

Natalia Yakovenko
Inna Valevska

The formation of independent Ukrainian state through cooperation and joint struggle of the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar peoples

Abstract

The article explores the processes of formation of contemporary Ukrainian political nation, founded by both the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar peoples. The unique nature of this process lies in the fact that the Crimean Tatars, who are ethnically Turkic, religiously Muslim, and are bearers of a different „cultural code” in contrast to Ukrainians, who are Slavs and predominantly Christians, have become subjects in the formation of the Ukrainian political nation. They both fight side by side for the Ukrainian state and envision their future together.

The article is aimed at studying the reasons behind such a unique phenomenon in the modern world, which suffers from conflicts of identity – ethnic, linguistic, religious, and historical ones. The writers of the paper are trying to analyze processes and reasons behind the Crimean Tatars’ struggle for Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, which is also a struggle for their own political subjectivity. The authors also try to examine why cultural, historical, and political development of the Crimean Tatar people is possible only within the framework of a unified Ukrainian state.

Key words: Crimean Tatar people, Ukrainian people, annexation of Crimea, Russia’s genocide policy in Crimea

Introduction

The formation of a modern democratic state always has one of its driving forces: the fate of the peoples who are subjects of its sovereignty. It is historically rooted that one of integral parts of the Ukrainian people, as a subject of the political process, is the Crimean Tatars. Crimean Tatars are Turkic by ethnic origin, Muslim according to religious affiliation, and bear an entirely different „cultural code” in contrast to Ukrainians.

In the modern world, we observe numerous conflicts based on identity – religious, national, historical. Almost every country is facing challenges of the contemporary world, in particular the coexistence of different peoples within a single state. These issues include the refugee crisis in Europe, religious conflicts, as well as conflicts based on socio-cultural markers of identity, and the problems of coexistence and adaptation of peoples in a globalized world.

In this context, Ukraine is something of an exception. Islamic people having different ethnicity and culture, alongside Ukrainians – who are predominantly Christian – have become a subject of formation of Ukrainian political nation. They fight side by side with Ukrainians for the Ukrainian state and view their future together with Ukrainians.

Our research presents an attempt to understand the reasons of this phenomenon, while examining the prerequisites for the formation of Ukrainian political nation, the features of societal and political communication within the Ukrainian society – such as building a dialogue with the Crimean Tatar people and creation of value-based foundations in the relationship between the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar peoples.

The Crimean Tatar people in Modern History of Ukraine

The history of formation of modern Ukraine is closely connected with the processes of the USSR disintegration and is influenced by those political and historical events that had taken place over decades within the Soviet empire. On 19 II 1954, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Council issued a Decree transferring Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR. The official reason was the commonality of economy, territorial proximity, and close economic and cultural ties between the Crimean oblast (region) and the Ukrainian SSR. Besides, in a propagandist way, it was officially stressed that this act commemorates the 300th anniversary of Russia-Ukraine unification and symbolizes eternal friendship between Russian and Ukrainian peoples. In April 1954, the Supreme Council legalized this Decree and decided to make corresponding amendments to the USSR Constitution.

In June of the same year, corresponding amendments were made to the republican constitutions. Thus, the process of transferring Crimea was legally completed¹.

At that time, Crimea was still devastated by World War II and depopulated following the mass deportation of the Crimean Tatars. Ukraine not only „inherited” the peninsula but also intertwined its fate with the fate of the wronged, unjustly accused, and nearly destroyed Crimean Tatar people due to the deportation.

The shared history of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars begins when the Crimean Tatar people, after a long and exhausting struggle for their existence, finally gained the opportunity to return to their homeland, Crimea. If the deportation took place from the Crimean oblast (region) of the RSFSR – Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, they returned to the Ukrainian SSR – Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which in 1989 was still a part of the Soviet Union. It goes without saying that the people who began the process of repatriation faced fierce resistance from both the Soviet political elites on the peninsula and the negative attitudes of the „local” residents, who were extremely hostile towards the returnees. These were the results of the Soviet propaganda and the classic „myths” about the Crimean Tatars in the Soviet Union. For indigenous Crimeans a difficult process of reestablishing themselves on their native land began.

After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the situation for the Crimean Tatars began to change, albeit very slowly and with considerable difficulty. New Ukrainian political elites began to realize the necessity of engaging in dialogue with the Crimean Tatar people. It should be mentioned that from the very beginning, the Crimean Tatars embraced and welcomed Ukraine’s independence. Having a tragic historical experience of existence within the Russian state – regardless of its historical name – they placed their hopes on life and development in Ukraine. Ukraine had the opportunity and took on the responsibility to its citizens, guaranteeing the Crimean Tatar people rights, protection, and support for their cultural and political development.

Repressive policies of the Russian and Soviet Empires

The history of Crimean Tatars in the Russian Empire begins in the late XVIII – early XIX century, when, as a result of wars between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, the Crimean Khanate was incorporated into the Novorossiya Gubernia, and from 1802, into the Taurida Gubernia of the Russian Empire.

¹ 70 років тому до складу УРСР передали Крим, зруйнований війною і спустошений депортаціями, [https://babel.ua/texts/59594-67-rokiv-tomu-do-skladu-ursr-peredali-krim-zruynovaniy-viynoyu-i-pustosheniy-deportaciyami-zgaduyemo-yak-vidnovlyuvati-zhittya](https://babel.ua/texts/59594-67-rokiv-tomu-do-skladu-ursr-peredali-krim-zruynovaniy-viynoyu-i-pustosheniy-deportaciyami) (25 VII 2024).

