroda-video/163818/>.



Figure 2. Source: “Try narody—odyn korin”—Mininformpolityky stvorylo rolyk do dnia korinnykh narodiv,” *Islam v Ukraini*, 10 August 2017, <http://islam.in.ua/ua/novyny-u-krayini/try-narody-odyn-korin-mininformpolityky-stvorylo-rolyk-do-dnya-korinnykh-narodiv>.

There has been some progress towards the theoretical recognition of some kind of Crimean Tatar ethnic autonomy in occupied Crimea,<sup>62</sup> a proposal that Kyiv had ignored before 2014. There was also some talk of setting up a Crimean Tatar autonomous district just north of Crimea in Kherson, on territory formerly controlled by the Crimean Tatar Khanate,<sup>63</sup> or of a government-in-exile or Mejlis Muftiat operating in continental Ukraine.<sup>64</sup> In June 2016, President Poroshenko proposed changing Chapter Ten of the Ukrainian Constitution to guarantee, albeit in carefully-chosen non-specific words, “the inalienable right of the Crimean Tatar people to self-determination as part of a sovereign and independent Ukrainian

<sup>62</sup> See for example the mock billboard “Welcome to the Crimean Tatar National Autonomy” at <http://qha.com.ua/en/politics/billboard-welcoming-to-crimean-tatar-republic-set-up-at-entrance-to-crimea/134148/>.

<sup>63</sup> Anastasiia Rinhis, “Chubarov: Vony znushchait’sia nad kryms’kymy tataramy, a Ukraina postachaie im tovary,” *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 10 September 2015, [www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2015/09/10/7080788/](http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2015/09/10/7080788/).

<sup>64</sup> “Krymskie tatory sozdaui Muftiat na materikovoi chaste Ukrainy: ‘V Krymu on polnost’iu podchinen okkupantu,’—Dzhemilev,” *Tsenzor.net*, 4 January 2016, [http://censor.net.ua/news/367898/krymskie\\_tatory\\_sozdadut\\_muftiyat\\_na\\_materikovoyi\\_chasti\\_ukrainy\\_v\\_krymu\\_on\\_polnostyu\\_podchinen\\_okkupantu](http://censor.net.ua/news/367898/krymskie_tatory_sozdadut_muftiyat_na_materikovoyi_chasti_ukrainy_v_krymu_on_polnostyu_podchinen_okkupantu).

state.”<sup>65</sup> In September 2016 parliament voted to change the status of Crimea from a territorial to a Crimean Tatar national autonomy, and a draft law was introduced to this effect in April 2017—though critics claimed going ahead with the measure would only further alienate the Russian majority in occupied Crimea. Others have proposed granting the Crimean Tatars, or the Crimean Tatar language, special rights at a national level, even proposing Crimean Tatar language classes for all students in all schools.<sup>66</sup>

### **The New Ukrainian Nationalism and the Crimean Tatar Question**

Ukrainian nationalists have also rethought their attitude towards the Crimean Tatars, though not universally. The need to oppose Russian aggression against Crimea has pushed the issue to the forefront, as has the Crimean Tatars’ disproportionate contribution to the Euromaidan demonstrations and to the war in the east, and their leading role in the protests against annexation.

But Ukrainian nationalists and the Crimean Tatars have not always been allies. For many traditional Ukrainian nationalists, Crimea is supposed to be Ukrainian land, and while denying it to Russia has been the priority,<sup>67</sup> this has certainly not meant a friendly attitude towards the Crimean Tatars. The OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) depicted the Crimean Tatars as just as much an enemy as the Russians, Jews, or Poles. The OUN “Decalogue,” for example, a nationalist version of the Ten Commandments first published in 1929, refers mystically to “the Spirit of the eternal

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<sup>65</sup> “Poroshenko: Maiemo vnestu u Konstytutsiiu prava kryms’kykh tatar na samovyznachennia u skladi Ukrainy,” *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 28 June 2016, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2016/06/28/7113064/>.

<sup>66</sup> “Krym otrymaie shyroku avtonomiiu abo kryms’ka mova bude ofitsiina po vsii Ukraini—Ali Tatar-zad,” *Gazeta.ua*, 6 July 2016, [http://gazeta.ua/articles/mova-zavtra/\\_krim-otrimaye-shiroku-avtonomiyu-abo-krimska-mova-bude-oficijna-po-vsij-ukrayini-ali-tatarzade/708780](http://gazeta.ua/articles/mova-zavtra/_krim-otrimaye-shiroku-avtonomiyu-abo-krimska-mova-bude-oficijna-po-vsij-ukrayini-ali-tatarzade/708780).

<sup>67</sup> The Crimean “Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic” was part of the Russian Republic when Lypa *et al.* were writing in the 1930s and early 1940s.

element that has kept You from Tatar floods,” as the would-be guiding force of the new revolutionary nationalism.<sup>68</sup>

But even the right-wing fringes had begun to rethink their attitudes in the 2000s. In 2005 the activist Vasylyl Ivanyshyn wrote an influential article “The Crimean Knot,” in which he argued that “Crimea in its current state is a delayed-action mine under the sovereignty and even the very statehood of Ukraine.”<sup>69</sup> A Crimean rather than Crimean Tatar Republic, he argued, was a breeding ground for potential Russian separatism. According to the group Tryzub (“Trident”), which Ivanyshyn helped found, in 2005:

The Crimean Tatars do not have their national metropolis outside Ukraine. The Ukrainian land is their only native land, from which they were forcibly deported by the imperial-communist regime, and therefore they have the right to return to their native land. In Ukraine, the Crimean Tatars are not [just] a national minority, but the indigenous population of this part of the Ukrainian land on which they became a nation. Only in Ukraine can the Crimean Tatars focus as a nation and take care of their comprehensive national revival self-affirmation of statehood, and guarantee their future. For us, the national rights of the Crimean Tatar people, their desire for their own national state is natural, undeniable, and beyond discussion. This desire can be realized: a) only on the territory of Ukraine; b) only under the flag of the Ukrainian national idea and within a Ukrainian national state; c) only with the participation and assistance of the Ukrainian nation; d) only in the form of Crimean Tatar-Ukrainian autonomy.<sup>70</sup>

Other nationalist parties like Svoboda have been less generous, however.<sup>71</sup> So too has the notorious Azov battalion, founded by the group Patriot of Ukraine in 2014, which has supposedly reinvented itself with reference to “contemporary European neo-Nazism

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<sup>68</sup> The text can be found at [https://uk.wikisource.org/wiki/Декалог\\_українськог\\_о\\_націоналіста](https://uk.wikisource.org/wiki/Декалог_українськог_о_націоналіста).

<sup>69</sup> “Krymsk’yi vuzol’ Vasylya Ivanyshyna,” *Banderivets*, 9 October 2015, <http://banderivets.org.ua/krymskyj-vuzol-vasylya-ivanyshyna.html>.

<sup>70</sup> “Prohrama realizatsii ukrains’koi natsional’noii idei u protsesi derzhavotvorenna,” *Tryzub*, 20 August 2005, <http://dontsov-nic.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Nasha-prohrama.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> “Eduard Leonov: Teperishnia zlochynna vlada v svoikh utyskakh kryms’kykh tatariv ne daleko vidiishla vid komunistychnykh poperednykiv,” *Svoboda*, 18 May 2013, [www.svoboda.org.ua/diyalnist/novyny/039190/](http://www.svoboda.org.ua/diyalnist/novyny/039190/).



instead of Banderite<sup>72</sup> traditions,<sup>73</sup> and tried to exploit pan-European sentiments against radical Islam, campaigning against a mosque in L'viv. Azov also participated in the blockade of Crimea in 2015–16 (see below), but simultaneously took pains to proclaim that “We are in support of Crimea being Ukrainian, and not Tatar. We are not there to support the Tatars.”<sup>74</sup>

Refat Chubarov has accused Russia of promoting radicals from the international pan-Islamic organization Hizb ut-Tahrir “to show the world ‘bad’ Crimean Tatars,”<sup>75</sup> but has also expressed some solidarity with arrested members of that organization.<sup>76</sup> Statements of this kind are only likely to inflame the radical Azov type of Ukrainian nationalism.

### “Rootedness”

The great paradox of contemporary Crimean Tatar nationalism is that its key principles have moved to the forefront of public debate precisely at a time when the Crimean Tatars have lost control of their homeland. The central tenet of Crimean Tatar nationalism is that the Crimean Tatars are “rooted” in Crimea.<sup>77</sup> The Russian word for this is *korennoi* (“rooted”); the Ukrainian is *korinnyi*. In English one might say “indigenous,” or “autochthonous,” but the botanical association built into the Slavic terms is significant, suggesting as it does a claim to an organic linkage between territory and ethnicity. According to this concept of indigeneity, ethnic and national groups

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<sup>72</sup> Stepan Bandera was the leader of the more radical branch of the OUN.

<sup>73</sup> Olszański, “Ukraine’s Wartime Nationalism,” 1.

