

***We remember the propaganda footage of people in Crimea welcoming the “reunification” with Russia in 2014. Back then, the occupants promised to raise the living standards of the Crimeans. What is the public mood at this moment in Crimea?***

The problem is that we cannot trust the results of any surveys or polls conducted in Crimea, given the fact of the occupation which is recognized by the UN General Assembly, which was de facto recognized by the European Court of Human Rights and stated multiple times by the Office of Prosecutor of the International Criminal Report in its annual reports.

Ukrainian non-governmental organizations that somehow manage to work in Crimea (to provide assistance to the victims, gather information on the human rights and humanitarian situation) do not have tools to measure societal attitudes.

We are aware of the survey conducted by the Russian sociological service Levada Center in Spring of 2019, which is often quoted in the media. But despite the fact that this center is considered to be the only independent sociological center in Russia, I doubt this survey - in terms of methodology and ethics of conducting surveys in the occupied area and in the atmosphere of fear as well as in terms of approach to the wording of questions. The internationally recognized occupation is called an "accession" - just as it is promoted by the Russian Federation and occupation authorities despite the internationally recognized occupation.

Similarly, we have no reasons to trust any polls undertaken in the non-government-controlled part of Donbass, because of the atmosphere of terror there. You just don't get the real attitude from people, that's it.

Of course, this does not exclude the fact that some people in Crimea are satisfied – I mean those who became beneficiaries of this occupation in terms of gaining power or resources, for example, Russian servicemen in the Crimea. But one should ask about the mood of, for example, the Crimean Tatar community, which is facing new arrests, new searches, and new repressions nearly every other week.

***On October 25, 20 Crimean Tatars were detained for daring to come to a court hearing that was held at the so-called “Crimean garrison military court.” People came to listen to the court proceedings that viewed the appeal case of their three compatriots. There are a lot of examples of cases of mass unmotivated detentions of Crimean Tatars in occupied Crimea in the last 7 years. Can we talk about collective punishments and punitive measures?***

When considering international humanitarian law we can indeed talk about *collective punishments and punitive measures*. But most often Ukraine refers to legal definitions that lie within crimes against humanity and war crimes. In this case - massive politically motivated arbitrary detentions, illegal persecution by administrative and criminal means of the indigenous people of Crimea - the Crimean Tatars, massive arrests and oppression of the right to peaceful assembly, free expression and the right to a fair trial. I hope one day these actions will be recognized as a crime against humanity and war crimes by the International Criminal Court.

At the very least, Ukraine is making a lot of efforts to prove that. In particular, the Ukrainian non-governmental sector.

In addition, the annual resolutions of the UN General Assembly on the human rights situation in Crimea include a long list of violations committed by the Russian Federation. This episode you've mentioned is just one of dozens. The occupying authorities of Crimea are really irritated by human rights activism, solidarity and totally peaceful resistance by the Crimean Tatars. With these mass detentions, searches at 5 am, new political arrests, traumatized children Russia tries to intimidate people. But also - to radicalize them. However, it does not succeed. People remain absolutely peaceful.

Unfortunately, there is almost no possibility to bring to responsibility those responsible for grave human rights violations. Therefore, Ukrainian NGOs collect the information on perpetrators and advocate for imposing personal sanctions against them by the U.S., EU, UK, Canada.

***There is an aggressive policy of russification of Crimea. According to reports one in three people from the peninsula came from Russia. Are there any estimates?***

It is worth distinguishing the concept of russification of Crimea and changing the demographic composition. Both processes are there, they are interlinked, however, to my opinion, russification and attack on Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar identity is harder to measure. This is a complex humanitarian and legal issue. But when it comes to the expulsion of the population and the colonization - it is more obvious. Although it is still very difficult to measure given that there is no access to the territory. However, NGOs are attempting to do so. For example, our colleagues from the Regional Center for Human Rights recently has published a large and detailed report on this matter [https://krymbezpravil.org.ua/en/issues/report-on-the-results-of-the-study-of-the-policy-of-the-russian-federation-on-forcible-change-of-demographic-composition-of-the-occupied-crimean-peninsula /](https://krymbezpravil.org.ua/en/issues/report-on-the-results-of-the-study-of-the-policy-of-the-russian-federation-on-forcible-change-of-demographic-composition-of-the-occupied-crimean-peninsula/)

From a legal point of view and within the framework of international humanitarian law, artificial change in the demographic composition is defined as the colonization. This seems to be a term from a previous era, as now we often hear news of renaming streets, removing monuments of former colonizers, or descendants of victims of colonial-era crimes are demanding remedies in courts of former metropolises. But, unfortunately, there are regions where the practice of colonization still exists and flourishes. Occupied Crimea belongs to them.