Despite Catherine II's manifesto of 1783, which guaranteed national and religious rights of the Crimean Tatars, the Empire's policy of persecution forced a significant portion of the population to emigrate to the Ottoman Empire. Simultaneously, immigration processes occurred on the Crimean Peninsula, with the peninsula being actively settled by representatives of various peoples from the Empire – Russians, Ukrainians, Germans and others. This led to a reduction in the proportion of Tatars in Crimea from 80% of the total population at the beginning of the peninsula's incorporation into the Russian Empire to 35.5% by the end of the XIX century².

According to the 1774 Kuchuk-Kainarji Treaty, the Crimean Khanate ceased to be a vassal of Turkey and the Crimean state was proclaimed independent under the protection of Russia. In 1783, it was annexed to the Russian Empire, reorganised as Tavrida Province in 1802, and retained this status and the same administrative structure until the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917. In 1917 Crimean Tatars made up 36.6 % of rural population and only 11.3% of urban population in Crimea³.

The policy of the Russian Empire in Crimea was marked by absolute cynicism – Crimean Tatar architectural and artistic monuments were destroyed, and mosques were demolished. At best, mosques were converted into Orthodox churches. In 1805, there were 1,556 mosques in Crimea, but by 1914, their number had dropped to 729⁴.

In November and December 1917, the Crimean Tatar Qurultay held in Bakhchisarai, declared the Crimea „to be for the Crimeans” and elected Crimean Tatar national government called „Directoria” on 12 XII 1917. However, this Declaration proved unacceptable to the Bolshevik Soviet government, which announced it counter-revolutionary and forbade its implementation⁵.

For the first time, the autonomy of Crimea, as a part of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic, was established in March 1918 and named the Soviet Socialist Republic of Tavrida – SSRT. On 19 and 21 III 1918, the Tavrida Central Executive Committee, which had been elected in Simferopol at the First Constituent Congress of Soviets, Revolutionary Committees and Land Committees of Tavrida, adopted Decrees establishing the Tavrida SSR.

This arrangement did not last long. In April 1918, the Tavrida SSR was occupied by German troops and a revolt of White Guards and Tatar Nationalists broke out in Alushta. The Tavrida SSR fell on 30 IV 1918, and for the following

² А. Байцар, *Український Крим: Кримське ханство і Козацька Україна*, <http://plus.lviv.ua/publ/13-1-0-743> (28 IV 2018).

³ В. Чумак, *Україна і Крим: Спільність історичної долі*, Київ 1993, p. 38.

⁴ А. Байцар, *Крим. Нариси історичної, природничої і суспільної географії*, Львів 2007.

⁵ *Борьба за советскую власть в Крыму: Документы и материалы, т. 1*, Симферополь 1957, p. 153.

two years the peninsula became the arena of armed conflict between Bolshevik and the White Guard and interventionist forces.

The short-lived period of Crimean Tatar statehood in 1917-1919 ended just as tragically as the Ukrainian National Republic. In November 1920, at the cessation of hostilities, Crimea was absorbed into the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic.

Crimean Autonomy, however, was re-established by the Resolution of Sovnarkom RSFSR and Central Executive Committee of 18 X 1921. Thus, the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created as a part of the RSFSR. The official state languages were Russian and Tatar.

After the USSR was created in 1922, Moscow recognized the Crimean Tatars as the indigenous people of the Crimean ASSR within the policy of „korenizatsiya” (indigenization). In the 1920s, Crimean Tatars were allowed to develop their culture. In Crimea, there were Crimean Tatar newspapers, magazines, educational institutions, museums, libraries, and theaters. Crimean Tatar, along with Russian, was an official language of the autonomy.

From the mid-1930s, Soviet policy towards the Tatars, like towards other nationalities in the USSR, became repressive. Initially, this involved the relocation of Tatars to northern Russia and beyond the Urals. Then came forced collectivization and the Holodomor of 1932-1933. Following this, there were the purges of the intelligentsia in 1937-1938. The same fate befell some other oppressed peoples of the Soviet Union, including Ukrainians. However, the history of the Crimean Tatars is unique in that, driven by political interests, the leadership of the Soviet Union decided on the physical destruction of the entire people.

The deportation of the people was carried out according to the personal order of Joseph Stalin. The official reason for the forced relocation was the accusation of the entire Crimean Tatar population of treason, collaboration, and cooperation with the Nazi occupants. In fact, it is believed that the reason behind the decision to deport the Crimean Tatar people was the Soviet Union’s plan to strengthen its southern borders. Given the close historical ties between the Crimean Tatars and Turkey, their presence in Crimea was deemed undesirable. Supporting this reason is the fact that other Muslim peoples from the Caucasian regions adjacent to Turkey were also relocated – the Chechens, Ingushs, Karachays, and Balkars.

For the deportation of the entire people, the NKVD (the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) deployed over 32,000 soldiers. The main phase of the forced relocation was lasting for about three days, starting at dawn on 18 V 1944, and ending at 4:00 PM on 20 V 1944. A total of 238,500 people were deported from Crimea – almost the entire Crimean Tatar population. This event is called Sürgün in the Crimean Tatar language; the few who escaped were shot on sight or drowned in scuttled barges, and within months half their number had died

of cold, hunger, exhaustion and disease. Many of them were re-located to toil as indentured workers in the Soviet GULAG system.

