

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

The situation in the Crimean Peninsula



Forum: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

Issue: The situation in the Crimean Peninsula

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Introduction:

The Crimean Peninsula has been a hotspot for conflict for many years now; most recently it has been annexed by the Russian Federation. The reason behind the annexation stems back to November 2013 when Viktor Yanukovich (former pro-Russia president of Ukraine) rejected a trade deal between Ukraine and the EU, alternatively choosing for closer relations with the Russian Federation. **The local population rebelled against this decision**, leading to demonstrations that were so severe they have been named; the Euromaidan protests **leading to an estimated 100 deaths**. The unrest led to the ousting of Yanukovich, which many pro-Russians living in Crimea disagreed with, again leading to protests. Help from the Russian authorities was provided to ensure peace in the area after the request for help by Sergey Aksyonov (pro-Russian leader of Crimea). Russian armed forces were then placed in Ukraine, leading to military aggression. A referendum was held on March 16th, 2014, to determine if Crimea (a predominantly Russian area) would join the Russian Federation or restore the status of being part of Ukraine. The results were overwhelmingly supportive of joining Russia. However, this election was deemed illegal by the UN. The importance of this issue is still relevant, 6 years later. To this day, **Crimean-Tatars are still being oppressed** by the Russian authorities, as well as small businesses suffering due to the lack of subsidies and support from the Russian government. The conflict has had social impacts, but also severe economic losses. Furthermore, the constant militarisation does not permit stable and bearable living conditions to the locals, hence why today's NATO is **urged to strengthen and produce new resolutions** to solve the issue and allow adequate living conditions in Crimea.

Definition of Key Terms:

Annexation:

Annexation can be defined as the action of a sovereignty getting hold of another country's territory forcefully, to enlarge their own. Generally, annexations are internationally established as illegal by internal law.

Asset Freeze:

In the context of this research report an Asset Freeze can be defined as a legal measure to apply financial pressure on influential people. The action blocks access to international assets and individual possessions. The purpose of this measure is to encourage individuals to cooperate and work towards a solution.

Many Russian and American diplomats have had this legal action imposed on them due to their involvement in the Crimean Situation.

Crimean-Tatars:

A Turkish ethnic group that lives in the geographical location of the Crimean Peninsula and are also known as the indigenous people of the area. The ethnic group has sustained issues surrounding the lack of their recognition and the consideration of their land.

Inflation:

Inflation can be defined as the decline in the purchasing value and power of a currency through its value diminishing and the overall costs of living increasing. A controlled low level of inflation is significant for a country's development as it indicates overall improvement of life and encourages investment as long-term savings devalue over time. High levels are unfavourable though.

Primary and Secondary capital market:

It can be defined as a part of the capital market where new stocks and bonds are sold for the first time. When a company first goes public, it sells its stocks on the primary capital market. Investment firms or banks set the beginning price of these securities. Any stock that has experienced one or more transactions is sold on the secondary market.

Travel ban:

A law imposed on certain individuals or groups that limits and prevents them from entering certain territories. In the context of this research report the travel bans are employed on individuals that have acted unlawfully and have breached international law.

General Overview:

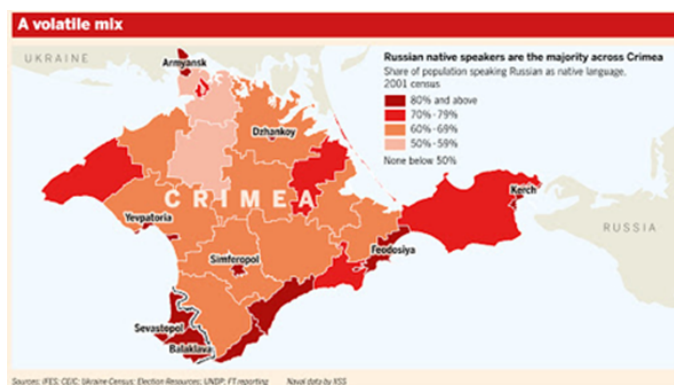
The Crimean Peninsula is located in Southern Ukraine and North of the Black Sea. It has an area of around 27 000 km²; with a population of around 2,284,000. This relatively small population is, however, ethnically very diverse which is the root of many of their issues.

