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Torn Between Loyalty and Identity

The Crimean Armenians in the post-Soviet era

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By Davit Aghabekyan

Supervisor Vahram Ter-Matevosyan

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Abstract

The following research tries to understand how the lives of the Crimean Armenians were impacted after the collapse of the Soviet Union. After discussing briefly, the history of Crimean Armenian communities and their lives in the Soviet Period, the research mainly focuses on the social and political issues that Armenians of Crimea have faced during the post-Soviet period. There are two research questions: 1. what key problems have the Crimean Armenians encountered during the post-Soviet transformational period? 2. How did the 2014 events impact the Crimean Armenians? With the help of content analysis and interviews the research looks into these and a set of other relevant questions. Main findings were that Crimean Armenians have mostly perceived the peninsula to be more Russian than Ukrainian, that is why their lives were not dramatically affected after Crimea went under the control of Russia, apart from some issues concerning traveling and visas, documentation and social protection.

Introduction

Armenians have been residing in the territory of Crimea since the eleventh century. They have left rich historical and cultural legacy. There are a number of churches, historical monuments and sites which signify the Armenian presence in the peninsula. There has been sufficient research done on the development of Armenian communities of Crimea in the Middle Ages up to the twentieth century. Since the 1900s Crimea has been under constant transformation periods. In the course of a century it has been a part of the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, independent Ukraine and the Russian Federation. During each of the four phases it had different status. After the collapse of the Soviet Union Crimea, as any other post-Soviet state or region went through a difficult transformation. When discussing Crimea, it is usually perceived as a region within either independent Ukraine or Russia rather than a single distinct area. In the context of 2014 events Crimea is viewed either as a reason or as a tool in the hands of international actors. Crimea is discussed from the perspective of sanctions imposed by the West, while the people of the peninsula are often neglected. It is not quite often spoken about how the multi-ethnic population of Crimea coexists and how their lives have been affected after the 2014 events. The aim of this paper is to discuss the post-Soviet period of Crimea and understand what difficulties the Armenians of the peninsula have been facing. In order to conduct the research, two research questions have been developed which are “what key problems have the Crimean Armenians encountered during the post-Soviet transformational period?” and “How did the 2014 events impact the Armenians of Crimea?”. In order to answer the research questions, content analysis and interviews have been conducted. The 1998 constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the 2014 constitution of the Republic of Crimea have been analysed. Additionally, articles from websites and news agencies have been reviewed in order to understand how the public discourse with regards to Crimea have been developing in Armenia. Ten interviews have been conducted with the Armenians living in Crimea who gave first-hand information about their lives in the peninsula. Apart from the

latter, research has reviewed the existing academic literature, and tried to identify the existing gaps and contribute to the already existing academic materials.

In the first part of the research a brief history of the Crimean Armenian communities was discussed. The following part concentrated on the main issues of the Crimean Armenians, a short part dedicated to their lives in the Soviet Union, followed by how the Armenians lived during the first years of the post-Soviet period etc. The next section describes the methodology and includes content analysis and interview analysis. The research is completed with the conclusion, where the findings are summarized.

Literature review

Crimean Armenians have been residing in the territory of the peninsula since the 11th century. Some even claim that Armenian communities in Crimea were established earlier, during the 8th century. Although there is sufficient amount of works written about Crimean Armenians in the middle ages and up to the 19th century, there is not enough academic material written on them during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Literature review will discuss the following categories: Stalin's nationalist policies, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consolidation of the community, the post-Soviet period. The first category will mainly concentrate on the period of the 1940s. Crimean Armenians were able to maintain good relations with multi-ethnic population of Crimea, with Ukrainians, Russians, Crimean Tatars and other ethnic groups residing in the peninsula (Grigoryants 2004). According to Clement Harutyunyan, Crimean Armenians played a significant role in the World War II. Speaking of partisans who were fighting against fascism behind the enemy lines and contributed greatly to the victory, he mentioned that there have been a number of Armenians: around 500 Armenian partisans from Crimea and North Caucasus. A partisan detachment no. 10 was fighting in Crimea under the command of Aram Teryan (Harutyunyan 2004). However, the above mentioned did not play a significant role for Stalin. From May to June 1944 around 200,000 Crimean Tatars have

been deported from Crimea to Central Asia. Stalin's order was based on the accusation that Crimean Tatars have betrayed the Red Army and collaborated with the Nazis. Next step of Stalin's nationalistic policy concerned the other ethnicities of Crimea, particularly to Armenians, Greeks and Bulgarians. Shortly after the deportation of Crimean Tatars, according to the decree of the State Defense Committee No. 5984 TS (top secret) of June 2, 1944 during the so-called "second special resettlement", Armenians, Greeks and Bulgarians were deported from Crimea. Every representative of those ethnicities, regardless of their gender, age, service to the Soviet regime, the former partisans, disabled people, veterans, members of the Communist party, family members of Red Army soldiers etc. were forcibly taken away from the peninsula. Around 10,000 Armenians were deported from Crimea (Grigoryants 2004). The pretext used for the deportation was once again accusation in conspiring against the Red Army (Mirzoyan and Mirzoyan 2019). The literature adequately addressed the issue of deportation, however, there is a lack in the academic research with regards to the Armenians in Crimea from 1944 up to the 1980s. As almost all the Armenians were deported from the peninsula there was no community as such, hence the absence of the community resulted in the gap in academic literature.

Although in 1956 a decision was made which allowed the deported peoples to move from deported destinations (except returning to Crimea) still there were not many Armenians in Crimea till 1989, however, the situation changed after that. Spitak earthquake in Armenia in 1988, Sumgait pogroms and the struggle of Nagorno-Karabakh for self-determination became a psychological impetus for ethnic consolidation. After the creation of the "Crimean Armenian Community", the efforts of the organization were aimed at consolidating Armenian community in Crimea and since then they have been implementing various initiatives aimed at strengthening the Armenian community of the peninsula. The urge to assist Armenians who suffered from the 1988 earthquake and the Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan became a decisive factor for ethnic mobilization. Newly created "Crimean

Armenian Community” took the responsibility of taking care of 6000 Armenians who moved to Crimea from the disaster zone (Grigoryants 2004).