<sup>74</sup> Halya Coynash, “Ukraine’s Police Must Not Collaborate with Azov Xenophobes,” *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 3 February 2016, <http://khp.org/en/index.php?id=1454456536>.

<sup>75</sup> “Rosii namahaet’sia pokazaty svitu ‘pohanykh’ kryms’kykh tatar—Chubarov,” *Hromads’ke TV*, 27 January 2017, <http://hromadske.ua/posts/rosiia-namahaet-sia-pokazaty-svitu-pohanykh-krymskykh-tatar>.

<sup>76</sup> “U Krymu shche 2 kryms’kykh tatar zvyuvatyly u prychnosti do ‘Khizbut-Tahrir,’” *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 18 April 2016, [www.pravoda.com.ua/news/2016/04/18/7105912/](http://www.pravoda.com.ua/news/2016/04/18/7105912/).

<sup>77</sup> Nataliya Belitser, *Kryms’ki tatory yak korinnyi narod: istoriia pytannia i suchasni realii* (Kyiv: Ministry of Information Policy, 2016), [http://mip.gov.ua/files/pdf/blicer\\_pro\\_krimtat.pdf](http://mip.gov.ua/files/pdf/blicer_pro_krimtat.pdf).

may often move or resettle, but they are “rooted” in a given territory if their development as a cultural group took place there.

The Crimean Tatars accept that the Krymchaks and Karaim are also *korenye* to Crimea. Both groups are Jewish, but speak a language close to Crimean Tatar. The Krymchaks write in Hebrew characters, and the Karaim language is Hebrew-influenced. Like the Crimean Tatars, both groups claim to predate the Mongol incursion of the thirteenth century and are de facto an agglomeration of many local ethnicities. But neither group had their own state to rival the Crimean Tatar claim on Crimea, and both are in any case small in number. In 1897 there were 3,300 Krymchaks and 5,400 Karaim (the Karaim were then a privileged merchant class, officially distinguished from both Ashkenazi and Krymchak Jews), but the 2001 Ukrainian census counted only 280 Krymchaks and 715 Karaim (the 2014 exercise by the Russian occupying authorities recorded 228 and 535).<sup>78</sup>

The Crimean Tatar Khanate was a dynastic state. The idea of ethnic “rootedness” developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, after Crimea was annexed by the Russian Empire in 1783, although pan-Turkism overlapped with the Young Tatars’ (*Genc Tatarlari*) idea of “island Crimea” as a natural homeland, propagated by intellectuals like Üsein Abdurefioğlu Bodaninsky (1877–1938), Osman Nuri-Asanoğlu Aqçoqraqli (1878–1938), Noman Çelebicihan (1881–1918), and Cafer Seydamet Qırımer (1889–1960). Çelebicihan in particular is an important symbol of modern Crimean Tatar identity: he helped found the political parties Vatan (“Fatherland”) and the original Milli Firka (“National Party”—see below), served as both President and Mufti of the Crimean People’s Republic in 1917,<sup>79</sup> wrote the national anthem, and was murdered by

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<sup>78</sup> See <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/> for the Ukrainian census. For the disputed Russian version, see “Tablitsy s itogami Federal’nogo statisticheskogo nabliudeniia ‘Perepis’ naseleniia v Krymskom federal’nom okruge” (sic), *Federal’naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki* website, [www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/population/demo/perepis\\_krim/tab-krim.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/demo/perepis_krim/tab-krim.htm).

<sup>79</sup> A Qurultay (“assembly”) of 76 delegates was elected by universal Crimean Tatar suffrage on 17 November 1917. The 1991 Qurultay was therefore dubbed the

the Bolsheviks in 1918. Çelebicihan established good relations with the Ukrainian People's Republic in Kyiv, and is used as a symbol of the Crimean Tatars' alignment with Ukraine today, even though in real life he was also inclined towards negotiating with Bolsheviks in 1917–18 (which didn't stop them assassinating him).

Paradoxically, pan-Turkism was only definitively replaced by the idea of a separate Crimean Tatar nation under Soviet rule.<sup>80</sup> As throughout the USSR, the promotion of “ethnogenesis”—the affirmation of as ancient a history as possible for the titular peoples of the Soviet republics<sup>81</sup>—was part of the official ideology of the national communist period of the 1920s. The official name of the policy was *korenizatsiia* (“putting down roots”). The homogenizing effects of Soviet rule, especially the creation of “a common Crimean Tatar grammar and language based on the central mountain dialect,”<sup>82</sup> helped smooth over what were still then substantial differences between three main ethnic sub-groups: the coastal Yaliboyu, mountain Tats and steppe Nogai. Arguably, this process was remained incomplete until the common trauma of Deportation and enforced exile after 1944.<sup>83</sup> This idea of homeland was also ironically reinforced by the Soviet authorities' reluctance to ease the conditions of exile, or to create stable conditions for the Crimean Tatars in Central Asia, and by the long campaign to return to the homeland that began in the 1960s.<sup>84</sup> The political aim and the organization around it became a defining feature of Crimean Tatar

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“second.” After the Bolshevik seizure of power, the Qurultay proclaimed the Crimean People's Republic, which lasted until the Bolsheviks took over Crimea in January 1918.

<sup>80</sup> Brian Glyn Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: From Soviet Genocide to Putin's Conquest* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015), 59–60; Magocsi, *This Blessed Land*, 98–99.

<sup>81</sup> The Crimean ASSR created in 1921 was named after the peninsula, not after any ethnic group; but some commentators have argued that ethnic rights were just as important as in Dagestan or Nakhichevan; Williams, *Crimean Tatars*, 59–60.

<sup>82</sup> Williams, *Crimean Tatars*, 75.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 150; and Ye. S. Kul'pin, *Krymskie tatarsy i vyzovy XXI veka* (Simferopol: ARIAL, 2014), especially 45–58, “Transformatsiia krymsko-tatarskogo etnosa (1944–1996).”

<sup>84</sup> Brian Glyn Williams, “The Crimean Tatar Exile in Central Asia: A Case Study in Group Destruction and Survival,” *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 2 (1998): 285–317.

identity in itself, helping to explain the tenacity of resistance to Russian annexation after 2014.

The central reference point for modern Crimean Tatar nationalism is the Declaration of National Sovereignty passed by the Qurultay in 1991, which declares that “Crimea is the national territorial autonomy of the Crimean Tatar people, on which they alone possess the right to self-determination.”<sup>85</sup> According to Chubarov, “Our principles, our demands are that the Crimean Tatars in all circumstances must live on their own land. I know that the Karaites, and Krymchaks follow exactly the same opinion.”<sup>86</sup>

The idea of Mongol origin is rejected, because it is useful to Russian nationalists. If the Crimean Tatars only arrived in the thirteenth century, then that allows Russia to claim precedence and pre-eminence from what was in reality a patchy pattern of Slavic settlement before then.<sup>87</sup> One Russian *History of Crimea* rushed out in 2015, compresses the history of the Crimean Tatar Khanate into only one of thirteen chapters, after long sections depicting Crimea as the “northern outpost of the Byzantine empire” and before discussing the Imperial and Soviet eras.<sup>88</sup>

In the Mejlis version of Crimean Tatar identity, Crimean Tatar history is much older. The Mongol influence was only added onto that of other native elements. Crimean Tatar identity is itself “civilizational,” a mixture of ethnic traditions, which were allowed to mingle in a spirit of toleration. This view is best expressed in the massive four-volume *History of the Crimean Tatars: Sketches of an Ethnic History of the Rooted Population of Crimea*, published in 2013

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<sup>85</sup> Andrew Wilson, “Politics in and Around Crimea,” in Edward Allworth (ed.), *Tatars of the Crimea: Return to the Homeland* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 281–322.

<sup>86</sup> “Krymskie Tatory dolzhny zhit’ na svoiei zemle—Chubarov,” *Ukrinform.ru*, 9 August 2016, [www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-community/2064227-krymskie-tatory-dolzny-zit-na-svoej-zemle-cubarov.html](http://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-community/2064227-krymskie-tatory-dolzny-zit-na-svoej-zemle-cubarov.html). See also Chubarov’s remarks at a launch of Vozgrin’s book *Istoriia krymskikh tatar* in Simferopol’ on 14 August 2013, at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GR8N76RMno4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GR8N76RMno4).

<sup>87</sup> “Krymskie tatory: mify i real’nost’,” *Istoričeskaja pravda*, 7 March 2014, [www.istpravda.ru/research/8156/](http://www.istpravda.ru/research/8156/).