Crimea has had a number of wars and disputes, dating back to when the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) was established. During the time it was part of the USSR, it was a popular holiday destination for Russians as it enjoys a temperate climate. Many Russians settled in the area and contributed to the Crimean infrastructure, leading to an almost permanent settlement of the Russians, even after the collapse of the USSR. This can be seen by the ethnic makeup statistics in Crimea over the past 150 years; before the USSR's establishment in 1897, the Russian ethnic group was 33.11% of the Crimean population, which rose to 71.4% in 1959. The total population also rose drastically, more than doubling in 62 years, indicating migration of Russians to the Crimean Peninsula. After the collapse of the USSR, Russians made up 60.4% of the population. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Crimean Peninsula has very different views and is disconnected to the rest of Ukraine.

The predominance of Russians in the area has led to ethnic conflict, plus a question of whom the Crimean Peninsula belongs to. Because of its geographic position, and many years

under the governance of Ukraine, it seems like it rightfully belongs to Ukraine. However, due to the prevalence of Russians in the area it might benefit the local population to be governed by the Russian administration.

Unfortunately, the reason for the annexation of Crimea has been criticised for not benefiting the local population. The annexation created opportunity for Russia to gain control of the Black Sea (which holds underground gas reserves), obtain coastline real estate, gain control over the Titanium



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mines in Crimea, and subjugate the military bases on the Crimean Peninsula . Above all it, allowed Russia to demonstrate their strength financially and militarily.

Economic impact:

The Russian authorities had promised a prosperous future for Crimea, especially in terms of economic growth, however, the economic status of the peninsula has not improved. Crimea relies on the support from the Ukrainian government even though Russia is in charge, in 2013, 50% of its annual budget came from Kyiv; now 70% of its annual budget derives from Ukrainian subsidies. Clearly, the area can not stay afloat on its own and is requiring additional support. The cause of their negative economic situation consists of many factors working together to produce unstable circumstances. Some of these factors include, but are not limited to:

- Corporations leaving the Crimean Peninsula for more stable and promising areas; leading to higher unemployment rates. The unemployment rate of 2013 was 5.4% whilst 2 years into the annexation the unemployment rate was at 6.9%. This reduces the total economic output and reduces collected taxes which leads to the required additional subsidies.
- The past tourist destination now doesn't seem as attractive as it used to be due to the uncertainty and lack of safety in the area. Crimea used to heavily rely on tourism and since the annexation their tourist arrivals have halved, reducing the Crimean income.
- Extreme inflation has also been a side-effect on the annexation as the product prices are several times higher than the rest of Ukraine. The wages have also increased in Crimea, but this can be explained due to the high inflation rate; from 2014 to 2016 the inflation rate surpassed 75%. Taking this into account, the purchasing power for most Crimeans has dropped, exponentially reducing the quality of life.
- The foreign trade rates have declined considerably in Crimea, the foreign export has declined by 28 times in 2014 and import by 35 times in 2014. The root of this may be linked to the unwillingness of foreign countries to trade with such an unstable area or the total economic output declining due to instability and migration out of the area (which can be seen by the population decreasing by 200 000 people after the annexation)

Crimean-Tatar Issue:

Crimean-Tatars have been oppressed for many years now, however, unfortunately since the arrival of the Russian authorities their basic rights have been disregarded and challenged even more. The UNPO accuses the Russian administration of breaching the basic human rights of the unrepresented ethnic group through neglecting their voice and putting measures in place to intimidate the ethnic group, forcing emigration.

There has been a history of suppressing the rights of the ethnic group by the Russian majority in the area, which has worsened since the governance of the Russians, due to their acceptance of the oppression. Since the annexation, many measures have been put in place to silence and intimidate the local Tatars as they are described as being a threat to "regional security" by the administrative body.

