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Russian policy of discrimination and assimilation regarding ethnic Ukrainians in Crimea after 2014

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Abstract

The article analyzes the Russian policy of discrimination and assimilation of the Ukrainian community in occupied Crimea. Having analyzed a large amount of information and using the methods and principles of historical, sociological and political sciences, the authors came to the conclusion that the actions of the Russian Federation towards the Ukrainians of Crimea are discriminatory in nature, because they consist in the elimination of Ukrainian national identity. It has been established that in Crimea there have been registered numerous violations of Ukrainians' rights to freedom of conscience, Ukrainian public and political organizations, educational system for Ukrainian-speaking inhabitants of Crimea, media infrastructure, Ukrainian centers and monuments have been illegally liquidated. In addition, culture and religious institutions are being destroyed. In the conclusions, it is stated that the state of the Ukrainian community in Crimea is deteriorating. The authors propose as one of the important components of the state policy of the future de-occupation and reintegration of Crimea, the protection of the Ukrainian identity of the inhabitants of Crimea and full support of the Crimean Ukrainian.

Keywords: Crimea; Ukrainians; rights; discrimination; assimilation.

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Política rusa de discriminación y asimilación hacia los ucranianos étnicos en Crimea después de 2014

Resumen

El artículo analiza la política rusa de discriminación y asimilación de la comunidad ucraniana en la Crimea ocupada. Habiendo analizado una gran cantidad de información y utilizando los métodos y principios de las ciencias históricas, sociológicas y políticas, los autores llegaron a la conclusión de que las acciones de la Federación Rusa hacia los ucranianos de Crimea son de naturaleza discriminatoria, porque consisten en la eliminación de identidad nacional de Ucrania. Se ha establecido que en Crimea se han registrado numerosas violaciones de los derechos de los ucranianos a la libertad de conciencia, se han liquidado ilegalmente organizaciones públicas y políticas ucranianas, el sistema educativo para los habitantes de Crimea de habla ucraniana, la infraestructura de los medios de comunicación, los centros y los monumentos de Ucrania. Además, la cultura y las instituciones religiosas están siendo destruidas. En las conclusiones, se afirma que el Estado de la comunidad ucraniana en Crimea se está deteriorando. Los autores proponen como uno de los componentes importantes de la política estatal de la futura desocupación y reintegración de Crimea, la protección de la identidad ucraniana de los habitantes de Crimea y el apoyo total a la ucraniana de Crimea.

Palabras clave: Crimea; ucranianos; derechos; discriminación; asimilación.

Introduction

In February 2014, using its regular army and special military formations, the Russian Federation illegally occupied the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. This has violated the existing system of environmental, energy, and economic security in the Azov-Black Sea region, which threatens general world security.

Since the occupation, the Ukrainian ethnic community in Crimea has found itself in a difficult even critical situation, having turned into one of the discriminated communities of the peninsula, experiencing systematic and brutal oppression. Today, it is dangerous to be a Ukrainian in Crimea. Russia pursues a policy of suppressing everything Ukrainian, including the Ukrainian language, culture, art, religion, and education. A system of oppression and persecution has been created to fight against the residents of Crimea who have not supported the occupation. Ukrainians in Crimea, who are under Russian occupation, are almost deprived of effective international protection mechanisms.

Currently, there is a real threat of assimilation of the large, second largest Ukrainian community in Crimea, and the destruction of not only the civil Ukrainian identity in Crimea, but also the ethnic one. The peculiarity of the current situation is also that the aggression is taking place against Ukraine, which, under pressure from Western countries, voluntarily handed over the third-largest arsenal of nuclear weapons to the aggressor state. Therefore, the situation of Crimean Ukrainians, Russian manipulation of the size of the Ukrainian community in Crimea, violation of a number of their rights is very acute, urgent and requires a thorough scientific analysis

1. Materials and methods

Our research is prepared using a variety of both special and interdisciplinary scientific methods, principles and approaches. In particular, principles of our research are the principles of objectivity, systematicity, social approach, methods of analysis, synthesis, systematization, observation, logical and historical. The use of such methodological tools has allowed us to compare different views on certain aspects of the discrimination and assimilation policy of the Russian Federation in relation to the Ukrainian community in Crimea after its annexation of the peninsula in 2014, to study and analyze carefully the stated issue in all its integrity and multidimensional nature.

2. Literature Review

There are no fundamental scientific works on this issue since we are analyzing the situation of the Ukrainian community of Crimea in 2014–2022, which has become one of the most discriminatory ethnic communities in the region under the temporary occupation of Crimea by Russia. We can state that there are general works on the illegal annexation of Crimea, in particular on the course of the occupation itself, its international legal aspects and consequences. This is stated in the studies of Ukrainian scientists, such as: Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk, Myroslav Mamchak, Serhii Hromenko, Oleksandr Zadorozhnyi, Taras Berezovets, Nataliia Vlashchenko, and others (Hay-Nizhnyk *et al.*, 2015; Gromenko, 2017; Zadorozhnyi, 2015), as well as in the foreign works of Robin Geiß (2015), Anton Bebler (2014), Austin Charron (2016), Agnia Grigas (2016), Paul D’Anieri (2019), Zoran Oklopčic (2015), Jorge Emilio Núñez (2017), Juan Francisco Escudero Espinosa (2018), Thomas Grant (2015), Christian Marxsen (2014), Amandine Catala (2015), Jure Vidmar (2015) and others.

The authors consider the issue of the status of Crimea after 1991 and the legality of its change in 2014, legal consequences and various options for the future resolution of the conflict. They have come to the conclusion

that the annexation of Crimea was illegal with violated basic principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter, the Declaration on the Principles of International Law of 1970, the Helsinki Final Act of the OSCE of 1975, which the modern world order is based on (Zadorozhnyi, 2015).

