

Human Rights Abuses in Crimea under Russia's Occupation

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DOI: [10.1163/18750230-02503002](https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02503002)

Abstract

Russian and local authorities have severely curtailed human rights protection in Crimea since Russia began its occupation of the peninsula in February 2014. This article describes the human rights consequences of the extension of Russian law and policy to Crimea since the occupation. Russia has violated multiple obligations which it has as an occupying power under international humanitarian law – in particular in relation to the protection of people’s rights.

Keywords

Crimea – human rights – occupation – international human rights law – international humanitarian law

February 2015 marks exactly one year since troops in green army uniforms without insignia, armed with Russian military equipment and referred to by locals and journalists as ‘little green men’, appeared on Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula.

Increasingly identified as members of Russia’s security forces and aided by pro-Russian paramilitary groups actively operating in Crimea since mid-February, they rapidly asserted their authority in Crimea. They seized strategic sites, blocked military bases and took over Crimea’s administrative borders with the rest of Ukraine.

By mid-March, Ukraine had lost – and Russia secured effective control over Crimea. Russia denied the involvement of its forces in Crimea until Vladimir Putin publically admitted to this during a televised broadcast in April 2014, commenting: “Of course, Russian servicemen backed the Crimean self-defense forces.”¹ At that time, pro-Russian and anti-government groups in eastern Ukraine were beginning to protest in the aftermath of the overthrow of Viktor Yanukovich, and in that context, the Russian President’s statement, apart from sounding surprisingly nonchalant, raised fears of what the Russians might do next in Donbass.

On March 16, Crimea’s self-proclaimed local authorities held a referendum on whether Crimea should secede from Ukraine to join Russia. The Ukrainian government banned the referendum, saying it was illegal. After the de-facto authorities announced, on the day after the referendum, that 97 percent of the peninsula’s population had voted to join Russia, President Vladimir Putin signed a decree recognizing Crimea as an independent state. On March 18, Putin and Crimea’s leadership signed agreements making Crimea and the city of Sevastopol part of the Russian Federation. Putin asked Russia’s Parliament to adopt a law accepting the new regions as parts of the Russian Federation – which it did. And as far as Russia was concerned, Crimea was now part of Russia. Putting aside historical and political issues such as reasons and motives that led to Russia’s occupation of Crimea and the controversial issue concerning the level of support of Crimean residents for Russia, as a matter of international law Crimea is considered to be a part of Ukraine. Russia’s actions in Crimea under international law constitute a belligerent occupation. This is a purely factual determination that is addressed in more detail below.

International Law on Occupation and International Human Rights Law

In our 2014 report: “Rights in Retreat: Abuses in Crimea”, Human Rights Watch applied the international law of

1 Putin: Russian military servicemen were behind Crimean self-defense forces’ back, Interfax Information Service, 17 April 2014. Retrieved 29 January 2015, <http://www.interfax.com/newsinf.asp?id=498071>.

occupation to Russian forces in the peninsula.² Under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, territory is considered “occupied” when it comes under the control or authority of foreign armed forces, whether partially or entirely, without the consent of the domestic government.³

Russia cites the local authorities’ request to be part of Russia, later approved by the Russian Parliament, to argue that it is not an occupying power, even though the local authorities had no authority to make such a request. In other words, as far as Russia is concerned – and what will undoubtedly be reflected in history textbooks for Russian students – in March 2014 Crimea requested to be part of Russia, and Russia agreed. Russia is therefore acting as though Crimea was a part of Russia and has extended Russian laws to Crimea.

But under international law Russia is an occupying power as it exercises effective control in Crimea without the consent of the government of Ukraine, and there has been no legally recognized transfer of sovereignty to Russia. The referendum held by the local authorities, without the authorization of the Ukrainian government or a broad endorsement by the international community, and Russia’s unilateral actions following the referendum do not meet the criteria under international law for a transfer of sovereignty that would end the state of belligerent occupation.⁴

In its March resolution on the “Territorial integrity of Ukraine,” the UN General Assembly stated that the March referendum in Crimea had no validity and called on the international community “not to recognize any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol on the basis of the above-mentioned referendum and to refrain from any action or dealing that might be interpreted as recognizing any such altered status.”⁵

Both Ukraine and Russia are parties to several international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, which continue to be applicable during the occupation. International human rights law remains totally applicable to Crimea, including all treaties ratified by Russia, because Russia exercises effective control in Crimea and human rights obligations extend to occupied territory outside the national territory of a state party and does not imply a change of

2 Human Rights Watch, Rights in Retreat: Abuses in Crimea, 17 November 2014. Retrieved 29 January 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2014/11/17/rights-retreat-0>.

