Federalism beyond Federations
Asymmetry and Processes of Resymmetrisation in Europe

Edited by Ferran Requejo and Klaus-Jürgen Nagel
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ASHGATE 2011
The end of the Cold War profoundly altered the dynamics between and within the various states in Europe and the rest of the World, resulting in a resurgence of interest in the concept of federalism. This shift in balance has been further fuelled by the increase in the number of conflicts arising from the disaffection of the diverse ethnic or religious minorities residing within these states (e.g. Sudan, Iraq). Globalization is forcing governments not only to work together, but also to reconsider their internal roles as guarantors of economic growth, with regions playing the major part.

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The Crimean Conundrum

Chapter 9

The Crimean Conundrum

The Crimean Conundrum

Historical Introduction

The Crimean Conundrum is a unique European-Caucasian conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Its roots are deeply intertwined with the history of the region, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries. The conflict has its roots in the history of the region and the Russian Empire, which annexed Crimea in 1783. The Crimean War of 1853-1856, fought between the Russian Empire and a coalition of European powers, including Great Britain and France, highlighted the significance of the region. The Treaty of Paris in 1956 returned Crimea to Ukraine, but the region remained a source of tension between Ukraine and Russia. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 has further complicated the situation, leading to international sanctions and diplomatic consequences.
held in the Crimea, deliberately entitled so as to show continuity to the first Tatar assembly held in 1918. The Tatars look upon the Kurultai, with its own flag and national hymn, as their parliament and therefore some politicians see it as a rival power centre to the Crimean Parliament. The Kurultai elects a Mejlis to function as an unofficial working parliament between assemblies.

The Tatars trace their origins to the thirteenth century when their ethnic group emerged as a consequence of the intermingling of the remnants of the Mongol Golden Horde and local nomadic tribes. Their main geographic location was the Crimea and the southern shore of Ukraine (then Kyiv Rus). The Crimea was united in the mid-fifteenth century by Khan Haci Giray, who claimed descent from the Mongol Emperor Genghis Khan; the dynasty he created ruled the Crimea until the Tsarist occupation in the 1780s. The Tatars accepted the protection of Ottoman Turks who arrived in the wake of conquering Byzantium and Constantinople in the 1470s. The Tatars retained many of the traditions inherited from the Mongol empire, including the Kurultai assembly, as well as Greek and Genoese traditions that were prevalent in southern Crimea. Crimean Tatar identity is firmly rooted in the Crimea, making them distinct from Tatars in Tatarstan and Astrakhan in the Russian Federation.

Secondly, the Russian claim to the Crimea rests on traditional Russian and Soviet historiography that portrays Kyiv Rus as an eastern Slavic state (rather than a proto-Ukrainian state) that split into three eastern Slavic peoples after the Mongol invasion. The Tatars are portrayed as having arrived during the thirteenth century Mongol invasion. The Crimea was 'returned' (not annexed) by eighteenth century Russian Tsarina Catherine the Great to the Tsarist Russian Empire.

Third, the Ukrainian view is that the Crimea was always linked to Ukraine through geography, culture and ethnicity prior to, and including, the medieval Kyiv Rus state. As Kyiv Rus is defined as a proto-Ukrainian state by post-Soviet Ukrainian national historiography, the Crimea was therefore historically part of 'Ukraine' before the arrival of the Mongols-Tatars in the thirteenth century, or the Russians in the eighteenth century. This view of the Crimea is included in all standard textbooks of Ukrainian history that have been published since Ukraine became an independent state in 1992.¹

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the Crimean population had declined to 200,000, of whom half were Tatars (see Table 9.1). Following Tsarist Russia's occupation of the Crimea, 100,000 Tatars out of a Tatar population of half a million emigrated, primarily to Turkey which is home to a large and influential Tatar minority (see Table 9.1). In the 1897 census, Russians and Ukrainians were recorded together as Eastern Slavic Ruski and made up 45.3 per cent of the population, with Tatars recording 34.1 per cent. It was not until the twentieth century that Russians became a majority of the Crimea’s population through Russification, Tatar emigration and finally in 1944 their ethnic cleansing. The

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than Slavic peoples after the
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made up 45.3 per cent of
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rimea's population through
their ethnic cleansing. The

the Re-Writing of History in
arch, 33(1), 30–58.

proportion of Crimeans who were Tatar continued to decline as Slav immigration
continued in the twentieth century to the accompaniment of industrialisation, the
building of the Black Sea Fleet and tourism. By the 1897 and 1926 censuses, the
Tatar share of the population had declined to 34 and 26 per cent respectively and
in the 1926 census Russians became a slim majority with 53 per cent rising to a peak
of 71.4 in 1959 and then dropping to 65 per cent in the 1989 Soviet census and
58 per cent in the 2001 Ukrainian census. Therefore, the ethnic Russian population
of the Crimea has never possessed a permanent majority and will probably decline
to under 50 per cent by the next Ukrainian census.

On 18 October 1921, the Crimean ASSR (Autonomous Soviet Socialist
Republic) was included within the Russian SFSR (Soviet Federative Socialist
Republic) as an autonomous (non-ethnically designated) republic with two cities
(Sevastopol and Evpatoria) under all-Soviet jurisdiction. The Crimea was not
designated as a Tatar homeland but the Crimea was recognised as ethnically
distinct and therefore given autonomy within the Russian SFSR. When the Soviet
armed forces returned to the Crimea in 1944, 200,000 Tatars were ethnically
cleansed to Central Asia, together with 60,000 additional national minorities. It
is estimated that up to 40 per cent of the Tatars died during the expulsion. In June
1945, Crimean autonomy was formally abolished by the Presidium of the USSR
Parliament and the peninsula was downgraded to an oblast of the Russian SFSR.
The ‘legal’ reason for ethnically cleansing the Tatar population was an accusation
of 'treason' made wholesale against the entire Crimean Tatar population charging
that they had collaborated with the occupying Nazis in 1941–44. The Chechens
and Georgian Meshketians were also accused of collaboration with the Nazis and
exported to Central Asia.

Following the Second World War, Slavs migrated in large numbers to the
Crimea. In 1954, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, himself an ethnic Russian from
the Ukrainian SSR, supported the transfer of the Crimean oblast from the Russian
SFSR to the Ukrainian SSR which was legalised by the USSR Parliament on 26
April 1954. Khrushchev’s reasoning was that the Crimea was geographically
connected to the Ukrainian SSR, not to the Russian SSR. Marples and Duke
concluded that it was “a purely internal administrative matter without, it would
not seem, having much significance in political or economic terms.”

2 See Greta Uehling, ‘The first independent Ukrainian census in Crimea: Myths,
misconceptions and missed opportunities’, Ethnic and Racial Studies, vol.27, no.1 (January
2004), 149–70.

3 David R. Marples and David F. Duke, ‘Ukraine, Russia, and the Question of Crimea’,

4 Eduard Ozhiganov, ‘The Crimean Republic: Rivalries for Control’ in Alexei
Arbatov et al. (eds), Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American
Perspectives (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), 123.
Table 9.1 Changing Ethnic Composition of the Crimea (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>1783</th>
<th>1897</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tatars</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>total for eastern Slavs</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The remaining balance up to 100 per cent consists of other nationalities.

was only included within the annual Russian SFSR budget up to 1953 and thereafter it was funded by the Ukrainian SSR budget. From 1954, the port of Sevastopol was included in Crimean election districts for Soviet elections.5

Tatars began to return to the Crimea following the first official condemnation of the 1944 ethnic cleansing of Tatars in a November 1989 USSR Parliament resolution supported by reformist Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Nevertheless, they still only accounted for 15 per cent of the population by the 2001 Ukrainian census. Approximately half of the estimated 500–600,000 Crimean Tatars living in Central Asia since the 1940s have returned to the Crimea.