Russia quickly seized the territory of the neighboring state. This was facilitated by a number of very favorable circumstances, including political, historical, geographical, linguistic and military advantages in the region, which have only partial counterparts in other former Soviet republics. The limited geography of the peninsula, the proximity of Crimea to Russia and its existence as a separate autonomous republic within Ukraine gave Russia the opportunity to influence the Crimean socio-political processes. Russia's Black Sea Fleet was based in Sevastopol close to internationally designated sea routes used for covert operation (Kofman *et al.*, 2014).

In recent years, several works by well-known journalists Nataliia Humeniuk, Anna Andriievska, Olena Khalimon, Nataliia Vlashchenko have appeared, which contain memories and testimonies of Crimean Ukrainians of various professions (military, public activists, students, pensioners, entrepreneurs, human rights defenders), social and ethnic origin, political views, whose lives have changed dramatically after 2014. The authors try to show the process of changing their material, economic, social life and the transformation of memory, highlight the human rights activities of pro-Ukrainian activists who remained in their homeland despite the repression of the collaborating administration and Russian security forces (Humeniuk, 2020; Book of testimonies: Anatomy of the Russian annexation of Crimea, 2019).

Serhii Hromenko in his work "KrymNash" (Eng.: Crimea is ours) (2017) gives answers to important questions: Has Crimea always belonged to Russia, and is Sevastopol the "city of Russian glory"? Does the peninsula really have nothing to do with Ukraine and has become part of Ukraine illegally? And what were the events of February – March 2014 – the occupation of Crimea or the "restoration of historical justice"? (Gromenko, 2017).

Kostiantyn Palshkov's article analyzes the dynamics of public opinion regarding the de-occupation of Crimea (Palshkov, 2023). Pavlo Hai-Nyzhnyk, Leonid Chuprii and Oleh Batrymenko reveal the formation factors of the Crimean regional pro-Russian identity and outline the ways of the Crimea reintegration in the context of the national security policy of Ukraine (Hay-Nizhnyk *et al.*, 2015).

One of the first scientific studies that directly analyzes the state of the Ukrainian community in Crimea in the occupied Crimea is the analytical report by Andrii Ivanets. The author therein deals with certain issues of violated rights of Ukrainians to freedom of conscience and speech, to access

to education in the Ukrainian language, the destruction of Ukrainian cultural monuments and centers in Crimea, considers the Russian colonization policy in Crimea as an instrument of assimilation pressure (Ivanets, 2021).

Publications on the pages of the newspaper «Krymska svitlytsia» and Internet resources «Voice of Crimea», «Radio Liberty», «Crim. Realii», «Ukrinform», «Ukrainian Pravda», etc.

3. Statement of the basic material

The most recent Russian-Ukrainian war (2014–2023) has caused fundamental changes in bilateral relations between the countries: the breach of a number of bilateral and multilateral interstate agreements and treaties has led to the liquidation of the interstate (Ukrainian-Russian) contractual legal framework and institutional mechanisms of interstate relations; termination of contacts at the highest level and diplomatic relations in 2022; there was an unprecedented curtailment of economic cooperation; significant estrangement between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples has appeared (Prospects of Ukrainian-Russian Relations. (Conceptual Approaches and Practical Steps), 2015).

According to the results of sociological research in 2015, the majority of Ukrainians considered Crimea to be the territory of Ukraine. In particular, according to the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 69% of citizens recognized Crimea as a Ukrainian territory annexed by the Russian Federation, and only 14% accepted it as a territory of the Russian Federation. At the same time, according to 8% of them, the inclusion of Crimea into Russia was legal, and the remaining 6% claim that this process was illegal. For 10% of the Ukrainian population, Crimea did not belong to Russia or Ukraine, and another 8% did not have their own opinion on the Crimean status (Hay-Nizhnyk *et al.*, 2015: 334; International center for prospective studies, 2015: n/p).

When the Ukrainian independence was restored in 1991, about 25% of Ukrainians lived in Crimea, who were dispersed in small groups throughout its territory. In addition, they were not sufficientl ideological or organized. Thus, the Ukrainian community on the peninsula found itself in a difficult situation. Representing the titular ethnic group of the Ukrainian state, they were a regional minority (Ivanets, 2021).

3.1. Discrimination by the Russian authorities against Crimean Ukrainians, their persecution and expulsion from the peninsula

Immediately after the annexation of Crimea, information began to arrive about the deteriorated situation of Ukrainians here. Today, the

discriminatory policies of the occupiers include the suppression of freedom of speech, protests and rallies, repression of religious communities, persecution and displacement of activists, illegal prosecutions of Ukrainians, the destruction of Ukrainian-language education and the church, and banning the activities of various Ukrainian organizations, terrible conditions of detention in prisons and pre-trial detention centers etc. The occupation authority resorted to unfounded searches and arrests, fabrication of criminal and administrative cases under “terrorist”, “extremist” articles, as well as articles about illegal armed formations, etc.

According to Dmytro Lubinets, the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights, 180 citizens of Ukraine are in prison as part of politically motivated or religious criminal prosecution as of February 2023 (40 people were arrested and are in pre-trial detention centers, another 122 are in prisons, 18 remain without status) (Ukrainian Helsinki Union for Human Rights, 2023: n/p). As Olha Skrypnyk, the head of the board of the Crimean Human Rights Group, notes, these people did not commit crimes, the cases against them are absurd. Witnesses and experts are mostly FSS employees. Russian judges do not accept independent expertise (Crimean lighthouse, 2023: n/p).

For instance, Oleh Sentsov and Oleksandr Kolchenko, the political prisoners, the so-called “Crimean terrorists”, were sentenced to 20 and 10 years in a high-security prison, respectively, for creating a so-called “terrorist organization and preparing terrorist attacks in Simferopol”. Hennadii Afanasiev, Yurii Soloshenko, and Oleksii Chyrnii also received different terms of imprisonment. Oleksandr Kostenko was charged with causing bodily harm to an employee of “Berkut” during the events on the Maidan in 2014.

