

The Discrimination and Persecution of Crimean Tatars in 2014-2021

Restrictions on national institutions and systematic violation of civil and political rights

Russia's policy in annexed Crimea has resulted in major restrictions of the right to self-determination of the Crimean Tatars, primarily through a ban and strict limitations on the operation of national institutions. On 29 September 2016, the RF Supreme Court banned the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people after finding it an extremist organization. Twenty-three regional mejlis working in Crimea as local government bodies and the Qurultay (the national congress of the Crimean Tatar people), which is made up of 250 deputies elected every five years, were also banned. Another national religious institution – the Spiritual Board of Crimean Muslims – fell under the full control of the de facto government.

Discouragement of commemorating important dates and holding cultural events

Since 2014, just before Remembrance Day for the Victims of the Deportation of the Crimean Tatars on 18 May 1944, representatives of the prosecutor's office have issued warnings not to hold unauthorized rallies or demonstrations to activists and human rights defenders. Warnings have been issued to attorneys E. Avamileva and D. Akiyev and activists Z. Smedlyayev, N. Dzhelyalov, E. Akimova, L. Zudiyeva, R. Mennanov, M. Suleymanov, and others.

In 2020, warnings were handed out right before May 3 (planned for the March of Dignity, which was postponed), May 18 (Remembrance Day), and June 26 (Crimean Tatar National Flag Day) (reports from Sovetsky Region); in Sudak, local police inspectors held "discussions" with people in Crimean Tatar neighborhoods on the eve of May 3.

The de facto Crimean government has banned any independent public actions, both sociopolitical and cultural.¹ Crimean Tatars who participate in cultural events in mainland Ukraine face the risk that their families will be subjected to repressions.² At the same time, the de facto government is trying to create the illusion that Crimean Tatars can exercise their cultural rights. For example, government agencies have organized celebrations of Hıdırellez for several years, even though Crimean Tatars themselves do not attend these events, which are required for public workers.³

Interference with the work of Crimean Tatar media outlets

¹ On 16 May 2014, the self-proclaimed "Leader" of Crimea Sergey Aksenov banned mass events on the peninsula's territory until June 6 (including events on May 18 to commemorate the deportation of Crimean Tatars). For more information, see https://lb.ua/news/2014/05/16/266637_aksenov_pered_godovshchinoy_deportatsii.html Events of mourning to commemorate the anniversary of the deportation were banned in: 2015–2017: <https://ru.tsn.ua/video/video-novini/v-simferopole-zapretili-miting-pamyati-zhertv-deportacii-krymskih-tatar.html>, <https://15minut.org/news/159803-v-seti-poyavilis-kadry-traumnyh-akcij-v-bahchisarae-foto-video>, <https://15minut.org/news/171684-v-sudake-zapretili-traumyj-miting-v-den-pamyati-zhertv-genocida-krymskih-tatar>. "They don't let us commemorate May 18. In 2016, they said there was a danger of terrorist threats in Simferopol. When they banned meetings in the center of the city, people started gathering in villages." (interview, 30 April 2017).

² "Many artists are scared to come perform at Ukrainian events, because then they will have problems in Crimea. They are also scared that their families will be pressured. There were plans for artists to come [to the festival], but many of them refused to come at the last moment" (interview, 30 April 2017).

³ "No one has banned holding a competing Hıdırellez, but this is a closed event. There are people who attend the state celebration, but they are mainly forced to. Many [Crimean Tatars] went there only until their managers saw them, and then they left. Workers from Crimean State Engineering Pedagogical University, for example." Ensembles also have to "participate"; in 2016 ensemble members said: "we're being forced, we don't have a choice" (interview, 30 April 2017).

Before 2014, two social and political newspapers in the Crimean Tatar language (Qırım and Yani Dyunya) and two Crimean Tatar newspapers in Russia (Voice of Crimea and Avdet) were published in Crimea. The state broadcasting companies Krym and Sevastopol had national editorial offices that produced programs in the Crimean Tatar language, and the privately-owned news agency QHA, channel ATR, and the radio station Meydan, which are all part of the privately-owned holding company Atlant-SV, produced programs in the Crimean Tatar, Russian, and Ukrainian languages. Aside from Avdet, all the newspapers received different forms of financial support from the state.

With rare exceptions, after 2014 Crimean Tatar media outlets shut down or lost their independence. The Crimean Tatar editorial office of Krym came under pressure (the channel was seized by Russian soldiers on 1 March 2014). Some staff, including longtime editor-in-chief Seitslyam Kisheev, spoke about strict censorship and government pressure. The channel was closed soon after, and the pro-government channel Millet started broadcasting from its studios.