The Crimea remained within the Ukrainian SSR as an oblast until 1990. A Crimean referendum to revive the (1922–44) Crimean ASSR within the Ukrainian SSR was held on 20 January 1991 which was supported by 93.26 per cent of Crimeans.6 The former Crimean oblast council was transformed into the Parliament. The Tatars boycotted the referendum because they sought a Crimean Tatar autonomous republic while Ukrainian nationalist groups saw the vote as an assault on Ukraine’s territorial integrity.7 The step assisted in dampening potential conflict in the Crimea during the final years of Soviet rule when a rise of anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalism was propelling the country to independence. In Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Chechnya, different policies by the central authorities in dealing with national minorities led to inter-ethnic violence. In Moldova, autonomous status was refused to the Transnistre region and in Georgia, the autonomous status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were abolished. In Azerbaijan, the Nagorno (Upper) Karabakh region was de facto annexed by neighbouring Armenia and Chechnya declared independence from Russia. These

5 Information supplied by the directorate on Treaties and Legal Issues of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Flot Ukrayiny, 30 November 1996).

6 The central committee of the Communist Party Ukraine stated that if Ukraine seceded from the USSR the Crimean ASSR had, ‘the right to independently decide its fate beyond the confines of Ukraine’ (Molod Ukrayiny, 23 May 1991). The law ‘On the Revival of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic’ was signed by Leonid Kravchuk as parliamentary chairman (Radianska Ukrayina, 14 February 1991).

are different to the peaceful resolution of the Crimean question and the four cases led to inter-ethnic violence resulting in massive civilian casualties, ethnic cleansing and frozen conflicts that remain in place to this day.

Between 1991 and 1993, the former communist leadership of the Crimea, led by Nikolai Bagrov, attempted to obtain significant concessions from Kyiv in an attempt to maximise the Crimea’s autonomy within Ukraine. This autonomist position was sidelined in the first half of the 1990s by a pro-Russian secessionist movement seeking independence from Ukraine. Separatist leader Yurii Meshkov was elected Crimean president in January 1994 but only lasted 15 months in office. The secessionist movement collapsed in 1995–96 due to internal quarrels, lack of substantial external Russian assistance and Ukrainian economic, political and security-force pressure. The Crimean presidency was abolished by a Ukrainian presidential decree in March 1995.

The marginalisation of Russian nationalist separatism in the Crimea from the mid-1990s failed to defuse latent tension between the small but highly mobilised and vocal Tatar minority and the two political forces that dominate the Crimea’s ruling elites, the left and centrist. Tatars have traditionally aligned with anti-Russian Ukrainian centre-right national democrats and nationalists who are traditionally weak in the Crimea. At only 15 per cent of the population, and with little influence inside Crimea’s Parliament or local councils, Tatar demands are still largely ignored by the Crimean authorities. Tatar activists’ homes have been bombed, Tatar journalists have been murdered and Tatars have been sentenced to lengthy prison sentences for acts of civil disobedience. The most serious violence has erupted over historic Tatar sites that are now misused by Russophone Slavs. Violence between Tatars and Russophone Slavs has broken out over attempts to build apartment buildings and business dwellings on ancient Tatar sites, such as the former imperial seat of the Tatar Khans in Bakhchisarai and an old Muslim cemetery used as a flea market. Tatars have also undertaken acts of civil disobedience to bring attention to their plight. Tatar protests outside Crimean government buildings have been over the lack of land allocated to them by the local authorities and recent changes to the criminal code which impose severe punishments for illegal seizures of land.

The ongoing tension in the Crimea between the minority Tatars and the Russophone Slavic ruling elites rests on seven unfulfilled demands:

1. **Land:** Seventy-five per cent of Tatars live in rural areas, but they only possess half of the land allocated to Russophones. Prior to 1944, Tatars accounted for 70 per cent of the population along the south coast, an area that today they find difficult to settle in because high property values means it is monopolised by tourism and property developers.

2. **Employment:** Although Tatars account for 12.1 per cent of the population, according to the 2001 Ukrainian census, they only account for 4 per cent of the official working population in the Crimea. Many Tatars are forced
to work in the shadow economy, which has led to violence with organised crime groups who often control street markets.

3. **Housing:** The number of Tatars in the Crimea has grown over six times between the 1989 Soviet and 2001 Ukrainian censuses and they now number 250,000, with another 150,000 still remaining in Uzbekistan. Tatars find that their former homes are occupied by Russian settlers, creating demands for property restitution. The authorities have failed to allocate sufficient resources for returning Tatars to build new accommodation, which has led to the growth of shanty towns.

4. **Religion:** Prior to the absorption of the Crimea into the Russian Empire in the late eighteenth century, the peninsula had 21,000 mosques. This number declined to only 1,700 by the time of the 1944 ethnic cleansing. Currently, there are 160 mosques, in very poor condition, in the Crimea, and 9 madrasahs (religious schools). Tatars complain that the local authorities are hostile to the building of new mosques.

5. **Culture and education:** Thirteen Tatar-language schools with poor resources and under-qualified teachers are sufficient to only serve 14 per cent of Tatar children. Eighty-six per cent of Tatar children attend Russian-language schools leading to accusations of continued Soviet-era style Russification. Tatar leaders complain that ‘no conditions have been created in the Crimea for Crimean Tatars to preserve their ethnic identity.’ Tatars demand that the Crimea return to the policy in place prior to 1944 whereby the Tatar language was recognised as one of the Crimea’s official languages.

6. **Legal demands:** First, that the Crimeans be recognised as an indigenous national group in the Crimea, not as a national minority. Secondly, that the 1944 deportation be recognised as an act of ‘genocide’. The Ukrainian Parliament voted in December 2006 by only a slim majority to recognise the deportation as ‘genocide’, but the Party of Regions and the Communists, who dominate the Crimean Parliament, voted against the resolution. Third, to introduce a legislative base for the rehabilitation of Tatars. In the summer of 2004, a law ‘On the Rehabilitation of People Deported on Ethnic Grounds’ was adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament, but it was vetoed by President Leonid Kuchma.

7. **Political representation:** Tatars were allocated 14 seats in the 1994–98 Crimean Parliament but legislative changes removed this guaranteed allocation of seats from the 1998 elections. The 2004 revised law on elections only provides for full proportional elections to local councils and the Crimean Parliament. This makes it difficult for Crimean Tatars to be elected in the Crimea, as their political representation cannot break through the 3 per cent threshold. Leftist and pro-Russian political forces that dominate the Crimean Parliament are hostile to Tatar demands and insensitive to their plight.
Legal and Constitutional Asymmetries

In late 1990, local Crimean branches of the Communist Party gave their approval to hold a referendum to resurrect the Crimean Autonomous SSR, although this was pursued without any consultations with the Tatar minority. Ukrainian parliamentary leader (speaker) Leonid Kravchuk stated his support for a referendum to decide the Crimean oblast’s fate. After the disintegration of the USSR in December 1991, the momentum for Crimea’s separation from Ukraine gathered pace and relations between the Crimea and Kyiv deteriorated throughout the first year of Ukrainian independence in 1992. In February 1992, the Republican Movement of the Crimea (RDK) began a campaign to collect 180,000 signatures to hold a referendum on the peninsula’s fate in accordance with a newly adopted Crimean referendum law. The referendum campaign soured relations with the Ukrainian authorities, and Ukrainian nationalist parties demanded tough action against the RDK. On 26 February, the Crimean Parliament voted to change its name to the Crimean Republic (from Crimean ASSR) as an additional step towards full sovereignty, although it was unclear if this would be within, or separate from, Ukraine.