On similar charges, 22-year-old Andrii Kolomiiets was convicted in Crimea and received 6 years in a high-security prison for allegedly throwing “Molotov cocktails” at “Berkut officers during the Euromaidan in Kyiv. He was also found guilty of a drug possession charge, which added another 4 years to his prison term. Valentyn Vyhovskyi and Viktor Shchur were detained in 2015. They were accused of spying for Ukraine and sentenced to 11 and 12 years in prison, respectively. For so-called “high treason” and “espionage”, Russian courts convicted Leonid Parkhomenko, Dmytro Dolhopolov, Kostiantyn Davydenko, Kostiantyn Shyrinh, Anna Sukhonosova, Ivan Yatskiv and Halyna Dovhopola (Dorosh, 2016: n/p).

In August 2016, the FSS of Russia arrested Yevhen Panov and Andrii Zakhitei, who were allegedly preparing terrorist attacks on the peninsula’s tourist and social infrastructure facilities. In November 2016, Russian security forces detained in Sevastopol military experts, employees of the Ukrainian analytical center “Nomos”, researchers of national security and Euro-Atlantic integration in the Black Sea-Caspian basin – Dmytro

Shtyblikov and Oleksii Bessarabov, as well as their close friend Volodymyr Dudka.

All three were accused of “preparing sabotage in Crimea on the order of Ukrainian intelligence”. V. Dudka and O. Bessarabov were sentenced to 14 years in prison and fined 300 and 350 thousand rubles, respectively (Radio Freedom, 2021: n/p). Also, the Sudak City Court found Hennadii Limeshko guilty and deprived him of freedom for 8 years for “illegal acquisition, storage and carrying of explosive substances” (Radio Freedom, 2018: n/p).

In total, about 20 Ukrainian citizens have been convicted of “espionage” and “sabotage” in Crimea since 2014. Their cases, as a rule, are fabricated, they lack evidence and justification, there have been recorded illegal methods of investigation and the use of torture to get confessions, violation of the presumption of innocence. Crimean Ukrainians are beaten during detention and then in pre-trial detention centers being compelled to confess. Prison conditions are often unbearable, involve torture and forced psychiatric treatment. It is almost impossible to deliver medicines or call a doctor for an examination in detention centers and prisons. As a result, Ukrainian political prisoners do not receive enough vitamins, live in poor lighting and are rarely in the fresh air, as a result of which their health declines (Esmanova and Sudakova, 2018: n/p).

As Gennady Afanasyev, a political prisoner, recalled after his release at a press conference at Ukrinform in Kyiv on 23 June 2016, the Russians promised to take him to the forest, where he would dig his own grave and lie in it if he did not answer the questions. Having nothing to do with the terrorist activities of which he was accused, of course he could not answer them. For this, H. Afanasiev was beaten on the head and stomach, a bag was put on his head and he was strangled. FSS employees forced him to admit he was a terrorist. And when they realized that they could not find out anything, they began to really torture him. In particular, a gas mask was put on his head and the hose was closed.

It was impossible to breathe, and when they saw that Hennadii was already losing his mind, they opened the gas mask, took it off and brought him back to consciousness - gave him water and doused him with water, gave him to smell ammonia. As he recalled, they undressed him, put him on the floor, took a police baton, ran it over his genitals and said that he would be raped (Book of Testimonies: Anatomy of the Russian annexation of Crimea, 2019).

In the same way, the Russian authorities oppressed people for using Ukrainian symbols. For instance, they were detained, interrogated, and fined for displaying blue and yellow flags and ribbons. Most of these persecutions took place in 2015. On 09 March 2015, in Simferopol, Russian policemen detained Leonid Kuzmin, Veldar Shukurdzhiiev, and Oleksandr

Kravchenko as pro-Ukrainian activists, organizers of a rally for Taras Shevchenko's birthday.

The participants of the action (about 50 people) in the Gagarin Park of Simferopol read poems and shouted the slogan "Glory to Ukraine!". They unfurled two Ukrainian flags (one with the inscription "Crimea is Ukraine") and a Crimean Tatar one, for which they were detained (Book of Testimonies: Anatomy of The Russian Annexation Of Crimea, 2019).

The participants of the car rally in honor of the Day of Commemoration of Crimean Tatar Deportation Victims were also detained on 18 May 2015 for using the Ukrainian flag and on 21 May activists in Armiansk were detained for trying to take a picture in embroidered shirts. On 24 August in Kerch, on Mt. Mitryda in the center of the city, one boy was arrested for 15 days, the others – a boy and a girl – were fined for trying to take a picture with the Ukrainian flag in honor of Ukrainian Independence Day (Book of Testimonies: Anatomy of The Russian Annexation of Crimea, 2019).

Relatives of political prisoners and human rights defenders in Crimea often face serious problems: surveillance, searches, criminal prosecutions, psychological pressure, threats, etc. from the Russian special services. All this is done to intimidate people, force them to stop fighting for their relatives and not to disclose the facts of these persecutions.

The Russian authorities in Crimea are "at war" not only with symbols, but also with Ukrainian names. After the annexation, the Crimean Academic Ukrainian Musical Theater in the center of Simferopol was renamed to the "State Academic Musical Theater of the Republic of Crimea", and the only Ukrainian gymnasium to the "Simferopol Academic Gymnasium". In Sevastopol, as early as 2014, there was dismantled a monument to the Ukrainian Hetman Sahaidachnyi (Book of Testimonies: Anatomy Of The Russian Annexation Of Crimea, 2019). Citizens are fined and arrested for Ukrainian songs and slogans.

After the start of Russia's full-scale invasion into Ukraine, Ukrainians got new reasons for persecution in the annexed Crimea, in particular, mass persecution of anyone who disagrees with the war and discredits the Russian army. According to the latest charge, 261 administrative cases have been opened, in 223 cases of them a decision was made to impose an administrative fine. 421 criminal cases were initiated for evasion of service in the armed forces of Russia (Lubinets, 2023).