<sup>88</sup> S. Z. Kodzova (chief editor), *Istoriia Kryma* (Moscow: Russian Military-Historical Library, 2015). See also Kirill Kochegarov, *Krym v istorii Rossii* (Moscow: Russkoe slovo, 2014).

by Valerii Vozgrin, who is Russian but a native of Simferopol. His magnum opus was endorsed by the Mejlis,<sup>89</sup> after which he lost his job in Russia. According to Vozgrin, “Crimean Tatar ethnoculture” was itself an agglomeration of four cultures: “the Mediterranean (Christian), Islamic (Moorish), Steppe (predominantly Turkish) and German-Scandinavian (Goth).”<sup>90</sup> According to another author,

many waves of humanity came to the Crimea—the Scythians, the Goths, the Genoese, the Tatar-Mongols ... but the Crimean Tatars never came here [i.e. they have always lived here]... The nation of Crimean Tatars emerged and formed itself in the Crimea as a result of long-term, comprehensive and mutual assimilation of residues of the original inhabitants of Crimea: Tauri,<sup>91</sup> Cimmerians with the Sarmatians, Scythians, Pechenegs, Polovtsians, Goths, Genoans, Greeks and other newcomer peoples. From this complex “conglomerate” a new ethnic unit emerged—the Crimean Tatar people, with its distinctive national culture, language, religion, traditions, customs and a clear identity, national economy, market, territory, statehood, and capital cities.<sup>92</sup>

Despite annexation and repression since 2014, this idea of rootedness is still strong, expressed in the slogan *Qirim-Millet-Vatan* (“Crimea-Nation-Homeland”). One influential Facebook post by Nariman Dzhelial, the deputy chair of the Mejlis, criticized the older generation’s idea that it was enough just to “live in our homeland”—unity and action were what mattered, he insisted.<sup>93</sup> But he still argued that Crimean Tatars should stay in Crimea,

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<sup>89</sup> “History of Crimean Tatars’ by Vozgrin Presented in Crimea,” *QHA*, 15 August 2013, <http://qha.com.ua/en/society/history-of-crimean-tatars-by-vozgrin-presented-in-crimea/129253/>.

<sup>90</sup> Vozgrin, *Istoriia krymskikh tatar*, vol. 1, 351–52.

<sup>91</sup> The Tauri, mentioned by Herodotus, gave their name to the Russian terms Tavrida or Taurida. Their origins are obscure—different theories have them as remnants of the Scythians, Cimmerians, or related to the Abkhaz.

<sup>92</sup> Yurii Osmanov, *Pochemu Krym—istoricheskaiia rodina krymskotatarskogo naroda?* (Simferopol: Biznes-inform / NDKT, 2012 version), 8 and 9. Osmanov headed the supposedly more “moderate” NDKT party in the 1990s (see below).

<sup>93</sup> Post by Nariman Dzhelial, 13 May 2016, [https://mobile.facebook.com/15minut.kiev/posts/480626958789511?\\_\\_mref=message\\_bubble&\\_rdr](https://mobile.facebook.com/15minut.kiev/posts/480626958789511?__mref=message_bubble&_rdr).

despite all the persecutions.<sup>94</sup> Another article on Crimean Tatar identity in 2016 emphasized patriotism, tolerance, non-violence, and the role of education as “almost a cult.”<sup>95</sup> According to the sociologist Ol’ga Dukhnich, there are three components in the “ensemble... of Crimean Tatar identity,” namely: “cultural identity based on tradition... political identity linked to political ambitions... [and] religious identity.” Dukhnich also agreed that, “Another feature that we have seen mainly in young people is the identity of a citizen of Ukraine.”<sup>96</sup> The Crimean political scientist Lenora Diul’berova added that generations of protest movement and consequent traditions of “political communication” and “political subjectivity” were also part of Crimean Tatar identity.<sup>97</sup> The Crimean Tatars had been appealing to the international community for fifty years: they were used to couching such appeals in the universal language of human rights, rather than the cultural framing of *ummah*.

The religious component of Crimean Tatar nationalism may now be reviving after declining in the years of Soviet exile. But, like the “new Ukraine,” albeit to a lesser degree, the Crimean Tatars themselves are also a new civic nation. What matters is not “ethnic purity,” but commitment to the cause. Not all of those who joined the Crimean Tatar battalions fighting in the east or blockading Crimea (see below) were Crimean Tatar. There is some flexibility when it comes to defining ethnicity—Jamala, winner of the Eurovision Song Contest and widely recognized as Crimean Tatar, was born in Osh, Kyrgyzstan to a Crimean Tatar father and an Armenian mother. In general, many Crimean Tatar communities have a long history of intermingling with other groups, including Azov Greeks.

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<sup>94</sup> “Nariman Dzheljal: Krymskie tatory dolzhny ostavat’sia v Krymu,” *QHA*, 5 January 2016, <http://qha.com.ua/ru/obschestvo/nariman-djelyal-krimskie-tatari-doljni-ostavatsya-v-krimu/153351/>.

<sup>95</sup> “Krymskie Tatory. Who We Are?” *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 16 May 2016, [www.pravda.com.ua/rus/columns/2016/05/26/7109808/](http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/columns/2016/05/26/7109808/).

<sup>96</sup> Cited in Mustafa Chaush, “Identichnost’ krymskikh tatar posle anneksii Kryma: zashchitnaia reaktiia i otsutstvie dialoga,” *Krym.Realii*, 13 November 2014, <http://ru.krymr.com/a/26689906.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Chaush, “Identichnost’ krymskikh tatar.”

The alternative possibility would be the emergence of a radical and fundamentalist strain within Crimean Tatar Islam. Before 2014, ironically, that possibility was constrained by the hegemonic position of the Muftiate; since 2014, its control over Crimean Tatar religious life has weakened. Many radicals left in the first wave of exiles in 2014; and it is hard to tell how much of the local “extremist” threat is real or a FSB invention. But if the Crimean Tatars remain alienated and unintegrated, the possibility will grow over time.

## Tatarism

The Mejlis strongly rejects “Tatarism”—the ideology positing the existence of a pan-Tatar identity shared by Kazan Tatars, Crimean Tatars, and Bashkirs. From 1944 to 1989 the adjective “Crimean” was not used administratively—according to Soviet ideologues, the exiled Crimean Tatar diaspora was simply part of the broader Tatar nation based in Kazan.<sup>98</sup> But Mejlis supporters have dismissed the very term “Tatar” as a “mythological ethnonym.”<sup>99</sup> They argue, for example, that, “In fact the actual words ‘Tatar-Mongol,’ [hardly appear] in the Crimean Tatar language, four to five times less than in Russian”;<sup>100</sup> and that, “The Crimean Tatars are not the same as the ‘Mongol-Tatars.’ Deriving the Crimean Tatars from any other ‘Tatars’ only on the basis of the consonance of ethnonyms is totally unscientific; the term ‘Tatar’ has too many completely different meanings.”<sup>101</sup> Consequently, there has been a long-running campaign to drop the term “Tatar” altogether and leap-frog to the more straightforward ethnonym of “Crimean,” *Qirimli* or *Kirimli*—the latter being the title of a film on Crimean Tatar history made by Burak Arliel in 2014.

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<sup>98</sup> R. Bukharaev, “Kazanskie i krymskie tatary: odna natsiia—dva naroda?” *LiveJournal*, 21 November 2008, <http://ulr.livejournal.com/91930.html>.

<sup>99</sup> “Mificheskii etnonim ‘Tatary,’” *Avdet*, 7 April 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Osmanov, *Pochemu Krym—istoricheskaiia rodina krymskotatarskogo naroda?*

<sup>101</sup> Sergei Gromenko, “Krymskie tatary—eto ‘mongolo-tatary’? Mif i razvenchanie,” *Krym.Realii*, 1 August 2016, <http://ru.krymr.com/a/27891416.html>.

The rejection of “Tatar” identity and resistance to the use of “Tatarism” as a means of pulling the Russian version of Eurasianism more towards Asia leads to the emphatic claim that the “Crimean Tatars are a European people” (a claim made easier by the similar stance of the Kemalist tradition in Turkey). Thus, for example, Dzhemilev has argued that, “Many European peoples took part in the ethnogenesis of the Crimean Tatars. This didn’t happen without Turkic tribes and Mongols. But in appearance only ten percent of Crimean Tatars are Mongol.”<sup>102</sup> The idea of a European identity also has its roots in the long history of the Crimean Tatar movement’s appeals to international organizations.<sup>103</sup> Official Mejlis policy is therefore (perhaps surprisingly) unequivocal. According to Dzhemilev, “we support Ukraine’s integration into the EU and NATO.”<sup>104</sup>

In Russian historiography, the Crimean Tatar Khanate is often depicted as little more than a slave-trading enterprise, or as an empty vessel, a channel for pan-Islamic or pan-Turkish Ottoman Russophobia. In the *History of Crimea* published in Moscow in 2015 it is baldly stated that “the flourishing of the peninsula [only] began after the return [sic] of the Russian population” after 1783.<sup>105</sup> According to Vozgrin, however, the Khanate was both a substantial civilization in its own right, and a second al-Andalus, home to a “Proto-Renaissance” from the fourteenth century, with a tolerant, open society. The Khanate allowed the flourishing of historical Christian communities (mainly Armenian and Greek) and of the two varieties of local Judaism. “The humanism of Islam in contrast to the European [version],” Vozgrin argues, “was universal.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> “Krymskie tatarı—yevropeiskii narod,” *Avdet*, 10 November 2015, <http://avdet.org/ru/2014/11/10/krymskie-tatary-evropejskij-narod/>.

