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Political Participation of the Crimean Tatars – the Indigenous People of Ukraine (1989-2022): Peculiarities of Development and Functioning

Abstract

The article examines the development of political participation of the Crimean Tatars, an indigenous people of Ukraine, and the peculiarities of its functioning in 1989-2022. The author divides this process into three conditional stages: the revival of the Crimean Tatar movement (late 1989-1991); Crimean Tatars in the political landscape of independent Ukraine (1991-2014); political participation of Crimean Tatars in the context of the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian war (2014-2022).

The author describes in detail the revival of the Crimean Tatar movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Crimean Tatars massively advocated for repatriation and created their own representative body, the Mejlis. Next, the process of formation of relations between the Crimean Tatars and the Ukrainian authorities in 1991-2014 is highlighted. The emphasis is also placed on the main features of the political participation of the Crimean Tatars in 2014-2022, in the context of the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. It is noted that during this period, the indigenous people faced a new threat to their existence – the repressive policy of the occupation authorities.

In conclusion, the author concludes that the process of development of political participation of the Crimean Tatar indigenous people of Ukraine in 1989-2022 was quite complex and ambiguous, characterized by stages of growth and decline. In particular, the author emphasizes that the most important victory for the indigenous people was the adoption of the Law of Ukraine „On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine” in 2021. However, as the author notes, the adoption of this law is only one of the steps in building further political and legal relations between Ukraine and indigenous peoples.

Keywords: political participation, Crimean Tatars, indigenous peoples, indigenous rights, Russian-Ukrainian war, Russian aggression, annexation of Crimea, Ukraine, Mejlis, Kurultai

Introduction

Crimean Tatars (*qırımtatarlar*) are an indigenous people of Ukraine, historically formed on the territory of Crimea¹. Despite the complicated history of their ethnogenesis, Crimean Tatars continue to actively fight for their interests and rights, including political ones. The annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 once again threatened not only the rights of the indigenous people, but also their very existence. In this regard, the Crimean Tatars were forced to leave their homes again, and those who did not leave have been subjected to repression by the occupation authorities for 10 years. The intensification of scientific interest in the Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people of Ukraine and their position in the socio-political plane of the Ukrainian state has led to the study of the peculiarities of the development and functioning of political participation of the Crimean Tatars from 1989 to 2022 (*before the full-scale invasion of Russia on 24 II 2022*). Since this period of development of political participation of Crimean Tatars in independent Ukraine clearly demonstrates all the positive and problematic aspects of this process.

Revival of the Crimean Tatar movement (1989-1991)

It should be noted that even as part of the USSR, Crimean Tatars fought for their own identity and rights, including the right to return to their historical homeland, Crimea. This struggle, like any liberation movement in the USSR, continued in waves. For example, in the second half of the 1980s, in connection with the weakening of the regime and the first steps of a kind of democratization, the Crimean Tatar movement experienced its rise. For example, in 1987, the first All-Union meeting of representatives of initiative groups took place, where it was decided to send a delegation of Crimean Tatars to the top leadership of the state to consider their ethno-national issue. Also, at the same time, an appeal to the then Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Mikhail Gorbachev was approved, which collected about 40 thousand signatures. In the absence of any official response to the letter, it was decided to hold a peaceful demonstration in Moscow to draw

¹ *On the indigenous peoples of Ukraine* [1 VII 2021], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1616-20#Text> (9 VII 2024).

attention to the Crimean Tatar issue. As a result, peaceful demonstrations were held on Red Square on 6 and 23 VII 1987, which ended with the dispersal and detention of Crimean Tatars by Moscow police². Protests of the Crimean Tatars also took place in Crimea, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, etc., where peaceful demonstrations were also dispersed by police units with the use of force.

However, the Crimean Tatars continued to defend their interests, primarily demanding a return to their homeland and autonomy. Thus, on 7 X 1987, Crimean Tatars organized a march from Taman, Krasnodar Krai, to Simferopol, in which about 2 thousand Crimean Tatars took part. However, the action could not be carried out to the end due to the police cordoning off the 7th kilometer from Taman Peaceful. As a result, the march was stopped and many participants were detained. In the same year, on 18 X, Crimean Tatars planned to hold rallies on the occasion of the day of the formation of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the places of residence of the indigenous people, but the Soviet authorities prevented them from holding them. As a result, the Crimean Tatars held mass protests against repression in cities such as Krymsk, Tashkent, Bekabad, Belogorsk, and others. On 24 XII 1987, the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted a resolution on „temporary restriction of residence registration for people arriving” in Crimea as well. The purpose of this resolution was to counteract the independent return of Crimean Tatars to Crimea³. The reaction to this policy of the Soviet authorities was a mass rally on 14 II 1988, organized in Simferopol. More than 2 thousand Crimean Tatars protested against the discrimination and infringement of the rights of the indigenous people at that time. Since February 1988, similar protests have been held in various cities of the union, including Moscow. The mass protests of the Crimean Tatars did not stop there. On 18 V 1988, on the 44th anniversary of the deportation of the Crimean Tatar indigenous people, mass demonstrations were held in 22 cities of the Soviet state. It is known that more than 25 thousand representatives of the indigenous people took part in these actions. On 26 V 1988, a tent city was set up near the Crimean village of Zuya (*modern Bilohirsk district of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea*), which was later destroyed by Russian soldiers and police.