There are actually two parallel processes. First one is a "clean-up" of territory through persecutions and displacement of those non-loyal to the occupying authorities. In particular, through politically motivated persecution, illegal arrests, abductions, torture, conscription to the Russian army, forced passportization and other human rights violations. The estimated number of those who had to flee Crimea due to the occupation is 60,000 - 100,000 persons. Secondly, in parallel with "clean-up" Russia is massively moving its own population to the territory of Crime. This colonization process is difficult to measure without access to the territory and accurate statistics, however, even from the data available in open sources we can track mass relocation of military personnel and their families, security forces, representatives of the FSB, Investigative Committee, Ministry of Interior, prosecutors, judges, civil servants. In addition, Russia launches special incentives to make its own population move

to Crimea. Ukrainian researchers I've referred to previously estimate the number of those new illegal inhabitants as 500 to 800 thousand.

Ukrainian law enforcement agencies are also trying to track and to document these trends, even without access to the territory. Some time ago the relevant materials were submitted by the specialized Prosecutor's Office of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea to the International Criminal Court.

***What is Russia's attitude to justify this displacement of the population? How does Russia cooperate if any with international bodies in this regard?***

I think it is important to explain the Russian prism, the attitude to any issues concerning Crimea. If you follow their rhetoric in response to any allegations or accusations or even some international courts rulings or decisions in cases involving Crimea, you will see that Russia is simply claiming that Crimea is their federal district, and anything going on there should not concern anyone. Therefore, we should not expect that Russia will justify itself for something.

As for the cooperation, it is worth mentioning such a fact that neither in Crimea nor in the temporarily occupied territory in eastern Ukraine there are no independent human rights monitoring missions simply because they cannot gain access to this territory. Russia is ready to allow all these international mechanisms to Crimea only from the territory of the Russian Federation which would mean the legitimisation of the attempted annexation of the peninsula.

Although Russia is still presenting its position in international courts, this does not mean enforcement of their decisions. For example, the UN International Court of Justice has issued an order demanding from Russia to lift the ban on the Medzhlis as a representative body of the Crimean Tatar people and provide conditions for teaching the Ukrainian language in Crimea. Russia ignored that completely.

But justice still should be sought in the courts. Russia is waging a powerful disinformation campaign against Ukraine trying to promote the Ukrainian government being fascists and, according to the Russian propaganda, therefore Crimea and part of Donbas were willing to separate from Kyiv. I don't claim that everyone believes that, but those aggressive propaganda and disinformation campaigns created the fog of uncertainty. For Ukraine this is also a struggle for wording. That is why when the European Court of Human Rights de facto recognized the Russian occupation of Crimea and rejected the fairy tales about the people's referendum - for Ukraine it was important already.

***How would you describe the militarization of public life in Crimea? Does this process continue?***

It is indeed one of the most significant trends. It is so significant that a few years ago the UN General Assembly started to adopt a special resolution concerning the militarization of the peninsula annually. In the context of the militarization we can track some purely military issues (transfers by the Russian Federation of advanced weapon systems, including nuclear-capable aircraft and missiles, weapons, ammunition and military personnel, military exercises, establishment of infrastructure like the Kerch Bridge which is used for the military purposes). But we can also see how this militarization interferes with humanitarian space. Children are taught to handle weapons, they are subjected to aggressive military propaganda persuading

them that it is necessary to "defend the fatherland", of course, with Russia in mind. Occupying authorities establish combat training courses at schools, incorporate Crimean educational institutions into the "military-patriotic" education system of the Russian Federation, etc.

Militarization also applies to the media, with the massive aggressive rhetoric and hate speech in the Russian-controlled outlets and total clean up of Ukrainian media including blocking of multiple Ukrainian websites. And of course the cult of the victory in the WWII, which in fact became a glorification of the current Russian government. This trend relates to the whole territory of the Russian Federation. But it is gaining special momentum in occupied Crimea - against the background of Russia's attempts to digest and swallow Crimea.