<sup>103</sup> Gul’nara Bekirova (ed.), *Mustafa Dzhemilev: “Na protiazhenii desiatiletii golos krymskikh tatar ne byl uslyshan...”*: *Materialy k biografii, vystupleniia, interv’iu* (Kyiv: Stilos, 2014).

<sup>104</sup> Author’s interview with Dzhemilev, 17 January 2010.

<sup>105</sup> Kodzova (ed.), *Istoriia Kryma*, 4.

<sup>106</sup> Vozgrin, *Istoriia krymskikh tatar*, vol. 1, 336 and 361. Section four is called “The Proto-Renaissance in Crimea.” See also Gul’nara Abdulaeva, *Bitvy iz istorii Khrymskogo Khantsva. Ocherki* (Simferopol: Krym uchpedgiz, 2013).



## The Crimean Tatars, the Euromaidan, War, and Blockade

The Crimean Tatars' strong support for Ukrainian statehood and for a European Ukraine made them early supporters of the Euromaidan protests. Official participation was organized by Akhtem Chiigoz, deputy chair of the Mejlis. The first big trip to bring supporters from Crimea came as early as the week beginning 26 November 2013.<sup>107</sup> But many other Crimean Tatars made their own way, especially students from Kyiv, L'viv, and Kharkiv, helped by the local NGO "Crimean Fraternity in Kyiv" run by two Crimean Tatar businessmen, the Umerov brothers Rustem and Aslan. By the beginning of December 2013 more than a hundred were present on the Maidan.<sup>108</sup> A Crimean Tatar "hundred" was formed in January 2014. Its leader Isa Akaev showed some sympathy for Right Sector,<sup>109</sup> with sporadic contacts between Crimean Tatars and right-wing activists developing at this time. And in Crimea, as even Temirgaliev admitted, at the crucial moment just before the coup, and even though he had used Party of Regions' money to assemble a crowd, "our supporters numbered a little less than those of the Mejlis—somewhere like 60 to 40 in favor of the Mejlis."<sup>110</sup> Hence the need for bogus demonstrators brought in from Russia to sway the balance.<sup>111</sup>

When the war in east Ukraine began later in 2014, this organizational base led to the participation of many Crimean Tatars as both front-line fighters and activists. In November 2014, Mustafa Dzhemilev claimed 450 Crimean Tatars were taking part in total.<sup>112</sup> A "Crimea" patrol unit was formed as early as June 2014. In 2016 the

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<sup>107</sup> Idil P. Izmirlı, "Crimean Tatars Support EuroMaidan Protests in Kyiv," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 10, no. 219, 6 December 2013, <https://jamestown.org/program/crimean-tatars-support-euromaidan-protests-in-kyiv/>.

<sup>108</sup> "Sotni kryms'kykh tatar vyrushyly na Maidan—predstavnyky Medzhlisu," *RFE/RL*, 21 January 2014, [www.radiosvoboda.org/a/25237628.html](http://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/25237628.html).

<sup>109</sup> See Isa Akaev on Facebook, [www.facebook.com/isa.akaev.3?ref=br\\_rs](http://www.facebook.com/isa.akaev.3?ref=br_rs).

<sup>110</sup> "Rustam Temirgaliev o razvitiı sobytii."

<sup>111</sup> Kanev, "Spetsturisty."

<sup>112</sup> "Mustafa Dzhemilev: okolo 450 krymskikh tatar uchastvuiut v anti-terroristicheskoi operatsii," *Krym. Realii*, 24 November 2014, <http://ru.krymr.com/a/26708362.html>.

formation of a Noman Çelebicihan Battalion, named after the hero of 1918, was announced. It aimed to have 560 members, but initially claimed 250 to 300.<sup>113</sup> The blockade of Crimea that began in September 2015 was led by another paramilitary group dubbed Asker (“Soldier”), organized by the former businessman Lenur Isliamov,<sup>114</sup> in partnership with Ukrainian nationalist groups. The blockade had a notable impact on the peninsula’s electricity, food, and water supplies.<sup>115</sup> It was lifted in January 2016 after the government of Ukraine imposed its own restrictions.

### Crimean Tatar Eurasians

The Qurultay/Mejlis claims to be a Crimean Tatar parliament. It was last elected in 2013, when the rules were changed to allow for greater competition within the electoral process. But the Mejlis has always had external opponents as well as internal rivalries, and critics of its alliance with Kyiv and support for a European Ukraine. The 1991 Qurultay was organized by the OKND (Organization of the Crimean Tatar National Movement), after a split with the rival NDKT (National Movement of the Crimean Tatars)—largely because the latter opposed the former’s organizational radicalism, i.e. the claim that the Mejlis was a de facto parliament. The NDKT was led first by Yurii Osmanov and then by Vasvi Abduraimov after Osmanov’s death in 1993. Both men were prone to using key tropes of early 1990s Eurasianism: Abduraimov condemned the “anti-Slavic and pan-Turkic policy” of the OKND and argued that “in Crimea the Slavo-Turks (Crimean Tatars, Russians and Ukrainians) have a real possibility to create and perfect a micro-model for a Slavo-Turkic

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<sup>113</sup> Vladimir Golovko, *Okupatsiia Kryma. “Russkii mir” protiv Ukrainy* (Kyiv: COOP Media, 2016), 104–5; and “In the Crimean Tatar battalion of the national guard have joined 250 people. All will be up to 580—islyamov,” *News from Ukraine*, 18 January 2016, <http://en.reporter-ua.ru/in-the-crimean-tatar-battalion-of-the-national-guard-have-joined-250-people-all-will-be-up-to-580-islyamov.html>.

<sup>114</sup> See the interview with Isliamov by Svitlana Kriukova and Sevhil’ Musayeva-Borovyk, “Lehenda pro more. Odyn den’ na kordoni z Krymon,” *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, 26 February 2016, [www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2016/02/26/7100363/](http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2016/02/26/7100363/).

<sup>115</sup> Andrew Wilson, “No Stability under Occupation in Crimea,” *ECFR*, 18 March 2016, [www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_crimea\\_no\\_stability\\_under\\_occupation604](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_crimea_no_stability_under_occupation604).

‘superunion.’”<sup>116</sup> He even sent an open letter to Russian leaders in 2008 asking for their protection from the “nationalist-leaning official authorities in Ukraine.”<sup>117</sup>

In one-off Crimean elections in 1994, when the Crimean Tatars briefly had an ethnic quota of fourteen seats, the Qurultay/Mejlis ran and won the vote (despite presenting itself as a parliament), with 89.3% of the vote against 5.5% for the NDKT. The NDKT faded away thereafter, with Abduraimov shifting attention to a new party, Milli Firka (taking the name of the original “National Party” in 1917), which was officially registered in 2007. Unlike the “nationalist” Mejlis, Milli Firka emphasized “integration of the Crimean Tatar people with the Turkic world on the basis of the Islamic world view,” and Eurasianist cooperation with “the heads of the Turkic states and the heads of the Turkic Republics of the Russian Federation.”<sup>118</sup>

### Yanukovych’s Divide-and-Rule Policy

The organizational strength and leading position of the Mejlis was already under challenge before 2014. Milli Firka and other loyalist Crimean Tatar groups were actively promoted by the authorities during the Yanukovych years, especially in 2011–13. This was done in an attempt to split and/or discredit the Mejlis; the aim to “divide and rule” was what mattered most here, and so less attention was paid to the ideological dimension. The extent to which the Ukrainian authorities’ efforts on this front may have overlapped with the Russians’ is hard to assess: the divide-and-rule operation was run by a local political technologist, Andrii Yermolaev, on behalf

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<sup>116</sup> Vasvi Abduraimov, “Geopoliticheskie aspekty krymskogo uzla,” *Areket*, no. 3, 28 February 1994; interview in *Vseukrainskie vedomosti*, 22 June 1995; Wilson, “Politics in and Around Crimea,” 281–22, at 284; and S. M. Chervonnaia (ed.), *Krymsko tatarskoe natsional’noe dvizhenie*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 1997), 104–09.

<sup>117</sup> Halya Coynash, “The Crimea’s Interests Not Represented,” *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 15 September 2008, <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1221486403>.