On 9 VI 1988, the State Commission for the Resolution of the Problems of the Crimean Tatar People officially declared that there were no grounds for the formation of the Crimean Autonomous Republic⁴. The reaction to such decisions was a wave of mass peaceful actions and demonstrations of the Crimean Tatar

² O. Bazhan, *The Crimean Tatar National Movement (late 1940s – early 1990s)* [1995], p. 61, <http://history.org.ua/LiberUA/5-7702-0774-4/3.pdf> (9 VII 2024).

³ *Crimea is Ukraine, despite all the attempts of the occupiers. A brief history of the Ukrainian peninsula* [29 XI 2023], <https://www.village.com.ua/village/knowledge/podcast/345545-ukrainian-history-street-2023-s02e06> (9 VII 2024).

⁴ O. Bazhan, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

indigenous people, which took place in the Krasnodar Territory and certain regions of the Uzbek SSR. For example, on 23 VI 1988, mourning rallies were organized to mark the tenth anniversary of Musa Mamut's self-immolation⁵. From the end of June to half of August, thousands of indigenous people in different regions went on mass strikes. As a result, about 1,5 thousand people were fired from their jobs for not attending work. On 23 VII 1988, on the anniversary of the publication of the TARS statement (*the statement of the USSR Telegraph Agency of 23 VII 1987, accusing the Crimean Tatars of treason during the war and denying that the Crimean Tatars were the indigenous people of Crimea*)⁶, the Crimean Tatars held a day-long hunger strike, in which about 500 people took part⁷. In general, the position of the state apparatus and the activities of the specially created commission for consideration of the Crimean Tatar people, as recalled by researcher O. Bazhan, did not meet its expectations and was negatively assessed by the final statement of the participants of the meeting of representative initiative groups of the Crimean Tatar movement on 9 XI 1988⁸.

The next important step was the foundation of the Organization of the Crimean Tatar National Movement (OKNM), which took place at the V All-Union Meeting of Representatives of Initiative Groups on 29 IV-2 V 1989 in Yangil, Tashkent region. The chairman of the OKNR was the human rights activist and leader of the Crimean Tatar movement, and today the People's Deputy of Ukraine Mustafa Dzhemilev⁹. The prepared charter of the OKNR directly stated:

(...) the situation with the resolution of the Crimean Tatar issue decides whether the Soviet Union will become a democratic and legal state that respects the political and civil rights of people, the national sovereignty of peoples, their culture, identity and free development on their territory, or will return to a totalitarian and terrorist system of government. This puts before the activists of the Crimean Tatar national movement the task of transition to more organized forms of political struggle for their national rights and democracy¹⁰.

This rise of Crimean Tatar participation and the significant spread of the influence of the OCNM forced the authorities to make new decisions on issues concerning the Crimean Tatar indigenous people. Thus, on 12 VII 1989, the Commission of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the Problems of the Crimean Tatar

⁵ *On the self-immolation of Mousy Mammoth* [8 VII 2014], <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/25450059.html> (9 VII 2024).

⁶ O. Bazhan, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

⁷ *Crimean Tatar national movement*, <https://qtmm.org/krymskotatarskyj-naczionalnyj-ruh/> (9 VII 2024).

⁸ O. Bazhan, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

⁹ *Crimean Tatar national...*

¹⁰ O. Bazhan, *op.cit.*, pp. 64-65.

People was established, headed by the Secretary of the All-Union Central Committee of the CPSU, People's Deputy of the USSR H. Yanaev. And on 14 XI 1989, the Declaration of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR „On Recognizing Repressive Acts Against Peoples Subjected to Forced Resettlement as Illegal and Criminal and Ensuring Their Rights” was adopted¹¹. On 28 XI 1989, a closed meeting of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet was held, at which it was decided to recognize the rights of the Crimean Tatar people to return to their places of historical residence and restore national integrity. The commission also recommended the creation of a coordinating body of the Council of Ministers of the USSR with the participation of representatives of Ukraine and the Crimean Tatars¹². The next important step was the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of 29 I 1990, which proclaimed the establishment of the State Commission on the Problems of the Crimean Tatar People. On 11 V of the same year, the Commission approved the Concept of the State Program for the Return of Crimean Tatars to the Crimean region. On the basis of this program, the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted the following resolution of 11 VII 1990 „On priority measures to solve the problems of the return of Crimean Tatars to the Crimean region”¹³.