The existing literature on the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union adequately discusses the events which were happening in Crimea. With regards to the post-Soviet period, there are a number of articles in periodicals and websites, however, there is a little academic research. The academic articles which discuss the events of 2014 and how Crimea went under the control of Russia, mainly discuss the political issues and do not concentrate on the people of the peninsula. The social and political issues that Crimean Armenians have encountered during the post-Soviet transitional period is not sufficiently discussed. The aim of the following research is to try and enrich the existing literature on Crimea Armenians concentrating mainly on the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In order to fill the articulated gaps, interviews with the representatives of the Crimean Armenian Community and content analysis were conducted.

History of Crimean Armenian Communities

There are a couple of primary sources that were written in the middle ages which contain the history of Armenian communities in Crimea. The main work was written by Martiros of Crimea (Martiros Ghrimetsi) who was able to collect the known history of Armenians of Crimea from the people residing there and compile it in his work “Patmutyun Ghrimu Yerkri” (History of Crimea Land) which was written in 1672. It cannot be said how trustworthy the source is as it is just a compilation of stories told by the elders. Another primary source was a memoir published by Davit of Crimea. However, both sources are very similar and, according to Porksheian, the source for both works is the same (Porksheian 1968). Porksheian’s work was aimed at understanding when exactly Armenians settled in Crimea. Based on the historical assumptions and the vast archaeological and cultural heritage of Armenians in Southern Crimea Porksheian concluded that Armenians have settled in Crimea no later

than the eighth century. Nevertheless, the author himself stated that this assumption must be examined and proven by doing scientific analysis of the archaeological site and the old remnants of the Armenian heritage in Southern Crimea.

One of the locations from where Armenians went to Crimea was the capital Ani. Because of numerous invasions, thousands of Armenians were forced to migrate from Ani in order to save their lives (Hakobian 1988). Minas Bzhshkean in his work “Road to Poland” described the attacks on Ani and mentioned that in the 11th century when Ani was invaded by Alp Arslan a vast number of Ani’s population had to leave the city and they went mainly to the West, to Moldavia or even further to Poland. During subsequent invasions some residents moved to other cities of Greater Armenia, Van being one of them. According to Bzhshkean, Gh. Alishan and Martiros of Crimea they did not stay there for long because of constant violence and cruel attitude from the Tatar khans. Armenians sent an official delegation to the Genoese authorities of Crimea in order to get their permission and move to Crimea. Before moving there, they had to fight with Mongol-Tatars on their way to Crimea and eventually they arrived in the peninsula in 1330 (Bzhshkean 1830; Alishan 1901; Martiros of Crimea 1672; Mikayelyan 1962). However, according to Khachikyan the fact that Ani Armenians migrated and settled in Van or other cities is not corresponding with trustworthy sources of our historians, chroniclers or the facts written in trustworthy memoirs. According to him the year of “ՉԽՀ” (1299) is a result of pure anachronism. Moreover, Martiros and Davit both described the location of the city of Akhsaray contradictory and based on these contradictions and disinformation it can be said that both authors had not had sufficient information on the topic they were writing about and had not had a trustworthy data in order to write a precise history on Crimea Armenians (Khachikyan 1980, 26).

It is not known why Crimea was a famous destination among Armenians to migrate to, however, according to Maksoudian, the fertile soil and the pleasant climate of the peninsula, especially of its southern part as well as the trade opportunities were attractive for migrants (Maksoudian 1997).

Indeed, it is reasonable to think that those reasons made it appealing for Armenians to go to Crimea. Moreover, taking into account the geographic location of the peninsula it can be understood that from Ani or any other location of Greater Armenia crossing the Black Sea and reaching Crimea was an optimal option. The factor of already established ancient Armenian communities made it more appealing as it would be easier to start a new life in a place with your compatriots. The location of Crimea between Europe and Asia was probably another factor. A number of people have chosen Crimea as a temporary residence and later on migrated to different parts of Europe. The Armenians in Crimea did take the advantage of the prosperous geographical location of the peninsula and managed to become successful in the field of trade. For example, according to Panossian there were Armenian merchant communities in Crimea (Panossian 2006). There is information that the land given to Armenians was considered theirs and they were involved in the international markets and the markets of Crimea with the same rights as the Genoese (Abrahamian 1964). As the conditions that the Genoese had created and the Armenians had been working under were appealing the number of Armenians in the peninsula started to increase. Moreover, the communities grew larger as more and more Armenians started to arrive in Crimea after the fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in 1375 (Maksoudian 1997).

It is estimated that during fourteenth and fifteenth centuries no more than 200,000 Armenians were living in Crimea, of which around 46,000 were living in Kaffa (Abrahamian 1964). According to the analysis of the Genoese and Turkish sources by Levon Khachikyan the number is the same. (Khachikyan 1980).

From 15th century Crimea went under the control of the Ottoman Empire. Under Turkish dominion the life for Armenians and Genoese was hard. When Ottomans took Kaffa, they massacred different nationalities which constituted the population of the city, including Armenians, and they did the same in Surkhat and Kazaret (Martiros of Crimea 1672, Abrahamian 1964, 182-183).