<sup>118</sup> “Strategiia i taktika Milli Firka na sovremennom etape (2009–2011 gg.),” *Milli-firka.org*, 16 May 2009, [www.milli-firka.org/content/BFEA/title/Стратегия-и-](http://www.milli-firka.org/content/BFEA/title/Стратегия-и-)

of Serhii L'ovochkin, Yanukovych's Chief of Staff until January 2014.<sup>119</sup>

In 2012 a new "Crimean Tatar National Front" was launched with the authorities' covert support, led by a long-term Mejlis critic Lentun Bezaziev,<sup>120</sup> and including Abduraimov's Milli Firka. The Front leant towards pan-Tatarism, including local representatives of other Tatar and Bashkir groups, declaring that "the Crimean Tatars, Kazan Tatars, and Bashkirs are fraternal peoples, whose historical fate has for centuries been intertwined."<sup>121</sup>

Another "cloning" operation was run against the civic movement Avdet ("Return"), which had campaigned against Crimean Tatar homelessness since 2005. Its well-drilled activists were seen as a threat by the Yanukovych authorities—and an asset to be taken over. Avdet split in May 2011 and its offshoot Sebat ("Steadfast") was henceforth controlled by the Party of Regions—featuring prominently in local "anti-Maidan" demonstrations in the winter of 2013–14.<sup>122</sup>

Yanukovych also reformatted the "Council of Representatives of the Crimean Tatar People" that President Kuchma had set up in 1999. In two purges in 2011 and 2013 Yanukovych removed Dzhemilev as chair and replaced him with Bezaziev and Abduraimov, as well as replacing the old composition of 33 members of the Mejlis with only eight from the Mejlis and 11 from the loyal opposition. Not surprisingly, this led to a boycott by the Mejlis.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Author's interview with Yuliia Tyshchenko, 13 June 2016.

<sup>120</sup> Anvar Derkach, "A New Crimean Front," *The Ukrainian Week*, 7 March 2012, <http://ukrainianweek.com/Politics/52392>. Lentun Bezaziev had been both a Communist and a Tymoshenko MP, and ended up in the Party of Regions.

<sup>121</sup> "Kazanskie tatory i bashkiry Kryma tozhe voshli v Krymsko-tatarskii narodnyi front," *Novoross.info*, 2 February 2012, [www.novoross.info/politiks/1105-kazanskie-tatory-i-bashkiry-kryma-tozhe-voshli-v-krymsko-tatarskiy-narodnyy-front.html](http://www.novoross.info/politiks/1105-kazanskie-tatory-i-bashkiry-kryma-tozhe-voshli-v-krymsko-tatarskiy-narodnyy-front.html).

<sup>122</sup> "Krymskie tatory: 'My ne "titushki", a tozhe ukrainskii narod,'" *Segodnia.ua*, 18 December 2013, [www.segodnya.ua/regions/krym/krymskie-tatory-my-ne-titus-hki-a-tozhe-ukrainskiy-narod-483773.html](http://www.segodnya.ua/regions/krym/krymskie-tatory-my-ne-titus-hki-a-tozhe-ukrainskiy-narod-483773.html). See also the article in the Mejlis paper *Avdet*, "Kto oni—mogilevskie tatory?" *Avdet*, 24 June 2013, <http://avdet.org/ru/2013/06/24/kto-oni-mogilevskie-tatory/>.

<sup>123</sup> Andrew Wilson, "The Crimean Tatars: A Quarter of a Century after Their Return," *Security and Human Rights* 24, no. 3–4 (2013): 418–31.

The loyalist group were known as the “Mogilev Tatars” (after Anatolii Mogilev, who controlled Crimea for Yanukovych from 2011 to 2014), or the “*kazanskië*” because they were always saying that life for Muslims was better in Russian Kazan. It did not help that Mejlis supporters called their rivals “Crimean Tatar *vatniki*” or “*mankurts*” (derogatory terms for redneck Soviet chauvinists and traitors to the national cause, respectively).<sup>124</sup>

The conflict reached a peak during the elections to the Qurultay in 2013. Mustafa Dzhemliiev’s plans to be replaced by his long-term deputy Refat Chubarov were almost stymied by the internal opposition. Chubarov only squeaked home by 126 votes to 114 against his rival Remzi Iliasov, who represented both genuine dissenters and those promoted by the Yanukovych authorities.<sup>125</sup> Chubarov did little to build bridges after his victory; and so potential splits were already present in the Crimean Tatar movement on the eve of the Euromaidan protests.

### Russian Eurasianism and the Crimean Tatars

Russian ideologues who pushed the annexation of Crimea have also pushed this Crimean Tatar version of Eurasianism. According to the supporters of Aleksandr Dugin and Lev Gumilev, “the Crimean Tatars are a Turkic ethnic group that can feel comfortable in the bosom of Eurasianism.” In typically florid language, they have argued that the Crimean Tatars are part of “the political merger of the Forest and the Steppe,” the “duumvirate” of “Russians and Finno-Ugric” peoples with “Volga Tatars, Bashkirs.” “The mountains do not play a significant role in the life of the Crimean Tatars, as opposed to the Caucasians,” so cultural synthesis is supposedly all the easier. “The frames of Eurasianism are so broad that they fit the Buddhist culture of the Kalmyks and the Islamic culture of the Crimean Tatars.”<sup>126</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Andrei Zarembo, “Prizyv krymskikh mankurtoev,” *Krym. Realii*, 4 November 2015, <http://ru.krymr.com/a/27344659.html>.

<sup>125</sup> Wilson, “Crimean Tatars,” 427.

<sup>126</sup> Vladislav Gulevich, “Krymskie tatory i yevraziistvo,” *Geopolitica.Ru*, 8 August 2012; available at <http://vgulevich.livejournal.com/16668.html>.

The embrace of this version of Eurasianism will lead to a happy future for the Crimean Tatars in Crimea. “The acceptance of Eurasianism by the Crimean Tatars is not impossible because of some ethnic particularities,” as the Mejlis would argue, “(there are even Eurasians in far from Russophile Poland), but because of the anti-Crimean Tatar activity of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, deliberately leading its people into conflict with the Slavic population of the peninsula.”<sup>127</sup>

The Russian version of Eurasianism also contains a view of history diametrically opposed to the idea of a European Crimean Tatar identity, allied to the Ukrainian identity. According to the Gumilev Center ([gumilev-center.ru](http://gumilev-center.ru)), a think-tank devoted to promoting the ideas of the Eurasianist thinker Lev Gumilev (1912–92), a fatal divergence occurred “back in the 13th century, in the era of the departing Golden Horde and the division of Ukraine between West and the East.” “The Prince of Galicia - Western Ukraine - Danylo, unlike other [Rus] principalities led by Aleksandr Nevskii, defected to the West, took the crown from the hands of the Pope. Later there was a division on cultural and religious grounds: in western Ukraine many profess Greek Catholicism and recognize the supremacy of the Pope.” In the Russian north, however, “Aleksandr Nevskii made an alliance with the Tatars, became the adopted son of Batu, preserved the Orthodox faith and Russian culture, which later allowed the creation of a great Russia.” Therefore, “the Golden Horde is not a taboo for Russian Tatars, it is part of the history of not only the Tatars, but also the history of Russia and Eurasia, a very important part... The Eurasian approach allows the Tatars to be an important and influential force in Russia and Eurasia, which serves as a common home.”<sup>128</sup>

Pavel Zarifullin, head of the Gumilev Center, has more radical ideas of common origin, as expressed in his book *The New Scythians*

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<sup>127</sup> Gulevich, “Krymskie tatar’y.”

<sup>128</sup> Iskander Akhmedov, “Most ‘Tatarstan-Krym’: chto zhdet krymskikh tatar v Yevrope, initsiativy Tatarstana, novye realii Kryma i pochemu ruku Moskvyy nuzhno pozhat’,” *Gumilev Center*, 5 March 2014, [www.gumilev-center.ru/most-tatarstan-krym-chto-zhdet-krymskikh-tatar-v-evrope-initsiativy-tatarstana-no-vye-realii-kryma-i-pochemu-ruku-moskvyy-nuzhno-pozhat/](http://www.gumilev-center.ru/most-tatarstan-krym-chto-zhdet-krymskikh-tatar-v-evrope-initsiativy-tatarstana-no-vye-realii-kryma-i-pochemu-ruku-moskvyy-nuzhno-pozhat/).