From 26 to 30 VI 1991, a congress of the Crimean Tatars, the Second Kurultai of the Crimean Tatar people, was held in Simferopol, bringing together most of the initiative groups and organizations of the Crimean Tatar movement. The Kurultai declared the territorial autonomy in Crimea, established against the will of the Crimean Tatar people, illegal, adopted the „Declaration of National Sovereignty of the Crimean Tatar People” and by secret ballot elected the only supreme representative body of the Crimean Tatar people – the Mejlis, which consists of 33 people and functions on a permanent basis to this day¹⁴.

It should be noted that during this period, the Ukrainian Soviet authorities declared their desire to facilitate the solution of the problems of the Crimean Tatar indigenous people, in particular those related to their return to their homeland. On 11 V 1990, the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR issued an official statement „On the Anniversary of the Mass Deportation of the Crimean Tatar People” condemning the deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944 and promising to assist in the restoration of justice and the organized return of Crimean Tatars home¹⁵. On 25 XII 1990, the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR adopted a resolution to suspend the resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of 24 XII 1987, „On Restricting the Registration of Citizens in Certain Settlements

¹¹ R. Firsov, *Stages of repatriation of Crimean Tatars to Crimea*, pp. 3-4, <https://vmv.kymu.edu.ua/series/vmv/vipusk4/3.pdf> (9 VII 2024).

¹² O. Bazhan, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

¹³ R. Firsov, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁴ *Crimean Tatar national...*

¹⁵ O. Bazhan, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

of the Crimean Region and Krasnodar Territory” from 1 II 1991. The same resolution instructed the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR to formulate a procedure for registering citizens in the Crimean region¹⁶. Along with these processes, Crimean Tatars returned to Crimea, despite the resistance of the Moscow authorities¹⁷. For example, in 1989 another 28.2 thousand Crimean Tatars returned to Crimea, and in 1990 – 33.8 thousand. Thus, at the end of 1990 there were more than 70 thousand representatives of the indigenous people in Crimea, and in 1991 – more than 113 thousand¹⁸.

Since the Crimean Tatar movement emerged as a dissident movement in opposition to the Soviet system, many Ukrainian movements and political forces supported it. In particular, the political party „People’s Movement of Ukraine” supported the return of Crimean Tatars to Crimea and considered the idea of restoring national-territorial autonomy in Crimea. Having felt support from pro-Ukrainian political forces, Crimean Tatars also decided to support Ukrainians. Crimean Tatars took part in the 1991 referendum on the independence of Crimea and the restoration of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. As a result, the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR adopted the Law „On the Restoration of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic” of 15 II 1991¹⁹. Crimean Tatars also supported Ukraine’s secession from the USSR and restoration of independence in a referendum on 1 XII 1991. At that time, 54.19% of voters in Crimea voted in favor of restoring the independence of the Ukrainian state, while in Sevastopol the figure was higher – 57.07%. This position of the Crimean Tatars was an important stage in the struggle of the Crimean Tatars for self-determination and further integration into the Ukrainian State²⁰.

Crimean Tatars in the political landscape of independent Ukraine (1991-2014)

With the entry into force of the Law of Ukraine „On Citizenship of Ukraine” of 13 XI 1991, 73,981 representatives of the Crimean Tatar indigenous people who were officially registered in Crimea at that time automatically received Ukrainian

¹⁶ R. Firsov, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁷ *Crimean Tatar national...*

¹⁸ R. Firsov, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ *On the restoration of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic* [15 II 1991], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/712-XII#Text> (9 VII 2024).

²⁰ S. Mokrushyn, *Referendum of 1991: How Crimea chose independent Ukraine* [1 XII 2021], <https://ua.krymr.com/a/yak-krymchany-tikaly-z-srsr-u-nezalezhnu-ukrainu/30305482.html> (9 VII 2024).

citizenship. From that date, repatriates began to be divided into three main categories based on citizenship: 1) persons who returned to Ukraine before November 1991 and automatically became citizens of Ukraine; 2) persons who returned after 13 XI 1991, but left their country of previous residence before the legislation on citizenship came into force, and therefore became *de jure* stateless; 3) persons who returned to Ukraine after 13 XI 1991, and left their country of previous residence after the legislation came into force, and *de jure* acquired the citizenship of those countries. The latter two categories of deportees were excluded from privatization and elections due to their lack of Ukrainian citizenship, and were also denied the right to be civil servants, to receive free education, to serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, to obtain general and foreign passports, etc²¹.

It should also be noted that the period from 1992 to 1994 became a kind of decline in the repatriation of Crimean Tatars, as the majority of the indigenous people returned to their homeland in the previous years. In 1992, 27.6 thousand Crimean Tatars returned to Crimea, in 1993 – 19.3 thousand, and in 1994 – 10.8 thousand representatives of the indigenous people. During this period, the government of independent Ukraine adopted a series of resolutions and orders related to the organization of the return and settlement of repatriates. This included the important resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 28 I 1992 „On Some Issues Related to the Return of Crimean Tatars to Crimean ASSR”²². Additionally, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a resolution on 14 III 1992 „On the establishment of a fund for deported peoples of Crimea” and a resolution on 24 III 1992 „On the approval of the provisions on the republican commission on the affairs of deported peoples of Crimea”. The established commission was to deal with the organization of the return of deported peoples of Crimea and ensuring their needs after the return²³. In 1992, the Ukrainian government allocated 400 million karbovanets to the Council of Ministers of the Crimean ASSR for the creation of necessary conditions for the settlement of the deported Crimean Tatar population, which was implemented in the following years. The fulfillment of the obligations undertaken was positively received by the Crimean Tatars²⁴.