At the end of the eighteenth century one of the Armenian centres in Russia was established in Nor Nakhijevan as a result of a deportation organized by Tsarist Russia (Barkhudarian 1996). The source of the event dates back to 1774 Küçük Kaynarca treaty signed between Ottoman empire and Tsarist Russia. According to the treaty the Ottoman Empire had no right to interfere with the internal affairs of Crimea and the latter fell under the influence of Tsarist Russia. However, immediately after the treaty Crimea was not officially Russian so the steps of the Russian Queen Catherine the Great were aimed at doing everything in order for Crimea to become Russian. One of the steps undertaken by her was by any means weaken Crimea economically to the point when she could eventually annex it. The Khan of Crimea at the time was Sahin Giray, the protégé of Catherine the Great and he needed her assistance in order to ease domestic revolts happening in the peninsula. However, Catherine exiled Christians of the peninsula who were the true supporters of the khan. (Dixon 2001). The majority of the exiled Christians were Armenians and Greeks who were the leading force of the Crimea and by exiling them Catherine would not only get rid of the khan's supporters but would also weaken Crimea economically. On 23rd of April 1778 exile was declared. Armenians had to leave their properties, the graves of their loved ones and everything they've built and move to Nor Nakhijevan (currently a district in Rostov-on-Don) and start a new life there. The deportation was organized in three phases. The first group departed on the 18th of July 1778, the second on August 20th and the third on September 28th. The exile was organized by commander-in-chief Suvorov. As a result of these exiles Armenians established a new settlement in Nor Nakhijevan (Abrahamian 1964).

Crimean Armenians in Soviet and post-Soviet periods

Crimea has always been a multinational hub which underwent a number of transformational phases. In 1921 the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was established within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic of the Soviet Union. In 1936 it was renamed to Crimean Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic and in 1945 it was transformed into Crimean Oblast. Even within Soviet Russia, Crimea had witnessed significant transformations. From 1942 to 1943 it was under the control of Nazi Germany. A year later, in 1944, after regaining the control over Crimea, Stalin ordered the deportation of the Crimean Tatars using as a pretext their collaboration with Nazis. Around 250,000 Tatars were deported to Central Asia (Potichnyj 1975). Later on Armenians, Greeks and Bulgarians of the peninsula were deported as well. The demographics of Crimea witnessed a dramatic shift. In 1954 the Crimean Oblast was given to Ukrainian SSR. The decree was published on the front page of “Pravda” and stated that the decision was made taking into the account the economic commonalities, closeness and cultural and communication links between Crimea and Ukraine (Siegelbaum 2021). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Crimea transformed into the Autonomous Republic of Crimea within independent Ukraine and a special status was given to the city of Sevastopol. According to the article 133 of the Ukrainian Constitution of 1996 the cities of Kiev and Sevastopol have a special status, which is regulated by the laws of Ukraine (Constitution of Ukraine 1996). According to the decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine № 11-rp/2001 from 13.07.2001, forms of local self-government in each state are determined taking into account its political and territorial structure as well as historical, national, economic and other characteristics (Constitutional Court of Ukraine 2001). There is special provision on the special status of the city of Sevastopol which states that the hero-city Sevastopol is a city of national importance with a special status due to a number of reasons such as historical and geographical significance, base of the Ukrainian naval forces and the temporarily

located Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation, the characteristics of local budget formation, executive power and local self-government (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2006).

After 2014 Crimea has become a part of the Russian Federation. A year earlier, the president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich rejected the association agreement with the European Union in order to tighten economic ties with Russia. This step became a reason for Euromaidan protests. Russia framed the protests as fascist movements hostile to the Russian minorities of Ukraine. As the majority of Crimean population was Russian, panic spread through the peninsula. Using the opportunity, Russia intervened and the armed group called “Little green men” raised Russian flag on the roof of the Crimean Supreme Council’s building. In less than a month Crimean Supreme Council voted to secede from Ukraine and to declare it as a sovereign territory within the Russian Federation (Crimean Supreme Council 2014). After the referendum which was organized in Crimea, Moscow officially declared the Republic of Crimea and the Federative City of Sevastopol territorial subjects of the Russian Federation (Russian State Duma 2014).

A number of different nationalities have been living in the territory of Crimea and it is interesting to understand what impact the territorial and sovereignty transitions of the 20th and 21st centuries have had on the population of Crimea. During the 20th century, in addition to Russians, who constituted the majority in Crimea, among other ethnicities residing in the peninsula were Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, Armenians etc. For example, in 1939 Crimean Tatars comprised 19.43%, Ukrainians 13.68%, and Armenians 1.15% of Crimea’s population (Demoscope weekly 1939).

As already mentioned before, not a lot of research has been conducted on the Armenian population of Crimea. There are enough sources which deal with the origins of Armenian communities in Crimea, however a little was done on the social, political transformations and the dynamics within the Crimean Armenian community of 20th century. Moreover, the academic research during the post-Soviet period

is mostly discussing the diaspora communities outside the USSR. The focus was primarily on the traditional diaspora communities such as in the USA, Europe, Middle East etc. The Soviet Union was perceived as a single entity and even after the collapse of it researchers have seen it as one big area rather than different states with distinct historical and geographical characteristics. In case of Crimea the situation is worse. If, for example, there are a number of studies conducted on Russian Armenian communities, Crimea was always perceived as a part of some region rather than a distinct area: it has always been seen as a part of Ukraine or Russia. However, the peninsula is an important aspect for academic research not only because of its geographical location or historical role, but also for its multi-ethnic population which underwent a number of transformational phases.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Crimea remained a part of Ukraine, however, a referendum was conducted in 1991 to understand if the population of Crimea wished to “Re-establish the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as a subject of the Union SSR and a participant of the Union Treaty” (crimea.vgorode.ua 2014). 93.26% of the population of Crimea said “yes” to the territorial autonomy (Hrach 2009). Voter turnout was 81.37% while the percentage of people who voted against the re-establishment of the Crimean ASSR was 5.64% (Noskova 2016). In 1992 Crimean Supreme Council adopted its constitution which was amended in the same year, and twice more in 1994. Finally, at the end of 1998 Ukrainian Parliament approved the Crimean constitution. After 1992 the question of independent statehood of Crimea depended solely on the persona of Ukrainian President. If the president was pro-Russian, the situation in Crimea was calm and harmonious, while, if the president was pro-Western, separatist and independent state-building narratives were spreading all over the peninsula. So, the latent phase of the conflict on the status of Crimea was marked by calm and positional controversy manifestations (Hovhannisian 2018).