3 Human Rights Watch, Q&A, Questions and Answers: Russia, Ukraine and International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, March 22, 2014. Retrieved 29 January 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/21/questions-and-answers-russia-ukraine-and-international-humanitarian-and-human-righ-0>.

4 United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/68/262. “Territorial integrity of Ukraine,” 1 April 2014. Retrieved 30 January 2015, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/262.

See also: Human Rights Watch, Questions and Answers: Russia, Ukraine, and International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, March 22, 2014. Retrieved 30 January 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/21/questions-and-answers-russia-ukraine-and-international-humanitarian-and-human-righ-0>.

5 United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/68/262. “Territorial integrity of Ukraine.”

sovereignty.⁶ Under the law of occupation, Russia has an obligation to restore and ensure public order and safety as far as possible while respecting, unless absolutely prevented from doing so, Crimea's and Ukraine's laws in force prior to March 2014.⁷ Russia is also responsible for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law committed by local authorities or proxy forces and has a duty to prevent and prosecute such violations.⁸

As an occupying power, Russia has violated a number of obligations under international humanitarian law including the responsibility to ensure that everyone is treated humanely and without discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or any other basis. They also include respecting the integrity of the family, people's lives, and private property, as well as religious and customary convictions and practice and adhering to the prohibitions on acts such as arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment and torture.

While in a time of war restrictions on and derogations from many of the internationally guaranteed human rights are permitted (e.g. restrictions on freedom of assembly and the right to privacy), such restrictions are limited to those that are strictly required by the necessity of the situation and that are compatible with obligations under international humanitarian law. Several rights such as the prohibition on torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, and the obligation of non-discrimination cannot be subject to restrictions or exceptions.

Human Rights Consequences for Crimea

Rights abuses have surged in Crimea since Russia began its occupation of the peninsula in February 2014. De facto authorities in Crimea severely curtailed human rights protection by limiting free expression, restricting peaceful assembly, and intimidating and harassing those who have been opposing Russia's actions in Crimea. In particular the authorities have targeted the Crimean Tatar community, a Muslim ethnic minority that is native to the Crimean peninsula and that has openly opposed Russia's occupation.

Abuses by Self-Defence Forces

The situation around the so-called self-defence forces, armed paramilitary groups that emerged in late February to prevent any opposition to the March referendum on Crimea's status, has been one of the most troubling aspects contributing to the atmosphere of lawlessness in Crimea. These groups have been implicated in grave abuses: enforced disappearances, unlawful detention and ill-treatment, sometimes torture, of activists, journalists, and other individuals who are or are perceived to be pro-Ukrainian. Ukrainian human rights groups have reported that these units have also been involved in unlawful searches of persons and vehicles, violent dispersals of public

6 See: *Loizidou v. Turkey*, Application No. 15318/89, 23 March 1995. The Grand Chamber of the Court confirmed (at para. 62) "that, although Article 1 sets limits on the reach of the Convention, the concept of "jurisdiction" under this provision is not restricted to the national territory of the High Contracting Parties. ... Bearing in mind the object and purpose of the Convention, the responsibility of a Contracting Party may also arise when as a consequence of military action – whether lawful or unlawful – it exercises effective control of an area outside its national territory. The obligation to secure, in such an area, the rights and freedoms set out in the Convention derives from the fact of such control whether it be exercised directly, through its armed forces, or through a subordinate local administration."

See also: European Court of Human Rights, *Extra-territorial jurisdiction of States Parties to the European Convention on Human Rights*, November 2014. Retrieved 30 January 2015, http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Extra-territorial_jurisdiction_ENG.pdf.

7 Convention with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague, ii); 29 July 1899, on The Avalon Project: Documents in War, History, and Diplomacy, Yale University School of Law, 2008. Retrieved 30 January 2015, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/hague02.asp.

8 Ibid.

gatherings, and attacks on journalists.⁹

Yet the authorities have neither restrained these units from committing abuses nor investigated the abuses themselves. Rather, they have taken steps to regularize the units under the law and give them wider powers. In recent months these units have carried out countless raids on enterprises across the peninsula, with armed men wearing balaclavas arbitrarily confiscating private property.¹⁰

Last autumn, a draft law which is pending in the local parliament at the initiative of the de facto Prime Minister of Crimea, Sergei Aksenov, proposed to grant an amnesty to all members of the self-defence units in Crimea for the period between February and April 2014.¹¹ While it was not adopted, such draft legislation clearly illustrated the extent to which the de facto authorities were counting on these forces and the lengths to which they were prepared to go to ensure that they continue to operate in the same manner.