Tension between the Crimea and Kyiv reached a peak on 5 May 1992 when 118 out of 176 deputies in the Crimean Parliament voted for a declaration of ‘sovereignty’ that was interpreted by the Ukrainian authorities as a ‘declaration of independence’, a step that was to be followed by a Crimean referendum. Sovereignty was understood by Crimean elites as control over local resources and their negative reaction to the 29 April 1992 law ‘On the Division of Authority Between Ukraine and the Republic of Crimea’. Crimean parliamentary chairman Bagrov never supported independence and explained, ‘The Act of Declaration of State Sovereignty – and I am stressing that: state sovereignty, not independence – is not an attempt to violate the integrity of Ukraine’s borders. The goal of the act is to emphasise that the Crimea is not an ordinary region, but a republic that should be taken into account.’ Ukraine had declared sovereignty within the USSR in July 1990 and only declared independence from the USSR in August of the following year. Bagrov therefore understood sovereignty in the same manner as Ukraine understood sovereignty within the USSR in 1990.

The main objective of the Crimea’s ‘sovereignty declaration’ was to put pressure on Kyiv to change the law dividing responsibilities between Kyiv and the Crimea, as seen in the following day’s vote to include the Crimea within Ukraine in the draft Crimean Constitution. After the law was modified on 30 June 1992 to increase powers given to the Crimea, the Crimean Parliament voted to ‘suspend’, rather than abandon, its call for a referendum. The revised law provided the Crimea with rights to property and natural resources located in the peninsula that post-communist elites sought to control through insider privatisation.

The declaration of sovereignty produced a dangerous crisis in Crimean–Ukrainian relations that could have spun out of control, as in Georgia. Ukrainian

nationalist groups demanded the introduction of presidential rule, the dissolution of the Crimean Parliament and the arrest of Crimean parliamentary chairman Bagrov on charges of ‘treason’. The Ukrainian Popular Movement (Rukh), which had close ties to Crimean Tatars, blamed former President Kravchuk for failing to halt Crimea’s slide towards independence, demanded central government support for the Tatars and protested against Russian interference in Ukraine’s internal affairs.

President Kravchuk and Crimean parliamentary chairman Bagrov negotiated a centrist compromise that sidelined both Russian and Ukrainian nationalists, with Russian nationalists seeking Crimea’s separation from Ukraine and Ukrainian nationalists calling for a security crackdown on Crimean separatists. The centrist compromise included the demand that the Crimean Parliament rescind its declaration of sovereignty and referendum, a demand which the Crimean Parliament fulfilled. The compromise prevented the crisis escalating into a violent Ukrainian central government response that could have led to civil war and Russian covert – as happened in Georgia – or direct (from the Black Sea Fleet) military intervention – as happened in Moldova.

President Kravchuk co-opted the regional elites who could potentially be a threat to Ukraine’s territorial integrity by offering patronage (that is, access to local resources during privatisation) in return for territorial loyalty. These policies maintained stability but the consensus began to break down in 1993 as separatist tendencies grew in the Crimea under the impact of Ukraine’s economic crisis and hyper-inflation. In the January 1994 Crimean presidential and March 1994 Ukrainian parliamentary elections and referenda, Crimeans voted for leaders and political groups that advocated the separation of the Crimea from Ukraine. Central government plans were derailed by the 16 January 1994 Crimean presidential elections when the Russian nationalist separatist Meshkov obtained 75 per cent of the vote compared with the Ukrainian pro-autonomist Bagrov’s 23 per cent. Kyiv had gambled on allowing the Crimean presidential elections to take place because it had expected that Crimean parliamentary chairman Bagrov, its favourite candidate, would win. The Ukrainian central authorities, dominated by elite members of the Soviet-era Communist Party in Ukraine, such as President Kravchuk, continued to deal with their former communist counterparts in the Crimea, such as former Crimean Communist leader Bagrov. The Ukrainian authorities had no option but to work with Bagrov and former local Communists, now regrouped in the centrist Party of Economic Revival of the Crimea (PEVK). The Ukrainian authorities could not work with Russian separatists, such as Meshkov or the Crimean branch of the

10 The resolution of the Ukrainian Parliament was published in Holos Ukrayiny, 15 May 1993.
Communist Party of Ukraine, as the former sought the Crimea’s separation from Ukraine and the latter a revival of the USSR. Meanwhile, a reliance on Ukrainian nationalists would have led, as in Georgia, to supporting a violent response. Ukrainians numbered, according to the last Soviet census of 1989, only 25.75 per cent of the Crimean population but a majority were Russified and therefore they traditionally aligned with ethnic Russians in the Russophone group. In the March 1994 referendum that accompanied Crimean parliamentary elections, 78.4 per cent voted for greater autonomy and 82.8 per cent for dual Russian-Ukrainian citizenship, figures higher than the Russian ethnic population of the Crimea which suggested that Russified Ukrainians also backed these policies.

The election of Russian separatist leader Meshkov as Crimean president inevitably led to a deterioration of relations with the Ukrainian authorities and the potential for inter-ethnic conflict. Meshkov sought Russian support for Crimean separatism and appealed to Russia, ‘not to allow arbitrariness and to protect the universally recognized, inalienable civil, political, ethnic, religious and linguistic rights of the inhabitants of the Crimea’. President Meshkov and his parliamentary allies wavered between supporting Crimean independence or the Crimea’s union with Russia, both policies that Kyiv would oppose.

The Ukrainian authorities followed a three-pronged response – legal, economic and military – to forestall President Meshkov’s separatism.

The Ukrainian authorities responded legally by annulling Crimean presidential decrees and Crimean parliamentary laws through asserting the supremacy of Ukrainian over Crimean legislation. The Crimean authorities agreed to the establishment from January 1993 of a presidential prefect in the Crimea to assert the primacy of the Ukrainian constitution. In February 1994, the Ukrainian Parliament rejected demands for separate Crimean citizenship and dual citizenship and ruled out any changes in Ukraine’s borders, which were ‘unitary, indivisible, inviolable and integral’. The resolution demanded that the Crimea should ‘bring the constitution and other legislative acts of the Crimean republic into conformity with Ukraine’s constitution and legislation’. Separatist leader President Meshkov supported a return to the draft May 1992 constitution that promoted Crimean independence whereas Crimean parliamentary chairman Bagrov backed, with the support of the Ukrainian authorities, the autonomist draft September 1992 Crimean constitution. A Ukrainian parliamentary resolution described separatist

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Published in Holos Ukrayiny, 15

Growing Regionalism’, Jan’s hanyk, ‘Crimea’s Presidential institution’, RFE/RL Research
support for the draft May 1992 constitution as, ‘a step towards Crimea leaving the composition of Ukraine’.

Economic, trade and financial sanctions were threatened and used against the Crimea. Then President Kravchuk warned, ‘The economic consequences of Crimea’s separation from Ukraine would be catastrophic.’ The Ukrainian authorities threatened economic sanctions, including the blockage of electricity and water, pointing out, ‘Let’s speak frankly, Crimea today is a region which is subsidised by Ukraine. We don’t have to go into all the figures; there’s energy, water, etc.’

