

# FIVE YEARS SINCE THE OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA

2014-2019

For two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian authorities did not attempt to change the status of the Crimean peninsula, which formed part of Ukraine's territory after the USSR's dissolution. Between 1991 and 2003, Russia and Ukraine signed three treaties recognizing Ukraine's sovereignty, with Crimea as part of Ukraine, and the inviolability of both States' territorial integrity.

At the height of the political crisis in Ukraine in early 2014, **Russian authorities, driven by Putin's irredentist ambitions, decided to act according to the law of the jungle.** Under the false pretext of protecting Russian speakers, Russia secretly deployed its military in Crimea and instigated an armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. These hypocritical actions, which ran contrary to the prohibition of the use of force in international relations, were globally condemned.

## WHY THE OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA IS A SETBACK?

### Plummeting living standards

As early as March 2014, Russia issued decrees raising pensions and increasing salaries for public sector workers like teachers and doctors. However, the initial rise was soon offset by the increase in prices caused by the depreciation of the ruble. Subsequently, wages were cut back again by 30% to 70%. Inflation sent prices skyrocketing, while corruption stalled most of the development projects.

### Appalling human rights situation

Beyond socio-economic considerations, being under Moscow's control has come at the expense of certain fundamental individual freedoms for regular Crimeans. Russia has adopted numerous restrictive measures targeting human rights defenders, pro-Ukrainian activists, and ethnic or religious minorities, all under the guise of fighting terrorism and extremism.

### Global isolation of the peninsula

In winter 2014, the bus and train communication between Crimea and mainland Ukraine ceased, separating many Ukrainian families. The Kerch Strait Bridge, opened in May 2018, is the only ground pathway connecting Crimea with the outside world. Flights out of Crimea's main airport currently go only to and from Russia. In addition, Ukrainian and western banks, insurance companies, mobile operators, and telecommunications companies have all left Crimea.

### The loss of main sources of income—tourism and small business—for many Crimeans

In the first year after the occupation alone, Crimea lost hundreds of over 250 million dollars from a reduction in tourism. In 2015, armed men seized various Crimean businesses, including banks, hotels, shipyards, farms, gas stations, a bakery, a dairy, and Yalta Film Studio. Crimean agricultural yields were also significantly impacted by the occupation.

### Power supply problems

Crimea still suffers electricity shortages, since Ukraine stopped providing peninsula with energy. Russia's plans to start operating power stations in Crimea are at the center of an international scandal after Siemens said its power turbines had been installed without its knowledge and in violation of European Union sanctions.

### Omnipresent corruption

The sum of all direct transfers from Russia to Crimea by February 2019 amounted to 310.6 billion rubles, or 5.5 billion dollars (one fifth of the Russian budget allocated to all its regions). But money does not reach ordinary Crimeans. The local administration has not changed much, officials are embezzling money, and arrests on corruption charges are commonplace.

Territory — 27,000 km<sup>2</sup>  
Population — 2,284,000  
Salary wage — \$444 per months  
Ethnic groups — 65.3% Russians, 15.1% Ukrainians, 10.8% Crimean Tatars, 8,8% others

# ENFORCEMENT OF RUSSIAN LAWS IN CRIMEA RESULTED IN A HUMAN RIGHTS SETBACK

2014-2019

## Freedom of expression and assembly

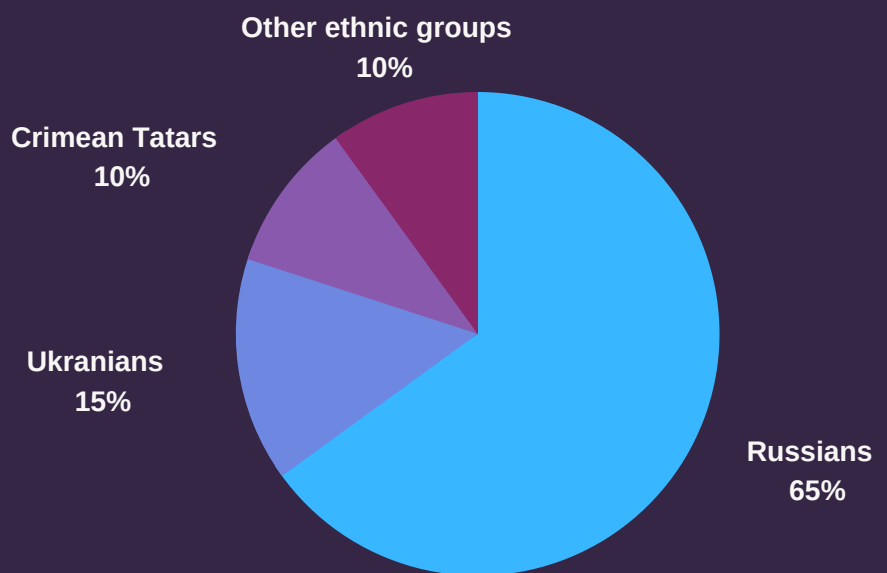
The mandatory re-registration of media completely changed the media landscape, particularly since the introduction of legislation restricting peaceful rallies, which resulted in the arrest of over 350 peaceful protesters between 2014 and 2018.