The radio station Meydan stopped broadcasting on 31 March 2015, with the television stations ATR and QHA following suit the next day because the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) rejected their registration and prohibited them from broadcasting in Crimea.⁴

The weekly Avdet received its rejection from Roskomnadzor on 1 April 2015. It was forced to reduce circulation to 999 copies (the maximum circulation allowed without registration). By this time, editor-in-chief Shevket Kaybullayev had already received four warnings from Russian security officers about extremist activities.⁵

Yani Dyunya editor-in-chief Zera Bekirova and several staff members were fired in August 2018. She says that she had to deal with never-ending censorship and the government's displeasure at her participation in international conferences on Crimean Tatar culture.⁶ This newspaper continues to be published, but according to its website, it now "reports on the work of the State Council, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Crimea, the State Committee on Interethnic Relations, and local government bodies."⁷

Qırım, the only independent newspaper still published in the Crimean Tatar language, is under threat. It has received repeated warnings from Roskomnadzor, and in February 2021 the editor-in-chief announced that a court would soon review a story that the supervisory agency deemed "abuse of freedom of speech."⁸

After 2015, pro-government media outlets designed to create a positive image of ethnic relations in Crimea were founded. The new television station Millet started broadcasting on 1 September 2015; it was promoted as a national Crimean Tatar station. In reality, it broadcasts at least twice as much content in Russian than in Crimean Tatar and its website does not have a Crimean Tatar version.⁹

Thousands of copies of a Russian-language newspaper with the Crimean Tatar name Meraba have been published since 2015. As the paper itself declares, it "works with the

⁴ Publications on this topic: <https://krymsos.com/ru/news/yak-vlada-rf-znishchuvala-nezalezhni-zmi-v-okupovanomu-krimu-i-yak-voni-pratsyuyut-zaraz/>, <http://kp.ua/life/495062-aksenov-telekanal-ATR-daet-nadezhdu-na-vozvraschenye-kryma-v-ukraynu-on-rabotat-ne-budet>

⁵ Media reports on this topic: <https://hromadske.radio/podcasts/golosy-krymu/krymskotatarskuyu-gazetu-avdet-obvynyayut-v-ekstremizme-shevket-kaybullaev>, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/27695309.html> aksenov-telekanal-ATR-daet-nadezhdu-na-vozvraschenye-kryma-v-ukraynu-on-rabotat-ne-budet

⁶ Media reports on this topic: <http://old.qha.com.ua/ru/politika/tsenzura-i-davlenie-iz-gazeti-yani-dyunya-v-krimu-uvolilis-jurnalisti/194965/>, <https://avdet.org/ru/2018/08/29/glavnyj-redaktor-i-chast-kollektiva-uvolilis-iz-gazety-yany-dyunya/>

⁷ Information about the newspaper on Mediacentr's website: <https://mediacentr.org.ru/gazeta-yany-dyunya/>

⁸ Media reports on this topic: <https://ru.krymr.com/a/video-krymskotatarskaya-gazeta-qirim-v-krymu/31080324.html>

⁹ The station's website, <http://trkmillet.ru>

leadership of the Republic of Crimea to bring the slogan ‘Crimea is the Blossoming of Cultures’ to life.” This newspaper is considered a national publication, but it is printed in Russia and proudly proclaims that “the best thing about Meraba is pages in our native language.”¹⁰

All the national publications but the abovementioned Qırım and Avdet newspapers are part of the Gasprinsky State Mediacenter. This center was founded in 2015 and is financed by the de facto State Committee on Interethnic Relations, which makes it possible for the government to control and censor publications and dictate their agenda.

Biases, discrimination, and the creation of a distorted image of the Crimean Tatar people in the public’s mind

Since 2014, after Russia established de facto control over the Crimean peninsula, the rumor that there are allegedly many extremists and Islamists among Crimean Tatars has proliferated in public statements made by Russian politicians and in the media.¹¹

Additionally, there is ongoing speculation about historical myths about the Crimean Tatars as “collaborators and traitors of the Soviet Union” during World War II in the media and in public discourse. The main themes that are spread throughout Crimean society are: “Crimean Tatars are traitors,” “Crimean Tatars are not an independent people,” “Crimean Tatars must be deported again,” “Crimean Tatars are dishonorable, they must be avoided” and so forth. Thus, any Crimean Tatar could become the victim of discriminatory rhetoric and practices. According to the testimony of victims of everyday discrimination, their close friends, neighbors¹², colleagues, and clients started to display discriminatory treatment against them. Some people show their negative attitudes towards Crimean Tatars when performing their official duties at government agencies. Forms of ¹³discrimination include slurs and offensive actions¹⁴, refusals to buy/sell goods or services to/from Crimean Tatars,¹⁵ informing,

¹⁰ Information about the newspaper on Mediacenter’s website: <https://mediacentr.org.ru/gazeta-meraba/>

¹¹ “Anti-terrorism teachings and events – this is the Russian trend. Unfortunately, society has formed the persistent stereotype that ‘a terrorist is equal to a Muslim.’ It’s a woman in a headscarf or a man with a beard” (interview, 7 May 2017).