Ukrainian security force numbers were increased in the Crimea, which was already more than double that of the Soviet era. In Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan, separatist military formations received covert or overt assistance from Russia prior to, and immediately after, the disintegration of the USSR that thwarted the imposition of central control over their regions. The newly independent Moldovan, Georgian and Azerbaijani states failed to take control of Soviet security formations on their territories when the USSR collapsed. In the Crimea, the Ukrainian authorities had quickly asserted control over local Soviet security forces in the Interior Ministry, the Border Troops, the military and the KGB, and partially in the Soviet Navy. In the course of 1991–92, these Soviet security forces were rapidly transformed into Ukrainian security forces before Russian separatists had the opportunity to establish their illegal armed formations. The Black Sea Fleet, the majority of whose personnel declared its loyalty to Russia, was the only source of instability as its status was legally undefined until May 1997, when its presence in Ukraine became encoded in a 20-year treaty. A majority of Soviet Black Sea Fleet personnel refused to transfer their allegiance to the new Ukrainian Navy and gave administrative, economic and military assistance to Crimean separatists. Ukrainian central control over Crimean security forces gave the Ukrainian authorities a stronger position from which to negotiate with local separatists compared to that of the Moldovan, Georgian and Azerbaijani authorities, who never could assert their control over separatist enclaves.

President Meshkov’s relations with the Ukrainian authorities deteriorated when he initiated a referendum that asked Crimean citizens if they backed a return to the draft May 1992 constitution, dual citizenship and to give the Crimean president greater powers. Following intervention by the Ukrainian authorities, the referendum was made not legally binding and instead described as ‘consultative opinion polls’ in an attempt at reducing the perception that they were a threat to Ukraine’s territorial integrity (see Table 9.2).

Conflict between the Ukrainian authorities and Crimea revealed that opposition to Crimean separatism ran across Ukraine’s political spectrum from left to right.

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loved, Georgia and Azerbaijan,
assistance from Russia prior
that thwarted the imposition
resident Moldovan, Georgian
security formations on their
the Ukrainian authorities had
aces in the Interior Ministry,
ially in the Soviet Navy. In
were rapidly transformed into
id the opportunity to establish
majority of whose personnel
instability as its status was
Ukraine became encoded in a
sonnel refused to transfer their
strative, economic and military
control over Crimean security
ition from which to negotiate
an, Georgian and Azerbaijani
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Crimea revealed that opposition
al spectrum from left to right.

**Table 9.2 1994 Crimean Opinion Poll (Referendum)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Crimea %</th>
<th>Sevastopol %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restore the May 1992 Constitution</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce dual Ukrainian and Russian citizenship</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>87.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase presidential power</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Ukrainian Central Election Commission.*

The left, centre and right wings of the political spectrum backed Ukraine’s territorial integrity but the left and centre were more inclined to support moderate and non-violent policies against Crimean separatism, while the right sought a tougher response. Ukrainian parliamentary resolutions were adopted by two-thirds of deputies (a constitutional majority), including from its large left-wing caucus.18

Support for separatism has been weak outside the Crimea. When asked if they supported the separation of their region and joining another state, only 17.7 per cent of Russians and 3.6 per cent of Ukrainians supported such a step. Support for separation with the aim of establishing an independent state was backed by 2.9 per cent of Ukrainians and 9.4 per cent of Russians.20 When asked if they believed themselves to be Ukrainian ‘patriots’, 74 per cent in eastern Ukraine and 74 per cent in southern Ukraine agreed with this definition of themselves. In eastern Ukraine, 85 per cent did not support separatism and 78 per cent did not support their region’s unification with another state. In the Crimea, 64 per cent did not support their region’s separation from Ukraine and its unification with another state (in southern Ukraine, opposition to separatism was higher at 75 per cent). A slim majority supported the Crimea’s autonomy within Ukraine (52 per cent), but a sizeable number of Crimean’s remain opposed to autonomous status (35.5 per cent). This nationwide support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity was inherited from the USSR, when Ukraine’s borders became established and accepted.21

**Main Political Actors**

In the final years of the USSR, particularly after the Communist Party was banned in Ukraine by a parliamentary vote in August 1991, the Crimean Communist Party divided into two groups. One group followed senior members of the Ukrainian

19 UNIAN, 20 May. Grach, leader of the Communist Party of the Crimea, issued a statement denouncing the return to the May 1992 constitution which, ‘allows dishonourable leaders in Ukraine, Crimea and Russia to inflame inter-ethnic hostility and a bloody conflict’ (UNIAN, 22 May 1994).


21 Ibid.
Communist nomenklatura in establishing centrist parties of power. Crimean parliamentary chairman Bagrov became leader of the PEVK. The second group to emerge in the Crimea after the re-legalisation of the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) in October 1993 were hard-line Communists grouped around their local leader, Leonid Grach. Both wings of the former Crimean Communists (centrists and Communists) were hostile to Russian separatism.

The PEVK (and later other centrist) and Communists have dominated Crimean politics after the Crimean presidency was abolished in March 1995. Between 1995 and 1998, Russian nationalists became increasingly fractured and marginalised. Crimean voters who had become disillusioned with Russian separatists switched to the Communists who returned in large numbers to the Crimean Parliament in the 1998 elections (as they did in the Ukrainian Parliament). The 14 Crimean seats allocated to Tatars and other Crimean minorities in the 1994–98 Parliament were abolished.

The next three Crimean parliaments (1998–2002, 2002–06, 2006–10) continued to be dominated by two groups: centrists and Communists. In the 1998 elections, pro-Ukrainian centrists formed the ‘Crimea is Our Home’ Movement that included the People’s Democratic Party (NDP), the Inter-Regional Bloc of Reforms (MRBR), Agrarians and the Social Democratic United Party (SDPU). After the 1998 elections, the PEVK was eclipsed by the NDP until the 2006 elections, when the Party of Regions became the largest centrist party in the Crimean Parliament.

Regionally based parties were banned when Ukraine adopted its Constitution in June 1996. In October 1996, the Ukrainian Ministry of Justice revoked the registration of 15 Crimean political parties and groups after they refused to re-register themselves as either national Ukrainian parties (which requires them to have branches in two-thirds of Ukraine’s oblasts), or as Crimean regional branches of national Ukrainian parties. Of Crimea’s then 17 political movements and parties only two re-registered with the Ukrainian Ministry of Justice as national Ukrainian political parties. The Union in Support of the Crimean Republic chose to become a local branch of the NDP. Three parties opted to transform themselves into national Ukrainian parties. The PEKV changed its name to the Party of Economic Revival (PEV), but after the 1998 elections went into terminal decline when the Ukrainian authorities destroyed one of its main financial benefactors, the ‘Seylem’ organised crime group. The PEVK/PEV had transformed itself into a political krysha (criminal slang for ‘roof’, meaning protection) for organised crime. Two separatist Crimean parties opted to become national Ukrainian parties: the Republican Party of the Crimea became the Sotnez (Union) Party, and the Russian Party of the Crimea became the Slavic Unity Party. Following their

22 The IRBR and NDP merged in 2001.
transformation, the Soiuz and Slavic Unity parties have remained highly marginal political forces and reformulated their demands from Crimean separatism to campaigning for Ukraine’s membership of the Russian-Belarusian eastern Slavic union, in defence of Russian speakers and support for the Russian language as a second state language.

Resymmetrisation

On 20 May 1994, the Crimean Parliament, dominated by the separatist Russia bloc and supported by then President Meshkov, reintroduced the separatist draft May 1992 constitution. Four out of five articles in the May 1992 draft separatist constitution were opposed by the central authorities.26

1. Relations between the Crimea and Ukraine are to be based on a federal treaty (similar to those negotiated between the central Russian authorities and autonomous republics).

2. The federal treaty forms the basis for a relationship between two sovereign states (creating de facto equality in law between the Crimea and Ukraine).