***What were Russia's reactions to the creation of the Crimea Platform?***

We have analyzed the messages from the Russian officials and media. And I should say that the reaction was hysteric at all levels. But public reaction is one thing. Another thing is the diplomatic efforts. What we know from our sources is that Russia tried very hard to sabotage the summit, namely, to prevent international leaders from coming to Kyiv by various means. It succeeded to some extent. If you look at the map of the summit you will see that South East Asia, Africa, Latin America were not presented and mainly there were Ukrainian allies from EU and North America plus Turkey and Australia. The turnout was still amazing, but I believe it could be even more impressive if there were no active measures from the Russian side.

***What are the realistic expectations of the Kyiv authorities for this initiative, Crimea Platform?***

I would rather comment on the expectations of Ukrainian civil society. This is important since the Crimea Platform is not only about the governmental level, but also non-governmental organizations that are currently launching an expert network. The main expectation of all of us, including the government, is the deoccupation of Crimea. It is clear that this is an ambitious expectation and task. But we have no choice other than to consider it as realistic.

In the meantime, there are tactical goals that need to be implemented now. Like keeping Crimea on the international agenda and supporting the non-recognition policy; maintenance of the international sanctions concerning Crimea and advocating for additional sanctions regimes; establishing some forms of the efficient reactions towards the human rights violations in Crimea; supporting the legal efforts to bring Russia to responsibility for its aggressive actions and all the international crimes; maintaining the connection with the citizens of Ukraine who continue to live in Crimea, especially with those disagree with the occupation.

When it comes to the Crimea Platform it is not only about the international summit, but Ukrainian internal every day work for maintaining human-to-human contact, implementation of projects aimed at supporting Ukrainian citizens living in the occupation, etc.

***How would you describe the strength of the civil society in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea? Could you describe any projects and initiatives that managed to bring improvement to human rights in the regions? Any collaboration between central NGOs and local ones?***

I have to admit that the situation in Crimea and in occupied Donbas is actually different. Despite the fact that in both cases we are dealing with a regime that is defined in Ukrainian legislation as the temporary occupation and in both cases, it is about the Russian Federation and its invasion into the territory of Ukraine. But still the situation in the field is slightly different. Russia recognizes its control over Crimea, establishes its authority there and at least it is very clear who is responsible for all violations and crimes.

In occupied Donbas things are much worse and complicated. It remains a gray zone, a dark hole controlled by the illegal armed groups. They don't even pretend to be following some standards. The International Committee of the Red Cross cannot even get access to the arrested people, many are held incommunicado.

There are very limited possibilities in Crimea for civil society. Few dozens of activists of Crimean Solidarity group (they document and highlight human rights violations, support families of politically persecuted Crimean Tatars, undertake humanitarian projects) are under the arrest and terrorism charges, many more are persecuted by the administrative means. Journalists trying to work there under the nicknames are getting arrested under the trumped up charges and tortured. Just like it happened with the Radio Liberty reporter Vladyslav Yesyenko.

But the situation in occupied Donbas is even worse. The operation of any of such civic associations as Crimea Solidarity is not possible there at all. You will immediately end up in the basement as a hostage. By the way, when it comes to the journalists and bloggers, we have identified at least 5 hostages detained in Donbas for writing Tweets about life in occupied Donbas under the nicknames. These are both men and women. They were identified by illegal armed groups and arrested.

***How is the Crimea Platform perceived by the inhabitants of Crimea (and most especially representatives of minority groups)?***

To answer this question accurately it would be necessary to conduct some surveys, which is not possible, as we have discussed above. I can just assume from my communication with people living in Crimea. First, there is gratitude for the fact that Crimea is on the agenda of Ukraine and of the important international actors. Second of all, there is hope that Crimean Platform can somehow contribute to the improvement of the human rights situation. And it seems self-evident that there should be deoccupation, restoration of adequate conditions in terms of civil and political rights in the peninsula. It is especially true when it comes to the Crimean Tatar population, which is probably the most affected by the Russian occupation. In fact, Crimean Tatars are not a minority, they are the indigenous population of Crimea. This means that they do not have their own state, they do not have another homeland other than Crimea. And this is another point that emphasizes the drama and tragedy of what is happening now in the Crimea.

And just to illustrate more the Crimea Platform effect I would like to mention the fact that as a kind of hybrid response from the Russian Federation to Crimea Platform there was a detention of Nariman Dzhelyal, Deputy head of the Medzhlis of Crimean Tatar People, Crimean Tatar activist, an absolutely kind and wonderful, brave man. He was attending the Crimea Platform summit publicly, at his own risk and he paid the price after he went back

home to Crimea. The case of Nariman provides us with one more significant reason on why Crimea should be deoccupied.