Another Reason that there is not much written on Crimean Armenians is connected with the area of focus of diaspora studies. Before discussing the mentioned issue, we should look at demographics data.

Figure 1. USSR population census results of 1979 and 1989

	1979	1989
Armenians in Armenia	2,725,000	3,084,000
Armenians in Russia	364,570	532,390
Armenians in Azerbaijan	475,486	390,505
Armenians in Ukraine	38,646	54,200

The population census results of 1979 and 1989 of the Soviet Union show an interesting pattern. The number of Armenians residing in the USSR but not in Armenia had been increasing. During a decade the number of Armenians in the USSR had increased by 471991 or 10.2% (from 4151241 to 4623232). Taking into the account the earthquake of 1988 that took the lives of around 25000 people the increase in the population is significant. The number of Armenians residing in Armenia increased by 1.1% reaching from 65.6% to 66.7%. The number of Armenians in Russia had increased by 2.7% (364570 in 1979 and 532390 in 1989) while the number of Armenian population in Azerbaijan decreased by 3% (475486 in 1979 and 390505 in 1989). The latter figure can be understood taking into the consideration the increasing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabagh. The number of Armenians in Ukraine had witnessed an increase from 38646 in 1979 to 54200 in 1989 accounting for 1.2% change (Panossian 2006; Demoscope Weekly 1989).

According to Panossian, in the early 1990s the number of Armenians throughout the world was estimated 7 million (Panossian 2006). These figures show that around 66 percent of all Armenians resided in the territory of the Soviet Union. As already noted, the percentage of Armenians residing in the USSR but outside of Armenia was also 66 percent. Nevertheless, scholarly articles and academic research are usually concentrated only on diaspora outside the USSR seemingly not paying too much attention to the post-Soviet space. The most touched upon Post-soviet area in terms of diaspora is understandably Russia. On the other hand, the reason why most studies have concentrated on Western or Middle Eastern countries is clear. The community in those places has been larger and has been in closer ties with the Republic of Armenia than the ones in the post-soviet space. It is interesting to observe that a lot of Armenians did not choose their “new home” immediately. They migrated to a particular country or a region, and after staying there for some time moved to another place. So the Armenian diaspora communities in Western Europe were formed not only from migrants who have initially went to Western European states, but also from the ones who temporarily resided in Eastern European countries such as Poland or Ukraine and then moved to other places. We have seen from the census figures that there was Armenian diaspora community in Ukraine. It was not big but it was significant and has left a great historical legacy. Crimea was one of the destinations that people chose as a temporary place before moving to Europe while others stayed there because of a number of reasons. However, as the whole post-Soviet space, Crimea as well did not receive much academic attention. This is another reason that there is not much written on Crimean Armenians.

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions of the paper, interviews have been conducted. Purposive sampling strategy, which was the most suitable option for this research, was used in order to choose

interviewees. Ten interviews have been conducted with the Crimean Armenians which revealed evidence and helped answering the research questions.

Document review was done in order to understand the rights and privileges ethnic minorities of Crimea had during both Ukrainian and Russian rule.

Apart from this, articles from websites and news agencies have been analysed in order to see how the public discourse in Armenia has changed before and after 2014.

The research faced a number of limitations. Firstly, because of the COVID-19 pandemic the interviews were conducted online. It was not possible to go to Crimea and conduct interviews face to face with the representatives of the Crimean Armenian community because of the mentioned reason. Some interviewees, who were purposefully chosen based on their life experience and background in Crimea refused to give interviews because of various reasons.

Document review

The article 9 of the Crimean Constitution of 1998 stipulates “Securing Rights and Freedoms of Ukrainian Nationals in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea”. According to article 9.2, The Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) and the statutory acts of the authorities of the ARC may in no way limit any rights and freedoms of citizens established by the Constitution of Ukraine and Ukrainian laws (Constitution of Crimea 1998). This article shows that the rights of national minorities in Crimea were protected by the main law of the Autonomous Republic. Indeed, the following articles of the constitution prove this point. For example, Article 10.1 stipulates that alongside with the official language, Russian, Crimean Tatar and other ethnic groups’ languages must be secured, used and protected, moreover according to Article 10.2 Russian, as the language of the majority shall be used in all spheres of public life (ibid). Article 10.3 gives more freedom to the

languages of national minorities of Crimea. It stipulates that citizens should have the right to be educated in their native language at preschool establishments, to be taught in the native language at educational establishments of state etc. in accordance with Ukrainian legislation and other statutory acts of the ARC.

Indeed, we can observe that since then, article 10 has been functioning properly as there are a number of Crimean Tatar and Armenian schools in Crimea. According to the information provided by the rg.ru as of 2020 there are 547 schools in Crimea of which 16 are Crimean Tatar (Izotov 2020). There are Armenian Sunday schools in Simferopol, Sudak, Yalta, Alushta, Yevpatoria and Theodosia. Moreover, in September 1999, one year after the constitution was adopted, the first consolidated Armenian language class in Crimea was opened in the Simferopol school no. 33, where, in addition to the main curriculum, primary school students had Armenian language lessons twice a week (Crimean Armenian Community 2021).

Article 14 of the ARC Constitution concentrates on Citizens' rights and interests in the sphere of national culture. This is another representation of Crimean law taking into consideration its diverse and multi-national population. The sub-points of article 14 concentrate on the "preservation of the diversity of cultures which were formed in the Crimean Peninsula in the course of history" (Constitution of Crimea 1998, article 14.1). The article also provides different cultures and nationalities with an opportunity to form their associations which will establish their rights and interests. This particular point gives green light to nationalities to form their community representing bodies in order to preserve their national identity outside their homeland.

