

MUNTI 2020

GA4: Special Political and Decolonization (SPECPOL)

# Research Report

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Topic 1: The question of establishing the sovereignty of Crimea



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## Introduction

Crimea is a peninsula in the black sea bordering Ukraine to the north and the Russian Federation to the east. The political status of the Crimean Peninsula is disputed seeing as it is claimed by Ukraine and recognized by most countries as a part of Ukraine. This hasn't stopped the peninsula from being administered by the Russian Federation following the 2014 annexation of Russia. A dispute concerning rightful sovereignty over Crimea has (re)emerged as one of the most heated points of contention between Ukraine and Russia following the Euromaidan protests and Russia's subsequent annexation of the region in March 2014. Both Ukraine and Russia have argued for Crimea in a manner of 'belonging' to one or the other with little regard given to the strength of regional identities among Crimean's of all ethnic backgrounds. Based on results from a 2011 survey, at least prior to 2014, Crimean's' senses of territorial identity and belonging were primarily tied to Crimea itself, while their political affinities for either Ukraine or Russia were generally far less salient.

## Key Terms

**Annexation:** the act or an instance of annexing, or adding to something larger, especially the incorporation of new territory into the domain of a city, country, or state.

**Sovereignty:** supreme and independent power or authority in government as possessed or claimed by a state or community. a sovereign or independent state, community, or political unit.

**Administered:** to manage (affairs, a government, etc.); have executive charge of.

**Referendum:** a general vote by the electorate on a single political question which has been referred to them for a direct decision.

**Euromaidan:** A wave of demonstrations in Ukraine following the president's choice of closer ties to Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union over closer association with the European Union (EU).

## Context

The revolution in 1917 led to the collapse of the Russian Empire, which resulted in the remaining Crimean Tatars to declare Crimea to be an independent democratic republic of its own.

However, Crimea has since been a part of an ongoing geopolitical conflict, in which the sovereignty of the state has come into question. On 16th March 2014, a referendum was held where an overwhelming 97% of the population voted to join the Russian referendum. On 18th March, Vladimir Putin signed a treaty in result of the overwhelming majority votes to

join the Russian Federation. The treaty incorporated Crimea as a part of the the state, which was approved days later by both houses of Russia.

Despite the treaty, only a handful of international member states recognized the referendum and treaty, with the majority dismissing the legitimacy of the Russian annexation.

The United Nations repeatedly affirmed that Crimea remained an integral part of Ukraine.

On the 27th March 2014, the United Nations gathered in the General Assembly to discuss the geopolitical status of Crimea. The resolution titled "Territorial integrity of Ukraine" was adopted, calling on states, international organizations and specialized agencies to withhold and abstain any recognition or any change in the status of Crimea or the Black Sea port city of Sevastopol, and to refrain from actions or dealings that might be interpreted as such.

On that day the UN General Assembly voted on a non-binding resolution which claimed that the referendum (which the Russian Federation tried to pass) was invalid and at the same time reaffirming Ukraine's territorial integrity, by a vote of 100 to 11, with 58 abstentions and 24 absent. The member states which voted for this resolution included: Australia, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, United Kingdom, United States and other 89 countries, however the delegation such as Armenia, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, North Korea, Nicaragua, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Zimbabwe, as well as Russia, voted against. The abstaining countries included China, India, and Brazil. Israel was among the countries listed as absent.

Some states even reported that some Western states resorted to "political blackmail and economic threats" to coerce diplomats and other state members to vote for the resolution. The news agency Reuters reported unnamed UN diplomats saying that the Russian delegation threatened punitive action against certain Eastern European and Central Asian countries if they supported the resolution.

Futuremore, some delegations took issue with the resolution's motivations, voicing their regret that the assembly had failed to consider the historical context of the geopolitical dispute and the nature of the regime change that had occurred in Ukraine.

## Major Actors

### **Russia:**

Russia is one of the biggest actors in contemporary global politics along with being a military superpower. This gives Russia the ability to defy the international community and annex a peninsula from another sovereign nation. Despite mounting pressure from the rest of the international community and especially the UN, the Kremlin has openly celebrated and stubbornly defended its territorial annexation of Crimea despite international condemnation,

economic sanctions, and mounting pariahdom. Russia has also galvanized the Russian public behind a reinvigorated sense of patriotic nationalism, with the catchphrase "Crimea is Ours" ("Krym Nash") serving as a popular and defiant refrain against challenges to the perception of Russia's legitimate sovereignty over the region. It was hard for Russia to accept an independent Ukrainian state. Since 1991, the history of Crimea has been that of a fight by the Russian population of the peninsula for self-determination. It was also a fight of the Crimean Tatars to return to the land they see as their homeland, which they were forced to leave in 1944. When talking about autonomy of the peninsula of Crimea and about the possibilities of guaranteeing internal self-determination, one has to look at the special situation of the Crimean Tatars and their position within this autonomy. The autonomy of Crimea however doesn't translate to the autonomy of the Crimean Tatars but instead of the Russian Crimean's that currently inhabit the peninsula. On March 17, 2014, the day after the referendum, the president of the Russian Federation signed an executive order On Recognizing Republic of Crimea. He indicated to the Government of the Russian Federation, the State Duma, and the Federation Council on March 18, 2014, that local Crimean institutions had proposed joining the Russian Federation. The same day, Russia and the local institutions signed an agreement on the admission of the Republic of Crimea into the Russian Federation.

#### **Ukraine:**

Since Ukraine became a sovereign State in 1991 it has had to fight serious economic, social and legal problems. The 'borderland' Ukraine had to find its way out of the shadow of 'big brother' Russia and develop its own national identity. The peninsula of Crimea stands as a symbol for the difficult situation Ukraine faces between the 'East' and the 'West', for the economic troubles, for the difficulties of transformation and for a variety of homemade problems, such as corruption and the acceptance of its own statehood. In 1954, on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the contract of Perejaslav, the peninsula was taken out of the territory of the RSFSR and became part of Ukraine. Ukraine finds itself today in a kind of discrepancy concerning its relations with the Russian Federation. On the one hand it is seen as a 'brother state', sharing the same problems and being, therefore, a possible partner in finding solutions. On the other hand, Russia is regarded as former oppressor still trying to deter Ukraine from becoming a self-confident, European state. Already in 1992, a struggle about the division of powers between the Crimean and Ukrainian authorities. The situation became more serious when Russia immediately interfered in the relations between Simferopol and Kiev. On March 7, 2014, the acting president of Ukraine suspended the Crimean decree that had called the referendum. In response to the referendum, on March 14, 2014, the Constitutional Court indicated that only under an all-Ukrainian referendum could a proposed change to Ukraine's territory be lawfully addressed and that only the parliament of Ukraine has the authority to call such a referendum. In consequence, the Constitutional Court mandated that the Crimean authorities repeal the referendum decree.

#### **US:**

International reaction to the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 have always been in favor of Ukraine and condemning of Russia and the US was no different. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, then President Barack Obama released a statement warning Russia not to intervene

in Crimea. The statement said that Obama was "deeply concerned by reports of military movements taken by the Russian Federation inside of Ukraine". It added that "any violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity would be deeply destabilizing, which is not in the interest of Ukraine, Russia, or Europe". This set an overall tone of support towards Ukraine from the Obama administration and a strong disapproval of Russia's actions.

## Previous/Relevant UN Resolutions

- General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling upon States Not to Recognize Changes in Status of Crimea Region
  - GA/11493
- General Assembly Adopts Resolution Urging Russian Federation to Withdraw Its Armed Forces from Crimea, Expressing Grave Concern about Growing Military Presence
  - GA/12223

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