Many people were transported by trucks to railway stations. From there, nearly 70 trains with tightly sealed freight cars, overcrowded with people, were sent eastwards. During the relocation, about 8,000 people died, most of whom were children and the elderly. The most common causes of death were thirst and typhus.

The majority of Tatars were sent to Uzbekistan and the neighboring regions of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. About 30,000 were sent to the Mari ASSR, the Ural region, and several other Russian regions. In the first three years after resettlement, according to various estimates, 20% to 46% of all deportees died of hunger, exhaustion, and disease. The overwhelming majority of Crimean Tatars were transported to so-called special settlements – areas surrounded by militarized guards, checkpoints, and barbed wire, which resembled labor camps rather than settlements for peaceful civilians.

The newcomers were a cheap labor force and were used to work in collective farms, state farms and at industrial enterprises. In Uzbekistan, they worked in cotton fields, mines, construction sites, factories, and plants. Among the most arduous labour was the construction of the Farhad Hydroelectric Power Station⁶.

In 1948, Moscow declared the Crimean Tatars to be lifelong exiles. Those who left their special settlement without the NKVD permission, for instance to visit relatives, risked a 20-year imprisonment.

In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev condemned Stalin's deportation. However, at that time, the Soviet government did not remove the accusation of treason from the Crimean Tatars (as it did not for other deported peoples) and did not allow them to return to their homeland or even to the southern regions neighboring Crimea. The children of the deportees could receive education in Russian or Uzbek, but not in the Crimean Tatar language. Until 1957, any publications in the Crimean Tatar language were prohibited. The Great Soviet Encyclopedia had an article about the Crimean Tatars removed. This nationality was also banned from being listed in passports.

After the expulsion of the Tatars, as well as Greeks, Bulgarians, and Germans from the peninsula, Crimea lost its status as an autonomous republic in June 1945 and became a region within the RSFSR. In 1954, the Soviet leadership, headed by Nikita Khrushchev, transferred the Crimean oblast (region) from the RSFSR

⁶ *Депортація кримських татар 1944 р. та заходи, що вживаються урядом України з метою облаштування та інтеграції в українське суспільство колишніх депортованих кримських татар*, 11 V 2014, <http://usa.mfa.gov.ua/en/press-center/news/22718-deportacija-krimskykh-tatar-1944-r-ta-zahodi-shho-vzhivajutysya-uryadom-ukrajini-z-metoju-oblash-tuvannya-ta-integraciji-v-ukrajinskyke-suspilstvo-kolishnih-deportovanihkrimskykh-tatar> (25 VII 2024).

to the Ukrainian SSR. In the Decree by the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR, the reasons for this decision were explained as follows: „Considering the territorial connection of the Crimean region to the Ukrainian SSR, the common economic ties, and the close economic and cultural connections between the Crimean region and the Ukrainian SSR”⁷.

In 1967, the Supreme Council of the USSR removed the accusation of mass treason against the Crimean Tatars during World War II, but still did not grant them the right to return to Crimea.

Relations Between the Crimean Tatar People and the Ukrainian State

Gradually, through exhausting and uncompromising struggle, the Crimean Tatars managed to achieve certain expansion of their rights: they were allowed to settle across the entire territory of the USSR. However, an informal but nonetheless stringent ban on their return to Crimea remained in effect until 1989. In 1989, as the Soviet Union was nearing its final years, the Supreme Council of the USSR adopted a Declaration titled „On the Recognition of Repressive Acts Against Peoples Subjected to Forced Relocation as Illegal and Criminal, and Ensuring Their Rights”⁸.

The return to their historic homeland for the indigenous population was challenging and was accompanied by land conflicts with the local residents who had settled in Crimea and held hostile attitudes towards the repatriates. Gradually, step by step, relations between the Crimean people and the Ukrainian state were being built. After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the state found itself largely alone in supporting the return of the Crimean Tatars. In late 1991, the first President of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, established the credo of the Ukrainian government regarding the restoration of national rights of the Crimean Tatar people. This included creating economic conditions for their resettlement to their historical homeland and establishing conditions for the Crimean Tatar people to occupy a corresponding place in the state’s administrative structures⁹.

⁷ Д. Шурхало, *70 років тому: як Крим перейшов до складу України*, 9 II 2024, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/yak-krum-pereyshov-do-skladu-ukrayiny/32812565.html> (25 VII 2024).

⁸ Декларація Верховної Ради СРСР „Про визнання незаконними і злочинними репресивних актів проти народів, яких було піддано насильственному переселенню, і забезпечення їхніх прав”, 14 XI 1989, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/v0772400-89#Text> (25 VII 2024).

⁹ *Крим – це Україна, попри всі намагання окупантів. Коротка історія українського півострова*, „The Village. Україна”, 29 XI 2023, <https://www.village.com.ua/village/knowledge/podcast/345545-ukrainian-history-street-2023-s02e06> (27 I 2024).

Before the Russian Federation occupied the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in February-March 2014, Ukraine, in fact, spent its own resources to resolve the socioeconomic problems of Crimean Tatars and individuals of other nationalities who returned to Crimea for permanent residence. Starting from 1991, the State Budget of Ukraine had a separate item to settle the repatriates. The budget money was spent mostly on the construction of housing, engineering communications, and sociocultural objects. The total expenditure from the State Budget of Ukraine to settle the individuals formerly deported on the national basis amounted to over UAH 1,270 million (over 158 million USD) as of end-2013¹⁰.