¹² “Before March 14, my Russian neighbors talked with me. After, though, they put up a fence and, without a dispute or anything, stopped talking to me. It was clear that they had gone to the referendum, while, Crimean Tatars were obviously for Ukraine” (interview, 30 April 2017). “Before you could go out into the courtyard, see a [non-Crimean Tatar] neighbor and chat with them, but now there’s no conversation, only talk about daily matters – move this rock out of our way and then go about your business” (interview, 30 April 2017).

¹³ “The village is 90 percent Crimean Tatar, ambulances reach us very rarely when it is a case of life or death. In August 2015, one person got an electric shock. The ambulance took three hours and 23 minutes to get here, and it wasn’t in time. But the hospital is only a 15-minute drive from here. I asked people I know who work there why this happened. They said that there were six free ambulances in the parking lot at that time. I’ve noticed that I always spend a long time waiting in the hospital. They take my card, which gives my first name and last name, and I can wait two to three hours. Once [in August 2014] I went to the district polyclinic with a serious injury three days in a row, I had a broken ankle. The nurse didn’t like me because of my nationality even when we were still under Ukraine. When I finally got an appointment, I was told that it was a fracture, but it was a dislocation. They didn’t provide high-quality service. The nurse even said several times so that everyone could hear ‘you need to leave here, you should be deported.’ In 2009–2010, this attitude was hidden, they didn’t always show it, but now their hands have been untied” (interview, 27 April 2017). “Two people I knew were taken to the military recruitment office in 2015; they came back two months later in zinc coffins. They were 18, 19. One person from the unit let it slip that they were very depressed. They both hanged themselves, they were brought to that. They were constantly beaten because of their nationality, they were punched in the kidneys, people tried to kill them emotionally. The commanders had no reaction. A guy from their unit let this slip when he was intoxicated. The leaders concealed this. They were threatened with deportation” (interview, 27 April 2017).

¹⁴ “Most dollar vans here are driven by Crimean Tatars. We’ve started to hear phrases like ‘the Crimean Tatars have overrun us here’ (interview, 5 May 2017).

¹⁵ “All the ads are peppered with the word ‘Slav.’ ‘Respectable family of Slavs renting housing,’ ‘hiring Slavs.’ The Tatars aren’t stupid either. Our people don’t really want them, they leave you high and dry. They live there for three months and leave and that’s it. They leave at the end of the year, and you don’t know who to complain to, where to find them, who actually rented from you. This scam is well developed with them” (interview, 8 May 2017).

threats, marking of Crimean Tatar homes,¹⁶ and so forth.¹⁷ All the victims connect this upsurge in everyday discrimination with aggressive Russian propaganda.¹⁸ There have been cases where schoolchildren, students, and teachers show bias against national minorities.¹⁹ Cases have been recorded where teachers pronounced slurs against Crimean Tatars that repeat the themes of Russian propaganda word for word.²⁰ In 2015, announcements offensive to Crimean Tatars were posted on bulletin boards at some Crimean schools.²¹ At some educational institutions, staff members from Russian special services have held “preventative” discussions about extremism in Crimean Tatar classes, but not in Russian ones.²² There have also been cases where people were fired or not hired²³ on the basis of ethnicity.

Various pretexts are being used to squeeze Crimean Tatars out of spheres of services mainly offered to Crimean Tatars and replace them with workers from Russia.²⁴ In these cases, Russians generally have significantly higher salaries than Crimean Tatars. This kind of masked discrimination is also manifested in the creation of obstacles for selling food products produced by Crimean Tatar farms. For example, agricultural oversight agencies and services have banned the sale of products on contrived grounds.²⁵

¹⁶ “The place that we later leased on Inkerman, they probably thought that Crimean Tatars were leasing it. They demolished everything (at that time it was abandoned). I turned onto Inkerman, 50 meters and our café, and no homes in the surroundings. They demolished everything, they wrote, ‘get the hell out of here, Crimean Tatars’ (on our café). They drew crosses on some people’s gates.” (interview, May 5 2017).