3.2. Ban on freedom of speech and independent media in Crimea in occupied Crimea

While preparing the annexation of the peninsula, Russia understood that for its complete subjugation, it was not enough to physically seize

the territory, it was necessary to have the information space. Therefore, the Russian authorities immediately isolated Crimea from the Ukrainian information space and began to displace the Ukrainian language from the local mass media. The so-called “Crimean self-defense” and the Russian military in civilian clothes seized the office of the Crimean media, among others the “Center for Journalistic Investigations” in Simferopol, used force against journalists, damaged cameras, etc.

The purpose of the show massacres was, firstly, to silence those who tried to call a spade a spade: chronicled the seizure of Crimean strategic objects by the Russian army and explained why all this was a seizure, and not “a defense”, as Russian propaganda convinced; and secondly, to intimidate everyone who could replace them.

Among the hundreds of human rights violations that Crimean human rights defenders and journalists recorded in Crimea in February-March 2014, a significant number of them were against journalists and mass media. At the beginning of the occupation, due to pressure and persecution, about a dozen editors who had worked there for many years but refused to cooperate with the occupation authorities, left Crimea (Book of Testimonies: Anatomy of the Russian annexation of Crimea, 2019).

In October 2015, the editors of the BlackSeaNews portal received a message from Roskomnadzor with a warning about blocking access to the resource on the Russian territory, including Crimea, for an interview with Andrii Klymenko as the editor-in-chief of the site “The Black List and the Sea Blockade - Only a Small Fragment strategy for the return of Crimea...”, published on 07 July 2014, which allegedly “contains calls for mass riots, extremist activities, participation in public events held in violation of the established order”. The Crimean informational Internet resources “Center for Journalistic Investigations” and “Sobytiya Kryma” received the same notices from Roskomnadzor about blocking on the territory of the Russian Federation and occupied Crimea (Voice of Crimea. Information Agency, 2015: n/p).

Today, most Crimean television channels and radio stations do not have any Ukrainian-language broadcasts of the Crimea TRC, which was registered by the occupation regime as an autonomous non-commercial organization “Crimea Television and Radio Company”. In general, before the occupation, according to the UN report, more than 3,000 regional and local mass media worked in Crimea.

Today, the distribution of mass media took place according to the principle of “accepted – did not accepted the occupation”. According to the latest information, there are about 400 mass media in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and a little less in Sevastopol. All those who had a principled position, called a spade a spade, occupation was occupation,

sabotage was sabotage, were forced out of Crimea (Ukrinform. August 19, 2021: n/p).

Over the past 8 years, human rights defenders have recorded more than 500 violations of journalists' rights in Crimea. The main mass of them falls on 2014-2015, but even now such facts are not isolated. More than 200 journalists left the territory of the peninsula due to pressure, threats of opening criminal cases, etc. 12 mass media have left Crimea and continue their activities on the mainland of Ukraine (Media Detector, 2021: n/p).

Here are some examples of the journalists' detention over the past year. On 10 March 2023, in the temporarily occupied Crimea, employees of the FSS of the Russian Federation arrested Vladyslav Yesypenko, a freelance worker of Radio Liberty, who the day before took part in a rally for the birthday of Taras Shevchenko. On 12 March, he was charged with part 1 of Art. 223 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation - illegal manufacture, processing or repair of firearms and ammunition. By decision of the Kyivskyi district "court" of Simferopol, he was taken into custody for two months, until 11 May. Independent lawyers were not allowed to visit the journalist during detention in the Simferopol pre-trial detention center (Ukrinform. August 19, 2021: n/p).

On 29 April 2022, on the way from Koktebel to Feodosiia, the occupiers detained Iryna Danylovych, a nurse, who also worked as a journalist in several Crimean mass media and covered the problems of the health care system in Crimea and disseminated information about the war in Ukraine. On 28 December 2022, the occupation "court" of Feodosiia sentenced her to 7 years in prison on charges of illegal possession and manufacture of explosives. I. Danylovych did not admit her guilt. According to her father, Bronislav, her state of health remains unsatisfactory, she complains of constant headaches, hearing loss and problems with coordination of movements. Due to the lack of treatment and medical assistance, on 22 March, I. Danylovych announced a dry hunger strike "until the start of treatment or biological death". On 06 April, she ended her hunger strike after being promised that she would be allowed to see a lawyer and receive medical treatment. But the promise was not fulfilled (Media Detector, 2023: n/p.).

Over the past year, the State Duma of the Russian Federation has adopted a number of repressive laws that finally approve strict censorship. Many of them have contradictory wording and a wide range of crime subjects. In fact, anyone can be prosecuted for them. Professional Ukrainian mass media cannot legally work in Crimea. Public activists and bloggers are regularly prosecuted, "terrorist" criminal articles are used, and they are arrested on false charges (Crimean Human Rights Group, 2021).

At least 25 Ukrainian information websites have been illegally blocked in Crimea for several years. Russia purposefully suppresses the voices of professional journalists and bloggers, they are prosecuted for their professional activities in an administrative procedure, using articles on the restriction of freedom of assembly for this purpose, as a result of which Crimeans are deprived of the Ukrainian information field. The detention of bloggers and journalists, the blocking of Ukrainian media, new dictatorial laws, and the ban on entry became the basis for Ukraine's submission of a claim against Russia to the International Criminal Court in the Hague in early 2021 (Crimean Human Rights Group, 2021). But these violations continue. New and new facts of such pressure are being recorded.

On the border with the Kherson region, the occupiers installed a new television and radio tower, as a result of which the number of frequencies on which Ukrainian radio broadcasts can be heard has decreased. In March 2021, the signal of Ukrainian FM radio stations was recorded in 13 out of 19 settlements. In June of this year, Ukrainian broadcasting was available only in 8 settlements from the same list (Muzyka, 2021).