It should also be noted that an important step in the genesis of political participation of Crimean Tatars was the introduction of an ethnic quota in the elections to the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea of the 2nd democratic convocation in 1994 (*this quota was introduced only in these elections*). As a result of the elections to the Crimean parliament, 16 representatives

²¹ R. Firsov, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

²² O. Bazhan, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

²³ R. Firsov, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

²⁴ O. Bazhan, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

of the Mejlis were elected out of 102 deputies²⁵. This step could not but influence the increase of influence of the indigenous people on the public policy of the peninsula. Additionally, it provided significant opportunities to influence regional policy on the peninsula. The next important step was the establishment on 18 V 1999, of the Council of Representatives of the Crimean Tatar People to the President of Ukraine. This council included all 33 representatives of the Mejlis, and the Chairman of the Council was then the Head of the Mejlis and a member of the Ukrainian Parliament of the 3rd convocation, Mustafa Dzhemilev. The Council had an advisory status and was to deal with the implementation of measures and the resolution of various legal, social, political, economic, and other problems related to the return of the indigenous people to Crimea, as well as to prepare relevant proposals for the President of Ukraine to address these issues. Additionally, the council had the right of legislative initiative and the development of state programs, in accordance with the tasks set²⁶.

During that period, the then People's Deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine raised the issue of the legal status of the Crimean Tatars, perhaps for the first time. This is evidenced by relevant legislative initiatives, including the adopted „Resolution on holding parliamentary hearings on legislative regulation and implementation of state policy regarding the protection of the rights of the Crimean Tatar people and national minorities who were deported and voluntarily return to Ukraine”, initiated by Mustafa Dzhemilev, Refat Chubarov, and Hennadiy Udovenko²⁷. However, significant steps towards the realization of the rights of the Crimean Tatar indigenous people or ensuring their legal status have not been implemented after the adoption of this resolution.

The next hope for improving the status of Crimean Tatars came with the 2004 presidential elections. Since there was a threat of the dissolution of the Council of the Indigenous People under the President of Ukraine at that time, Crimean Tatars decided to support the candidacy of V. Yushchenko. It was expected that under his presidency, the dialogue between the Ukrainian government and the indigenous people would be significantly improved. However, no significant changes occurred. The Council, while still existing, did not engage in full cooperation. Nevertheless, during Yushchenko's presidency, the weight of the indigenous people in the socio-political life of Crimea increased. For instance, in 2007, about 100 Crimean Tatar public organizations were registered in Ukraine, half of which were registered in Crimea. These organizations included

²⁵ *Deputies of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, 2nd convocation*, „Crimea Political” 2013, <https://archive.ph/20130701093443/http://www.politika.crimea.ua/verkhovnyj-sovet-kryma/deputat/17-deputy-2> (9 VII 2024).

²⁶ N. Drapushko, *Crimean Tatars in the socio-political life of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea during the years of independent Ukraine*, „Historical Sciences” 2013, no. 111, pp. 214-215.

²⁷ *Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine*, <https://www.rada.gov.ua/> (9 VII 2024).

„Azatlyk”, founded in 2005, „Koydeshler”, founded in 2005, „Avdet”, founded in 2007, „Bizim Qirim”, founded in 2007, and others. Similar organizations also emerged during Yanukovych’s presidency, such as the youth organization „Yashlar Shurasi”, established in 2011. They focused on peaceful cooperation with the Ukrainian government, promoting Crimean Tatar values, revitalizing faith and language, representing Crimean Tatars in government bodies and more²⁸. Many of these organizations organized peaceful protests and rallies to defend the interests of Crimean Tatars and draw attention to their issues. One of the most significant actions was the organization of National Crimean Tatar Flag Day on 26 VI 2011, by another Crimean Tatar public organization „Yashlar Shurasi”, together with the Crimean Tatar Youth Center, the Mejlis, and the World Congress of Crimean Tatars²⁹.

The main cause of the conflict between the Crimean Tatars and the Ukrainian side was the unresolved land issue. The Crimean authorities at that time refused to provide land to representatives of the indigenous people, leading them to resort to radical actions such as illegal construction and land seizures. This situation gave rise to conflicts such as the „Bakhchisaray precedent”, which involved mass destruction of Crimean Tatar buildings on mount Ai-Petri and elsewhere. The Crimean Tatars logically sought the return and/or compensation for lost lands and property. At the same time, the Mejlis noted that conflicts related to the land issue were actively provoked by the local authorities of the peninsula and estimated that the indigenous people of Crimea needed around 3-4 thousand hectares of land, mostly in the steppe areas. However, this issue remained unresolved, as did problems regarding the legal status of the Crimean Tatar people³⁰.