¹⁷ “I came in and there was a fight going on in my class. All the Crimean Tatars came and said: ‘Can you believe it, Nastya is walking around and saying, ‘all you Tatars, leave here,’ she’s walking around, calling us names, ‘traitors, my father said, my grandmother said.’ Tanechka, who makes out with me, said: ‘My grandmother said you’re traitors.’ That was in 6th grade. Tanya and Nastya said such things to their classmates. To me this means that these things were said at home, that this topic was discussed at home” (interview, 5 March 2017).

¹⁸ “We used to be able to react to all this in the form of meetings, pickets, we held different actions, we reacted. Now we have been deprived of this ability, so many people have really let their hair down in terms of discrimination, starting at the everyday level. Various conflicts even arise with my neighbors every day. In terms of ‘you came here, now leave, you’re no one here’” (interview, 9 May 2017).

¹⁹ “My neighbor was summoned to the university’s legal committee and then to the FSB, Center E [counterterrorism] for comments in a university group’s social media account. People in this group wrote offensive things about Crimean Tatars [late 2015 to early 2016]. He stood up for the Crimean Tatars, and the person who said the offensive thing was not held responsible. After this, he was expelled, and he left Crimea on 11 May 2016” (interview, 30 April 2017).

²⁰ “In January 2017, the topic in a 6th grade geography class at a school in Golubinsky was on supporting the deportation of Crimean Tatars. The teacher dictated that Crimean Tatars were traitors. They had to write a summary of the dictation. When they were writing this, one of the students stood and said: ‘That’s not true.’ This went all the way up to the principal, who closed down the topic “nicely.” The teacher wasn’t even fired” (interview, 5 May 2017). “After school, a child, an 8th grader, went outside and put her book bag on a bench. That year a military instructor started working at the school as a teacher. He was well-meaning, a veteran of Afghanistan. He waited until the children were approaching and said: ‘Children, don’t come near this bag. It might explode.’ And the girl (Medine) was covered, she said: ‘That’s my bag. Why should it explode?’ He said: ‘It won’t explode with you, but it might with me’” (interview, 5 May 2017).

²¹ “As early as 2015, there was an announcement: ‘Crimean Tatar extremists on the border with Ukraine. You are under threat of danger.’ That was on our bulletin board. At the second school, which had few Crimean Tatars, the staff gathered and this was read out loud, announced. The principal at our school didn’t check anything, she just hung up this announcement” (interview, 3 May 2017).

²² One of these cases occurred on 27 May 2016 at School No. 15 in the village of Blizhneye (Feodosia). Media reports on this topic: <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news/27761578.html>

²³ “On the day before that [15 April 2014], I went [to apply for the position of merchandiser at a company]. They told me that there were no vacancies. And this Ukrainian guy I know went there the next day and was told that he should come the next day.” (interview, 7 April 2017). “A woman was looking for a new job as a pharmacist in Simferopol [in early 2017]. One of the employers said that she would be a good fit, but only if she had a different name. She ended up finding a job at a pharmacy, but it was run by Crimean Tatars” (interview, 30 April 2017).

²⁴ “My father wasn’t hired for a doctor’s position. They hired an intern, even though my father has 25 years of experience. They hired a young person from Krasnodar Krai” (interview, 30 April 2017).

²⁵ “Village of Pyatikhatka, Krasnogvardeisky District. Residents of this village specialize in growing cabbage, squash, tomatoes, cucumbers. Five to eight years ago, they brought all of this to the wholesale market. Then entire trucks started to go to their village. About 400 Crimean Tatar families live there. This year they came and took some squash from some families, apparently to test it. The agricultural oversight agency. They supposedly found that the level of something was higher than it should have been. That’s it. Nothing can be sold from the entire village. Now they’re trying to get themselves out of this situation somehow. Now they’re not allowed to sell at the market anymore. They bring everything in from

To make matters worse, the Russian government does not acknowledge that Crimean Tatars are discriminated against: In official responses to comments from UN CERD and other international organizations, the relevant state bodies insist on the argument that Crimea “voluntarily” acceded to Russia, which they believe is enough to prove that there is no discrimination. However, the actions Russia has taken to improve ethnic relations are purely declarative in nature.

Political persecution of Crimean Tatar activists

Russia has ignored a 2017 decision of the UN International Court of Justice stating that any restrictions on the activities of the representative body of the Crimean Tatars – the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people – must be lifted in accordance with Russia’s obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.²⁶ The right of Crimean Tatars to self-government has not been restored, and the work of the Mejlis, which has been characterized as an “extremist public organization,” has been banned in the Russian Federation since 2016. Mejlis members have been subjected to criminal prosecution, and a politically motivated case against Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev was forwarded to court in 2020.