In the 1990s, the Ukrainian political leadership regarded the Crimean Tatars as allies in countering pro-Soviet or pro-Russian separatism in Crimea. This perspective is explained by the clearly pro-Ukrainian stance of the Crimean Tatars, who began to play a counterbalancing role on the peninsula, where separatist tendencies were increasingly becoming evident.

Gradually, an institutional dialogue between the official government of Kyiv and the Crimean Tatars was established. On 18 V 1999, President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma signed a Decree „On the Council of Representatives of the Crimean Tatar People”, which consisted specifically of representatives from the Mejlis. This led to legalization of the Mejlis. However, Kuchma’s successors in the presidency made limited use of this communication instrument with the political leadership of the Crimean Tatars. For instance, Viktor Yushchenko paid almost no attention to these opportunities. His successor, President Viktor Yanukovich, in summer 2010, completely altered the principle of forming this consultative and advisory body, which had previously consisted exclusively of Mejlis members. Yanukovich included in its composition a majority of forces opposing the national-democratic movement of the Crimean Tatars. At that time, the authorities tended to react situationally to various problems rather than developing a coherent national policy¹¹.

The results of measures taken by the Government of Ukraine to ensure repatriation and integration of formerly deported Crimean Tatars, is eloquently demonstrated by the following data¹²:

- 1) Stalin’s regime deported 200,000 ethnic Crimean Tatars from Crimea. As of early 2013, about 266,000 ethnic Crimean Tatars returned to Crimea for permanent residence in Ukraine.
- 2) According to the results of elections to local councils in 2010, the share of representatives of Crimean Tatars in local self-government amounted to 16%,

¹⁰ *Депортація кримських татар...*

¹¹ Ю. Тищенко, *Повернення кримських татар до Криму*, „Український журнал” 2011, no. 6, <https://ukrzurnal.eu/ukr.archive.html/1228/> (13 VI 2024).

¹² *Депортація кримських татар...*

while Crimean Tatars represented 13.7% of Crimea's population. 8 managerial positions in the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea were occupied by Crimean Tatars. Over 1,800 representatives of deported nationalities worked in government service and local self-government, which amounted to 6.4% of the total number of officials.

- 3) According to the Republican Committee of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea for Land Resources, as of end-2012 the share of land plots allocated to Crimean Tatars for residential construction (over 85,000 plots with a total area of about 11,000 hectares) was 17.1% of all land allocated for that purpose for Crimean population.
- 4) In 2013/2014 school year, 15 schools that taught in Crimean Tatar language (3,092 students) operated in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The Republican Higher Educational Institution „Crimean Engineering-Pedagogical University” and philological faculty of V. Vernadsky Tavria National University trained teachers of the Crimean Tatar language and literature. The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine created and printed educational programs on the Crimean Tatar language and reading for 1-4 grades and for 5-9 grades, as well as schoolbooks on the Crimean Tatar language and literature, the Ukrainian-Crimean Tatar and Crimean Tatar-Ukrainian school terminology dictionary, „Tales of a Large Family” textbook for elementary school students in Crimean Tatar language. Thus, in 2001-2013, 103.207 copies of 82 types of schoolbooks for Crimean Tatar schools, about 30 study guides of the Crimean Tatar language and literature for kindergartens, schools and colleges were printed. The budget of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea financed the publication of 63 types of educational and methodological publications and of 60 fiction books to the amount of UAH 3.748 million.
- 5) The number of religious buildings and premises grew by 122% in 12 for Muslim organizations (from 146 in 2000 to 324 in 2012). The Ukrainian State, realizing the complicated character of the process of integration of repatriates into the Ukrainian society, strived to provide for religious needs of Crimean Tatars and to resolve conflicts among representatives of the government and religious organizations by means of constructive dialogue.
- 6) „Kyrym” and „Maarif Ishleri” newspapers and „Tasyl” and „Kasevet” magazines were printed in the Crimean Tatar language to provide for informational needs in 2013. The Crimea State TV and Radio Company had „Meydan” Crimean Tatar desk that covered 7% of total broadcast time.
- 7) Before March 2014, the state protected dozens of historic memorials of the Crimean Tatar people.

Unfortunately, in many cases that remained more on paper. In fact, the Crimean Tatars have not been treated properly by consecutive governments in Kyiv. There was not enough money and seldom the will to resolve long-standing problems, including housing for those who returned home from exile after Ukraine had gained its independence.

The struggle of the Crimean Tatar people under the occupation of Crimea

The situation changed in 2014 with the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. The Crimean Tatars opposed the occupation of Crimea in 2014.

We know very well what the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation are like. We have a strong genetic memory; we do not forget what they did to us, starting with the annexation of Crimea in 1783. Our grandparents remember well what it is like when an armed Soviet soldier enters the house. They experienced it in 1944, and we experienced it in 2014

– notes Gayana Yuksel, a member of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people¹³.

In the analytical note by the National Institute for Strategic Studies „On the Observance of the Rights of the Crimean Tatar People in Annexed Crimea”, it is mentioned that the events connected with the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation demonstrated the firm stance, cohesion, and organization of the Crimean Tatars, who make up 12% of the peninsula’s population, in supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The resistance of the Crimean Tatars to the „new authorities”, which was manifested, among other things, in ignoring the so-called „referendum on the status of Crimea” on 16 III 2014, earned them respect from Ukrainians and an aggressive attitude from the Russian authorities. It is confirmed by reports of international organizations, particularly the latest report by Human Rights Watch (the international organization dealing with protection of human rights), which states that Russia, as the occupying power, is violating human rights on the peninsula, especially those of the Crimean Tatars.