According to the article 14.4 citizens of all ethnicities, should be given a right to celebrate ethnic holidays, profess their religion, satisfy their needs in literature and arts, to establish ethnic mass media, publishing houses, museums, theatres, film studios and other ethnic, cultural and educational

establishments pursuant to the Constitution of Ukraine and Ukrainian laws (Constitution of Crimea 1998, article 14.2).

“The Crimean Armenian Society” which was formed in 1989 is an example of the proper functioning of article 14.

Figure 2. Population of Crimea by ethnicity in 2001 and 2014

	2001 (number)	2001 (percentage)	2014 (number)	2014 (percentage)
Russians	1,450,000	60.4	1,492,078	67.9
Ukrainians	576,600	24	344,515	15.7
Crimean Tatars	259,000	11	232,340	10.6
Belarussians	35,000	1.46	21,694	0.95
Tatars	13,500	0.56	45,000	1.96
Armenians	10,000	0.4	11,030	0.5
Total Population	2,401,200	100	2,293,673	100

Source: Ukrainian census results 2001, Crimean census results 2014

According to the Ukrainian census results of 2001 there were 2,024,000 people in the ARC and 377,200 people in the city of Sevastopol. Overall, there were 2,401,200 people in the peninsula¹. More than 60% of the populations were Russians (around 1,450,000), 24% Ukrainians and around 11% Crimean Tatars (576,600 and 259,000 respectively). The number of Armenians in Crimea was 10,000 (around 0.4%) (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001).

After 2014 the picture has changed. Republic of Crimea had a population of 2,293,673 of whom 1492078 Russians (67.9%), 344515 Ukrainians (15.7%), 232340 Crimean Tatars (10.6%) and 11030

¹ Further calculations will discuss the national composition of Crimea combining the number of population in Crimea and Sevastopol

Armenians (0.5%). As we can see the number of Ukrainians has decreased dramatically which is understandable from the context of 2014 conflict while the number of Armenians has slightly increase. (Federal State Statistics Service 2015)

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Crimea 2014 Article 13 everyone “is equal before law and the court. The state guarantees equality of human and civil rights and freedoms regardless of gender, race, nationality, language, origin, property and official status, place of residence, attitude to religion, beliefs, membership in public associations, and other circumstances. Any form of restriction of the rights of citizens on the basis of social, racial, national, linguistic or religious affiliation is prohibited” (Constitution of the Republic of Crimea 2014, Article 13). Article 19.1 stipulates that “everyone has the right to determine and indicate his nationality” and according to the Article 19.2 “everyone has the right to use his native language, to choose freely the language of communication, education”, and art. Article 21 specifies that “everyone is guaranteed freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, including the right to profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion or not to profess any religion at all, to freely choose, have and disseminate religious and other beliefs and to act in accordance with them” (Constitution of the Republic of Crimea 2014, Article 19.1, Article 19.2 and Article 21).

It can be visible that after Crimea went under the control of Russia, the constitution underwent only a slight amendment: the rights of national minorities with regards to language, religion, freedom of conscience etc. have been preserved. Moreover, when Crimea was within Ukraine most of the articles in the constitution had a point about correspondence with Ukrainian laws and regulations while in case of 2014 Constitution the situation is different. Correspondence with Russian laws and regulation is not required after each article which may signify that national minorities are entitled to more freedom than before.

Public Discourse

Armenian diaspora throughout the world has always been connected to the homeland. Armenian government has been trying to keep contact with the representatives of the diaspora with the help of a number of programs and initiatives. Although the participants of most of the organized programs were mainly from the United States or the Middle East, Crimean Armenians also tried to keep contact with Armenia. It is interesting to see the public discourse in Armenia with regards to Crimea and especially how it changed after 2014. One of the most vivid examples of Armenia-Crimea relations can be the 650th anniversary of Holy Cross cloister in Crimea. President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan and the Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II took part in the event. In his speech Sargsyan stressed the importance of religion and church for the Armenian people and congratulated everyone on the occasion. He expressed his gratitude to the authorities of Ukraine and particularly Crimea for assisting in the reconstruction works of the church as well as all those who took part in it. Saint Hripsime church of Yalta was the next destination after Holy Cross, where hundreds of Armenians welcomed the president and the Catholicos. Sargsyan said “we came here to share with you our delight, we came here to tell you that you have Motherland, we came to tell you that we will assist and support you on every occasion” (President.am 2008). However, the overall atmosphere in the country and the relations of the government have changed after the events of 2014. On the other hand, according to the survey results provided by Gallup International 76 percent of Armenian population thought positively about Crimea being under the Russian control while only 12 percent had a negative opinion on it. Moreover, 73 percent of the respondents thought that Yerevan should recognize Crimea as a part of Russian Federation while 12 percent opposed this view. The survey was conducted in the whole territory of Armenia and included around 1070 participants (Gazazyan 2014).