Crimean Tatar activists and Muslim believers are persecuted most harshly. Human rights organizations have recognized over 70 Crimean Tatars as political prisoners. This includes people under investigation and people already convicted. Administrative arrests, searches, detentions, interrogation, and torture continue. Crimean Tatars have been sentenced to long prison terms – from 10 to 20 years without any reasonable evidence of guilt – for involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir, which Russia believes is a terrorist organization.

In January 2021, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don handed down a sentence to people involved in the Belgorod group in the “case of Hizb ut-Tahrir.” All three of the defendants were sentenced to maximum security penal colonies. Enver Omerov was sentenced to 18 years, Ayder Dzhapparov, to 17 years, and Riza Omerov, to 13 years. According to the case materials, the accused were not in possession of weapons, explosives, or ammunition, had no plans to commit a terrorist act, and did not call on others to commit terrorist acts. There was also no evidence that they attempted to overthrow the constitutional order of the Russian Federation and seize power. The case materials contain audio recordings of the defendants discussing religious and political topics, which was in actual fact the only piece of evidence that they committed a crime of terrorism.²⁷

Manipulation of Crimean Tatar symbols as tools of propaganda

Crimean Tatar national symbols, imagery, and heritage and attributes of Crimean Tatar identity are being used to shape the pro-Russia discourse. For example, in 2017 Crimea’s de facto parliament approved a medal named after the distinguished Crimean Tatar educator Ismail Gasprinsky. Aleksandr Formanchuk, deputy chair of the Public Chamber of Crimea,²⁸ one of the creators of the “list of Crimea haters” (a dossier on politicians, journalists, and public figures who did not recognize Crimea’s annexation) and the co-author

Krasnodar, from somewhere else. As if a squash from Krasnodar will have the acceptable norm, even after it travels this distance” (interview, 8 May 2017).

²⁶ Court press release 19 April 2017: <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/166/19412.pdf>

²⁷ Report on the court hearing of January 12, 2021: <https://crimean-solidarity.org/news/2021/01/12/sud-priznal-vinovnymi-krymskix-tatar-iz-belogorska-i-prigovoril-k-srokam-ot--do--let-v-kolonii-851>

²⁸ Media reports on this topic: <https://avdet.org/ru/2020/01/29/avtoru-skandalnoj-istorii-kryma-vruchili-medal-gasprinskogo-s-krestom/?fbclid=IwAR022jiHBARe3QqHRKQxWkBdyOGQW48KzEOsNG9xM82R9sxExJDj8loV1wU>

of a notorious textbook on Crimean history for 10th graders, was awarded this medal in 2020 for “a significant personal contribution to the cultural and spiritual development of the peoples of Crimea.” Thus, the government’s actions (awarding a medal to recognize the service of a Crimean Tatar figure) appear positive at first glance, but are actually offensive to Crimean Tatars.

The textbook “History of Crimea” (2018), which presented a biased view of the Crimean Tatars’ participation in World War II and their deportation in 1944, was removed from schools and subsequently reworked in 2019 at the request of Crimean Tatar activists. Nevertheless, the media cited reports about conflicts between Crimean Tatar and Russian students in Crimean schools after this scandalous textbook was released.²⁹

Violation of linguistic and cultural rights

On May 24, 2017, the Russia-controlled Crimean parliament adopted a law enshrining equal rights for three state languages: Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tatar.³⁰ The law proclaimed freedom to choose a language, the right to an education in one’s native language, government support for the development of state languages, and the use of all three state languages prior to and during elections, when laws of the Republic of Crimea are published, and in the work of federal and local state bodies, local bodies, and other institutions. Russian is required in some areas (official paperwork, court proceedings, notary paperwork, publication of regulations aside from laws of the Republic of Crimea, etc.), while the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages “may” be used. In reality, the Russian language predominates, and only a few forms and tables giving the names of state institutions are published in all three languages. The websites, regulations, and publications of the de facto Crimean parliament and other government bodies are not available in Ukrainian or Crimean Tatar.

In 2016, the Crimean authorities announced with much pomp that the historical names of localities would be restored. The bill proposed listing the historical (i.e., before Crimean Tatars were deported in 1944) names of settlements, villages, and cities along with their current names. But this initiative was never seen through, and very few of these signs exist.