After the annexation of Crimea, the dialogue between the Ukrainian authorities and the Crimean Tatar community gained greater significance. On 20 III 2014, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a Statement on the guarantee of

¹³ *Дев’ять років спротиву. Як кримські татари чинили спротив окупації та захищали свою ідентичність*, 26 II 2023, <https://shotam.info/krymom-use-pochalosia-krymom-maie-y-zakinchytysia-dev-iat-rokiv-sprotyvu-okupatsii-pivostrova-v-istoriiaikh-kyrymly/> (15 VI 2024).

the rights of the Crimean Tatar people within the Ukrainian state¹⁴. This statement guarantees preservation and development of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity of the Crimean Tatar people as an indigenous people, as well as all national minorities of the state. It guarantees the protection and realization of the inalienable right to self-determination of the Crimean Tatar people within the sovereign and independent Ukrainian state. It designates the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People and the Qurultay as the highest representative body of the Crimean Tatar people.

On 12 XI 2015, the Verkhovna Rada recognized the deportation of the Crimean Tatars from Crimea in 1944 as genocide against the Crimean Tatar people and declared 18 V as the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Genocide of the Crimean Tatar People¹⁵.

On 7 IV 2021, the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers approved the Decree „On Approving the Concept for the Development of the Crimean Tatar Language”, which outlines the development of Strategy for the Advancement of the Crimean Tatar Language for the period 2022-2032¹⁶. It regulates, among other things, the promotion of the Crimean Tatar language, the increase in educational and methodological materials for its study, and one of the key objectives is to remove the language from the list of those at risk of extinction according to UNESCO classification.

It is worth noting the adoption on 1 VII 2021, of the Law of Ukraine „On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine”, initiated by President V. Zelenskyi. The Law defines that the indigenous peoples of Ukraine, having been historically formed on the territory of the Crimean Peninsula, are the Crimean Tatars, Karaites, and Krymchaks. The law provides the following definition of an indigenous people:

An indigenous people of Ukraine is an autochthonous ethnic community that has been formed on the territory of Ukraine, possesses a distinct language and culture, has traditional, social, cultural, or representative institutions, self-identifies as an indigenous people of Ukraine, constitutes an ethnic minority within its population, and does not have its own state formation outside Ukraine¹⁷.

¹⁴ Постанова Верховної Ради України „Про Заяву Верховної Ради України щодо гарантії прав кримськотатарського народу у складі Української Держави”, 20 III 2014, „Відомості Верховної Ради” (ВВР) 2014, no. 15, ст. 581, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1140-18#Text> (25 VII 2024).

¹⁵ *Верховна Рада України ухвалила Постанову „Про визнання геноциду кримськотатарського народу”*, 12 XI 2015, <https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/119029.html> (25 VII 2024).

¹⁶ *Депортація кримських татар: як і чому СРСР вчинив злочин проти корінного народу*, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cx8qjx3pgego> (25 VII 2024).

¹⁷ *Президент підписав Закон „Про корінні народи України”*, 21 VII 2021, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/prezident-pidpisav-zakon-pro-korinni-narodi-ukrayini-69677> (25 VII 2024).

The law prohibits the denial of the ethnic identity or ethnic distinctiveness of the indigenous peoples of Ukraine. Indigenous peoples have the right to uphold, revive, and develop their spiritual, religious, and cultural traditions and customs, preserve their material and intangible cultural heritage, determine their own places and objects of religious and cultural significance, restore their historical toponymy, and collaborate with educational institutions to ensure the study of their language, history, and culture. In addition, indigenous peoples can allocate a portion of the revenues from the use of natural resources located on the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol for their own needs. They can also reserve agricultural and other lands for representatives of indigenous peoples returning to Crimea.

The Crimean Tatars have maintained their stance towards Ukraine throughout the entire period of occupation. However, living under occupation is difficult and dangerous. Since 2014, the primary goal of the Crimean Tatar national movement has been the de-occupation of Crimea, the preservation of the people and their national identity, and the protection of their civil and political rights. Today, the political activity of the Crimean Tatar people is mainly possible outside of Crimea. The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People is now integrated into the political life of Ukraine and takes an active stance both within Ukraine and internationally, emphasizing respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity and the return of Crimea.

In occupied Crimea, important areas for protecting the Crimean Tatar community include social, legal, and cultural aspects. The preservation of historical memory is also a priority. After deportation of the Crimean Tatar people, the Soviet authorities carried out the so called „toponymic repressions” on the peninsula – most cities, villages, mountains, and rivers with Crimean Tatar, Greek, or German names were given new Russian names. During the Soviet era, the authorities destroyed Tatar monuments, burned manuscripts and books. Muslim cemeteries and religious sites in Crimea were demolished or converted into secular places: mosques were turned into cinemas and shops. The principles of assimilation policy of the Russian state – regardless of its historical name – remain unchanged. According to Elmaz Akimova, a journalist who actively advocates for the protection of historical and cultural heritage of the Crimean Tatar people, it is very important to support Crimean Tatar identity, culture, and language. It is necessary to work on reinterpreting the history and consequences of colonization on the peninsula, starting with the names of cities and villages, all of which were renamed after the deportation. Sharing her personal experience in protecting culture of the Crimean Tatar people, Elmaz Akimova writes the following:

In February 2018, I held a solo protest in Bakhchisarai against the barbaric so-called restoration by the occupying authorities in Crimea of the Crimean Tatar

historical monument – the Khan’s Palace. It was not a restoration but a campaign to destroy Hansaray, the residence of the Crimean Tatar Khans. And, unfortunately, it is still going on. Everything is being done to erase the traces of the indigenous people’s history in Crimea¹⁸.