The coming to power of President Yanukovych significantly exacerbated relations between Ukraine and the indigenous people, as in addition to the aforementioned conflicts between Crimean Tatars and other inhabitants of the peninsula against the backdrop of unresolved land issues, the situation was worsened by the personnel decisions of the new authorities. In particular, the changes introduced by the President to the Council of representatives of Crimean Tatars caused a sharp negative reaction from the Mejlis and the Qurultay. The newly elected head of state reduced the number of representatives of the Crimean Tatar people in the Council from 33 to 19 and appointed 10 new members, who were oppositional to the Mejlis and often pro-Russian and/or close to the president’s Party

²⁸ V. Napadysta, *The subjects of the Crimean Tatar national movement: strategy and tactics for implementing ideological priorities in the political context of independent Ukraine*, „Scientific Notes” 2017, no. 1 (87), p. 267.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 268.

³⁰ M. Larchenko, *Features of the ethno-political situation in the post-Soviet space and, in particular, in independent Ukraine*, „Scientific Notes of the Institute of Political and Ethnonational Studies” 2003, no. 24, p. 245.

of Regions. From the Mejlis, disregarding the position of the representative body, several delegates were chosen led by Mustafa Dzhemilev. Crimean Tatars decided not to participate further in the Council's work at the 2010 Kurultay Congress, as they considered the changes made unlawful. Also, at the same congress, it was decided to delegate 15 candidates for future elections to the Ukrainian Parliament from the political party „People's Movement of Ukraine”. The list of candidates was headed by the then First Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis, President of the World Congress of Crimean Tatars Refat Chubarov³¹. In addition to personnel decisions and the removal of Crimean Tatars from positions of power, the appointment of A. Mogilev as Minister of Internal Affairs was also negatively perceived by Crimean Tatars, as he was one of the initiators of power conflicts in resolving land issues. The Mejlis also condemned the controversial „Kharkiv agreements”, to which Refat Chubarov made a statement regarding the fact that such steps pull Ukraine „into the orbit of Russian state policy”³².

The subsequent events showed that Refat Chubarov was not mistaken in his statement from the previous sentence, as the openly pro-Russian position of Yanukovych's government led to new challenges for the whole of Ukraine and the Crimean Tatar indigenous people in particular.

Political participation of Crimean Tatars in the context of the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian war (2014-2022)

The authoritarian policies and the rejection of the country's European integration course led to societal resistance. Peaceful protests and demonstrations engulfed the country, sparking the Revolution of Dignity, which also affected Crimea. In 2013, Crimean Tatars actively traveled to Kyiv to support the Euromaidan. For example, on 22 XII 2013, at the People's Veche in Kyiv, the People's Association „Maidan” was announced, and its Council was elected, with the Chairman of the Mejlis, Refat Chubarov, included. On 8 II Crimean Tatars joined the All-Crimean Forum of public-political initiatives „Euromaidan – Crimea”. The forum was attended by the Head of the Secretariat of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People D. Akiev, Mejlis members A. Egiz and E. Bariyev, and MP of the „Kurultai – Movement” faction in the AR Crimea L. Pilunsky³³.

³¹ V. Prytula, *The Kurultai of Crimean Tatars refuses to cooperate with the Crimean Tatar Council of Yanukovych's version* [29 VIII 2012], <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/2140723.html> (9 VII 2024).

³² M. Larchenko, *op.cit.*, p. 246.

³³ *Crimean Tatar national...*

According to Refat Chubarov, Crimean Tatars already understood that unforeseen events could happen in Crimea due to the situation in Kyiv. In connection with this, an extraordinary meeting of the Mejlis was held on 18 II 2014, where Crimean Tatars made a series of decisions related to maintaining the situation on the peninsula under control. The following day, on 19 II representatives of the indigenous people made a statement at the session of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea about the inadmissibility of aggression against people on the Maidan. The process of the illegal annexation of Crimea began on 20 II³⁴. In response to the unlawful actions of Russian military, a large peaceful rally was organized by the Mejlis and pro-Ukrainian population of the peninsula on 26 II 2014, outside the building of the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea. Approximately 12-15 thousand people participated in the rally. Thanks to this action, the holding of the session of the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea, where the announcement of Crimea's secession from Ukraine was supposed to take place, was prevented. The official representation of the indigenous people also sided with the Ukrainian state and during the illegal referendum on 16 III 2014, urged Crimean Tatars not to attend the referendum and not to vote in it, thereby supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

On 20 III 2014, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a resolution „On the Statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine regarding the guarantees of the rights of the Crimean Tatar people within the Ukrainian State”. This resolution recognized Ukraine the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people as the executive body of the Kurultai of the Crimean Tatar people, and the Kurultai as the highest representative body of the Crimean Tatar people³⁵. On 29 III 2014, an extraordinary session of the Kurultai of the Crimean Tatar people took place in Bakhchisarai, where the creation of national-territorial autonomy for the Crimean Tatar people on its historical territory in Crimea was initiated. The Kurultai also called on Ukraine, the UN, the Council of Europe, the EU, the OSCE, and governments of other countries to support the right of the Crimean Tatar people to self-determination. However, there was no official response from Ukraine to this statement³⁶. Subsequently, representative bodies attempted to establish a dialogue with the occupying Russian authorities, even delegating their representatives to the occupation authorities. However, this attempt was unsuccessful for

³⁴ O. Holubov, *Tracing the Tragedy: Crimeans Remember Maidan* [20 II 2017], <https://ua.krymr.com/a/28321020.html> (9 VII 2024).