(newskif.su), calling for Russian-Crimean Tatar Union as the basis for a new invigorated Eurasianism. In a speech to Milli Firka several weeks before the annexation in January 2014, he declared that

Crimea has a special role. The peninsula has a sacred value as the laboratory of the Friendship of the Peoples. Formed over many generations... Crimea was the end of the last Scythian kingdom and the beginning of others... The Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, and Kazakhs all trace their origins from the Scythians...The Crimean Tatar people are by default Eurasian... Crimea is the starting point of any project, and will become a miniature of Eurasia.<sup>129</sup>

### Volga Tatar Eurasianism

Meetings and discussions between the Volga Tatars and Crimean Tatars were encouraged by the Kremlin in 2014, but only led to polemic on both sides.<sup>130</sup> The Volga Tatar side pushed the idea of pan-Tatarism, and attacked Crimean Tatar “separatism.” According to one Tatar activist Iskander Akhmedov,

Some representatives of Crimean Tatar organizations, after meetings with the delegations of the Republic of Tatarstan, gave interviews to the right and to the left, in which they actually began to refute the kinship of the Tatars and the Crimean Tatars. Furthermore, they stated that the language of the Turkmen people, the Gagauz, Azerbaijani, Turks is closer to the Crimean Tatar than Tatar, although the Tatar and Crimean Tatar language belongs to the same subgroup—Kipchak, and is very far from those mentioned above. Tatars and Crimean Tatars understand each other without problems.<sup>131</sup>

Among some Crimean Tatars there is a quite common desire to get rid of the proud name “Tatars” in the name of the people. They begin to call themselves just “Crimeans.” Some believe their ancestors are some Tavrians-Scythians, Italians, “proto-people,” while ignoring the huge, decisive role of ancient Tatars and Turks in their ethnogenesis. But the desire to prove his indigenosity should not turn into the absurd and the denial of the nearest relatives. Such shameful attempts to escape from their history, origin, and

<sup>129</sup> “Russko-krymsko tatarskii soiuz,” *Gumilev Center*, 30 January 2014, [www.gumilev-center.ru/russko-krymskotatarskij-soyuz/](http://www.gumilev-center.ru/russko-krymskotatarskij-soyuz/).

<sup>130</sup> See also Victor Shnirel'man, “Useful Eurasianism, or How the Eurasian Idea is Viewed from Tatarstan,” in Mark Bassin and Gonzalo Pozo (eds.), *The Politics of Eurasianism: Identity, Popular Culture and Russia's Foreign Policy* (New York and London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 223-42.

<sup>131</sup> Akhmedov, “Most ‘Tatarstan-Krym.’”

kinship are reminiscent of our home-grown Tatarstan Bulgarists [who claim that the Volga “Tatars” are not Tatars at all, but the descendants of the Volga Bulgars].

Some Crimean Tatars dream of Europe. But it is necessary to look at the rights of Muslims in Europe. It is necessary to look at the situation with the expectation of Turkey to become a full member of the EU ... It is worth remembering, for example, the decision of the people of Switzerland, adopted in a referendum, to ban the construction of minarets. Think of the fragmented, mixed federation of Bosnian Muslims.<sup>132</sup>

Kazan historians were writing an alternative history of the Crimean Tatar people, based on the claim that, according to Kazan Tatar historian Marat Gibatdinov, “the Crimean Tatars have always been part of the big family of the Tatar nation.”<sup>133</sup> The Mufti of Moscow and Chuvashia, Albirhazrat Krganov, has lectured on “Volga Tatars and Crimean Tatars: Common Historical Destinies.”<sup>134</sup> But the main ideologue of Volga Tatar nationalism is the historian Rafael Khakimov, who was also the main ideologue of “Russian Islam”<sup>135</sup>—a secularized Islam subordinated to the needs of Tatar Republican nationalism, subordinated in turn to the *raison d'état* of the Eurasian idea. Khakimov endorsed an Asia-leaning form of Eurasianism in a pair of essays entitled “Who are the Russians?” and “Who are you, Tatars?” In the first, Khakimov claimed that “the Russians are no more European than the Tatars.”<sup>136</sup> “Russian” was in any case an ambiguous concept. “The Russian (*Russkii*), the German, the Pole, the Georgian, the Finn, the Tatar—it is all Russia

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<sup>132</sup> Akhmedov, “Most ‘Tatarstan-Krym.’”

<sup>133</sup> “Uchebnik istorii krymskikh tatar pishut v Kazani,” *BBC Russian Service*, 11 November 2014, [www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/11/141111\\_crimean\\_tatars\\_history\\_book\\_tatarstan](http://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/11/141111_crimean_tatars_history_book_tatarstan).

<sup>134</sup> “Dukhovno-prosvetitel'skii soiuz krymskikh i povolzhskikh tatar pozvolit sozdat' polnotsennyi tatarskii mir—Krganov,” *Islamskii portal*, 25 March 2014, [www.islam-portal.ru/novosti/104/4749/](http://www.islam-portal.ru/novosti/104/4749/).

<sup>135</sup> Sometimes confusingly called “Euro Islam.”

<sup>136</sup> “Tatar Historian: ‘Russians are No More European than are the Tatars,’” *Euromaidan Press*, 9 June 2014, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/06/09/tatar-historian-russians-are-no-more-european-than-are-the-tatars/>.



(*Rossii*).<sup>137</sup> Up to and including the time of Ivan the Terrible, the conqueror of Kazan, “Moscow was half Tatar,” “an international city.” Muscovy was founded on the principles of the Great Horde. “Ivan III is credited with the honor of separation from the Horde, which is not true. He spoke out against the Khan of the Great Horde Akhmat as an impostor, but was not at war with the Golden Horde and did not undermine its foundations. These foundations were loosened themselves without the help of the Russians.” The true “source for the construction of the Russian empire” was therefore Tatar *passionarnost'*, not the declining strength of the Byzantine empire. “After the collapse of the Golden Horde the Russian idea turned to the Byzantine tradition, close in faith, [and] joined the statehood of the Horde and Orthodoxy, after which Tatar ideas acquired a completely new, Christian-Byzantine shell.”<sup>138</sup>

The Volga Tatars, meanwhile, according to Khakimov, are a once-mighty nation reduced to a “slave psychology” by Imperial Russian and then Soviet divide-and-rule policy. The aim of this policy had been “to make every ethnic group of Tatars a separate nation with its own literary language and thus do away with the nation,” splitting away the Crimean Tatars and Bashkirs.<sup>139</sup>

### **Divide-and-Rule Continues after 2014**

The mainstream Crimean Tatar movement, as represented by the Mejlis, was weakened but not destroyed by Yanukovych. In fact, one of the reasons for the Russian coup d'état in Crimea in February 2014 was to forestall the installation of a Crimean government with strong participation by the Mejlis led by Refat Chubarov, who had hoped to become the chair of the Crimean parliament, and to receive “a third of the posts” in the new government.<sup>140</sup> Temirgaliev

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<sup>137</sup> “Rafael’ Khakimov: ‘Kto takie russkie?’” *Biznes online*, 9 March 2013, [www.business-gazeta.ru/article/76466/](http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/76466/).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> “Rafael’ Khakimov: ‘Khto ty, Tatarin?’” *Intelros*, 2013, [www.intelros.ru/?newsid=203](http://www.intelros.ru/?newsid=203).

<sup>140</sup> “Rustam Temirgaliev o razvitií sobytii.” See also Berezovets, *Anektiisia*, 65–66; Matzusato, “Domestic Politics in Crimea,” 245–48; and Chubarov’s account of

even claims that the Mejlis threatened his supporters: “we will achieve it with or without you, we have everything good with the future new government in Kyiv... We will just come and throw you all out of here.”<sup>141</sup>

The annexation changed everything. Once Dzhemilev rejected Putin’s initial overtures, it was now even more important to split the Mejlis, building on Yanukovich’s previous work, but with tougher and cruder tactics. Most Ukrainian security service personnel (SBU) in the Crimea defected to the Russian FSB, and it was they who then used their contacts, information, and agents to arrest recalcitrant Mejlis members and promote the “loyalists.”<sup>142</sup> They were joined by old FSB hands from the North Caucasus, peddling the same card of the “radical Islamic threat.”<sup>143</sup> Interestingly, this seemed to be easier or more instinctive than playing divide-and-rule among Crimean Tatar ethnic sub-groups, even though most leaders of the Mejlis are Yaliboyu.

A mixture of old and new bodies to rival the Mejlis duly appeared after February 2014, building on the splits of 2011–13. All have duly spoken out against “extremism” and the blockade of Crimea. All have peddled versions of Eurasianism.<sup>144</sup> The new program adopted by Milli Firka in 2014 declared the party an “active supporter of the Eurasian integration of the Crimean Tatar people.”<sup>145</sup> One activist Murat Yazydzhiev was much blunter: after “Crimea reunited with Russia by peaceful means ... the idea of the national state loses its

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various Crimean Tatar meetings at [www.facebook.com/dogrujol/posts/1201282769966875](http://www.facebook.com/dogrujol/posts/1201282769966875).

<sup>141</sup> “Rustam Temirgaliev o razvitiu sobytii.”

<sup>142</sup> Author’s interview with Yuliia Tyshchenko, 13 June 2016.

<sup>143</sup> “Krym radikaliziruetsia, yesli siloviki RF povtoriat opyt Severnogo Kavkaza, zaiavili uchastniki diskussii na ‘Kavkazskom uzle,’” *Kavkazskii Uzel*, 27 June 2014, [www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/244906](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/244906). On personnel changes in Crimea, see Nikola Petrov, “Krym: prevrashchenie ukrainskogo poluostrova v rossiiskii ostrov,” *Counterpoint (Kontrapunkt)* no. 1 (September 2015), [www.counterpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/petrov\\_counterpoint1.pdf](http://www.counterpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/petrov_counterpoint1.pdf).