Therefore, freedom of speech is being suppressed in the occupied Crimea, independent mass media are almost non-existent. As a result, Crimean Ukrainians and Crimeans in general do not receive complete and reliable information and become less knowledgeable about various political, economic and social problems in Ukraine and the world. They are convinced that only the official information is true, the rest are the consequences of the "provocative" activity of Ukrainian and American "agents" who do not want to accept the "right of Crimeans to self-determination" (Book of Testimonies: Anatomy of The Russian Annexation of Crimea, 2019).

In this way, the Russian mass media imposes a distorted picture of the world using methods of military propaganda, an important component of which is the dehumanization of Ukraine, its political system and political forces, the cultivation of disrespect for the right of Ukrainians to choose a political system and a vector of integration, intolerance to many manifestations of Ukrainian identity, and sometimes to its complete denial (Ivanets, 2021).

3.3. Liquidation of the Ukrainian language and education on the peninsula

Russia justifies its invasion into Ukraine by protecting the Russian-speaking population here. But now we see the opposite result. In particular, even in Russian-speaking regions, the number of Ukrainian-speaking residents is rapidly increasing. Although Ukrainian, along with Russian and Crimean Tatar, is official the state language in the temporarily occupied Crimea, it is only on paper. There are no conditions for its preservation

and development. In fact, since 2014, the occupation authorities have eliminated the names of settlements with Ukrainian transcription. They did not hang the name in Russian nearby, but demonstratively removed the Ukrainian one.

From the very beginning of the peninsula's occupation, the invaders paid special attention to education. During the years of occupation in Crimea, not only the Ukrainian education system was destroyed, but also its infrastructure. According to the Commissioner for the Protection of the State Language, in 2013, 1,760 children (2.9% of the total) were educated in the Ukrainian language in 3 preschool educational institutions in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. There was one Ukrainian kindergarten in the city of Sevastopol, where 690 children (4.8%) were educated. However, since 2014, education in the Ukrainian language has not been carried out in Crimean preschools.

At the beginning of the 2013/2014 academic year, 12,694 students (7.2%) studied in the Ukrainian language in secondary education institutions in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. 7 secondary schools taught in Ukrainian, and another 76 taught in Ukrainian and Russian. A total of 829 classes with the Ukrainian language of studying operated in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. In the city of Sevastopol, there was one school with the Ukrainian language of instruction, 50 classes with the Ukrainian language of instruction, where 994 (3%) students studied, and 9 schools where teaching was carried out in Ukrainian and Russian. In the 2020/2021 academic year, 218,974 schoolchildren studied in 547 secondary schools in Crimea. Of them, 214 (0.1%) studied in Ukrainian.

162 students studied in the only official operating school No. 20 with the Ukrainian language of instruction in the city of Feodosiia, where children study up to the 9th grade using the Ukrainian language. However, according to the parents, all subjects are taught here in Russian. Another 52 students' study in three Ukrainian-language classes of the Simferopol Academic Gymnasium, which before the occupation had the name "Ukrainian School-Gymnasium". Thus, there is not a single school in the currently occupied Crimea where all subjects are taught in the Ukrainian language. Classes with the Ukrainian language are also significantly reduced (Miroshnychenko, 2023).

The occupying state manipulates, indicating that thousands of Crimeans study the Ukrainian language "as a subject, in-depth, optional, in extracurricular work" because it is almost impossible to check the study system, especially in extracurricular time.

The fictitiousness of teaching in Ukrainian is also evidenced by the methodical support. Thus, in 2015, the programs "Ukrainian language" and "Ukrainian literature" (mother and foreign) were developed for

preschool and general education organizations, which were approved by the decision of the federal educational and methodological association for general education of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation (protocol No. 2/15 dated 20 May 2015). However, they are written in Russian. Regarding the provision of textbooks, only 7 textbooks for primary school on Ukrainian language and literature have been issued. And not a single one was issued for secondary school.

Their content does not withstand any criticism. Also, the occupiers deceived everyone proclaiming the equality of the languages of instruction on the peninsula. After all, teaching in one's native language, according to Russian legislation, is possible only at the level of preschool, primary general and basic general education (Article 14, item 4 of the Law of the Russian Federation "On Education" and Article 11.2 of Law No. 131-ZRK/2015 of 06.06.2015 "On education in the Republic of Crimea"), that is, only in grades 1-9, and in grades 10-11 – teaching is in Russian (Okhredko, 2020).

The displacement of the Ukrainian language from the educational space is connected with the militarization of education since 2014, which is aimed at destroying Ukrainian identity and culture in Crimea and instilling a Russian identity in Crimeans. This happens through the activities of the organizations "Youth Army", "Big Break", "Movement of the Firsts", the formation of cadet classes, holding lessons on "Conversations about different things", military events and shows, even in preschool institutions, visits of Russian servicemen to educational institutions, etc. The militarization of education contributes to the heroization of the Russian army and its history, forming the image of the enemy in the Crimeans from Ukraine and its people (Miroshnychenko, 2023).

In 2014, the Department of History of Ukraine and the Faculty of Ukrainian Philology were liquidated at the V. Vernadsky Taurida National University. A significant part of university lecturers was dismissed. In 2014, the occupiers illegally united the educational institution with several other universities and renamed it into "V.I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University". Ukrainian language and literature departments were closed in other Crimean universities (Ivanets, 2021: 27).

In 2014, the Ukrainian School-Gymnasium TEC in Simferopol was captured by militants of the Crimean Self-Defense paramilitary formation, and later subordinated to the Russian Ministry of Education. Due to threats of prosecution, Nataliia Rudenko, the principal, had to resign and leave Crimea.

After the occupation in Crimea, not only the language of teaching (Ukrainian to Russian), but also the content of education in general changes. In particular, the teaching of humanitarian disciplines has undergone the most significant transformations. This especially applies to the history of

Ukraine, which was replaced by the history of Russia, and textbooks on Ukrainian history were removed from the educational process.