³⁵ *On the Statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine regarding the guarantee of rights of the Crimean Tatar people within the Ukrainian State* [20 III 2014], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1140-18#Text> (9 VII 2024).

³⁶ K. Vitman, *Crimean Tatars in the new ethno-political system of coordinates*, „Current issues of politics” 2014, no. 52, p. 154.

the indigenous people, leading the Crimean Tatars to re-establish cooperation with the Ukrainian authorities.

In general terms, it can be noted that from 2014 to 2022, many key steps were taken in the development of political participation of Crimean Tatars. During this period, the sphere of influence of the political participation of Crimean Tatars expanded significantly at the national and international levels. The Crimean Tatars became allies of Ukraine in the struggle for Crimea on the international stage. In this context, negotiations regarding the potential granting of status to Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people at the legislative level became important. Additionally, a series of legislative acts were adopted that were crucial for the indigenous people, including the resolution of the land issue that had troubled Crimean Tatars for all these years with the adoption of the Law of Ukraine „On the Restoration of Rights of Persons Deported on National Grounds” on 17 IV 2014. On 20 VIII, the position of the authorized representative of the President of Ukraine for the Crimean Tatar people was established, held by Mustafa Dzhemilev until 18 V 2019.

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the 8th convocation has adopted a series of resolutions aimed at supporting the Crimean Tatar indigenous people and drawing international attention to the repressive policies of the occupation authorities against the Crimean Tatars. For example, one can mention the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine „On the Commemoration of Memorial Dates and Anniversaries in 2015” regarding the deportation of the Crimean Tatar dated V 2015³⁷, the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine „On the Appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the United Nations Organization, European Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, world leaders, and all members of the international community condemning the violations of the rights and freedoms of the Crimean Tatar people” dated 14 V 2015³⁸, the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine „On the Recognition of the Genocide of the Crimean Tatar People” dated 10 VIII 2015³⁹, the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine „On the Appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the United Nations Organization, European Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Parliamentary

³⁷ *On amending the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine „On Commemoration of Memorable Dates and Anniversaries in 2015” regarding the deportation of the Crimean Tatar people* [14 V 2015], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/434-VIII#Text> (9 VII 2024).

³⁸ *On the Appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the United Nations, European Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, world leaders, and all members of the international community regarding the condemnation of violations of the rights and freedoms of the Crimean Tatar people* [14 V 2015], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/412-VIII#Text> (9 VII 2024).

³⁹ *On the Recognition of the genocide of the Crimean Tatar people* [12 XI 2015], <https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/119029.html> (9 VII 2024).

Assembly of the OSCE, world leaders, and all members of the international community concerning the condemnation of violations of the rights and freedoms of the Crimean Tatar people regarding the ban by the occupying authorities of the Russian Federation on the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol of the Mejlis and the recognition of it as an extremist organization” dated 31 III 2016, the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine „On the Appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to international organizations and parliaments of foreign states regarding the condemnation and non-recognition of the ban by the Russian Federation on the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people and on the protection of the indigenous people of Crimea by the international community” dated 5 X 2016⁴⁰, the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine „On holding a solemn meeting of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the first Kurultai of the Crimean Tatar people” dated 5 X 2017⁴¹, etc.

However, besides the support of Ukraine and the official condemnation of the repressive actions of the occupying authorities, Crimean Tatars did not receive the main thing – official status and national autonomy, which were key demands of the Crimean Tatar movement in the past century. In 2017, members of parliament of Crimean Tatar origin, with the support of other deputies, developed and submitted for consideration by parliament a draft law on the status of the Crimean Tatar people in Ukraine⁴², but this initiative was not supported until the next convocation of the Verkhovna Rada. Alongside this, representatives of the Crimean Tatar indigenous people actively defended their interests at the national and international levels, receiving support from governments of other countries. In particular, in Ukraine, Crimean Tatar civil organizations began to actively develop, many of which were established after the annexation of Crimea⁴³, and continue to function today.

In 2019, after the latest presidential elections in Ukraine, the political landscape in Ukraine changed. In the new circumstances, Crimean Tatars decided to quickly adapt and in the subsequent parliamentary elections, they delegated their representatives from the largest number of political forces in history simultaneously, including from the presidential party „Servant of the People”,

⁴⁰ *On the Appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to international organizations and foreign state parliaments condemning and not recognizing the ban by the Russian Federation on the Crimean Tatar Mejlis and protecting the indigenous people of Crimea by the international community* [5 X 2016], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1652-VIII#Text> (9 VII 2024).