Moreover, Crimean Tatars are never consulted on the names of streets, schools, and day cares in their close-knit neighborhoods. In 2018, streets in the Lugovoe-2 neighborhood, whose population is 95 percent Crimean Tatar, started being named after Russian cities. Residents learned about this from the media, even though an advocacy group had proposed giving the streets Crimean and Crimean Tatar names. In 2020, the authorities in the Beloye neighborhood of Simferopol and in Ukromnoye village in Simferopol Region refused to give new daycare centers in Crimean Tatar areas Crimean Tatar names.

It’s notable that even Crimean Tatar officials who publicly supported Crimea’s annexation in 2014 and joined the staff of de facto state bodies have repeatedly expressed disappointment that rules adopted to support the Crimean Tatar language were nothing more than lip service (see the public statements made by Remzi Ilyasov and Zaur Smirnov in videos on the pro-government Crimean website).³¹

²⁹ Article by Sergey Mokrushin “Textbooks as an Ideological Weapon: Why History Textbooks in Crimea Lead to Scandals at Schools,” *Krym.Realii*, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/pochemu-prepodavanie-istorii-kryma-privodit-k-shkolnym-skandalam/30725394.html>

³⁰ Text of the law: <http://crimea.gov.ru/textdoc/ru/7/act/1562prz.pdf> [in Russian]

Crimea had 16 schools offering instruction in the Crimean Tatar language in the 2020-2021 academic year (247 classes with 4,861 students). Crimean Tatar language classes have been opened in schools providing instruction in Russian (22 schools, 119 classes, 1,809 students). Only one school offers instruction in Ukrainian (9 classes, 162 students): School No. 20 in Feodosia. Ukrainian language classes are offered at Simferopol Academic Gymnasium (three classes, 52 students).

There are a total of 547 public and private general education institutions in the Republic of Crimea with 218,974 students. Of these, 212,090 (96.9 percent) receive instruction in Russian and 6,700 (three percent) are taught in Crimean Tatar, which is 14 classes (344 students) more than in the 2019-2020 academic year. Two hundred and fourteen students (0.1 percent) are taught in Ukrainian.

The low number of students learning in their native languages (three percent and 0.1 percent) as compared to the number of ethnic Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians living in Crimea stems from Crimea's intentionally destructive language policy. Every year lawyers and human rights defenders record large-scale violations of the right to education in one's native tongue right before the start of the school year in Crimea. School administrations use psychological pressure (lowering grades for no reason, making it difficult to take standardized tests) and manipulation (no textbooks or teachers, no free classrooms) to deter parents from having their children study in their native languages.

In 2018, Russia's federal educational standards added the required subject area "Native language and native literature." But school administrations deliberately try to persuade parents to forego these subjects in favor of additional classes in Russian language and literature and ask them to sign pre-filled applications where Russian is indicated as the native language (interview, 2020). Parents also cannot exercise their right to have extracurricular native language instruction for their children: If a school does not offer the subject of "native (Crimean Tatar, Ukraine) language and literature," then it also does not offer extracurricular activities in these languages.

On December 28, 2017, Crimea's de facto Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth and the so-called Civic Chamber of the Republic of Crimea developed and approved a road map for language of instruction. According to paragraph 2 of the road map, school administrations must hold an annual meeting for parents before the start of the school year (in February or March) and inform them that they can have their children receive instruction in their native language or have their children take this language as a subject. Information about the right to choose language of instruction should also be available on the school's website and bulletin board. However, human rights defenders and lawyers have found that school officials try to persuade parents to choose Russian as their native language during these meetings. Information for parents about language of instruction is missing from the websites and bulletin boards of most schools, but the fact that Russian is the language of study under the schools' charter is emphasized. School administrations in Simferopol, Lenin, and Belgorod regions say that the road map is just a recommendation and that they have no obligation to follow it.

There have been cases where children were rejected from a school after their parents selected Crimean Tatar and their native language.

In 2018, 17 students applying for General Secondary School No. 22 in the township of Agrarnoye (city of Simferopol) were all rejected from the school because

31 ¹ "Crimean Divan, Episode 8," September 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FS_Xx6uykfU&list=PLTOniSpnrXSgVW03JKdGNZAQf5QuOdG-m&index=15&t=31s, interview with Remzi Ilyasov conducted by Seiran Mambetov, October 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nw4mDWO_yuk&list=PLTOniSpnrXSgVW03JKdGNZAQf5QuOdG-m&index=17

their parents said they wanted their children to be instructed in Crimean Tatar on their applications. In a conversation with parents, the principal, O.V. Brezulevskaya, said she would accept all 17 children for the Russian class, but not for a Crimean Tatar class. She cited technical reasons for this: The children were registered on streets that were not in the school's district, even though they were 500 meters from the school. It was only after lawyers and human rights defenders got involved that the right of these children to receive an education in this specific school was upheld (interview, 2020).