All these factors combined led to what the Russians wanted, which is the weakened voice of Tatars on the peninsula through the emigration of the ethnic minority. Before the annexation the peninsula had a population of around 2,400,000 which has been reduced to 2,200,000 through emigration; many of which were Crimean-Tatars moving to areas such as Turkey, Ukraine or Poland.

Control through Militarisation:

The peninsula has been militarised by Russian armed forces, to allegedly maintain peace. Some of the weaponry placed in the geographical area includes a reconnaissance brigade, an artillery brigade, a nuclear, chemical and biological defence regiment, a helicopter regiment and two air-defence missile regiments. The use of armed forces has led to an estimated 10,000 deaths in Ukraine. Although Tatars are targeted, other ethnic minorities such as Ukrainians and the Orthodox Church have been targeted by Russian armed forces. The constant presence of an army and living under occupation can lead to persistent fear, stress and anxiety for the local community. It also eliminates the possibility of a prosperous future for the area, as it destabilised the local economy

Many UN members have condemned the militarisation as it has led to the infringement of human rights.

Human Rights Violations:

Russia has been infringing human rights in Crimea. Since the annexation, they have imposed their own laws and legislation. Some of the actions taken by the Russian Government that breaches international laws includes:

- The restriction of peaceful assembly, as 256 citizens have been convicted since the annexation of Crimea due to expressing their discontent towards the annexation and political prisoners held by Russia. The total sum of fines issued due to peaceful assemblies total more than 2.7 million RUR, some fines reaching 150,000 RUR, which is more than 16x the average pension, indicating the intolerance of the Russian administration.
- The restriction of opposing political individuals. Since the annexation, 60 have been convicted for expressing different political beliefs, and the numbers of political prisoners are also growing. The prisoners often must endure torturous and unlawful conditions.
- Torture, which has been used by the authorities to intimidate, deter, force confessions and punish individuals. Torture has been prohibited by the Geneva Convention, making Russia guilty of breaking international law. Many attempts have been made to start an investigation concerning the torture, however, the Russian Government has ignored every attempt.
- Enforced disappearances, which have been a common method to eliminate individual threats. A spike in these was seen in March 2014, when resistance against the Russians occurred. Enforced disappearances have been especially used against Ukrainian and Tatar activists and journalists, as they have the ability to speak out against the Russian government.
- The freedom of movement, which has also been restricted, to travel out or in of the country can be (and has been) denied as all movement is decided by the authorities.
- The right to nationality, after the annexation all citizens automatically become Russian citizens unless individuals declared their inclination to maintain their original nationality within a month of the annexation.

- The right to property, since the annexation, 4000 businesses, land and organisations have been nationalised by the Russian authorities. This has led to a rise in lawsuits surrounding seizure of land by the government, the majority of which result in favour of the occupiers.
- The limitation of religion, the Muslim and Protestant minorities in the area have suffered human right violations as a result of the Russian legislation. The laws have enabled raids and vandalisations of mosques and churches. An example of this was on May 6th, 2016 when armed men entered a mosque and detained around 100 Crimean Tatars to allegedly “check” them.
- The restriction of opinion and expression, right after the annexation the law against separatism was introduced which limits the ability to express discontent towards the occupation. Since the occupation 256 people have been charged for participating in peaceful assemblies which collectively totalled more than 2.7 million Russian Rubles, many people have also been abducted and murdered for peaceful assemblies. Media outlets have been shut down, including all Crimean Tatar media outlets. Countless journalists and media reporters have left the Crimean Peninsula to avoid harassment.
- The discrimination in education, from 2014 to 2017 the number of pupils being taught in Ukrainian reduced 36 times. In 2016 only 0.2% of pupils were taught in Ukrainian excluding Sevastopol, which leads to cultural erosion and loss of identity. It also distances Crimea from Ukraine for the future generations which is the aim for the Russian Government.