The impunity of the self-defence units contributes to the atmosphere of fear and hostility in Crimea. People expressing a 'pro-Ukraine' position, including Crimean Tatars, are constantly at risk of being targeted simply for speaking out.

In at least 15 cases, documented by domestic and international monitoring groups, including Human Rights Watch, Crimean Tatars or pro-Ukraine activists disappeared, were forcibly abducted, or went missing in Crimea since March 2014.¹² Two of those who disappeared or went missing were subsequently found dead. The true number of enforced disappearances is likely to be higher.

For example, in a highly publicized case, Reshat Ametov, a Crimean Tatar from the Simferopol region, disappeared and was subsequently found dead in March.¹³ Ametov was last seen during a protest in the centre of Simferopol on 3 March, where three unidentified men in military-style clothing, presumably members of the Crimea self-defence forces, led him away. His relatives' efforts to detect his whereabouts, including through a complaint to the police, were unsuccessful. On 16 March, the local police informed them that a body bearing marks of a violent death had been found outside the town of Belogorsk. On 17 March, the family identified the body as that of Ametov. There has been no effective investigation into the case, and a lawyer for the Ametov family has been struggling to get access to the case materials.

Human Rights Watch also reported on the case of two Crimean Tatar cousins, Islyam Dzhapparov and Dzhevdet Islyamov, who disappeared on 27 September after a witness saw two men in black uniforms bundle them into a

9 Crimean Human Rights Field Mission, Brief Review of the Situation in Crimea, December 2014. Retrieved 30 January 2015, http://crimeahr.org/sites/default/files/crimea_field_mission_report_december_2014_eng.pdf.

10 N. MacFarquhar, 'Seizing Assets in Crimea, From Shipyard to Film Studio', in The New York Times, 10 January 2015. Retrieved 30 January 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/world/seizing-assets-in-crimea-from-shipyard-to-film-studio.html>.

11 The Republic of Crimea, O nedopushchenii presledovaniya lits za deystviya, sovershennyye v tselyakh okhrany obshchestvennogo poryadka i zashchity interesov Respubliki Krym [On Preventing the Persecution of Persons for Actions Directed at Upholding Public Order and Protecting the Interests of the Republic of Crimea] November 2014. Retrieved 30 January 2015, <http://www.rada.crimea.ua/textdoc/ru/6/project/1664.pdf>.

12 Human Rights Watch, Crimea: Enforced Disappearances, 7 October 2014. Retrieved 28 December 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/07/crimea-enforced-disappearances>.

See also: Crimean Human Rights Watch Field Mission. Brief Review of the Situation in Crimea.

13 Human Rights Watch, Crimea: Disappeared Man Found Killed, 18 March 2014. Retrieved 30 January 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/18/crimea-disappeared-man-found-killed>.

minivan. The criminal investigation into their disappearances has not led to any results.

During the last week of May, Leonid Korzh, Timur Shaimardanov, and Seiran Zinedinov, activists of a pro-Ukraine group, disappeared one by one within several days. Two of them, according to their families, had hostile encounters with the 'self-defence' units in March. Their relatives and lawyers said that their whereabouts remained unknown, and there has been no progress in investigations into the circumstances of their disappearances.

Edem Asanov, a Crimean Tatar who was not politically active but had occasionally discussed in the social network VKontakte issues related to the situation of Crimean Tatars, disappeared on 29 September in Evpatoria, a resort town approximately 60 km from Simferopol, on his way to work. Six days later, police found Asanov's body hanging in an abandoned building in Evpatoria. The circumstances surrounding his death remain unclear.

Eskender Apselyamov, 23, disappeared on 3 October. Relatives told Human Rights Watch that Apselyamov left his apartment to go to work but never arrived. His relatives' attempts to locate him were unsuccessful.

This grim list goes on and while Human Rights Watch is not aware of any reported cases of enforced disappearances since November, the families of those missing or killed since March 2014 are still waiting for a meaningful investigation.

Use of Anti-Extremist Legislation to Persecute Critics; the Dismantling of Free Media

Following the signing of the Treaty on the Adoption of the Republic of Crimea into Russia between local Crimean authorities and Russia and the Russian Duma passing the law "On the Acceptance of the Republic of Crimea into the Russian Federation and the Creation of New Federal Subjects" on 20 March 2014, Russian and Crimean authorities started the process of extending Russian legislation and policies to Crimea. These include Russia's vaguely-worded and overly broad laws on 'extremism'.