3. The Crimean Republic controls all natural resources located on its territory.

4. Crimeans have a right to dual Ukrainian and Russian citizenship.

5. The Crimean Republic has a right to its own security forces separate to those of Ukraine’s.

Four of the five demands were rejected by the entire Ukrainian political spectrum inside the Ukrainian Parliament; only the third article (control over natural resources) was open to negotiation. The Ukrainian authorities dismissed a treaty relationship between the Crimea and Ukraine along the lines of that drawn up between Tatarstan and Russia because Ukraine – unlike Russia – is not a federal state. Dual citizenship was opposed because it was feared that such a step could lead to the Russian minority seeking Russian citizenship. No autonomous entity would be permitted to control security, foreign and defence policies; the Tatar-Russian Federation Treaty delegated all military, foreign and security policies to the central Russian authorities.27

A new Crimean constitution could only be successfully completed between the central authorities and the Crimea after Russian separatists were marginalised.


27 See Kravchuk’s speech to the Ukrainian Parliament after the end of the ten-day deadline (Holos Ukrajiny, 4 June 1994). See also The Wall Street Journal and Financial Times, 2 June 1994. A resolution of the Ukrainian Parliament on action to be taken followed Kravchuk’s speech (Holos Ukrajiny, 3 June 1994).
Table 9.3  Regional Attitudes to Abolishing the Crimean Presidency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Lviv</th>
<th>Kyiv</th>
<th>Donetsk</th>
<th>Simferopol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Decision?</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


from power and following the adoption of the Ukrainian Constitution. Abolishing the Crimean presidency was seen across Ukraine’s political spectrum as a facilitating compromise between the Ukrainian and Crimean authorities. Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz, chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament in 1994–98 during the height of the Crimean separatist threat, said, that ‘quelling the separatist tendencies’ was made easier after the Crimean presidency was abolished. In a Democratic Initiatives NGO poll, only 14 per cent of Ukrainians held a positive opinion of Meshkov, and 56 per cent supported the abolition of the Crimean presidency. In Russian-speaking south-eastern Ukraine, an average of 49 per cent of Ukrainians supported the abolishing of the Crimean presidency. Only in the Crimea did a majority (56 per cent) oppose the move. More ethnic Ukrainians (60 per cent) than ethnic Russians (42 per cent) supported the move, as seen in Table 9.3, but not by a large margin.

Two political groups opposed a compromise pro-autonomy constitution: Russian nationalists who sought separation and the Ukrainian right (conservatives and nationalists) who opposed the concept of autonomy for any Ukrainian region. Ukraine’s left and centrist supported Crimean autonomy and their view prevailed. All areas of the Ukrainian political spectrum rejected the institution of a Crimean presidency, the signing of a federal treaty between Crimea and Ukraine, dual citizenship and separate security forces.

Ukrainian conservatives and nationalists stressed that unitary states should not include autonomous entities and the Crimea should be therefore given a status short of autonomy with no parliament, namely, a regional chamber that

30 ‘The Results of Four polls Conducted During the 1994 Election Campaign in Ukraine’, *Political Portrait of Ukraine*, 4, 1994. Forty per cent were indifferent, 22 were negative and the remainder could not give an answer.
31 *Demokratychna Ukraina*, 27 April 1995.
33 Ibid., 159.
Table 9.4  Do You Support Autonomous Status for the Crimea?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Ukraine</th>
<th>Kyiv</th>
<th>Crimea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, somewhat</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, somewhat</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough information</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 9.5  Should the Crimea Have a Constitution?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Ukraine</th>
<th>Kyiv</th>
<th>Crimea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, somewhat</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, somewhat</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough information</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


would have greater powers than an oblast council but fewer rights than a regional parliament. Ukraine’s left and centrist parties supported Crimean autonomy in the face of opposition from the nationalist right and the Ukrainian public (see Tables 9.4 and 9.5). The Ukrainian right also supported the Tatars’ claim to have special rights in the Crimea as an indigenous people. They feared that granting the Crimea autonomy would lead down a slippery slope to separatism. Centrists and the left supported Crimea’s autonomous status but agreed with the Ukrainian right that the Crimea was an exception and autonomy would not be extended to any other region. A compromise was reached between centrists and the left who backed Crimea’s autonomous status in exchange for the right’s inclusion of Ukraine’s national symbols in the Ukrainian constitution, which reflected the interconnection between the 1996 Ukrainian and 1998 Crimean constitutions.

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34 ‘Russkiye na Ukrainе’, a poll by the Kyiv-based Ukrainian Centre for Political and Conflict Studies. Copy in the possession of the author. A summary was reported in ITAR-TASS, 10 November 1996.
35 Ibid.
On 31 May 1995, the Crimean Parliament adopted the draft of a pro-autonomy constitution with the Crimea inside Ukraine; this draft became the basis for the Crimean Constitution adopted three years later. The Crimea’s powers would be regulated according to the 17 March 1995 Ukrainian laws ‘On the Crimean Autonomous Republic’ and ‘On the Division of Power between the Ukrainian State Organs of Power and the Crimean Republic’. The August 1995 Ukrainian presidential decree ‘On the Bodies of State Executive Power of the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea’ included two additional important provisions. First, the Crimean prime minister is to be appointed and dismissed by the Crimean Parliament with the agreement of the Ukrainian president. Secondly, state administrative bodies from the rayon (village, rural) level upwards are subordinated to the Crimean government and the Ukrainian president.

Ukrainian objections were always strongest against Crimean separatist demands for ‘statehood’, separate citizenship and dual Ukrainian and Russian citizenship, control over appointments within the security forces and the reinstatement of the Crimean presidency. Following the marginalisation of Russian nationalists in 1995–96, these contentious issues were no longer raised by Crimean negotiators. The chairman of the Crimean Security Service and head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs would be appointed by the Ukrainian authorities in coordination with the Crimean Parliament.

The contentious issue of which languages would be official Crimean languages was resolved by a compromise which made Russian, Ukrainian and Tatar official languages, with Russian the working official language of government and business. The 1996 Ukrainian Constitution made Ukrainian the state language with other languages given rights in areas of the country where a majority of the population used them (for example, Russian in eastern Ukraine).

The marginalisation of Russian nationalists and reimposition of control over Crimean politics by Communists and centrist smoothed the process of completing a Crimean constitution. The election of Crimean Communist Party leader Grach as chairman of the Crimean Parliament following the March 1998 elections was particularly important in ensuring a compromise could be reached with the Ukrainian authorities. As Stewart argues, ‘The result was a constitution which differed significantly from those of 1992 and 1995 and bore the distinct seal of

37 ITAR-TASS, 31 May 1995. Of the two previous constitutions (6 May and 25 September 1992) Kyiv preferred to use as the basis for the 1996–98 constitution the latter because it was perceived as not ‘pro-separatist’ (in comparison to the 6 May 1992 version). On this question, see the interview with A. Danelian, chairman of the Crimean Constitutional Commission and Deputy Chairman of the Crimean Supreme Council, in Krymskiye Izvestiya, 25 October 1995.

38 Kyiv was undoubtedly concerned that the Crimea would attempt to control oil and gas deposits on the peninsula and those lying off the Black Sea coast.