School No. 28 in Simferopol denied families instruction in Crimean Tatar, and the principal even accused parents of separatism. She said that having a Crimean Tatar class would mean that children would be separated by ethnicity and that in this case the administration could not take responsibility for bullying at school (interview, 2020).

The situation in day cares is similar: Citing their charters, administrators give parents pre-filled applications listing Russian as the language of instruction that say nothing about the ability to select a language. If parents insist on Crimean Tatar, a group is formed with ethnic Russians and called bilingual (Russian and Crimean Tatar). In practice, Russian predominates, while Crimean Tatar is only used during school plays (these could be parts of a folk dance or excerpts from a poem in Crimean Tatar).

Parents' appeals to education agencies and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth do not bring about any managerial decisions regarding conflicts between parents and school and day care administrations that refuse to offer instruction in or study of a native language.

Free use of the Crimean Tatar language in the education system is such a sensitive topic that any attempts by teachers and civic activists to discuss it are opposed by the de facto government.

In 2019, the conference "Education in the Crimean Tatar Language: Problems and Prospects," which was supposed to bring together over 80 teachers of Crimean Tatar language and literature to discuss pressing problems with teaching this language in Crimea, was prevented from going forward. On the day before the conference was set to begin, management at the Gorizont Conference Hall told organizers that the conference could not proceed, citing oral instructions from the Emergency Services Ministry regarding fire safety rules; in an informal conversation, management revealed the real cause for the cancellation – pressure from the authorities. The Moscow Hotel agreed to host the conference, but management there apologized and cancelled the conference several hours after the lease agreement was signed (again, because of a telephone call from law enforcement agencies "recommending" not to lease out a hall for the conference). This story repeated itself for a third time with the Marakand Hotel, which received a "recommendation" from law enforcement to prevent the conference from happening an hour before it was due to start.

Bribing lessors is a widespread practice: On 10 December 2019, the human rights movement Crimean Idea was not able to hold its conference because a representative of the Marakand Hotel unexpectedly dissolved the lease agreement one hour before the conference was supposed to start, citing a violation of fire safety rules. In a personal conversation, it was established that FSB officers blackmailed the hotel administration with the threat of immediate closure if it hosted the human rights conference.

Even forms of popularizing the Crimean Tatar language like children's competitions, which independent Crimean Tatar social organizations used to hold annually, can be unofficially banned during "conversations" between the FSB and organizers. The children's

poetry competition Kobelek, the children's fairy tale competition Bir zamanda bar eken, and the Noman Chelebidzhikhan children's literature competition were all cancelled in 2019 (interview, 2020).

In August 2018, it became known that head and artistic director of the Crimean Tatar Academy of Musical and Dramatic Theater Bilyal Bilyalov had been fired. The official reason for his dismissal was the "inappropriate use of funds," but Bilyalov himself said that he was not able to recover his position through court and that he was fired because he refused to "obey all the authorities' orders." Almost 20 actors and employees left the theater along with Bilyalov in protest. The former business director was appointed the new head.³²

The staff members who quit went on to found the independent Crimean Tatar Altyn Beshik Theater. The authorities systematically obstruct their work by interfering in agreements between the theater and the venues it uses. For example, in January 2019 spaces in Evpatoria and Dzhankoy, Lenin Region turned down the theater, privately citing calls from de facto state bodies.

Destruction of monuments of cultural and historical heritage

Since large-scale construction is underway in Crimea, archeological digs are going on all over the peninsula to save cultural and historical heritage. The Russian media reported on "millions of finds" by archeologists during the construction of the Crimean Bridge, but independent specialists have not been able to determine the true value and fate of these objects. According to the Crimean Strategic Research Center, at least 90 archeological sites were destroyed during the construction of the Tavrida Highway.³³ Activists and human rights defenders say that items and museum pieces have been taken out of Crimea (mainly to Moscow and Saint Petersburg).³⁴

It has been reported that former Crimean Tatar cemeteries have been developed and that remains have not been treated properly during digs.