Ukraine supports the Crimean Tatars’ efforts to draw attention of the international community to the problems faced by their people under occupation. On 23 VI 2021, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted Resolution 2387 (2021) „Human Rights Violations Committed Against Crimean Tatars in Crimea”¹⁹. In the text of the Resolution, the Assembly strongly condemns the ongoing temporary occupation of part of Ukraine’s territory – the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol – by the Russian Federation and reaffirms the non-recognition of Crimea’s annexation. Furthermore, the Assembly condemns all attempts by the Russian Federation to legitimize the attempted annexation of Crimea and condemns serious human rights violations committed against the Crimean Tatars by the Russian authorities, including murders and enforced disappearances, among others.

The Resolution adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2024, „Countering the Erasure of Cultural Identity During War and Peace”, highlights that after the occupation of Crimea and parts of the Donbas in eastern Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2014 and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the military actions have been accompanied by a systematic state policy of Russification of the occupied territories, historical imperialist and neocolonial revisionism, as well as the denial of a distinct Ukrainian cultural identity for those under occupation²⁰. This policy is implemented through the removal of archives; the confiscation or replacement of history textbooks; indoctrination, including the militarization of education; hindering access to education in native languages, particularly the languages of indigenous peoples; looting and destruction of cultural objects and heritage sites; deliberate neglect of cultural heritage preservation; the implementation of distorted and ethnically biased restoration of cultural objects; and the neo-imperial renaming of geographical objects.

The PACE Resolution emphasizes that such policies are part of a campaign of genocide that the Russian Federation is conducting against the Ukrainian people and the Crimean Tatar people, grossly violating international law.

¹⁸ *Дев’ять років спротиву...*

¹⁹ Резолюція ПАРЕ 2387 (2021) „Порушення прав людини, вчинені проти кримських татар у Криму”, <https://coe.mfa.gov.ua/spivrobotnictvo/ukrayina-v-parye> (20 VI 2024).

²⁰ *Countering the erasure of cultural identity in war and peace, Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe. Recommendation 2280 (2024)*, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33686/html> (20 VII 2024).

On 25 VI 2024, the European Court of Human Rights publicly announced its substantive decision on the interstate case „Ukraine v. Russia (regarding Crimea)” concerning applications Nos. 20958/14 and 38334/18. This case concerns the mass and systematic human rights violations by Russia on the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as the violations of the rights of Ukrainian political prisoners. In its decision, the European Court of Human Rights indicated that the Ukrainian Government provided exhaustive evidence against representatives of the Russian Federation and individuals under its control, obviously and brightly demonstrating the extensive and systematic violations of the rights and freedoms protected by the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms²¹.

In a joint statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, G. Landsbergis, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, T. Rušopulos, the Secretary General, M. Pejčinović-Burić, and the Commissioner for Human Rights, M. O’Flaherty, on the somber occasion of the 80th anniversary of deportation of the Crimean Tatar people from the Crimean Peninsula by the Soviet totalitarian regime in 1944, it is emphasized that the suffering of the Crimean Tatar people, unfortunately, continues to this day. In eighty years after the deportation, Russia’s leadership continues the Soviet criminal policy of repression, persecution, and oppression of the Crimean Tatars. It deliberately violates their rights, conducts illegal conscription, and destroys cultural heritage.

On the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Genocide of the Crimean Tatar People, marked on 18 V the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, in Resolution No. 11237 of 8 V 2024, called on all world states to recognize the 1944 deportation of the Crimean Tatars from Crimea as an act of genocide against the Crimean Tatar people. It urged them to join in commemorating victims of the genocide on 18 V, support the restoration of Ukraine’s sovereignty over temporarily occupied territories, including Crimea, and back the establishment of a Special International Tribunal for the prosecution of Russian war crimes against Ukraine. The Resolution also called for participation in the International Crimean Platform’s activities at both government and parliamentary levels to facilitate the de-occupation of all temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories. Additionally, it demanded that Russia, as a UN member state and permanent member of the UN Security Council, lift restrictions on the Crimean Tatars’ right to maintain their representative

²¹ ЄСПЛ оголосив своє рішення у міждержавній справі „Україна проти Росії (щодо Криму)”, 25 VI 2024, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/yespl-oholosyv-svoie-rishennia-u-mizhderzhavnii-spravi-ukraina-proty-rosii-shchodo-krymu> (20 VII 2024).

institutions, including the restoration of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, in accordance with the decisions of the International Court of Justice²².

The Crimean Tatars are actively participating in the armed struggle of the Ukrainian people against Russian aggression. 24 II 2022, became the date when not only Crimean Tatars but also Ukrainians faced the threat of destruction and genocide. Thus, historical destiny has further united the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar peoples in their joint struggle for survival, identity, and freedom. Ismail Kurt Umer, a soloist of the Song and Dance Ensemble of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, reflects on his journey and himself, saying: „I wanted to be in Ukraine, where I was born and raised... And this country has given me a lot, I believe. It provided me with education, by the way, free of charge; I always studied free. This is my country, I love it, I respect it”, Ismail says. Everything he does should support Ukraine, facing the war now, Ismail believes. One of his tasks has been to compose a Crimean Tatar battle march.