In particular, under the pretext of combating extremism, the authorities in Crimea issued several 'anti-extremist warnings' to Mejlis, the Crimean Tatar self-governing body, which spoke out against the March referendum and abuses by the self-defence forces as well as calling for a boycott of the September parliamentary elections in Crimea. They also banned two Crimean Tatar leaders from entering Crimea, prevented Mejlis from conducting peaceful public events, which it has been organizing for years, and continue to harass and detain Mejlis members. As a final blow, in September the authorities searched the offices of the Crimean Foundation, a charitable organization administered by Mejlis, shut it down, and froze its assets. In December, the Foundation's attempt to re-register under Russian law was denied under the pretext of having minor inconsistencies in registration documents.¹⁴ For good measure, the authorities also searched and sealed the office of the Mejlis' newspaper *Avdet* and confiscated its scant equipment.

Between August and October, the authorities conducted invasive and in some cases unwarranted searches at mosques and Islamic schools and searched dozens of private homes of Crimean Tatars, including members of Mejlis. These searches, which the authorities say were conducted to look for "drugs, weapons, and prohibited literature," were carried out by local police officers and Russia's security services but also involved dozens of unidentified armed, masked men.

14 Crimean Human Rights Field Mission. Brief Review of the Situation in Crimea.

As part of a broader pattern of gradually pushing Ukrainian media from Crimea's airwaves and stifling all pro-Ukraine media, authorities issued warnings to pro-Ukraine and Crimean Tatar media outlets against publishing "extremist materials" and threatened that the outlets would not be allowed to re-register under Russian legislation unless they changed what the authorities called their 'anti-Russian' editorial policies and stopped publishing "extremist content." According to the authorities, such content included the use of the terms "annexation," "occupation," and "temporary occupation" of Crimea.

Practically all Crimean Tatar media outlets, including the ATR and *Lale* television channels, the *Meydan* and *Lider* radio stations, the *Avdet* newspaper and others, have been forced to cease operating because they were not able to re-register under the Russian media legislation.

Authorities also raided the offices of several media outlets, sometimes confiscating or damaging their equipment. Numerous journalists and bloggers critical of the authorities have been detained, harassed, or attacked.

Russian anti-extremist legislation, vigorously reinforced in Crimea, is vague and overly broad. The Federal List of Extremist Materials, introduced by the Federal Law "On Combating Extremist Activities" in July 2002, has been updated regularly and currently includes about 2,500 publications, audio and video materials, and images. Approximately 1/3 of the banned items on the list are Islamic literature and around 25 per cent of those items are widely used by the Islamic community, include no extremist content, and were banned inappropriately, according to experts.¹⁵ Additionally, as published, the list is confusing, at times contradictory, and very difficult to comprehend, especially for an ordinary person. In Crimea the enforcement of this law clearly has a discriminatory impact on Crimean Tatars who are Muslims.

The authorities have used the pretext of 'combating extremism' during November raids in public places such as markets and cafes, when armed men arrested and detained dozens of people of 'non-Slavic appearance', mostly Crimean Tatars and brought them for questioning to the police department tasked with countering extremism. All were released after their fingerprints and in many cases, DNA, were taken.¹⁶ Such measures appear to be directed at intimidating members of the Crimean Tatar community.

Human Rights and Citizenship

In December, the head of the Crimea office of Russia's migration services announced that the process of bestowing Russian citizenship in Crimea, commenced by Russian authorities in March, had been completed. It resulted, as the official said, in over 1.56 million people—75 per cent of Crimea's population—obtaining Russian passports.¹⁷ It seems appropriate to reflect on the so-called "passportization" process, a highly traumatic ordeal for some Crimean residents, which turned their lives upside down and made them foreigners in their own home.

In March, the Russian government moved swiftly to bestow Russian citizenship and passports on residents of Crimea. In line with its newly adopted law "On the Acceptance of the Republic of Crimea into the Russian Federation and the Creation of New Federal Subjects – the Republic of Crimea and the City of Federal Significance Sevastopol", Russia

15 Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Alexander Verkhovsky, Director of the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, 7 November 2014.

16 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 14 December 2015, p. 16. Retrieved 30 January 2015, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/OHCHR_eighth_report_on_Ukraine.pdf.