In the textbook on the history of Russia for the 10th grade, the events of the 20th century are presented in a more or less balanced way, although not entirely correct and biased, presented materials about the Holodomor of 1932–1933, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the German-Soviet war, and the activities of the OUN-UPA. Contemporary events (the Orange Revolution of 2004, the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, the referendum and the annexation of Crimea, etc.) are interpreted with a high political conjuncture (Samchuk, 2018).

Teachers who did not agree to teach according to the new rules of the occupiers were fired. For instance, Valentyna Potapova, who until 2014 taught at the Crimean Humanities University (Yalta) at the Department of History and Law, was forced to resign and leave Crimea due to her pro-Ukrainian position. She was threatened with criminal proceedings for public non-recognition of Russia's territorial integrity using her official position (Lykhovyd, 2023).

3.4. Russia's liquidation of Ukrainian cultural heritage in Crimea and its disregard for the right of Crimean Ukrainians to freedom of religion

Currently, the Russian authorities also pursue an anti-Ukrainian policy aimed at seizing and destroying the cultural heritage of Ukraine. In a short period of time, it prepared a normative and legal framework that made it possible to legalize the Crimean cultural heritage in the legal field of Russia. On 08 August 2014, the so-called "State Council of the Republic of Crimea" adopted the law "On objects of cultural heritage in the Republic of Crimea", which states that "objects of cultural heritage (monuments of history and culture) in the Republic of Crimea are an integral part of the national wealth and property of the peoples of the Russian Federation" (Voice of Crimea. Culture, 2023: n/p).

The majority of specialized Crimean scientific and museum institutions were also appropriated through re-registration under the legislation of the Russian Federation by the end of 2014. Thus, at the legislative level, conditions were created for the "legal" functioning of institutions and establishments in the field of cultural heritage

During the so-called "restoration", such historical and cultural monuments of the Crimean Peninsula as the Mithridates Stairs, the Khan's Palace in Bakhchysarai, the Tower of St. Constantine, the Dock Tower and others were damaged and partially destroyed (Voice of Crimea. Culture, 2020: n/p). Evelina Kravchenko, the head of the Inkerman expedition of the Institute of Archeology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine,

cites a vivid example of the criminal attitude of the Russian occupation authorities to the monument, which is included in the UNESCO world heritage list. It is about the situation with landscape transformations in Chersonese. There, on the Roman citadel, where the military authority of the Roman Empire was located, an open-air theater is now built with rows of spectators and a mounted stage with modern, rather heavy equipment, where plays are performed (Voice of Crimea. Culture, 2023: n/p).

In 1991–2014, many different monuments were installed in Crimea. Most of them reflected Soviet and Russian history, but there were also those that were about Ukrainian identity, Ukrainian national memory, the ancient history of Crimea, and other topics. Although it is difficult the peculiar multidimensional nature of Crimean history and the present, and Crimea as a part of Ukraine, was gradually asserted among the Crimeans.

This process was interrupted by the Russian occupation of Ukrainian autonomy and Sevastopol. Already in 2014, the Russian Federation began to move cultural heritage from the peninsula, especially paintings from the Feodosiia Art Gallery named after Aivazovsky, archaeological objects from the funds of the East Crimean Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve (Kerch), exhibits of the Yalta Historical and Literary Museum, etc.

This violates, in particular, Article 11 of the Convention on Measures for the Prohibition and Prevention of Illegal Export, Import, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, dated 14 November 1970, which states that the seizure or transfer of rights to cultural property, which occur as a result of occupation, are illegal. The illegal activities of the occupying state regarding the transportation of Crimean exhibits to its territory for presentation in Russian museums continue up to this day (Voice of Crimea. Culture, 2023: n/p).

Instead, in recent years, Russia has illegally erected more than 130 architectural monuments in Crimea and Sevastopol in the context of promoting the ideological narratives of the so-called “Russian world”, a large part of which promotes Russian imperial ideology and justifies aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, the occupation authorities dismantled the monument to Hetman of Ukraine Petro Sahaidachnyi and the commemorative sign in honor of the 10th anniversary of the Ukrainian Navy in Sevastopol, the foundation stone of the monument to Taras Shevchenko in Novoozernyi was liquidated.

In 1954, the Crimean Academic Ukrainian Musical Theater was founded in Simferopol, in the repertoire of which plays based on the works of M. Starytskyi, M. Kropyvnytskyi, I. Karpenko-Kary and other outstanding Ukrainian dramatists took the main place. At the end of the 20th - at the beginning of the 21st century, this art institution was actually transformed from a drama to an operetta as part of the attack on the Ukrainian presence

in Crimea. Despite this, in 2011, Viktor Humeniuk's staging of Volodymyr Vynnychenko's drama "The Lie" became a landmark.

The premiere of this performance was attended by many representatives of the intellectual elite of Ukraine. In March 2014, Taras Shevchenko's play "Nazar Stodolia" was staged in the theater for the 200th anniversary of the poet. In November 2014, by the decision of the occupation administration, this art institution was illegally deprived of its Ukrainian status and transformed into the "State Academic Musical Theater of the Republic of Crimea". In 2015–2020, there was not a single Ukrainian-language play in its repertoire (Ivanets, 2021: 30).

The illegal occupation of the peninsula and the Russian-Ukrainian war have had a negative impact on Ukrainian religious life there. One of the most important religious organizations that play a leading role in the preservation and protection of Ukrainian spirituality and morality on the peninsula are the Crimean Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (hereinafter - UOC KP) and the Crimean Exarchate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (hereinafter - UGCC).

In 2014, the UOC KP in Crimea consisted of 49 religious' structures. Currently, in conditions of constant oppression and persecution, only 7 of its communities and 4 priests continue their activities. The number of parishes has decreased significantly, some premises, some churches have been taken by force. Individual priests have been fined and detained

The number of Greek-Catholic parishes has decreased from 11 to 5. Part of the UGCC believers, the majority of whom were ethnic Ukrainians, were forced to leave Crimea after the Russian annexation. The number of parishes has decreased from 11 to 5. Some believers stopped visiting UGCC churches due to religious restrictions imposed by Russia (mandatory registration, prohibition of Ukrainian citizens and non-parishioners from participating in religious services, holding religious services outside the church, etc.), physical and other pressure.