40 Cited by Volodymyr Yavorivsky, then head of the Democratic Party, the 1998 election ally of the renamed Party of Economic Revival (Ukrayina moloda, 15 April 1998).
Grach’s attempts to consolidate his power in Crimea and raise his profile in Kyiv and Ukraine as a whole.41 The Crimea, Grach insisted, had no choice but to act within Ukraine’s legal and constitutional field42 and appealed to President Kuchma to ‘restore constitutional order in the Crimea’.43

A Crimean constitution recognising the Crimea as belonging to a ‘unitary’ Ukraine was adopted by the Crimean Parliament on 21 October 1998 by a vote of 82 out of 100 and ratified by the Ukrainian Parliament on 23 December. The adoption of the Crimean Constitution facilitated an improvement in Ukraine’s relations with Russia; following it, Russia’s and the two houses of Parliament ratified the May 1997 treaty with Ukraine. Continued opposition to the Crimean Constitution came from both the Ukrainian right (conservatives and nationalists) and from Russian nationalists in the Crimea, with the former claiming the 1998 constitution had given the Crimea too many powers while the latter believing it had given the Crimea too few.44 Ukraine’s and the Crimean’s left and centrists had avoided violence and brokered a pro-autonomy compromise in the face of opposition from both Russian and Ukrainian nationalists. The adoption of a new semi-parliamentary constitution in 2006 did not fundamentally change the Crimea’s relationship with Ukraine, as the main reform was the transfer of the government from the president to a parliamentary coalition. The 2006 elections were the first to be held using a full proportional system nationally and locally.

### Elections and Political Control

Following the marginalisation of Russian separatists, the Crimea has been ruled by centrists and Communists who have continued to dominate elections to the Crimean Parliament and the Ukrainian Parliament (see Tables 9.5–9.9). Crimean voters make similar choices when voting for the Ukrainian Parliament as they do for the Crimean Parliament.

Until the 2002 elections to the Crimean and Ukrainian legislatures, the largest number of seats traditionally went first to the Communists and second to pro-Ukrainian centrists. Since the 2006 elections, the Communist presence in both the Ukrainian Parliament and the Crimean Parliament has declined and centrists have won greater shares of the vote to both legislatures. The Communist faction was reduced by nearly half in the 2006–07 Ukrainian Parliament, compared to the 1998–02 and 2002–06 Parliaments. Since the 2006 elections, the Party of Regions has come first in elections to both the Ukrainian Parliament and the

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43 ITAR-TASS, 16 December 1999.
Crimean Parliament. In the 2006 elections and 2007 pre-term elections to the Ukrainian Parliament, the Party of Regions received 59 and 61.44 per cent respectively in the Crimea with the Communists trailing far behind the Party of Regions. Within the Crimea, the pro-Yanukovych bloc came first in the 2006 elections\(^{45}\) with an average of 35 per cent of the vote (Viktor Yanukovych is head of the Party of Regions). The pro-Yanukovych bloc, which united for the first time centrists (Party of Regions) with Russian nationalists, had the largest faction in the 2006–10 Crimean Parliament compared to only nine Communist deputies. As in elections to the Ukrainian Parliament in 2006 and 2007, where the Communists came in fourth and fifth place respectively, the Communists received only 4.51 per cent in elections to the Crimean Parliament. Crimea’s Communists were a stabilising force in the Crimea because when they were the largest party in the Crimean peninsula they supported Ukraine’s territorial integrity and opposed Russian separatism. Crimean voters prefer to support pro-Russian Communists or centrists rather than pure ethnic Russian nationalist political parties, a tendency that is apparent throughout Russian-speaking Ukraine. Ethnic Russian nationalist parties receive little support among Ukraine’s Russian-speakers, as they do throughout the former USSR, a factor that reduced the likelihood of inter-ethnic strife along the lines of the former Yugoslavia. The weakness of Russian ethnic nationalism made conflict less likely in the Crimea and the marginalisation of Russian nationalists easier.

During Kuchma’s second term in office (1999–2004), Communists controlled the leadership of the Crimean Parliament while the Crimean government was controlled by the NDP, whose Crimean leader Serhiy Kunitcsyn was also prime minister. In the 2002 Ukrainian parliamentary elections, the NDP was one of five political parties that united in the pro-presidential ‘For a United Ukraine’ bloc. Following the Orange Revolution, the NDP was eclipsed by another centrist political force: the Party of Regions.

Table 9.6 1998 Elections in the Crimea to the Ukrainian Parliament (Proportional Party Lists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloc or Party</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communist Party</td>
<td>39.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union (Soiuz)</td>
<td>10.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian Popular Movement (Rukh)</td>
<td>6.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Party Ukraine</td>
<td>5.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Democratic Party (NDP)</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The Green Party and the NDP were pro-President Kuchma.
*Source:* Ukrainian Central Election Commission.

\(^{45}\) Pre-term elections were only held to the national parliament in September 2007, not to the Crimean Parliament. Crimea’s Parliament was therefore elected in 2006.
Table 9.7  2002 Elections in the Crimea to the Ukrainian Parliament
(Proportional Party lists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloc or Party</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communist Party</td>
<td>33.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democratic Party united (SDPUo)</td>
<td>12.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Ukraine bloc</td>
<td>9.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a United Ukraine bloc</td>
<td>5.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Bloc</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The SDPUo and For a United Ukraine bloc were pro-President Kuchma. The For a United Ukraine bloc included the NDP.

*Source:* Ukrainian Central Election Commission.

Table 9.8  2006 Elections in the Crimea to the Ukrainian Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloc or Party</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party of Regions</td>
<td>58.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Ukraine bloc</td>
<td>8.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalia Vitrenko bloc (Progressive Socialist Party)</td>
<td>7.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yulia Tymoshenko bloc</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Party</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The 2006 elections were held on a fully proportional basis.

*Source:* Ukrainian Central Election Commission.

Table 9.9  2007 Pre-term Elections in the Crimea to the Ukrainian Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bloc or Party</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party of Regions</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Ukraine-Self Defence bloc</td>
<td>7.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Socialist Party</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yulia Tymoshenko bloc</td>
<td>6.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist Party</td>
<td>6.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volodymyr Lytvyn bloc</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The 2007 pre-term elections were held on a fully proportional basis.

*Source:* Ukrainian Central Election Commission.

In the Crimea in the 2002 elections to the Ukrainian Parliament, the main contest was between the pro-President Kuchma "For a United Ukraine" bloc and the Communist Party. The election results showed that the Crimea did not fundamentally differ from the other Russian-speaking area of south-eastern Ukraine in the political attitudes of its population where the main contest was...
between centrists and Communists. The ‘For a United Ukraine’ bloc backed the Kunitsyn Bloc (based on Crimean NDP leader Sergei Kunitsyn) in the Crimean elections and obtained the largest number of seats in the Crimean Parliament. After the 2002 elections, the Communist-centrist compromise in the Crimean Parliament collapsed as the NDP expanded its control from the Crimean government to the Crimean Parliament. This monopolisation of power by the NDP in the Crimea through control of both Parliament and the government mirrored a similar attempt at monopolisation of power by pro-presidential centrists in Kyiv during Kuchma’s second term in office.

Two factors worked towards resymmetrising the Crimea and removing the threat of inter-ethnic conflict. First, the Crimea’s two main political forces – Communists and centrists – supported Ukraine’s territorial integrity and opposed separatism. Secondly, Russian separatists became progressively marginalised after their removal from power in the Crimean presidency (1995) and the Crimean Parliament (from 1996 onwards). The extent of the rapid marginalisation of Russian nationalists in the Crimea was evident in the 2002 elections to the Ukrainian Parliament where two pro-presidential centrist forces (‘For a United Ukraine’ bloc and the Social Democratic United Party) obtained higher votes than two Russian nationalist separatist parties.