17 ria Novosti, FMS: the process of issuing Russian passports to residents of Crimea completed, 19 December 2014. Retrieved 10 January 2015, http://ria.ru/crimea_today/20141219/10391474_88.html.

required any permanent resident of Crimea who held Ukrainian citizenship to undergo a process of declaring an intent to maintain Ukrainian citizenship. The deadline to complete that process was 18 April 2014, after which all Ukrainian passport holders who resided in Crimea were deemed to be Russian citizens.¹⁸

Russia has not simply offered Russian citizenship to the residents of Crimea, but has rather compelled residents to choose between Ukrainian and Russian citizenship while imposing adverse consequences, directly and indirectly, on those who have chosen to retain their Ukrainian citizenship.

Some of the discriminatory effects of such imposition on those residents of Crimea who chose not to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship were evident immediately – for example, only Russian passport holders are allowed to occupy governmental and municipal jobs. The full scope of these adverse consequences can be assessed only as more time passes, but it is absolutely clear that it is extremely difficult to live in Crimea without a Russian passport. Most of the things that citizens take for granted, from running their own business to obtaining medical insurance, are now contingent on having a Russian passport. To put it simply, Crimean residents who chose to refuse Russian citizenship, became foreigners in their own home and are not guaranteed the same rights as Russian citizens. Their choice now appears to be: acquire Russian citizenship or leave.

The process of bestowing Russian citizenship in Crimea was coercive and riddled with serious flaws, and this prevented some Ukrainian citizens who sought to retain Ukrainian citizenship from exercising any real choice. Such flaws included, for instance, the extraordinary short, one-month period of grace, compounded by a lack of publicly available information on the procedure and other obstacles. According to local residents and human rights monitoring groups in Crimea, Russia's migration services operated only four offices in Crimea where Crimean residents could reaffirm their Ukrainian citizenship. These offices were not easily accessible to Crimean residents living in the countryside: three were in or around the regional capital of Simferopol and one was in Sevastopol.¹⁹

Local media reported on long lines exceeding the daily capacity of each of the four offices, which resulted in some people not being able to get to the head of the queue before the deadline expired.²⁰ Several more offices were open in Crimea in April, but the timeframe for retaining Ukrainian citizenship, which expired on 18 April, was not extended.²¹ Crimean residents who wanted to receive Russian passports could do so by mail, apply at 160 designated offices around Crimea, or apply at any Russian consulate or embassy in the world. Crimean residents who were Ukrainian citizens but were outside Crimea during that one-month period had no clear recourse for declaring Ukrainian citizenship within the deadline due to conflicting information provided by the authorities on whether

18 Russian Federation, Federal Law no. 6-fkz, in Rossiiskaya Gazeta, 21 March 2014. Retrieved 6 November 2015, <http://www.rg.ru/2014/03/22/krym-dok.html>.

See also: Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation, Informatsiya dlya inostrannykh grazhdan i lits bez grazhdanstva, prozhivayushchikh (prebyvayushchikh) na territorii Respubliki Krym i g. Sevastopolya [Information for foreign citizens and stateless persons residing on the territory of the Crimean peninsula and the city of Sevastopol], 6 August 2014. Retrieved 30 January 2015, http://www.fms.gov.ru/treatment/voprosy/info_dlya_instrn_grzhdn_v_krymu/.

19 Crimea Field Mission, Kratkiy obzor situatsii s pravami cheloveka v Krymu [Brief overview of the human rights situation in Crimea], July-August 2014. Retrieved 1 November 2014, http://crimeahr.org/sites/default/files/otchet_krymskoy_polevoy_missii_-_iyul-avgust_2014.pdf.

20 T. Generalova, 'Krymchane otkazyvayutsya ot rossiyskogo grazhdanstva' [Crimeans refuse Russian citizenship], in Krym Realii, 4 April 2014. Retrieved 11 November 2014, <http://ru.krymr.com/content/article/25321899.html>.

21 Crimea Field Mission, Kratkiy obzor situatsii s pravami cheloveka v Krymu.

Russian embassies and consulates around the world accepted such applications.²² Rights groups, journalists, and bloggers reported cases where people were unable to apply to retain their Ukrainian citizenship abroad because Russian consulates refused to accept such applications citing a lack of clear instructions and the absence of forms to process such requests.²³ Certain categories of residents of Crimea were left with no option but to accept Russian citizenship. This was particularly the case for prisoners, people with disabilities, or others who could not meet the in-person requirements to declare their Ukrainian citizenship by the 18 April 2014 deadline.²⁴

Some were also reportedly subjected to harassment and intimidation, including threats of dismissal at their workplace if they did not become Russian nationals.²⁵

While Russia is entitled to offer citizenship to whoever qualifies under its national laws, irrespective of where they reside, a policy that seeks to coerce, directly or indirectly, a population in occupied territory to assume Russian citizenship is not permitted under international law.

