



Who are the most trustworthy ?

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The fictitious murder in Kiev 29th May this year of the Putin-critical Russian journalist Arkadij Babtjenko is yet another example of how little we can trust the participants in the Western ongoing propaganda war. First, the government in Kiev blamed Putin for the murder. A day later they revealed that the murder was fictitious and that they arranged it. The journalist worked as a host for the private television channel ATR, which has supported the Mejlis, a Crimean Tatar exile organization most Crimean Tatars left in 2014. So maybe the Mejlis was also behind it?

According to the Ukrainian government, the Mejlis, Western countries and many human rights' organizations, Russia "annexed" Crimea in 2014. It means that Russia conquered Crimea by using military force. According to the population in Crimea, they joined The Russian Federation by free will after a democratic referendum. According to Ukraine, the Mejlis, Western countries and many human rights' organizations the Crimean Tatars are persecuted and victims of grave breaches of human rights. According to the population in Crimea, also the Crimean Tatars, they have never had better prospects than today. So what is the real situation in Crimea?

Roughly 92% of the inhabitants in Crimea are originally either Russian (65%), Ukrainian (15%) or Tatars (12%). After the 2014 coup in Ukraine, the Russian majority in Crimea saw an opportunity to put an end to the 1954 'forced marriage' to Ukraine. The Mejlis mobilized strongly to prevent the Crimean Parliament from organizing a referendum. Nonetheless, the Crimean Tatars voted in favour of joining The Russian Federation. Only 4% of them chose Ukraine. This result is affirmed in two subsequent polls held by German DfK and American Gallup. 1) Shortly after the referendum, in an extraordinary meeting in Kurulta (the general assembly of the members in the Mejlis), a vast majority agreed to abandon the Mejlis and instead work for the rightful place of Crimean Tatars in society by political and legal means.

We have interviewed three leading Crimean Tatars: their religious leader, mufti Emirali Hajj Ablaev, the vice-chairman in the Committee for Nationalities in the Russian State Duma, Ruslan Balbek and Seitumer Nemitklaev, who in 2014 started "Public Council of the Crimean Tatar People". They all stated that after 2014 there are very few Crimean Tatars that support the Mejlis or the Islamic Hizb ut-Tahrir. They also denied breaches of human rights and the use of torture in Crimea. Should we not believe them? Or should we believe the report from the UN Human Rights Office based on interviews with respondents in Ukraine?

For the period 2014 to 2020, Russia has allocated roughly £84 billion for new investments in Crimea. A super modern airport in the capital opened in April this year. The car connection of the longest bridge in Europe, Kerch Strait Bridge, between Crimea and the Russian mainland, opened in May. The train connection will be opened next year.

Less spectacular, but also very impressive, are Russia's investments to strengthen the culture and the economy of the Crimean Tatars. A law was passed in Crimea 11th April 2014 to have three official languages (Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar). The law is implemented in public documents, in the education sector and in the media. As follows, roughly £1.2 billion has been earmarked for the development of the Crimean Tatar



language, in the school system, in newspapers, radio stations and a Crimean Tatar TV-channel. To support their Sunni Muslim practices, 350 dilapidated mosques have been restored, whereas only five were operational before 2014, and the building of a giant new mosque in the capital will soon be finished. The government also organizes Hajj, offering annual cheap group travels to Mecca. To improve their living conditions, large-scale construction programs will provide Crimean Tatars with homes fitted with electricity and modern sanitary amenities. Moreover, large funds are designated for the compensation of land Crimean families lost in 1944. In the political system, Crimean Tatars and other minorities are by law overrepresented in relation to their population figures. More than 150 former Mejlis members now work in parliament and government offices.

However, 31st October 2017, the Ukrainian delegation in the United Nations presented a draft resolution to the General Assembly with a renewed criticism towards Russia for violating human rights in Crimea. Thus, it is not surprising that the final text of the resolution of 19th December 2017 corresponds with the propaganda of the Ukrainian government and the Mejlis. As an example, the resolution encourages Russia to ensure that the Crimean Tatar language is introduced in the educational system, ignoring both the Crimean three language law of 11th April 2014 and the huge investments earmarked to develop the Crimean Tatar language, also in the school system. Who should we believe? Have they who approve resolutions and sanctions set foot in Crimea after 2014? Amnesty International (AI), one of the human rights' organizations supporting Ukraine and the Mejlis. claims that the Mejlis is "a self-governing body representing the ethnic Crimean Tatars." 2) AI supports the Mejlis that in 2015 boasted they had established a Muslim battalion at the Crimean border, in cooperation with the government in Kiev. AI supports the Mejlis that was behind Ukraine's cut of the water supply in 2014, and the cut of food exports as well as the cut of power supply in 2015. Some think these cuts are appropriate retributions for a population that chose Russia without bothering about the fact that 80% of their water, power and food supplies came from Ukraine. Others think that these sudden cuts, carried out without warning, are acts of terror and breaches of human rights.

Following these events, two Mejlis leaders were denied entry into Crimea. AI condemned the decision. And when the Supreme Court in Crimea 26th April 2016 banned the Mejlis as an extremist organization, The Council of Europe and AI were upset and demanded immediate lifting of the ban. According to AI «... the ban demolishes one of the few remaining rights of a minority that Russia must protect instead of persecute." 3) AI also condemned the closure in Crimea of the Mejlis-

friendly TV channel ATR, claiming it was the only channel in the Crimean language. However, according to Crimean authorities, another Crimean Tatar TV-channel was already in full operation. A year later, 18th December 2017, Senior Advisor Oksana Pokalchuck, who is Ukrainian and also Executive Director of Amnesty International Ukraine, stated: "With Mejlis banned as 'extremists', its leaders imprisoned or forcibly exiled from their homeland and Crimean Tatar language media purged from Crimea, how much further can these reprisals go?"4)

It is disturbing how well the views of AI correspond with the views of the government in Ukraine and of the Mejlis. To investigate alleged human rights violations against the Crimean Tatars, Amnesty International and other human rights' organizations should immediately seek impartial experts from countries, preferably in Asia or Africa, that do not



participate in the propaganda war between the West and Russia, and between Ukraine and Crimea.

References:

- 1) Kenneth Rapoz: "One Year After Russia Annexed Crimea, Locals Prefer Moscow To Kiev" 20 Mars 2015. - <https://www.forbes.com/.../2015/.../20/one-year-after-russia-annexed...>
- 2) Ukraine 2017/2018 | Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/uk>
- 3) Crimean court bans 'extremist' Tatar governing body - The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/26/court-bans-extremist-crimea>
- 4) Crimea | Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/.../crimea-release-elderly-crimean-tatar-l...>

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