



UKRAINE: Kiev fails to end Crimea's ethnic tensions

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SUBJECT: Continuing tensions between Tatars and Russophone Slavs in Crimea.

SIGNIFICANCE: Inter-ethnic discord in Crimea has important ramifications for Ukrainian politics, and relations with Russia and Turkey.

ANALYSIS: The Crimean Tatars have always been close allies of national-democratic forces in Kiev. Tatars delegated senior representatives to Rukh in 1998-2002 and to Our Ukraine in the previous and current parliaments. Mustafa Cemilev (or Dzhemilev), head of the Qirimtatar Milli Meclisi (the unofficial Crimean Tatar parliament), is a deputy in President Viktor Yushchenko's Our Ukraine. Crimean Tatars' high hopes of Yushchenko after years of neglect during Leonid Kuchma's decade in power remain unfulfilled (see [UKRAINE: Pre-election provocation fuels Crimea tension - April 5, 2004](#)).

Violence continues on a regular basis between Russophone Slavs and Tatars, with Tatars usually receiving harsher punishment:

- The houses of Tatar activists have been bombed, and journalist Norik Shirin was murdered in Simferopol in December.
- The most serious violence has erupted over the abuse of historic Tatar sites, including attempts to build on the former imperial seat of the Tatar Khans in Bakhchisarai, and the use of a Muslim cemetery as a flea market.
- Last month, private security guards working for developers Olbi-Krym forcibly evicted Tatars encamped on a plot in Simferopol. Dozens were injured and the police made six arrests.
- Also in January, thousands of Tatars protested outside the Crimean government against local authorities' failure to allocate them land, and changes in the criminal code to increase the penalties for illegal seizures of land.

Potent mix. Tatars report good relations with Ukrainian Cossacks; however, the local authorities and the police have ignored the growing presence of Russian Cossacks, stoking inter-ethnic conflict:

- Although a small proportion of Cossacks are from the Donbas, most are from Russia's North Caucasus, a region plagued by inter-ethnic violence since the mid-1990s.
- Some belong to skinhead groups which have multiplied in Russia (see [RUSSIA: Kremlin has yet to tackle ultra-nationalism - June 14, 2006](#)).

Russian Cossacks are allied with the Russian Orthodox Church (officially, the 'Ukrainian Orthodox Church' under the Russian Patriarchate), extreme Russian nationalists and the Communists:

- One of the most active Russian nationalists is Sergei Tsekov, leader of the Russian Community of Crimea NGO and head of the Russian Bloc political association.
- The Orthodox Church seeks to block the construction of both mosques and churches of Ukrainian autocephalous denominations that are traditionally allied to the national-democrats, and erects crosses and monuments on sites that are either sacred or sensitive to Tatar history.
- Russian Cossacks and nationalists praise the 1944 deportation of Tatars to Central Asia, ignoring the death of 150,000 en route or in the first two years of settlement and the 1967 rehabilitation which stated that accusations of 'Nazi collaboration' were unfounded. They raise exaggerated fears that Russophones may lose their property and be themselves deported from an Islamic Crimean Tatar republic.

Islamic fundamentalism. Traditionally, Tatars have practised a moderate form of Islam. Yet Chechen nationalists, whose tradition is similar, became progressively Islamicised during the second conflict with Russia that began in 1999. As in Chechnya, Saudi missionaries with large financial resources are seeking converts among younger, disgruntled Tatars to the stricter Wahhabi form of Islam. However, Crimea's senior Muslim cleric, Mufti Emirali Adzi Abliev, remains confident that Wahhabism will not take root.

Crimean parliament. Kuchma-era political forces and personalities, defeated in the 2004 elections, regrouped in the Crimean parliament after the March 2006 elections. In the early 1990s, Russian nationalist separatists dominated the regional parliament, but from 1995 they were marginalised by an uneasy alliance of pro-Kuchma moderate centrists grouped in the People's Democratic Party (NDP), and Communists.

In 2006, pro-Russian groups recovered their dominance. However, this time, demands for close ties with Russia and the CIS have replaced support for separatism. The Crimean parliament's three largest factions are For Yanukovich (44 seats), Soyuz (11) and Crimea (10). Soyuz has close links to the Progressive Socialist Party of Natalia Vitrenko, a national-Bolshevik grouping that, despite being allied with the Party for Russian-Ukrainian Union, failed to enter the Ukrainian parliament (although whether a party gets into parliament has little bearing on its ability to mobilise people in the streets).

Senior former members of the Kuchma regime were elected in the For Yanukovich bloc. Dmytro Tabachnyk, who was head of the presidential administration in the mid-1990s, returned to national government as first deputy prime minister after Viktor Yanukovich became prime minister for the second time in August (see [UKRAINE: Yanukovich return settles political crisis - August 4, 2006](#)).

Tatar demands. The Tatars have seven unfulfilled demands:

- **Land.** Three-quarters of Tatars live in rural areas but possess only half the land allocated to Russophones. Before 1944, Tatars accounted for 70% of the population along the south coast, an area that they are barred from because tourism has made it highly valuable to developers.
- **Employment.** Although Tatars account for 12% of the population, according to the 2001 census, they only account for 4% of the official working population in Crimea. Many are forced to work in the shadow economy, which has led to clashes with organised crime which often controls markets.
- **Housing.** Tatar numbers in Crimea have grown 6.4 times between the 1989 Soviet and 2001 Ukrainian censuses, to 243,000 today. Another 150,000 remain in Uzbekistan. Finding their former homes occupied by Russian settlers, they are demanding restitution of property. The authorities have failed to allocate sufficient resources to house returning Tatars, leading to the growth of shanty towns.
- **Religion.** Before Crimea was absorbed into the Russian empire in the late 18th century, the peninsula had 21,000 mosques. This had declined to 1,700 by the 1944 deportation. Today, it has dwindled further to 160, which are in very poor condition, and nine religious schools or madrassas. Tatars complain that the local authorities are hostile to building new mosques.
- **Culture and education.** There are just 13 Tatar-language schools with poor resources and under-qualified teachers, serving 14% of Tatar children. The rest attend Russian-language schools, leading to accusations of continued Soviet-era Russification. According to Cemilev, the conditions have not been created for Tatars to preserve their ethnic identity. Tatars demand a return to the pre-1944 policy of recognising Tatar as an additional official language. Insufficient funds are provided for renovating Tatar historical sites, although they could bring in tourist revenue.
- **Legal position.** Tatars want to be recognised as an indigenous national group and not as a national minority, the 1944 deportation to be declared an act of 'genocide' and rehabilitation put on a legislative basis; in 2004, a law to that effect was adopted by the Ukrainian parliament but vetoed by Kuchma.
- **Guaranteed parliamentary representation.** Tatars were allocated 14 seats in the 1994-98 Crimean parliament, but this arrangement terminated in 1998. The 2004 revised election law provides for full proportional elections to local councils and the Crimean parliament, but it is difficult for Tatars to be elected, as local nationalists and pro-Russians are hostile to Tatars, who can only seek seats within national-democratic groups in the Kiev parliament.

CONCLUSION: The election of the more pro-Tatar Yushchenko in 2004 has failed to defuse tensions in Crimea. The same seven unfulfilled Tatar demands from the Kuchma era remain in place.

Keywords: EE, RUCIS, Ukraine, Russia, economy, politics, social, crime, election, ethnic, government, human rights, immigration, integration, judicial, legislation, nationality, opposition, party, policy, property, regional, religion, black market, constitution, education, tourism, trade

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