On 15 March 2014, in Sevastopol, "self-defense" militants kidnapped Mykola Kvysh, the priest of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary parish in Sevastopol, the chief military chaplain of the Crimean Exarchate of the UGCC, during the service, the Russian special services subjected him to interrogation and physical pressure, and the occupation authorities threatened prosecution.

After his release, the priest managed to leave Crimea. In Simferopol, there was an attack on a private house where the UGCC chapel is located. Ihor Havryliv, who at the beginning of 2014 was the dean of the Crimean deanery of the UGCC, was pressed to transfer to the UOC of the Moscow Patriarchate. Due to the threat of complete liquidation and pressure, the Greek Catholics in Crimea re-registered as a separate exarchate of the

Byzantine rite under the direct authority of the Vatican (Ivanets, 2021). But this does not save from persecution, violation of freedom of religion.

Greek Catholics in Crimea continue to be under pressure. For example, in 2016, the Greek-Catholic community in Yevpatoriia was deprived of the premises in the library of the central resort polyclinic for a chapel, which they used for a long time, and in 2017, the “Leninskyi District Court” in Sevastopol suspended the activities of the Greek-Catholic community for 2 weeks for the fact that services were conducted by a priest-citizen of Ukraine without a patent of the occupying state or a work permit. The cleric was deported with a ban on entering the territory of the Russian Federation and the occupied south of Ukraine (Ivanets, 2021).

The occupying state constantly fines Greek Catholic parishes. In particular, in the spring of 2019, the Greek Catholic parish in Sevastopol was fined for not having a sign on the building with the full name of the religious organization, and in October 2020, a fine of 30,000 rubles was imposed on the Yalta Greek Catholic community for a similar “violation” (Ivanets, 2021).

In general, Russian legislation in Crimea is discriminatory against a number of denominations and does not ensure the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and religion and the protection of religious organizations. Religious organizations that have not been re-registered under Russian laws have found themselves in a particularly difficult situation.

4. Discussion

One of the acute and debatable issues among Ukrainian politicians, the public, and scientists today is the attitude of Ukrainian society to the Crimean issue and determining the ways of the future de-occupation and reintegration of Crimea.

In 2016–2021, the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation together with the sociological service of the Razumkov Center conducted 3 sociological surveys. In 2016, 54% of respondents believed in the future return of Crimea to Ukraine, 37% considered its return unlikely, and 14% allowed this issue to be resolved by force. In 2018, these numbers were already 48%, 36% and 10%, respectively, and in 2021 – 43%, 44%. Also, 27% of respondents considered the strengthening of the armed forces of Ukraine to prepare for the operation to liberate Crimea as one of the factors of de-occupation of the peninsula. 10% of Ukrainians perceived Crimea as an independent state entity (Palshkov, 2023: 175–176).

At the beginning of the Crimean annexation, the attitude towards it as a Ukrainian territory temporarily occupied by Russia prevailed in all regions of Ukraine, except Donbas (22%). For instance, this position was supported by 90% of residents in Halychyna, 88.5% in Volyn, 86% in the city of Kyiv, 82.5% in the Lower Dnieper region, 77% in the Central region, 65% in the Southwest, Polissia – 71% and Podillia – 57.5%. Fewer respondents voted for it in Slobozhanshchyna - 45%, but there were the largest number of those who could not decide on this issue - 20% (International Center for Prospective Studies, 2015: n/p).

All-Ukrainian public opinion regarding the methods of returning Crimea was somewhat divided between several options. 24% of respondents spoke in favor of the return of Crimea as a result of effective internal reforms in Ukraine and an increase in the level of well-being. 21% - for the fact that this would happen as a result of the deterioration of the internal political and economic situation in the Russian Federation. Another 14% of Ukrainians believed that returning Crimea was possible only by military means. 13% supported the method of international pressure and Western sanctions on Russia. At the same time, 16% of the population of Ukraine did not see any way to return Crimea (International Center for Prospective Studies, 2015: n/p).

Here we shall note that since the occupation of the peninsula, the optimistic mood of the population regarding the prospects of the return of Ukrainian control over the peninsula has subsided somewhat, while at the same time skepticism has grown. Regarding the increase of those who considered the military way of de-occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, this can be explained by the increased public's faith in the Armed Forces, which were gradually reformed and strengthened (Palshkov, 2023; Ukrinform. August 20, 2021).

The attitudes of Ukrainians regarding the need to return Crimea changed dramatically after Russia's full-scale invasion into Ukraine in February 2022. According to a survey conducted on 12-13 March 2022 by the sociological group "Rating", 80% of respondents believed that Ukraine should use all opportunities to return Crimea under Ukrainian jurisdiction (Palshkov, 2023).

It shall also be noted that people over the age of 60 (54%) and residents of Eastern Ukraine (47%) saw the least political future of Crimea as part of Ukraine. Young people aged 18-29 (67%) and residents of Western Ukraine (73%) believed in the return of Crimea to Ukraine the most (Ukrinform. August 20, 2021).

In our opinion, in the future, an important factor in the formation of public expectations will be successful military operations by Ukraine and the prevention of "freezing" conflict in any form. The current Russian-

Ukrainian conflict will not end without the return of Crimea. And there are several explanations for this. In particular, the majority of Ukrainians do not recognize Crimea as Russian and are not ready to give it up in exchange for ending the war.

The annexation of Crimea violates the basic principles of international law, and the presence of Russian troops in Crimea creates a constant military threat to the south of Ukraine. The de-occupation of the Crimean Peninsula is the only way to return it from an authoritarian to a democratic path of development and to prevent the further displacement of Ukrainians from there. This will also make it possible to unblock certain areas of the Black and Azov seas, over which Russia has established de facto control and the Ukrainian economy is suffering huge losses due to the impossibility of normal export of its products.