In May 2014, the presidents of Armenia, Russia, Belarus, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan had an informal meeting during which Serzh Sargsyan mentioned that “Armenia had clearly stated that the referendum in Crimea was an example of the realization of peoples’ right to self-determination through free will” (armenpress.am 2014). He had also expressed concerns over the escalations in Ukraine (yerkir.am 2014). This shows that the former government of the Republic of Armenia was trying to maintain neutrality in the issue of Crimea by not recognizing it officially but making pro-Russian statements. In 2014 Armenia voted against UN resolution on defending the territorial integrity of Ukraine and recognizing the referendum in Crimea illegal (civilnet.am 2016). The same way in 2016 Armenia voted against the UN resolution which condemned the human rights violations, discrimination and “abuses against the residents of the temporarily occupied Crimea, including Crimean Tartars” (UN 2016). After the regime change of Armenia in 2018 the situation did not seem to change. In 2018 Armenia once again voted against anti-Russian UN resolution “The problem of militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine), as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov” (UN 2018). Prior to the UN GA meeting, PM Pashinyan gave an interview to a Russian channel where he said that unfortunately many CSTO members vote against the interests of Armenia in international organizations while they cannot accuse Armenia in doing the same. He added that the issue must be addressed (shantnews.am 2018). Ambassador of Armenia in Ukraine Tigran Seyranyan also commented on the issue with the voting. He mentioned that there were a number of occasions when Ukraine supported anti-Armenian resolutions. Seyranyan added that Armenia cannot vote in favor of a resolution where a very important principle of Helsinki Final act, the equality of nations and the right to self-determination, is ignored or subordinated to another principle (mfa.am 2019).

It can be understood that after the 2014 events the attitude to Crimea has changed in Armenia. If before 2014 official delegations were visiting Crimea, nowadays that is not possible taking into

account the status of the peninsula and the sanctions. This can be seen as a step in favour of the Ukrainian territorial integrity as Armenia still has not recognized Crimea. However, during both the pre-2018 regime and under current government the pro-Russian rhetoric has been visible. Armenia voted in favor of Russia with regards to resolutions or documents on Crimea. This ambiguity is not well perceived in Crimea. On the one hand the statements and actions of Armenia are pro-Russian, while on the other hand on the official level there is no recognition. Armenia tries to balance its stance on this issue, but the attempts of balancing have negative influence on the Crimean Armenians as they are deprived of the direct connection with Armenia.

Interview Analysis

Ten interviews have been conducted. Nine interviews were conducted in Russian and one in Armenian. All of the interviewees were Armenians from Crimea. Three of them have been living in Crimea since the Soviet times, four since the nineties and three moved to Crimea after the events of 2014. They have different background, and were from different age groups which helped to gain insight from different angles. During the interviews a number of interesting and useful facts have been identified. Evidence that was collected ranges from socio-political issues of the Crimean Armenians to their daily initiatives and personal stories.

Consolidation

One of the dominant themes derived from the interviews concerns the issue of the consolidation of Crimean Armenians into a united community. Almost all of the interviewees mentioned that during the Soviet period there have been very few Armenians left in Crimea after the 1944 deportation. The community was almost non-existent and there was a risk of closing the centuries-long history of Armenian community in Crimea. According to one of the interviewees *“in fact, until 1989, the Crimean Armenians were not particularly active. Moreover, there was no community as such. There*

were several families who ended up here for work, and they knew each other. But to say that there was a Crimean Armenian community in a sense, we should not, because all the Armenians of Crimea were deported in 1944.” According to another interviewee who has been residing in Crimea since the Soviet times *“At the time of my arrival in Crimea [70s, 80s] there were very few Armenians here, but they were all very respected. All directors, honoured doctors, kolkhoz chairmen, moreover, all eminent, not just ordinary people. There were a few of them, dozens and a bit more, maybe dozens of ordinary Armenians as well but that was all. We were few, but nevertheless we all knew each other and kept in touch”*. Moreover, according to another interviewee *“Armenians were not allowed to register here, that is, a person on his own could not come and register. Armenians and other peoples who were deported did not have the opportunity to enter higher educational institutions. They were on the list of those whom it was not desirable to accept”*. The interviewee added that *“Despite the fact that the main postulate, the slogan of Soviet power was the friendship of peoples, there were some issues about which the bulk of the population did not know, did not face them”*. The Armenian population of Crimea started to consolidate in 1989. *“In 1989, the first national cultural society was registered after being allowed to, the Armenian community was registered. And the activity, the impulse to this was given, first of all, by the earthquake of 1988”*. At that time the few Armenians in Crimea united and created the community. *“After the earthquake, after the events of Baku², and because of economic hardships in Armenia, waves of Armenians started to arrive in Crimea and according to the results of 2014 they almost restored the number of Armenians that were in Crimea before the deportation”*.

Assimilation

Another evidence found from the interviews was with regards to the Armenian language, its usage in the community and the issue of assimilation. Almost all of the interviewees stated, that despite the

² Pogroms against the Armenian population of Baku which took place in 1990

efforts of the community to teach Armenian both in church affiliated Sunday schools and private schools, not a lot of the young population speak Armenian fluently. The children who are born in the families where they do not speak Armenian, do not speak the language. Even some people who were born in Armenia but moved to Crimea at an early age start to speak less and less in Armenian. Interviewees have mentioned that they witness assimilation. As one of the interviewees noted *“Without linguistic environment, the language is forgotten and it is impossible to learn it. Let me bring an example of the 2014 census results. The analysis showed that 40 percent of the young girls and 60 percent of the young boys enter into inter-ethnic marriages. This means that we face a very rapid assimilation”*.

Another interviewee also commented on the issue of mixed marriages. He added that *“mixed marriages are not a novelty for the Armenian diaspora, but the issue is that, in Crimea, it is surprising how many new families are formed between Armenians and Crimean Tatars. It is a huge problem. They have absolutely different way of thinking. Moreover, Crimean Tatars are people who are extremely loyal to Turkey despite its aggressive stance on Crimea. It seems like people don't have the historical memory”*.

On the other hand, Crimean Armenian community is trying to implement initiatives in order to stop the assimilation and revive the Armenian language among the population. There are Sunday church affiliated schools where children *“can learn the Armenian alphabet and church stories”* . Apart from church Sunday schools, there is “Armenian school after Gabriel Ayvazovsky” (Non-conventional Armenian school until 2012). The latter is an *“educational structure”* which uses non-conventional methods in teaching the Armenian language. The school was established in order to tackle the issue of “the loss” of Armenian. Often, parent or both of them did not know the language, and that is why the child also did not speak it as well. *“One of the tasks of our school was not only to preserve the language, but also teach it at a literary level, and not only to children, but also to their parents”*.