<sup>144</sup> Dmitry Sosnovsky, “Crimean Identity: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, 7 June 2014, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Crimean-Identity-Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow-16714>.

<sup>145</sup> “Remzi Il’iasov sleduet programmu Milli Firka,” *Milli Firka*, 26 November 2014, [www.milli-firka.org/c/DBAGJHJB](http://www.milli-firka.org/c/DBAGJHJB).

meaning,” he declared. A “new idea that can unite all Crimean Tatars living in Crimea” was therefore needed. “And this idea is simple—the Crimean Tatars are Russians!”<sup>146</sup>

Two potential alternatives to the Mejlis now appeared; the difference between them was unclear—both operated in parallel. The Qirim (K’yrym) Public Movement was established in October 2014—Yazydzhiev was a member. Qirim Birligi (“Crimea Union”) was established in June 2014 and was headed by Refat Chubarov’s defeated opponent in the previous year’s Qurultay election, Remzi Il’iasov, who was also made Deputy Chairman of the State Council of Crimea. Il’iasov was personally close to Sergei Aksenov, who was declared Crimean Prime Minister after the February 2014 coup in Crimea. By November 2014 Aksenov was referring to Il’iasov as “the leader of the Crimean Tatar people.”<sup>147</sup> Il’iasov and a group of three to four former members of the Mejlis favored cooperating with the new authorities. Initially, they assumed that the Qurultay-Mejlis system could be retained, but subordinated to Russian legislation—as they hoped to take it over. Il’iasov duly called for new elections for the Qurultay and Mejlis in 2015, planning that its leaders would be elected in the place of the likes of Dzhemilev and Chubarov, but the Mejlis proved surprisingly resilient and loyal to its existing leadership. A would-be conference of Qirim in July 2015 attracted twenty former members of the Mejlis, instead of the two hundred (out of two hundred and forty-eight) that had been predicted.<sup>148</sup>

This strategy explains why the Mejlis was not shut down immediately, but was eventually banned as an “extremist organization” in 2016 once the takeover plan had failed. Qirim and Qirim Birligi meanwhile have followed the Russian line through every twist and turn since 2014, for example denouncing “the

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<sup>146</sup> Murat Yazydzhiev, “Krymskie tatory nachinaiut ob’ediniat’sia vokrug novoi idei,” *Belogorsk News*, 2 November 2015, [www.belogorsknews.ru/2015/11/blog-post\\_2.html](http://www.belogorsknews.ru/2015/11/blog-post_2.html).

<sup>147</sup> “Aksenov nazval Il’iasova ‘liderom krymsko tatarskogo naroda,’” *Krym.Realii*, 17 November 2014, <http://ru.krymr.com/a/26696272.html>.

<sup>148</sup> Golovko, *Okupatsiia Kryma*, 107.

terrorism prepared by the Ukrainian special services,” during the war scare of August 2016.<sup>149</sup>

In November 2014, a Public Council of the Crimean Tatar People emerged, gathering together twenty-two NGOs. Ruslan Balbek, Deputy Prime Minister of Crimea, another former delegate of the Qurultay, heads the Crimea Generation youth movement in opposition to the Mejlis, and he became the first Crimean Tatar Duma MP in September 2015—marking him out as another potential loyalist leader.<sup>150</sup> Sebat was again used for “Anti-Maidan” demonstrations, including in Moscow.<sup>151</sup> Several of its leaders, including the head Seidamet Gemedzhi, were, however, subject to “prophylactic” arrests, as the authorities struggled to control their activities.<sup>152</sup> Crimean Tatar businesses have come under pressure, especially after a new umbrella business organization was set up in February 2016 led by Rustem Nimetullaiev. ATR, the Crimean Tatar media company, was shut down in April 2015, and replaced with a “clone,” Millet (“Nation”). Millet clearly had broader pan-Turkic or Eurasian ambitions, as it planned to broadcast to Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia, and Turkey.<sup>153</sup>

The same strategy of (threatened) divide-and-rule was more successful in cowing the Mejlis’s religious allies, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Crimea (DUMK), led since 1999 by the Mufti of Crimean Muslims haji Emirali Ablaev. As with political parties and NGOs like Sebat, the Yanukovych era had already seen the artificial emergence of a rival to DUMK, the Spiritual Center of Muslims of Crimea (DTsMK), which was registered in December

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<sup>149</sup> “Krymskie tatory pochtili pamiat’ rossiiskikh voennykh, pogibshikh pri zaderzhanii diversantov,” *Russkaia vesna*, 20 August 2016, <http://rusvesna.su/news/1471712987>.

<sup>150</sup> “Ruslan Bal’bek: mezhnatsional’noe soglasie v Krymu—prezhde vsego,” *Krymskii vektor*, 28 May 2014, <http://crimeavector.com.ua/obschestvo/7551-ruslan-balbek-mezhnatsionalnoe-soglasie-v-krymu-prezhde-vsego.html>.

<sup>151</sup> “‘Sebat’ podderzhal Prezident Rossii na ‘Antimaidane,’” *Milli Firka*, 4 February 2015, [www.milli-firka.org/c/DBAGKCKC](http://www.milli-firka.org/c/DBAGKCKC).

<sup>152</sup> “V Krymu arestovan aktivist krymskotatarskoi organizatsii ‘Sebat,’” *Grani.Ru*, 29 January 2015, <http://graniru.org/Politics/Russia/m.237332.html>.

<sup>153</sup> “Pro-Russian Crimean Tatar TV Channel Starts Satellite Broadcasting,” *RFE/RL*, 1 April 2016, [www.rferl.org/content/crimea-pro-russian-tatar-tv-station/27648579.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/crimea-pro-russian-tatar-tv-station/27648579.html).

2010. In 2014 the DTsMK became a new “Taurida Muftiate,” with links to the radical Lebanese group al-Ahbash.<sup>154</sup> One of the oldest mosques in Crimea, the sixteenth-century Juma-Jami in Yevpatoriia was forcibly handed over to the Taurida Muftiate in September 2014. After this, Ablaev got the message, especially as the DUMK was much more reliant on its mosques and other physical infrastructure than the Mejlis. Since the Yevpatoriia incident, Ablaev has talked up the benefits of “dialogue” with the occupation authorities.<sup>155</sup>

Without citing any evidence, pro-Russian authorities claim that the Crimean Tatars’ support is evenly split between Qirim Birligi and the Mejlis.<sup>156</sup> The last reliable evidence was the 2013 Qurultay elections, when turnout was just over 50%.<sup>157</sup> According to one ex post facto survey, 72% of Crimean Tatars followed the call by the Mejlis to boycott the 2014 “referendum” on union with Russia;<sup>158</sup> and there have been no reliable opinion polls under the occupation. Remzi Il’iasov did not take many supporters with him when he left the Mejlis. Some defectors, like the businessman Lenur Isliamov, have gone back and forth between the Mejlis and its competitors. A substantial number of neutrals or drifters exist in between the two camps. The 2014 “census” conducted by the Russian occupying authorities recorded 232,340 Crimean Tatars (10.8%), but a big jump in those calling themselves just “Tatars,” to 44,996 (2%), compared to 245,291 Crimean Tatars (10.2%) and only 13,602 “Tatars” (0.6%) in the last official Ukrainian census in 2001.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> “‘Tavrisheskii muftiat’ ulichili v sviaziakh s opasnoi livanskoi sektoi,” *Islam News.ru*, 2 July 2015, [www.islamnews.ru/news-466828.html](http://www.islamnews.ru/news-466828.html).

<sup>155</sup> Compare Vladislav Mal’tsev, “Krym nash’ dlia muftiia Ablaeva,” *NG religii*, 1 April 2015; [www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2015-04-01/1\\_crimea.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2015-04-01/1_crimea.html); and the hostile critique of Ablaev by Sergei Stel’makh, “‘Gromkoe’ molchanoe muftiia Ablaeva,” *Krym.Realii*, 28 January 2017, <http://ru.krymr.com/a/28263312.html>.

<sup>156</sup> “50% of Crimean Tatars Support ‘Qirim Birligi’: Nimetullaev,” *QHA*, 23 October 2014, <http://qha.com.ua/en/politics/50-of-crimean-tatars-support-quot-qirim-birligi-quot-nimetullaev/132495/>.

<sup>157</sup> “Results for Elections to Qurultay Known,” *QHA*, 19 June 2013, <http://qha.com.ua/results-of-elections-for-qurultay-known-127731en.html>.

<sup>158</sup> Wojciech Górecki, “The Peninsula as an Island. Crimea in its Third Year since Annexation,” *OSW*, 22 November 2016; [www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2016-11-22/peninsula-island-crimea-its-third-year-annexation](http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2016-11-22/peninsula-island-crimea-its-third-year-annexation).

<sup>159</sup> See note 78.