The former separatist Russian bloc, renamed Soiuz (Union), failed to generate public support in three elections to the Ukrainian Parliament held since 1998. In the 1998 elections, Soiuz fought the elections alone and came 21st out of the 30 parties and blocs who competed in national elections, winning a mere 0.70 per cent of the vote. In the Crimea, Soiuz came second behind the Communists with a more respectable 10.68 per cent. In the city of Sevastopol, the Soiuz Party came fifth with only 2.25 per cent, only slightly more than the 1.77 per cent support received by Rukh. In the 2002 elections to the Ukrainian Parliament, the Russian Party (which included the Soiuz Party) and the Union of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia bloc (known by its abbreviation ZUBR) received 0.73 and 0.43 per cent respectively, coming 16th and 17th out of the 33 parties and blocs registered for the national elections. In the Crimea, the Russian Party and ZUBR came 5th and 14th with 4.76 and 0.93 per cent respectively. In Sevastopol, the base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and a staunchly pro-Russian city, the Russia bloc came third (after the Communists and ‘For a United Ukraine’ bloc) with 8.83 per cent while ZUBR came 11th with 2.14 per cent. In the 2006 elections to the national Parliament held in the Crimea, the Soiuz Party received an average of only 1.9 per cent support in nine Crimean electoral districts. Russian nationalist groups received fewer votes than the centre-right ‘Our Ukraine’ bloc led by opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko (elected president in January 2005), that won third place in elections to the Ukrainian Parliament in the Crimea with 9.77 per cent. This high vote for the ‘Our Ukraine’ bloc was mainly obtained from Crimean Tatar voters who make up 15 per cent of the Crimean population and traditionally vote for pro-Ukrainian conservative parties, such as Rukh (in the 1998 elections) and the ‘Our Ukraine’ bloc (in the 2002, 2006 and 2007 elections). Crimean Mejlis
Crimea and removing the two main political forces – territorial integrity and opposed progressively marginalised presidency (1995) and the of the rapid marginalisation in the 2002 elections to the tripartite forces (‘For a United Union), failed to generate support for the Communists with stopol, the Soiuz Party came in the 1.77 per cent support for Parliament, the Russian Union of Ukraine, Belarus and lviv 0.73 and 0.43 per cent ties and blocs registered for Party and ZUBR came 5th Sevastopol, the base of the city, the Russia bloc came 3rd bloc with 8.83 per cent 106 elections to the national ved an average of only 1.9 Russian nationalist groups nine bloc led by opposition 2005), that won third place ea with 9.77 per cent. This obtained from Crimean Tatar traditional vote (in the 1998 elections) and elections. Crimean Mejlis leaders have traditionally been included on Rukh and ‘Our Ukraine’ bloc lists in elections to the Ukrainian Parliament. Tatars were able to vote in larger numbers for the first time in the 2002 elections because 90 per cent of them were by then Ukrainian citizens, unlike in the 1998 elections when they remained in Crimea but still ineligible to vote because they remained Uzbek citizens. In the 2002 elections to the Crimean Parliament, seven Tatars were elected, an increase of one on the 1998–2002 Crimean Parliament but less than the 14 seats the Tatars were proportionately allocated in the 1994–98 Crimean Parliament.

External Influences on Resymmetrisation

The Crimean conundrum is more complicated in comparison to other ethnic conflicts by virtue of a large neighbour exercising territorial threats against Ukraine. What additionally distinguishes Ukraine’s case from that of the former Yugoslavia is that Russia is unable to see Ukrainians as a separate people and Ukraine as a coherent territorial entity. At the April 2008 NATO-Russia Council in Bucharest, held during NATO’s summit, President Putin spoke of Ukraine as a fragile and artificial state whose territory was brought together during the Soviet era; if Ukraine joined NATO, Putin predicted, Ukraine would cease to exist within its current borders. Putin claimed that Russia has natural interests in Ukraine because one-third of the population was allegedly ‘ethnic Russian’ (the real figure is 17 per cent).

In November 1990, the Russian SFSR and Ukrainian SSR signed a treaty respecting one another’s territorial integrity ‘within the framework of the USSR’ but Russia threatened not to recognise the continued validity of the November 1990 treaty if Ukraine seceded from the USSR. This threat was partially overcome when the treaty’s language was modified from ‘within the USSR’ to being conditional on Ukraine remaining within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The main stumbling block was that Russia had a ‘psychological aversion to the idea of a legally fixed Ukrainian-Russian border’, in particular, accepting the Crimea as part of Ukraine. Throughout the 1990s, Ukraine pushed the question of legalising the Russian-Ukrainian border through its delimitation and demarcation in the face of Russia’s refusal to negotiate any border between Russia and Ukraine. Russia preferred to maintain the ‘internal borders’ of the former USSR (since 1992 CIS) in the same symbolic manner.

46 Putin’s speech to the NATO-Russian Council is reprinted in Zerkalo Nedeli, 12–18 April 2008.
47 Radyanska Ukraina, 21 November 1990.
49 UNIAN, 20 August 1996.
50 Comments by Viacheslav Zhyhulin, head of the Topography directorate of the Armed Forces General Staff (UNIAN, 16 December 1996).
Russian territorial demands have been directed at the Crimea and the port of Sevastopol, adding an additional layer to that of domestic factors inside Ukraine working towards the region’s symmetrisation. Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov has played a central role in mobilising parliamentary support for territorial claims on the Crimea and Sevastopol, as seen in a June 2008 resolution following his provocative visit to the Crimea the month before.51 In Luzhkov’s view,52 ‘Sevastopol was never transferred to Ukraine by any document, even in [Soviet leader] Khruschev’s time, when he, in a drunken state, transferred Crimea.’53 The Moscow city council has built apartments, kindergartens and schools for Black Sea Fleet officers in Sevastopol54 that served to suggest the Black Sea Fleet would remain in Ukraine beyond the treaty’s expiration in 2017. Luzhkov’s actions were not officially supported by Russian President Boris Yeltsin but, unofficially, a hard-line Russian parliamentary stance was useful in extracting concessions in Russia’s negotiations with Ukraine on dividing and stationing the Black Sea Fleet, natural gas supply negotiations and blocking Ukraine’s membership of NATO. In the State Duma and the Federation Council, the pro-presidential ‘Our Home Russia’ party led by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin voted with nationalists and Communists to provide constitutional majorities in favour of territorial claims against Ukraine. Prime Minister Chernomyrdin used nationalist rhetoric to demand that Ukraine recognise the ‘illegality’ of its sovereignty over Sevastopol. The Russian executive distanced itself from State Duma resolutions on the Crimea, but they proved useful to the executive in exerting pressure on Ukraine. Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Lebed wrote an article for the Crimean media entitled ‘Sevastopol is a Russian City’.55 The Federation Council, the upper house of the Russian

52 Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 22 October 1996. See the reply by Odessa Mayor Eduard Gurfits in Izvestiya, 6 November 1996 reprinted in Flet Ukrajiny, 16 November 1996. Other open letters were from the Hetman of the Ukrainian Cossacks in Sevastopol and the Ukrainian Navy (Molod Ukrajiny, 5 November 1996, 15 November 1996), and Bohdan Yaroshynsky, head of the Republican Party (Molod Ukrajiny, 15 November 1996). The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry also issued a statement (Uriadovy Kurier, 14 November 1996). The parliamentary committees on Defence and State Security and Foreign Policy and CIS Ties held a joint meeting and issued a combined statement (Tserkva I Zhytyp, 18–24 November 1996). A joint statement by the Union of Ukrainian Officers, Congress of Ukrainian Intelligentsia and Ukrainian Cossacks was published in Vechirnyi Kyiv, 13 November 1996.
54 As early as 1997, 120 apartments were built for Black Sea Fleet officers. They were also provided with access to Moscow television via satellite (Krymskaya Pravda, 24 February 1998).
55 Flag Rodiny, 5 October and Krymskaya Pravda, 10 October 1996. As Den (24 January 1997) pointed out, ‘Russia does not have any territorial pretensions, but, at the same time, it wants to lease the entire city.’ For other discussions, see Valeriy Samovalov and I. Kononenko of the National Security and Defence Council in Uriadovy Kurier,
the Crimea and the port of estic factors inside Ukraine Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov has for territorial claims on the n following his provocative ew,52 ‘Sevastopol was never oviet leader] Khrushchev’s 53 The Moscow city council Black Sea Fleet officers in et would remain in Ukraine actions were not officially officially, a hard-line Russian ons in Russia’s negotiations ea Fleet, natural gas supply NATO. In the State Duma ‘Home Russia’ party led by and Communists to provide ms against Ukraine. Prime mnd that Ukraine recognise Russian executive distanced at they proved useful to the Security Council Secretary media entitled ‘Sevastopol upper house of the Russian