## Civil society

Prior to the occupation, a vibrant civil society working on a variety of human rights issues, including those linked to Crimean Tatar People, existed in Crimea. Many organisations have since then left the peninsula. Others stopped working due to persecution, and due to the repressive Russian legislation aimed at suffocating the civil society out of existence, like the Foreign Agent Law.

## Repression of minorities

Since 2014, pro-Ukrainian activists and journalists have been attacked, abducted, and tortured. Crimean Tatars are particularly targeted by this form of repression. Some are imprisoned, others disappeared.



## Abuse of extremism laws

Russia systemically arrests and prosecutes anyone who opposes Russia's occupation, under the pretense of the fight against terrorism. About 70 of political prisoners are now held in Crimea or in the Russian Federation, most of them on terrorism or extremism charges, including filmmaker Oleg Sentsov.

**70 Ukrainian political prisoners are now jailed in Russia**  
as of beginning of 2019

# TIMELINE OF CRIMEA'S OCCUPATION

2014-2019

**21 NOVEMBER 2013**

Pro-European protests starts in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv



**22 FEBRUARY 2014**

Yanukovich flees Ukraine and a new government forms in Ukraine

**26 FEBRUARY 2014**

Pro-Russian activists and Russian forces occupy key government buildings in Crimea, including the Parliament

**7 MARCH 2014**

Russia deploys up to 30,000 soldiers in Crimea in a clandestine operation

**16 MARCH 2014**

**A referendum on the status of Crimea is conducted in Crimea only**, with 96.77% of participants reportedly voting for joining Russia. Crimean Tatar People boycotts the referendum

**17 MARCH 2014**

First round of sanctions against Russia

**18 MARCH 2014**

Russia's Constitutional Court rules on the validity of Crimea's "reunification" with Russia, the **occupation is formalized** and completed under Russian law

**27 MARCH 2014**

UN General Assembly declares Crimea referendum invalid (Resolution 68/262). Shortly after the Council of Europe suspends the voting rights of Russia's delegation

**15 APRIL 2014**

The Ukrainian Parliament declares Crimea to be under "provisional occupation" by the Russian military

**APRIL 2014**

Armed hostilities erupt in Eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian government forces and anti-government armed elements

**9 MAY 2014**

Russia introduces an "anti-extremist" law to criminally punish calls for secession of Crimea from Russia

**10 MAY 2014**

Oleg Sentsov arrested **for his activism against the occupation** of the Crimean peninsula

**16 MAY 2014**

Crimean Tatars have been banned from holding protest rallies

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# TIMELINE OF CRIMEA'S OCCUPATION

2014-2019

## 14 JULY 2014

Russian military engagement in Eastern Ukraine results in an international armed conflict. The so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic claim "independence" from Ukraine

## JULY-AUGUST 2014

US and EU introduce new sanctions in response to the escalating War in Eastern Ukraine

## 21 SEPTEMBER 2014

An anti-war rally with about 5,000 to 20,000 demonstrators takes place in Moscow

## 25 AUGUST 2015

Oleg Sentsov sentenced to 20 years in prison after a prosecution widely condemned as similar to a Stalin-era "show trial"

## 29 SEPTEMBER 2016

The Supreme Court of Crimea accused Mejlis of extremism banning the activities of the Crimean Tatar Elected Body

## 8 NOVEMBER 2016

UN draft resolution condemns Russia's 'temporary occupation' of Crimea and **accuses Russia of multiple human rights abuses** in Crimea

## 22 AUGUST 2018

Oleg Sentsov enters his one hundredth day of hunger strike over the issue of Ukrainian political prisoners detained in Russia

## 25 NOVEMBER 2018

**Kerch Strait incident** marked the escalation of tensions in the shared Sea of Azov as Moscow has publicly acknowledged opening fire on Ukrainian forces. 24 POWs are tried for trespass in disregard of the Geneva Conventions

## 15 JANUARY 2019

Emil Kurbedinov, a human rights lawyer who openly denounces human rights violations in Crimea and defends members of Hizbut-tahrir, is prosecuted under Article 20.2 of the Administrative Code for an extremism offense and is threatened with disbarment