Conclusion

Having breached bilateral agreements and other international obligations in 2014, Russia occupied and annexed Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, thereby undermined international law and the global security system. This part of the Ukrainian territory has been transformed into a military bridgehead for further hostilities, where a policy aimed at discrimination and gradual assimilation of Ukrainians is carried out. Since 2014, Ukrainian national identity has been the main factor in criminal and humanitarian violations, as well as human rights violations in Crimea.

The Russian authorities are persecuting, repressing and arresting pro-Ukrainian Crimean activists for using and demonstrating Ukrainian symbols, for listening to and singing Ukrainian songs. The activities of Ukrainian political and most public organizations are prohibited here, and the right to freedom of assembly is restricted.

The isolation of Crimea from the Ukrainian information space has become the basis for the deepening and expansion of Russian repression on the peninsula. There are no Ukrainian newspapers and magazines that can be ordered by subscription in the catalog of the occupation postal operators and “Crimean Post”.

Illegal termination of rebroadcasting of Ukrainian TV programs and radio stations in Crimea by the Russian authorities, restriction of access to its territory of Ukrainian printed products and a number of Ukrainian websites has a negative impact on meeting the informational and cultural needs of ethnic Ukrainians and has significantly limited their opportunities to maintain a cultural connection with the mainland of Ukraine. In addition, Russian TV channels have become the only source of information

for Crimeans. All this has led to the fact that the inhabitants of Crimea, in particular the youth, began to feel alienated from Ukrainian culture and language.

The attack on Ukrainian identity is also in other aspects of the information sphere of Crimea. For example, there is an active campaign to change the historical memory and create a false history of Crimea, which justifies the illegal annexation of the peninsula by Russia. Most museums and other cultural institutions were Russified and stripped of Ukrainian traditions and national symbols.

The activities of institutions that promote Ukrainian culture and traditions have been mostly suspended. In particular, in February 2015, the Museum of Ukrainian needlework was closed, and books by modern Ukrainian authors were seized from the library named after I. Franko in Simferopol. In May 2017, the Ukrainian Cultural Center” in Simferopol was closed due to a lack of funds to pay for the rent of the premises, and its director left Crimea.

Currently, monuments are being destroyed on the peninsula, property is being expropriated or people are being forcibly deprived of property, illegal archaeological excavations are being carried out, artifacts obtained as a result of archaeological excavations are being taken outside Crimea, as well as non-compliance with the international humanitarian law on the provision and protection of monuments in the occupied territory.

Today, there are no Ukrainian-language schools in Crimea, while there were seven of them before. All of them were created on the initiative of Crimean Ukrainians, whose opinion the local authorities had to take into account. In fact, of the 13,000 schoolchildren who studied in the Ukrainian language in Crimea until 2014, today there remain less than 200, that is, their number has decreased tenfold (Medvid, 2023: n/p).

Students do not study Ukrainian history, language, literature, etc. in lessons. The number of students receiving education in the Ukrainian language has decreased by 97% since the occupation. Pro-Ukrainian Crimean teachers were replaced by Russian teachers, the ideological “re-education” of teachers is taking place. There are no programs and textbooks on Ukrainian studies subjects. Soldiers are being trained for the Russian army through youth movements and organizations. Children in Crimea do not know the real situation about the Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine.

The removal of the Ukrainian language from education in the occupied Crimea is a deliberate attempt to erase Ukrainian identity from the region. By forcing Crimean schools to teach exclusively in Russian, the occupying Russian administration deprives Ukrainian children of the opportunity to learn and use their native language, which is an integral part of their cultural

identity. The militarization of education, on the other hand, involves promoting the heroization of the Russian army and its history, while at the same time forming a hostile attitude towards Ukraine and its people.

Since the occupation, “freedom of religion and belief in Crimea has been threatened by a number of incidents targeting representatives of minority faiths and their religious objects” (Human Rights, 2019: 22). The Ukrainian Orthodox Church supports independent Ukraine and takes an open position against the occupation. After the annexation of the peninsula, the UOC KP/OCU decided not to change its registration to the Russian Federation and therefore it is not accepted by Russian legislation. In 2020, it was able to use 9 premises designed directly for the Crimean Diocese.

Its leadership was made to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights regarding the violation of the rights of believers. At the same time, the UN Human Rights Committee in 2015 expressed concern about “violations of freedom of religion and belief in the territory of Crimea, including intimidation and persecution of religious communities, including attacks on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church...” (Human Rights, 2019: 22).

Thus, the Russian campaign in Crimea with all its political, military and propaganda methods is aimed at restoring a nostalgic, ethnic feeling of loyalty to Russia, which includes the elimination of both the idea of a separate Ukrainian “people” and the idea of Ukrainian national identity.

As a result of the audacious occupation of Crimea, Russia has created another source of instability in the world, a threat to the vital interests of Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic region in the security, economic and humanitarian spheres. Therefore, regaining control over the temporarily occupied territory of Crimea is a national and vital task for Ukraine. The state, public and political figures, organizations, and business should make their contribution to its implementation.

Therefore, taking into account the above, we believe that the Ukrainian state authorities shall implement an effective humanitarian and ethno-national policy. One of its tasks is to protect the rights, satisfy the ethno-cultural, spiritual and informational and educational needs of Crimean Ukrainians in the free territory and, as much as possible, on the peninsula, as well as to promote their consolidation. It is necessary to regulate the status of the Ukrainian community in Crimea legislatively, carry out constant monitoring to meet the needs of Ukrainians on the peninsula, protect their rights, freedoms and interests, and respond to detected violations promptly.

The development of a number of studies on the history of the Crimea and its Ukrainian community, the study of the historical and cultural heritage of the Crimean Ukrainians requires significant activation. It is worth ensuring the preparation of Ukrainian information programs with the aim of broadcasting them to the occupied Crimean territory.

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