According to the interviewees the system of the school came to solve a number of issues. For example, if before the initiative students had problems with the places to study (there were no specifically designated places except from church), then after the creation of the school the students had an opportunity to study in classrooms equipped with facilities. Moreover, teachers at the school gained the opportunity to officially register as teachers of schools, received salary and received benefits such as social advantages etc. *“The non-conventional Armenian school has been in contact with the Ministry of Education of RA. The curriculum of the Armenian comprised by the non-conventional school for secondary schools, where there were groups created to study the Armenian language, was accepted by the ministry of education and recommended for the diaspora in 2004. Based on the curriculum, we got legislative right to study the Armenian language in all primary schools of Ukraine”*.

There were attempts to implement the curriculum in schools of Lvov and Kyiv, however they were unsuccessful, as the system which was functioning in Crimea failed to be created in other areas. There was no connection between the municipal authorities, the government and the Armenian community like in Crimea.

Interesting findings were derived from interviews with regards to the 2014 events. According to all of the interviewees not much has changed in their lives after Crimea went under the rule of Russia, except maybe the issues with documentation, visa and travelling. According to one of the interviewees *“I, as a representative of the middle class, cannot say that back then everything was fine and now we are under pressure. The person who have worked before works now as well”*. Moreover, according to one of the interviewees *“We have always perceived Crimea as Russian, have always spoken in the Russian language, only in documentation we encountered Ukrainian and remembered that we were a part of Ukraine”*. Another thing in common in the responses of the interviewees in terms of 2014 events is that because of Russia they have been saved and the violent events that happened in Donbass did not

reach Crimea. Within a night the flag of Ukraine has been replaced with the flag of Russia with no blood shed.

The impact of the 2014 events

The most common problem due to 2014 events emphasized by the interviewees refers to the documentation and visa issues. As all the documents were in Ukrainian, there was need to translate the documents to Russian. All the passports and all the registration documents had to be changed in order to correspond to the legislation of the new state. *“All the property had to be registered, to be moved to the legislative sphere of the Russian Federation. This was problematic. First of all, because of it there had been long queues. Secondly, you know, if someone, sometime created something and lived freely and no one had issues with it, now that needed to be legalized. But legalize how? People have had troubles with these and there has been dissatisfaction”*. Another major issue that Crimean Armenians are facing refers to travelling. If before 2014 there were direct flights to Yerevan and *“if before it took me two hours to arrive in Yerevan, now I have to spent all day on it and I am not even speaking about the fact that currently it is twice expensive”*. However, according to some of the interviewees, there are other options to travel from Crimea. One of those options is to go to Ukraine, obtain a Ukrainian international passport and get visa and travel with that one. So, people would have two international passports, Russian and Ukrainian, and they will show the Russian one in Russia and the Ukrainian one during international flights. It is sometimes possible to get a visa with Russian/Crimean passport, for example, during diplomatic visits.

On the other hand, there are also positive consequences of being under Russia's rule. According to one of the interviewees, after 2014 everyone got medical insurance, while during Ukrainian rule it was not the case. There were people who voluntarily paid for insurance but it was not widespread. After 2014 medical insurance became a common practice in Crimea. Indeed, till the end of 2014

almost all the residents of Crimea were provided with compulsory medical insurance policies (Federal Fund of Compulsory Health Insurance 2014).

Another interesting finding was with regards to other social issues. To the question about 2014 events affecting personal lives (social issues) of the Crimean Armenians, a number of interviewees shared important details. For example, they mentioned about the loans that were borrowed from Ukrainian banks. There have been a number of people whose loans, which remained unpaid in Ukrainian banks, were legally cancelled by the Russian authorities. According to the one of the interviewees, *“Crimeans have won in all aspects. Those who had loans, loans have been cancelled, those who had deposits in the banks, received their money back. People only won”*. On the other hand, another interviewee said that *“there have been talks on cancelling the loans, however around sixty percent of the people paid their loans back, at least the people that I know have paid back”*. Other interviewees have also spoken about this saying that there was an option of not paying the loans back. Thus, it can be understood that most of the Crimeans benefited from this and that is the reason many people feel satisfied with becoming a part of Russia.

Another interesting finding pointed out by one of the interviewees concerns the issue of church and religion. According to the interviewee after Crimea went under Russia’s control, a question with regards to the status of the Armenian Apostolic Church arose. The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin decided to move Crimea out of Ukrainian Diocese of Armenian Apostolic Church and incorporated it into Russian and New Nakhijevan Diocese. Understandably this caused issues in Ukraine. *“Ukrainian Diocese had problems because of this. From the perspective of logistics, the decision should have been made, as the head of the Ukrainian Diocese would not be able to attend parishes taken place in the peninsula due to the difficulties with entering Crimea. Therefore, it was necessary to incorporate it into either Russian Diocese with the centre in Moscow, or the Southern Russia Diocese with the centre in Krasnodar.”*

If we try to look at the issue which the interviewee spoke about from the perspective of the logistics, it would be more reasonable to incorporate Crimea into the Southern Russia Diocese as the distance between Krasnodar and Crimea is only around 420 km. However, according to the interviewee, it was incorporated into Russian and New Nakhijevan Diocese *“taking into account the difficulties that the Armenian churches of the Crimea had”*. And he added that *“Moscow did a lot in order to restore the Armenian churches in Crimea in the last 5 years”*.