⁴¹ *On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the first Kurultai of the Crimean Tatar people, a solemn session of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine will be held* [5 X 2017], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2160-VIII#Text> (9 VII 2024).

⁴² *Verkhovna Rada...*

⁴³ *Crimean Tatar national...*

the opposition „European Solidarity”, and others. In their statements, representatives of the indigenous people mentioned that they are ready to cooperate with Ukrainian political forces whose values align with the values of the indigenous people. As a result, the members of parliament of the 9th convocation became Akhtem Chiyyoz and Mustafa Dzhemilev from „European Solidarity”⁴⁴.

Mustafa Dzhemilev was relieved of his position as the Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for the Affairs of the Crimean Tatar People in 2019 during Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s presidency. No new Commissioner was appointed after him. However, this did not hinder the leaders of the indigenous people in building dialogue with the new political elite. During this time, the Ukrainian parliament managed to adopt a series of documents in support of the Crimean Tatars, including the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine „On the Appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the UN, EU PA, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, OEKES Parliamentary Assembly, governments and parliaments of the world regarding honoring the victims of the genocide of the Crimean Tatar people and condemning violations by the Russian Federation as an aggressor state of the rights and freedoms of the Crimean Tatar people” dated 2 VI 2020⁴⁵, the Law of Ukraine „On the Ratification of the Framework Agreement between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of the Republic of Turkey on cooperation in the field of housing construction for representatives of the Crimean Tatar people and privileged categories of citizens of Ukraine” dated 14 VII 2021⁴⁶, the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine „On the Statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine regarding the illegal detention of the first deputy chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people Nariman Dzhelalov and other representatives of the indigenous Crimean Tatar people on the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the aggressor state Russian Federation” dated 10 IX 2021⁴⁷, and others.

⁴⁴ *Verkhovna Rada...*

⁴⁵ *On the Appeal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the United Nations, European Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, OIC Parliamentary Assembly, governments and parliaments of the world on honoring the victims of the genocide of the Crimean Tatar people and condemning the violations by the Russian Federation as an aggressor state of the rights and freedoms of the Crimean Tatar people* [2 VI 2020], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/639-IX#Text> (9 VII 2024).

⁴⁶ *On the ratification of the Framework Agreement between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of the Republic of Turkey on cooperation in the field of housing construction for representatives of the Crimean Tatar people and privileged categories of citizens of Ukraine* [14 VII 2021], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1644-IX#Text> (9 VII 2024).

⁴⁷ *On the Statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on the illegal detention of the First Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People Nariman Dzhelalov and other representa-*

The creation of the Crimean Platform became significant on 23 VIII 2012, as an international consultation and coordination platform. The main goal of the platform is to seek effective international responses to the occupation of Crimea, addressing related security threats to both Ukraine and the indigenous Crimean Tatar people. Additionally, the platform aims to enhance international pressure on Russia to be held accountable for the crimes committed⁴⁸. Undoubtedly, for the Crimean Tatars, this platform serves as a hope for international support in defending their rights and holding the aggressor accountable for crimes perpetrated against them, continuing under the occupation authority.

On 1 VII 2021, the Law of Ukraine „On Indigenous Peoples” was adopted – a long-awaited document for the Crimean Tatar indigenous people. The Crimean Tatars finally acquired official status as an indigenous people of Ukraine after so many years of waiting. Based on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples⁴⁹, this law significantly expanded the rights of the indigenous people and the specifics of their development and protection of ethnocultural identity. This Law became another unifying stage in the relationship between the indigenous people and Ukraine. The law also recognized the right of the indigenous people to legal personality in their development and protection of their rights, including political rights, as well as the right to self-governance and representative bodies, and so on⁵⁰. There are different assessments of this law in scientific literature, with ongoing debates regarding the constitutionality of this legislative act. It is also predominantly believed that the enactment of this law is just one of the steps in the legal protection of indigenous peoples.

In his statements, Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev repeatedly emphasized that the main goal of the Crimean Tatars is to declare Crimean autonomy within Ukraine and the right of Crimeans to self-govern on its territory. This thesis was repeatedly voiced when discussing the future of Crimea in the context of its de-occupation and integration into the Ukrainian space. However, the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine on 24 II 2022, posed new security threats to Ukrainian society and the Crimean Tatars. The security of the state and its citizens, as well as the preservation of territorial integrity, became a top priority for the entire Ukrainian population.

tives of the indigenous Crimean Tatar people on the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the aggressor state, the Russian Federation [10 IX 2021], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1749-IX#Text> (9 VII 2024).

⁴⁸ *Crimea platform* [9 VII 2024], <https://crimea-platform.org/> (9 VII 2024).

⁴⁹ *Declaration of the United Nations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* [13 IX 2007], https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/995_156#Text (9 VII 2024).