Ironically, the Crimean Tatar Eurasianists can claim some of their authority from the work of the founding father of Crimean Tatar intellectual life, Ismail Gasprinski (1851–1914). Gasprinski was a Jadidist<sup>160</sup> reformer and believer in pan-Turkism, but in the climate of the times he thought the Russian Imperial authorities could promote such unity, appealing to them to take all of the “Turkic-Tatar” world under their wing. In his works *Russian Islam: Thoughts, Notes and Observations of a Muslim* (1881) and *Russian-Eastern Agreement: Thoughts, Notes and Wishes* (1896), Gasprinski called for harmony and cooperation within the “Russian-Muslim world, lying between the European and the Mongolian worlds in the central parts of the hemisphere, at the crossroads of all roads and trade relations, cultural, political and martial. Both their neighboring worlds—European and Mongolian—are overcrowded.” Europe, always seeking to expand to the east, was always “acting against Russia and against the Muslim.”<sup>161</sup> Aleksandr Dugin quoted Gasprinski approvingly in a “Eurasianist” speech in Ankara in July 2016, ironically coinciding with the failed coup in Turkey.<sup>162</sup> Dugin even tried to instrumentalize the Crimean Tatar connection as a means of bringing Turkey back closer to Russia.

### Crimean Identity

Finally, there is the issue of the place of the Crimean Tatars within a broader Crimean identity, if one is accepted to exist.<sup>163</sup> For many local Russian-speaking intellectuals, Crimea is simply part of a

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<sup>160</sup> The Jadids or “Progressives” were part of a modernizing Islamic reform movement in the last years of the Russian empire, which sought to improve education and cultural standards.

<sup>161</sup> Ismail Bei Gasprinski (Gaspraly), “Russkoe musul’manstvo. Mysli, zametki i nabliudeniia musul’manina,” and “Russko-vostochnoe soglashenie: mysli zametki i pozhelaniia,” in L.V. Shepot’ko (ed.), *Otechestvennaia istoriia: Khrestomatiia* (Vladivostok: Naval University, 2005), 165–71, at 169 and 70.

<sup>162</sup> See the video of Dugin’s speech at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-yFOb\\_TjtE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-yFOb_TjtE). The remarks are 39 minutes in.

<sup>163</sup> Oles’ Cheremshina, “Yest’ li otdel’naia krymskaia identichnost’?” *Krym.Realii*, 30 April 2014, <http://ru.krymr.com/a/25368172.html>.

broader Russian nation.<sup>164</sup> For others it is part, and a key part of Russian-led Eurasia.<sup>165</sup> For others, there is a specific regional identity, of a multi-national “Crimean people.”<sup>166</sup> According to the local academic Andrei Mal’gin, writing in 2000,

irredentism was never the dominant mentality of the Russian-speaking majority in the peninsula... the idea of recreating the Crimean autonomy was based primarily on the need [for the Crimean population] to distance itself from Moscow and establish local control over the use of resources of the Crimea and its environment... In this respect, Crimean autonomism was very reminiscent of regionalism in Siberia and the Urals, with their views on the value of a small regional homeland.<sup>167</sup>

The idea of a “Crimean People” rarely included the Crimean Tatars, however. Insofar as it has been used since 2014, it has been to claim the artificial unity displayed in the referendum on joining Russia. The occupying authorities have used crude tactics to depict the Crimean Tatars as jihadists.<sup>168</sup> They have also backed the idea that the local Greeks are the true “rooted” people of Crimea,<sup>169</sup> with Putin himself saying in May 2014 (after the Mejlis leaders had

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<sup>164</sup> Andrei Surkov, “Russkie—korennoe naselenie Kryma. Istoriia,” *Novorossiiia*, 8 March 2014, <http://novorus.info/news/history/13878-istoriya-kryma-russkie-korennoe-naselenie.html>.

<sup>165</sup> See, for example, the website of “Krymskoe respublikanskoe obshchestvennoe dvizhenie ‘Yevraziia,’” [www.krod.narod.ru](http://www.krod.narod.ru).

<sup>166</sup> Eleanor Knott, “Do Crimeans See Themselves as Russian or Ukrainian? It’s Complicated,” *The Monkey Cage*, 3 December 2015, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/12/03/do-crimeans-see-themselves-as-russian-or-ukrainian-its-complicated/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/12/03/do-crimeans-see-themselves-as-russian-or-ukrainian-its-complicated/).

<sup>167</sup> Andrei Mal’gin, “Novoe v samosoznanii etnicheskikh grupp Kryma,” <http://www.archipelag.ru/authors/malgin/?library=1172>; first published in *Ostrov Krym* no. 3(9) (2000).

<sup>168</sup> Halya Coynash, “New Weapon Against Dissent in Crimea: ‘Ideology of Terrorism,’” *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 26 February 2015, [www.khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1424552129](http://www.khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1424552129); and Coynash, “Russia Accuses Crimean Tatar Leaders of Recruiting for Islamic State,” *Human Rights in Ukraine*, 12 October 2015, <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1444434154>.

<sup>169</sup> V. K. Mordashov, “Kto v Krymu korennoi—slaviane, tatory, ili greki?,” *Krymskie izvestiia*, March 1992, available at the website of *Narodnyi Front “Sevastopol’-Krym-Rossiiia”*, <http://sevkrimrus.narod.ru/ZAKON/koren4.htm>.

rebuffed his overtures) that the Greeks “were there before us.”<sup>170</sup> The Greek, or Byzantine, link reinforces the Russian version of the myth of Vladimir’s baptism in 988. And the local Greeks are now reassuringly small in number—only 3,036 in Crimea in 2001 and 2,877 in 2014, although they number 200,000 in Russia and Ukraine as a whole.<sup>171</sup>

Once again, however, this is a selective reading of history at best. The older community with deeper historical links to Crimea, and a history of intermingling with the Crimean Tatars, are the Azov or Mariupol’ Greeks. The Pontic Greeks and Arvanites (speakers of a dialect of Albanian) that came from the Balkans and Anatolia in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had stronger links to the Imperial state that invited them—and it is presumably these loyalist Greeks that Putin had in mind.

But in truth, many Crimean intellectuals either neglected the Crimean Tatar issue before 2014 or were downright hostile. Even when the idea of a “Crimean People” and the Crimea as a local “small homeland” was promoted, it was based on supposed “external” threats, and first and foremost among these was “the myth of Crimean Tatar indigenoussness.” This myth should be opposed, as should the myth (or *mifologema*) of “Ukrainianness,” the “geopolitical construct of EuroAtlanticism,” and, ironically, Crimeans’ own apathy.<sup>172</sup>

## Conclusions

Crimea’s future will mainly be determined by international politics. But shifting identity politics will shape the environment in which

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<sup>170</sup> “Putin: nado tshchatel’no prorabotat’ vopros o korennykh narodakh Kryma,” *RIA Novosti*, 16 May 2014, [http://ria.ru/crimea\\_today/20140516/1008046244.html](http://ria.ru/crimea_today/20140516/1008046244.html).

<sup>171</sup> Paul Goble, “Another Punished People, the Pontic Greeks, Posing New Problems for Moscow in Crimea,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 12, no. 194, 27 October 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/another-punished-people-the-pontic-greeks-posing-new-problems-for-moscow-in-crimea/>.

<sup>172</sup> Anatolii Filatov, “Russkii Krym: vneshnie ugrozy i vnutrennie vyzovy. Krym poka izbegaet ukrainsva,” *Russkie.org*, 18 November 2011, [www.russkie.org/index.php?module=fullitem&id=24007](http://www.russkie.org/index.php?module=fullitem&id=24007).



the relevant decisions are made. The mainstream Crimean Tatar position that they are not a national minority, but a nation rooted in Crimea as their only homeland will ensure their continued opposition to Russian annexation, regardless of the legal status of the peninsula. The Eurasianist alternative offered by the occupying Russian authorities seems to have had less effect in building rivals to the Mejlis than their crude divide-and-rule tactics. Any prospects for attempts to build a genuine multi-ethnic Russian Crimea were jeopardized by the tactics used to secure annexation in 2014.

Alternatively, Crimean Tatars could accommodate to the realities of Russian annexation, if the Mejlis is seen by sufficient numbers of ordinary Crimean Tatars as too radical, and if the authorities commit to practical issues like land and housing. So far, Crimean Tatar education in Crimea has not been subject to the same restrictions as Ukrainian, more Crimean Tatars have gone on the Hajj via the Russian quota,<sup>173</sup> and the long-awaited prestigious Cathedral Mosque construction project is going ahead in Simferopol.

But the biggest impact of the Crimean Tatar issue since 2014 has been on helping to reshape Ukrainian national identity and nationalism. Two potential new civic identities, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar, feed off one another—although the long-term triumph of neither is currently guaranteed.

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<sup>173</sup> Abdullah Asanov, "Hajj 'at a Discount,' Russian Style," *Islam v Ukraini*, 1 October 2014, <http://islam.in.ua/en/ukrainian-news/hajj-discount-russian-style>.