Black Sea Fleet officers. They telltie (Krymskaya Pravda, 24 October 1996. As Den (24 ritorial pretensions, but, at the isions, see Valeriy Samoalov Council in Uriadovy Kurier,

Parliament that included regionally elected governors loyal to the president, also supported lower-house State Duma resolutions that included territorial claims on Ukraine. Federation Council Chairman Yegor Stroyev said, ‘Sevastopol is a town of Russian glory. So they voted correctly.’56 As one analysis of Russian policy towards Sevastopol concluded, the idea that the Russian executive was opposed to its Parliament applying claims towards the Crimea and Sevastopol ‘is too weak to be taken seriously’.57

Territorial claims on Ukrainian territory by the Russian Parliament began immediately after the disintegration of the USSR when, in May and December 1992, the Russian Parliament questioned the ‘legality’ of the 1954 transfer of both the Crimea and Sevastopol to the Ukrainian SSR. In July 1993, the Russian Parliament declared Russian sovereignty over the city of Sevastopol. In October 1996, the State Duma voted to halt the division of the Black Sea Fleet, demanded exclusive Russian basing rights in Sevastopol and declared Sevastopol to be Russian territory. Three months later, the Russian Federation Council issued a statement and resolution declaring the city of Sevastopol ‘part of Russian territory’ and condemned ‘Ukraine’s refusal to recognise Sevastopol’s Russian status’.54

The territorial dispute in the autumn of 2003 over the island of Tuzla in the Kerch Strait, located at the entrance to the Azov Sea, and the June 2008 State Duma resolution calling for the abrogation of the 1997 treaty recognising the Ukrainian-Russian border if Ukraine moved to NATO membership, showed to what degree the Crimean question in Ukrainian–Russian relations remains contentious. Russia’s construction of a dam from the North Caucasus to Tuzla Island was seen by the central Ukrainian authorities as an attempt to annex Ukrainian territory.

Russia has always insisted that there are no legal documents proving that the port of Sevastopol was transferred along with the Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954, a similar argument made by Russia over Tuzla. President Kuchma returned after two days of a planned 10-day visit to Latin America to oversee the handling of the Tuzla dispute and Prime Minister Yanukovych similarly cancelled a visit to the Baltic states. Russia has continually underestimated Ukraine’s readiness to defend its territorial integrity by diplomatic, political and, in the final resort, military means. Border Guards, Interior Ministry special forces and naval units were deployed on Tuzla Island immediately after Russian began construction of the dam. Ukrainian presidents’ tough stance on territorial integrity has always received support in the Ukrainian Parliament from a constitutional majority of deputies.

56 Argumenty i Fakty, January 1997.
58 Reuters, 5 December 1996.
In May 1997, Russian President Yeltsin finally visited Ukraine after his visit had been postponed on many occasions since Kuchma’s election three years earlier. The 1997 treaty recognised the Ukrainian-Russian border inherited from the USSR and de jure Ukrainian sovereignty was recognised by Russia over the Crimea and Sevastopol. In addition to the treaty, an agreement on the stationing of the Russian contingency of the Black Sea Fleet was signed that gave it ‘temporary’ basing rights for 20 years (Ukraine’s 1996 Constitution banned the permanent stationing of foreign bases). The inter-state treaty and naval agreement were, in turn, linked to a resolution of the Crimea question that facilitated the adoption of the Crimean Constitution in 1998 and its ratification by the Ukrainian Parliament. The years 1997–98 were therefore two crucial years during which relations within the Ukrainian–Crimea–Russian conundrum were resymmetrised. The upper house of the Russian Parliament ratified the 1997 treaty only in February 1999, deliberately waiting for the Crimean question to be resolved first.

The Tuzla conflict in 2003, continued Russian territorial demands under Presidents Putin and Dmitri Medvedev and poor Russian–Ukrainian relations are a reflection of two factors. First, Russia’s inability to recognise Ukrainians as a separate nation, and secondly, Russia’s refusal to accept Ukrainian sovereignty over the Crimea and Sevastopol. Russia has resolved to play the separatist card in Georgia and Ukraine in an attempt at halting their drive to NATO membership, as seen in Russia’s de facto annexation of the Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia following the August 2008 Russian–Georgian war.59 President Medvedev’s unprecedented August 2009 condemnation of his Ukrainian counterpart, President Yushchenko, laid out Russia’s terms for Ukraine as a semi-independent dominion. A Russian media campaign against Ukraine has turned Russians against the country, making Ukraine the third most disliked country by Russians (following the US and Georgia). These attitudes towards Ukraine and Ukrainian sovereignty over the Crimea have majority support within Russian elites and Moscow’s Mayor Luzhkov has overwhelming support in the State Duma and the Unified Russia party for his territorial claims against the Crimea.60

Conclusions

The Ukrainian authorities undertook moderate and non-violent policies towards the Crimea that led to a negotiated compromise which prevented inter-ethnic violence.


Ukraine’s policies and strategies contrast favourably with the policies adopted by some other post-communist states towards their national minorities or ethnic Russian populations that have led to civil wars, Russian covert and overt interventions and deadlocks which in one case, South Ossetia in August 2008, became a live conflict that was followed by Russia’s annexation of the region and yet another frozen conflict in Abkhazia. Ukraine’s willingness to compromise was facilitated by the domination of the negotiation process from 1990–91, when the Crimean oblast was upgraded to an autonomous republic, and the adoption of a Crimean constitution in 1998, by Ukrainian and Crimean politicians from the centre and left of the political spectrum. The left-centrist dominance of the negotiations between Kyiv and the Crimea between 1990 and 1998 sidelined Russian nationalist separatists, who sought the Crimea’s separation from Ukraine, and Ukrainian nationalists, who opposed granting autonomous status to the Crimea.

Ukraine’s negotiated compromise with the Crimea was made more difficult by Russia’s external interference in support of separatism, which is absent from separatist conflicts in Western Europe and Canada. In the UK, the Irish Constitution supported the unification of Northern Ireland (Ulster) with Eire, but Dublin did nothing to promote the issue and in 1999, the Irish Constitution was amended to remove any claim to Ulster. Ukraine’s relations with Russia remained strained throughout the 1990s because Russia was unable to come to terms with both an independent Ukrainian state and Ukrainian sovereignty over the Crimea and Sevastopol. It took Russia five years following the disintegration of the USSR to sign a treaty with Ukraine in 1997 that recognised borders inherited from the USSR, and a further two years for both houses of the Russian Parliament to ratify the treaty. Nevertheless, Russia continues to oppose a demarcation of the Russian-Ukrainian border. The 2003 Tuzla territorial conflict, Russia’s support for frozen conflicts in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova and annexation of two separatist enclaves in Georgia, Russia’s heavy-handed intervention in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections, and Russia’s repeated intervention in the Crimea mean that Russian–Ukrainian relations will pose a difficult challenge for the foreseeable future.61

### Bibliography


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61 See T. Kuzio (2005), ‘Russian Policy to Ukraine During Elections’, *Demokratizatsiya*, Fall, 13(4), 491–517.