In 2019, a cemetery identified as Crimean Tatar by the nature of the burial site was uncovered during excavation work at the location of the former village of Ungut in Kirov District. Activists thought that it was sacrilegious to store the remains in plastic baggies and cardboard boxes under the open sky, even though it was announced that the remains could be reburied following Muslim traditions after they were examined in a laboratory. After this situation was publicized, the remains were taken away. Their fate is unknown.³⁵

In 2019, human remains were found during repair work in Simferopol's city garden. Local historians say that an old Crimean Tatar cemetery used to be located at this site. Construction was temporarily suspended, but the fate of the remains is unknown.

Unprofessional repair work that compromised the authenticity and integrity of the 16th century Bagçesaray Palace of the Crimean Khans, which is on UNESCO's tentative World Heritage list, is cause for serious concern.

³² Media reports on this topic: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3713109>, <https://ru.krymr.com/a/uvolnenie-rukovoditelez-krymskotatarskogo-teatra-bilyalova/29422258.html>

³³ Media reports on this topic: <https://rus.uatv.ua/90-pamyatnikov-arheologii-v-okkupirovannom-krymu-unichtozhenozheno-iz-zastroitelstva-trassy-ablyalimova/>

³⁴ Media reports on this topic: <http://www.golos.com.ua/rus/article/323748>

³⁵ Media reports on this topic: <https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-musulmanskoje-kladbishche-v-krymu-kosti-pokoynikov/30172748.html>

Desecration of Crimean Tatar monuments and amplification of Russian propaganda using monuments

Crimea is experiencing what experts call a “boom in monuments”: At least 150 monuments were identified between 2014 and 2020. Most of these were openly used to promote Russia’s government ideology and “symbolically anchor the peninsula in Russia.” For example, 12 monuments glorify the annexation of Crimea, 25 are dedicated to events and figures of Ancient Rus and the Russian Empire (at least four items depict Alexander Nevsky), 44 immortalize events and figures of the Soviet period, seven memorialize Russian and Soviet border guards, and 18 are devoted to religious themes (including eight memorial crosses). Many of the monuments are distinctly militaristic (monuments to war heroes and commanders, at least two busts of Kalashnikov holding an automatic weapon).

Even monuments that would appear to be devoted to neutral topics work for ideology. For example, the director of a park where a four-meter tall statue of a balalaika was installed spoke at its unveiling about “the rebirth of Russian culture,” and sculptures of heroes from Russian fairy tales and Soviet cartoons were made for the anniversary of the annexation by the commercial group Russian Glory Alley, which mass produces “busts of citizens who brought glory to the Fatherland.”³⁶

The installation of statues and monuments is approved by local bodies of the de facto government without public discussion. The erection of a monument to the leaders of the Big Three, including Stalin, in Livadiya in 2015 despite numerous objections by Crimean Tatar activists was particularly offensive, as was the installation of a statute of Empress Elizabeth II, who Crimean Tatars see as a symbol of the persecution and destruction of their statehood, in Simferopol in 2016.

At the same time, objects sacred to the Crimean Tatar people are being desecrated and destroyed. These objects include not only gravestones at Crimean Tatar cemeteries, but also plaques commemorating Crimean Tatars who died during World War II or displaying Crimean Tatar symbols.³⁷ Acts of vandalism become pick up before commemorative dates connected with the deportation in 1944. Crimean activists say that 23 cases where Crimean Tatar holy objects were vandalized have been recorded in the six years since annexation.

The victims almost always attempted to get the police to react to these documented acts of vandalism (they called the police and filed statements), but the police never took any measures. The victims frequently reported that law enforcement refused to open criminal cases and maintained that the victims could have been harmed the objects themselves.³⁸

The present persecution and discrimination of the Crimean Tatar people, silence about the past tragedy of this repressed people, the destruction of monuments, and the ban on self-government are all part of the systematic violation of the rights of the Crimean Tatar population.

³⁶ Expert opinion of A. Ivanets, Candidate of History, 18 November 2020: https://voicecrimea.com.ua/main/articles/politika-monumentalnoĭ-propagandi-rosijskoĭ-okupacijnoi-vladi-na-krimskomu-pivostrovi.html?fbclid=IwAR3mwbK9RB-A-46Tr3GGvZHICpbUPT0_2XBV4WEtGK_gksgWidURJkXevvSU

³⁷ Reports from traditional and social media: <https://www.dw.com/ru/в-крыму-осквернен-памятник-погибшим-в-годы-войны-крымским-татарам/a-48677917>, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2937526523023781&id=100002993872443

³⁸ Reports from traditional and social media: https://theins.ru/obshestvo/229160?fbclid=IwAR2c7aWz0RDas5bfNKQF3zccCEPywEcWRLTHkJI4jTdmgu9_Q48tzw-ca88, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=741927493233636&set=a.181679055925152&type=3&theater>