In addition to introducing policies that would discriminate against citizens of the occupied territory, in this case Ukrainians, Russian migration laws and policies may also lead to a situation where Ukrainian nationals in Crimea are forced out of Crimea.

In July, the Russian government introduced a quota system for temporary residence permits for non-Russian citizens in Crimea.²⁶ In November, the quota for the year of 2015 was set at 1900 permits, a very low number which will likely be insufficient to accommodate all foreigners and Crimean residents who have chosen to maintain Ukrainian citizenship and reject Russian citizenship. This very problematic development may lead to the expulsion of foreigners and Ukrainian citizens who do not obtain permits.

Conclusion

After Crimea came under Russian control many people in Crimea have paid a high price in terms of fundamental rights. The atmosphere of lawlessness, pervasive on the peninsula since February 2014, has especially impacted Crimean Tatars and those with perceived 'pro-Ukraine' views. From the moment the occupation began, de facto authorities started silencing critics and controlling information, and as time wore on the campaign to tighten

22 On 11 April, Russia's Federal Migration Service in Crimea officially confirmed on its Facebook page that Crimean residents with Ukrainian citizenship could declare their wish to retain Ukrainian citizenship at Russia's consulates and embassies worldwide. However, the same statement also acknowledged problems with applications possibly not arriving to the FMS due to postal service glitches and encouraged people to apply in person in Crimea.

23 'Krymchanka namerenno vernulas' iz Germanii chtoby sokhranit' ukrainskoye grazhdanstvo' [Crimean citizen had to return from Germany to retain Ukrainian citizenship], in Fakti, 8 April 2014. Retrieved 30 January 2015, <http://fakty.ictv.ua/ru/index/read-news/id/1511057>.

See also: M. Krutov, 'Vkhod – odin rubl', vykhod – dva. Sokhranit' ukrainskoye grazhdanstvo v Krymu namnogo slozhneye, chem poluchit' rossiyskoye' [Entry – one rouble, exit – two. To retain Ukrainian citizenship in Crimea is much more difficult than to obtain Russian citizenship], in Radio Liberty, 10 October 2014. Retrieved 6 November 2014, <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/25319928.html>.

24 Kharkiv Human Rights Group, Russian or Else: On How Russia is foisting its citizenship in Crimea, 22 September 2014. Retrieved 5 November 2014, <http://khpg.org.ua/en/index.php?id=1411211863>.

25 Crimea Field Mission, Kratkiy obzor situatsii s pravami cheloveka v Krymu.

26 Russian Federation, Ob ustanovlenii kvoty na vydachu inostrannym grazhdanam i litsam bez grazhdanstva razresheniy na vremennoye prozhivaniye v Rossiyskoy Federatsii (s izmeneniyami na 19 iyulya 2014 goda) [On the establishment of quotas for issuing temporary residence permits to foreign citizens and stateless persons in the Russian Federation (as amended July 19, 2014)], 19 July 2014. Retrieved 12 November 2014, <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/499062521>.


the screws only intensified. Local authorities allowed armed paramilitary groups to abduct and attack pro-Ukraine journalists and activists with impunity and confiscate private property. Practically all Crimean Tatar media outlets have been forced to cease operating due to denials by the authorities to register them under Russian law. Most independent or critical journalists and activists have left from mainland Ukraine and those who remain are constantly at risk of being attacked or worse. The authorities have compelled Crimea residents who were Ukrainian citizens either to become Russian citizens or, if they reject Russian citizenship, to be deemed foreigners in Crimea, removing any guarantee against any future potential expulsion. Crimea has been transformed into a grey area, a legal vacuum, where the authorities feel free to enforce laws selectively and arbitrarily to suit their needs.

About the Author

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This article was first published with Brill | Nijhoff publishers, and was featured on the Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHRM) website.

Security and Human Rights (formerly Helsinki Monitor) is a journal devoted to issues inspired by the work and principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It looks at the challenge of building security through cooperation across the northern hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as well as how this experience can be applied to other parts of the world. It aims to stimulate thinking on the question of protecting and promoting human rights in a world faced with serious threats to security.

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