Very many Crimean Tatars are fighting in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. According to our analysis, there are representatives of Crimean Tatars in about every fifth battalion. Moreover, many Crimean Tatars are professional military personnel, ranging from colonels to soldiers. For example, here we have a military pilot who is a Crimean Tatar... At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, I received a call from the servicemen at the front lines asking me to create a Crimean Tatar battle march for them. It was important to them,

Ismail says in an interview with *Crimea.Realities*. In May 2022, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine published a greeting on Uraza Bayram, one of the most important Muslim holidays. On their official YouTube channel, they uploaded a video of the Armed Forces Ensemble performing a song in Arabic, with Ismail as the soloist. The ensemble supported Ismail and quickly learned the Arabic lyrics. The release of this composition on the official platforms of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine was noticed worldwide. Information about Ismail and his ensemble, was spread by Al Jazeera, CNN, and other global media outlets. „This clip made them understand that there are Muslims in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, who are now fighting and need help”, says the soloist of the Armed Forces Ensemble. This incident was completely unexpected for the Islamic world. The release of the music video changed the perception of Ukraine in the Islamic world²³.

²² Верховна рада закликала світ визнати геноцид кримськотатарського народу, 8 III 2024, <https://qtm.org/verhovna-rada-zaklykala-svit-vyznaty-genoczyd-krymskotatarskogo-narodu/> (25 VII 2024).

²³ „Вивчили слова арабською мовою”. Кримський татарин з ансамблю ЗСУ розповів про боротьбу з російською пропагандою за допомогою музики, 11 I 2024, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/krym-tatarin-vsuo-orborbe-s-rossiyskoy-propagandoy-muzyki/32769991.html> (25 VII 2024).

Conclusions

The Crimean Tatars have supported the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of modern Ukraine from the very beginning. Despite the differences in ethnicity, religion, and history between Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians, they have together started to form and build the Ukrainian political nation. Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars share not only a common state but also a common fate – the fate of struggling for the right to exist, and the struggle for national, ethnic, and cultural identity. This struggle has been against the Russian Empire, then the Soviet Union, and now against Putin's Russia.

The question of why Crimean Tatars fight for Ukrainian independence against Russian aggression can be answered as follows: because together with Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars are fighting for their own future.

The struggle of the Crimean Tatars for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine is a fight for their own ethnic and political identity. It is because only together with the Ukrainian state, within the framework of a united country, the cultural, historical, and political development of the Crimean Tatar people becomes possible. After the liberation of Crimea, there will be an opportunity to build a Crimean Tatar national territorial autonomy within Ukraine. This will allow the Crimean Tatars to preserve their own identity, ensure the future historical development of their people, and take responsibility for rebuilding their Ukraine together with Ukrainians.

The interethnic dialogue and cooperation between the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar peoples are based on principles of mutual respect and support. This dialogue occurs not only at the level of political elites but also in interpersonal communication, at the level of ordinary human relationships.

Historically and culturally different peoples found themselves within one country due to wars and colonial processes. However, there are no deep historical misunderstandings or grievances between Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars. Ukraine is a young state in the process of democratic formation. Simultaneously, Ukraine is forced to fight for its right to exist. The Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian peoples are at the origins of the birth of the Ukrainian political nation, jointly defending and building it.

References

- 70 rokiv tomu do skladu URSS peredaly Krym, zruynovanyy viynoyu i pustoshennyi deportatsiyamy, <https://babel.ua/texts/59594-67-rokiv-tomu-do-skladu-urss-peredali-krim-zruynovaniy-viynoyu-i-spustoshenyi-deportatsiyami-zgaduyemo-yak-vidnovlyuvali-zhittya>.
- Baytsar, A., *Krym. Narysy istorychnoyi, pryrodnychoyi i suspil'noyi heohrafiyi*, L'viv 2007.
- Baytsar, A., *Ukrayins'kyi Krym: Kryms'ke khanstvo i Kozats'ka Ukrayina*, <http://plus.lviv.ua/publ/13-1-0-743>.
- Bor'ba za sovetську vlast' v Krymu: Dokumenty i materialy, t. 1, Simferopol' 1957.
- Chumak, V., *Ukrayina i Krym: Spil'nist' istorychnoyi doli*, Kyiv 1993.
- Countering the erasure of cultural identity in war and peace, Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe. Recommendation 2280 (2024), <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/33686/html>.
- Deklaratsiya Verkhovnoyi Rady SRSR „Pro vyznannya nezakonnymy i zlochynnymy represyvykh aktiv proty narodiv, yakykh bulo pidnano nasytstvenomu pereselennyu, i zabezpechennya yikhnikh prav”, 14 XI 1989, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/v0772400-89#Text>.
- Deportatsiya kryms'kykh tatar 1944 r. ta zakhody, shcho vzhyyvayut'sya uryadom Ukrayiny z metoyu oblashtuvannya ta intehratsiyi v ukrayins'ke suspilstvo kolyshnikh deportovanykh kryms'kykh tatar, 11 V 2014, <http://usa.mfa.gov.ua/en/press-center/news/22718-deportacija-krimskykh-tatar-1944-r-ta-zahodi-shhovzhivajutysya-uryadom-ukrajini-z-metoyu-oblashtuvannya-ta-integracii-v-ukrajinsyke-suspilstvo-kolishnih-deportovanihkrimskykh-tatar>.
- Deportatsiya kryms'kykh tatar: yak i chomu SRSR vchynyv zlochyn proty korinnoho narodu, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cx8qjx3pgego>.
- Dev'yat' rokiv sprotyvu. Yak kryms'ki tatary chynly sprotyv okupatsiyi ta zakhyshchaly svoyu identychnist', 26 II 2023, <https://shotam.info/krymom-use-pochalosiya-krymom-maie-y-zakinchytysia-dev-iat-rokiv-sprotyvu-okupatsii-pivostrova-v-istoriiakh-kyrymly/>.
- Krym – tse Ukrayina, popry vsi namahannya okupantiv. Korotka istoriya ukrayins'koho pivostrova, „The Village. Ukrayina”, 29 XI 2023, <https://www.village.com.ua/village/knowledge/podcast/345545-ukrainian-history-street-2023-s02e06>.
- Postanova Verkhovnoyi Rady Ukrayiny „Pro Zayavu Verkhovnoyi Rady Ukrayiny shchodo harantiyi prav kryms'kotatars'koho narodu u skladi Ukrayins'koyi Derzhavy”, 20 III 2014, „Vidomosti Verkhovnoyi Rady” (VVR) 2014, no. 15, st. 581, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1140-18#Text>.