⁵⁰ *On the indigenous peoples of Ukraine* [1 VII 2021], <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1616-20#Text> (9 VII 2024).

Conclusion

The process of development of political participation of the Crimean Tatar indigenous people of Ukraine is a complex and difficult path with different intensities, ups and downs. Since the late 1980s, Crimean Tatars have been able to intensify the Crimean Tatar movement due to the weakening of the Soviet regime. This movement included mass actions, dialogue with the authorities, the creation of the OCNM, and the formation of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars. The support of pro-Ukrainian political forces provided the indigenous people with support for the restoration of Ukraine's independence, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. At the time, Crimean Tatars expressed ambitions for Crimean autonomy and sought channels of cooperation with the Ukrainian political elite.

From 1991 to 2014, there were positive developments in the political participation of Crimean Tatars, such as acquiring Ukrainian citizenship, returning freely to their homeland without fear, participating in electoral processes at national, regional, and local levels, and more. However, certain issues, such as land allocation to the indigenous people, led to conflict situations with the local population. This caused negative perceptions by the Ukrainian society towards the indigenous people, hence limiting their influence on socio-political processes. During President V. Yushchenko's term, political and legal issues regarding the indigenous people were largely neglected, with the focus mainly on solving socio-economic and partially cultural problems. Nevertheless, various Crimean Tatar civil organizations were actively emerging at that time. Under President Yanukovych, the relationship between the Crimean Tatar representation and the Ukrainian government significantly deteriorated.

In 2014, a new stage began in the relations between the Crimean Tatars and Ukraine. The illegal annexation of Crimea and the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war led the political elite of Ukraine and Crimean Tatars to unite in the fight against a common enemy. Crimean Tatars supported pro-Ukrainian sentiments on the peninsula and defended Ukraine's territorial integrity. After the annexation of Crimea, the indigenous people attempted to declare Crimean national territorial autonomy, but Ukraine did not react. As a result, Crimean Tatars sought cooperation with the occupiers, but these attempts were unsuccessful. Overall, from 2014 to 2022, Crimean Tatars became active participants in socio-political processes in Ukraine at the national and international levels. During this period, Ukraine recognized the Mejlis and Kurultai of the indigenous people, expressed support for Crimean Tatars, and ensured their protection. The most significant victory for the indigenous people was the adoption of the Law of Ukraine „On Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine”, which defined the political and legal status

of Crimean Tatars and expanded their political rights. This, in turn, will influence the further participation of Crimean Tatars in political processes in Ukraine.

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Abstrakt

Nataliia Dukach

Partycypacja polityczna Tatarów Krymskich – rdzennej ludności Ukrainy (1989-2022): specyfika rozwoju i funkcjonowania

W artykule zaprezentowano analizę rozwoju partycypacji politycznej Tatarów Krymskich, rdzennej ludności Ukrainy, oraz specyfikę jej funkcjonowania w latach 1989-2022. Autorka dzieli ten proces na trzy warunkowe etapy: odrodzenie ruchu Tatarów Krymskich (koniec 1989-1991); Tatarzy Krymscy w krajobrazie politycznym niepodległej Ukrainy (1991-2014); partycypacja polityczna Tatarów Krymskich w kontekście aneksji Autonomicznej Republiki Krymu przez Rosję i wojny rosyjsko-ukraińskiej (2014-2022).

Autorka przedstawia zarys odrodzenia ruchu krymskotatarskiego na przełomie lat 80. i 90. XX w., wówczas Tatarzy Krymscy masowo opowiadali się za repatriacją i stworzyli własny organ przedstawicielski – Medżlis. Następnie podkreślono proces kształtowania się stosunków między Tatarami Krymskimi a władzami ukraińskimi w latach 1991-2014. Nacisk położono również na główne cechy politycznego uczestnictwa Tatarów Krymskich w latach 2014-2022, w kontekście aneksji ARK i przed inwazją FR na Ukrainę na pełną skalę. Należy zauważyć, że w tym okresie rdzenni mieszkańcy stanęli w obliczu nowego zagrożenia dla ich istnienia – represyjnej polityki władz okupacyjnych.

Podsumowując, autorka stwierdza, że proces rozwoju partycypacji politycznej Tatarów Krymskich – rdzennej ludności Ukrainy w latach 1989-2022 był dość złożony i niejednoznaczny, charakteryzujący się etapami wzrostu i spadku. W szczególności autorka podkreśla, że najważniejszym zwycięstwem rdzennej ludności

było przyjęcie ustawy Ukrainy O rdzennej ludności Ukrainy w 2021 r. Jednak należy zauważyć, że przyjęcie tej ustawy jest tylko jednym z kroków w budowaniu dalszych relacji politycznych i prawnych między Ukrainą a ludnością rdzenną.

Słowa kluczowe: partycypacja polityczna, Tatarzy Krymscy, ludność rdzenna, prawa ludności rdzennej, wojna rosyjsko-ukraińska, agresja rosyjska, aneksja Krymu, Ukraina, Medźlis, Kurułtaj

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