Cultural coexistence

Another interesting aspect that came about during the interviews referred to the cultural and ethnic co-existence in Crimea. As Crimea is a multi-ethnic region it was interesting to know how throughout the years Armenians coexisted with the other ethnicities of the peninsula. This issue will be presented from two sides. The positive side is about peculiarities of cultural coexistence while the negative side is about cultural extremism. The positive example which was brought by one of the interviewees is from the beginning of the twentieth century while the example on cultural extremism is from April 2021. Famous composer Alexander Spendiaryan, who spent most of his life in Crimea, created two masterpieces which have significant place in the cultural life of Crimean Tatars. He wrote the music for the most famous Tatar dance Khaytarma. Moreover, *“in order to write down the music for Tatar lullaby, he needed to go to Tatar families to hear the women sing. However, Tatar women do not sing next to other men. He had a friend, they went to their house, persuade the wife so that she sings the lullaby in another room so that Spendiaryan can hear it and write it down”*. Although this story is from the beginning of the twentieth century, it still spread a light on the coexistence of Crimean Tatars and Armenians of Crimea. However, a more than a century later, things have changed. According to one of the interviewees there is cultural extremism present in the peninsula. According to him *“in one of the cities of Crimea, on the genocide remembrance day, posters, which contained information about Armenian Genocide, were torn down. In Theodosia, which can be considered an Armenian city, the*

representatives of the city administration instead of speaking about the Armenian Genocide, were speaking about the deportation of Crimean Tatars, Bulgarians, Greeks and Armenians”.

Connection with Armenia

Another dominant theme derived from the interviews is about the connection of Crimea Armenians to Armenia. Before 2014 there have been stronger ties with Armenia than now taking into account the sanctions that Crimea is under. The president of Armenia and Catholicos of all Armenians visited Crimea in 2008. After the 2014 events the ties with Armenia weakened. There were cases when government members of Armenia were invited to Crimea to some events or initiatives, however they declined the invitation. The lack of official visits, the difficulties with regards to traveling and Armenia’s ambiguous stance on Crimea have led to the fact that the Crimean Armenians started to feel less connected to Armenia. On the other hand, it did not ruin their unity during 44-day war. Most of the interviewees mentioned that by the efforts of the community about thirty million Russian Roubles (around 400,000 USD) was collected to help Artsakh. Moreover, there were volunteers who went to Armenia to protect their homeland. Unity and connection of Crimea Armenians have always been present and with regards to it an interesting pattern can be observed. According to Patkanian and Abrahamian, a group of Crimean Armenians consisting of 400 volunteers went to fight with Davit Bek for Syunik in 1722 (Patkanian 1897; Abrahamian 1964).

Conclusion

After the 1944 deportation there were few Armenian families left in Crimea as around 10,000 Armenians were deported from the peninsula. Armenians were physically absent from Crimea till 1989 hence the lack in academic articles with regards to the Crimean Armenians of the Soviet period. During the post-Soviet period there still have been a few Armenian families in the territory of the Crimea. The situation started to change after 1988 Spitak earthquake and Sumgait events. The before mentioned events and the subsequent economic hardships in Armenia resulted in three migration waves from Armenia to Crimea. Around 6000 Armenians went to Crimea from the disaster zone. In 1989 the Crimean Armenian Community was legally registered and Armenians in Crimea started to consolidate. Currently, the Crimean Armenian Community is still working in different directions, implanting various initiatives aimed at tackling the issues of the Armenian Community in Crimea and preserving the history and national traditions.

The analysis of the 1998 and 2014 Constitutions showed that the ethnic minorities of Crimea, including Armenians, enjoyed basic rights and freedoms ensured at the highest legislative level. The analysis of website articles and articles published by news agencies showed that public discourse in Armenia with regards to Crimea has not changed a lot after 2014. Armenia tries to stay neutral in international arena concerning the issue of Crimea. It did not recognize Crimea as a part of the Russian Federation; however, it still tries to keep the pro-Russian attitude which is visible during the decisions made during international meetings. This ambiguous balancing strategy is having a negative impact on the Crimean Armenians as they have no direct connection with Armenia.

Ten interviews conducted with Crimean Armenians revealed a number of dominant themes. One of the issues that Armenians in Crimea are currently facing is the problem of assimilation. Although the efforts of the community are aimed at tackling the issues connected with assimilation by implementing

a number of different initiatives such as teaching the Armenian language or celebrate ethnic holidays still the cases of inner-ethnic marriages and the loss of the language are present.

Armenians in Crimea have mostly perceived Crimea as Russian even when they were within Ukraine. That is the reason, that after 2014, when Crimea became a part of the Russian Federation, the lives of Armenians in Crimea have not been significantly affected. One of the main issues that the Armenians encountered after the 2014 events concerned the documentation. The documents they had were in Ukrainian and there was a need to translate them into Russian. There were issues with property registrations as well.

Sanctions imposed on Crimea, absence of international flights made it complicated for Crimean Armenians to travel to Armenia and other destinations.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questionnaire

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself, your background and tell how you and your family arrived in Crimea.
2. What is your main occupation in Crimea?
3. Can you tell me about the lives of Crimea Armenians after the collapse of the Soviet Union? *
*If the interviewee has been residing in Crimea since the 1990s
4. What role does the Armenian language play in the lives of Armenian community of Crimea?
5. Are you or any of your relatives involved in any volunteering/social events or initiatives organized by the Armenian Community in Crimea/Church
6. Can you tell me about your experience in 2014? What challenges did you face?
7. What can be said about the lives of Crimea Armenians before and after 2014? What has changed? Were Armenians enjoying more privileges during Ukrainian or Russian rule?
8. Can you please tell me about the impact of 2014 events on your life? How did it affect your personal life (for example if you had any loans taken from Ukrainian banks etc.)?
9. How did the 2014 events affect your visa issues and traveling? What I mean is that was it easier to travel before or after 2014?
10. How connected do you feel to Armenia? Have there been any action from Armenian organizations or government to contact with you?
11. What was the overall mood of the Crimean Armenians during the 44-day war? Have you been involved in any initiatives aimed at assisting Armenia during the war?