- Prezydent pidpysav Zakon „Pro korinni narody Ukrayiny”, 21 VII 2021, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/prezident-pidpisav-zakon-pro-korinni-narodi-ukrayini-69677>.*
- Rezolyutsiya PARE 2387 (2021) „Porushennya prav lyudyny, vchyneni proty kryms'kykh tatar u Krymu”, <https://coe.mfa.gov.ua/spivrobotnictvo/ukrayina-v-parye>.
- Shurkhalo, D., *70 rokiv tomu: yak Krym pereyshov do skladu Ukrayiny*, 9 II 2024, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/yak-krym-pereyshov-do-skladu-ukrayiny/32812565.html>.
- Tyshchenko, Y., *Povernennya kryms'kykh tatar do Krymu*, „Ukrayins'kyy zhurnal” 2011, no. 6, <https://ukrzurnal.eu/ukr.archive.html/1228/>.
- Verkhovna Rada Ukrayiny ukhvalyla Postanovu „Pro vyznannya henotsydu kryms'kotatars'koho narodu”, 12 XI 2015, <https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/119029.html> (25 VII 2024).*
- Verkhovna rada zaklykala svit vyznaty henotsyd kryms'kotatars'koho narodu, 8 III 2024, <https://qtmm.org/verhovna-rada-zaklykala-svit-vyznaty-genoczyd-krymskotatarskogo-narodu/>.*
- „Vyvchyly slova arabs'koyu movoyu”. Kryms'kyy tataryn z ansamblyu ZSU rozpoviv pro borot'bu z rosii'skoyu propahandoyu za dopomohoyu muzyky, 11 I 2024, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/krym-tatarin-vsu-o-borbe-s-rossiyskoy-propagandoy-muzyki/32769991.html>.*
- YESPL oholosyv svoje rishennya u mizhderzhavniy spravi „Ukrayina proty Rosii (shchodo Krymu)”, 25 VI 2024, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/yespl-oholosyv-svoie-rishennia-u-mizhderzhavniy-spravi-ukraina-proty-rosii-shchodo-krymu>.*

Abstrakt

Natalia Yakovenko
Inna Valevska

Kształtowanie niepodległego państwa ukraińskiego poprzez współpracę i wspólną walkę narodów ukraińskiego i krymskotatarskiego

W artykule została zwrócona uwaga na procesy kształtowania się współczesnego ukraińskiego narodu politycznego, złożonego zarówno przez naród ukraiński, jak i krymskotatarski. Wyjątkowość analizowanego procesu polega na tym, że Tatarzy Krymscy, którzy są etnicznie ludem tureckim, muzułmanami i nosicielami innego „kodu kulturowego”, w przeciwieństwie do Ukraińców, którzy są Słowianami i w większości są chrześcijanami, stali się podmiotami w tworzeniu

ukraińskiego narodu politycznego. Oba narody walczą ramię w ramię o państwo ukraińskie i wspólnie wyobrażają sobie swoją przyszłość.

Artykuł ma na celu zbadanie przyczyn tak wyjątkowego zjawiska we współczesnym świecie, który cierpi z powodu konfliktów tożsamości – etnicznych, językowych, religijnych i historycznych. Autorki artykułu podejmują próbę przeanalizowania procesów i przyczyn walki Tatarów Krymskich o integralność terytorialną i suwerenność Ukrainy, która jest również walką o własną podmiotowość polityczną. Autorki starają się również zbadać, dlaczego kulturowy, historyczny i polityczny rozwój narodu krymskotatarskiego jest możliwy tylko w ramach zjednoczonego państwa ukraińskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: Tatarzy Krymscy, naród ukraiński, aneksja Krymu, ludobójcza polityka Rosji na Krymie

Natalia Yakovenko – dr hab. historii, profesor w Katedrze Organizacji Międzynarodowych i Służby Dyplomatycznej w Instytucie Stosunków Międzynarodowych Narodowego Uniwersytetu Kijowskiego im. T. Szewczenki. ORCID: 0000-0001-6962-7379

Inna Valevska – dr filozofii, docent w Katedrze Międzynarodowej Komunikacji Medialnej i Technologii Komunikacyjnych w Instytucie Stosunków Międzynarodowych Narodowego Uniwersytetu Kijowskiego im. T. Szewczenki. ORCID: 0000-0001-8832-3549