Major parties involved:

Ukraine:

Ukraine has taken most legal action against Russia. Their stance on the matter is clear, Russia has illegally occupied a part of Ukrainian territory, but they still regard the land as fundamentally Ukrainian. The Ukrainian government still sends subsidies and funds to the peninsula, as they view the area as Ukrainian.

Evidently Ukraine has taken measures to manage the situation and impose stress on the Russian administration. In 2016 The Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons was established to work on and manage the thousands of people that emigrated out of the area and to negotiate a resolution to this crisis. Travel-bans have been imposed on 388 Russian officials and sanctions were placed on 105 Russian companies.

Russia:

The Russian administration justifies the seizure of the peninsula referring to the 2014 referendum. Their view on the matter is that their territorial takeover is, and will, benefit the local community and will produce prosperity for the peninsula. In their view, the annexation was legal. There have been no indications that Russia is willing to cease their occupation of the area.

Counter-sanctions have been imposed since the start of the crisis to deter nations from imposing further restrictions. Their initial sanctions were identical to those that were set by the USA; frozen assets and travel bans on certain individuals. In this case, 13 essential American politicians were affected by these measures. The following measure that was set involved a one-year ban on imports from the agricultural sector, from countries that introduced economic sanctions on Russia. These countries include the USA, EU, Canada and Australia. Following the suspension on trade, 89 European politicians were blacklisted, therefore banned from travelling to the Russian territory.

Russia has suffered from the trade restrictions and economic limitations that have been put in place. In 2015, Russia experienced a negative GDP growth of around -2.3%, from a GDP of around 2 trillion in 2014 to 1.35 trillion in 2015. The reduced trade of agricultural products also led to pressure being placed on domestic farmers to produce sufficient food, resulting in the growth of the agricultural sector, becoming the second largest sector after the oil and gas industry, surpassing the Russian arms industry.

Turkey:

The importance of this issue to the Republic of Turkey is substantial due to the large Turkish ethnic group present in the peninsula, the Tatars. They have been opposing the annexation since the start, which was reinforced by President Erdogan in a televised conference in April of 2020 with the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky. Erdogan stated that, "We stand for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We reiterated our principles decision not to recognise Crimea's Annexation."

However, actions taken to prove these statements are limited. Turkey has not been very active during this conflict, mainly due to their close economic relations with Russia. Even though they do not support the seizure of the peninsula, taking action would presumably lead to sanctions being placed. The last time sanctions were placed by Russia on Turkey in 2015 after the downing of an Su-24 aircraft led to a decrease in trade from \$23.9 billion to \$16.8 billion in 2016, proving the importance of close ties with Russia.

Small actions that were undertaken include Erdogan communicating with Putin that he demands good treatment of the Tartars and limiting vessels that originate from the Crimean Peninsula; this minimal restriction indicates the reluctance to weaken relations with Russia over the Crimean dispute.

USA:

The influence on the conflict itself by the United States of America was limited, however, their reaction to the illegal takeover was considerable. Their stance on the matter has been very clear from the start, they opposed it. President Obama was very outspoken on the issue, stating that the annexation of Crimea was a “violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity ... [and a] breach of international law”. This led to the USA imposing many economic sanctions on Russia, such as on Sberbank, Rostec, and oil and gas producers.

EU:

The EU acted as a whole against the annexation. Their view on the matter was similar to that of the USA. They disapproved of the annexation as they believe it is an infringement of sovereignty and territorial integrity, which led to many sanctions being put in place. Some of the measures taken:

- Diplomatic measures, in 2014, the EU-Russia summit was cancelled which led to the suspension of bilateral talks on visa matters and new agreements. In addition, EU members still supported the suspension of Russia’s presence in the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. Both these measures hindered maximum prosperity for the Russian Federation.
- Economic restrictions on Russia, a limit on the access to primary and secondary capital markets for banks and companies, export and import ban on arms, an

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 export ban on dual-use goods that can be used to enforce the Russian military, limit Russian access to the most recent technologies for oil production and exploration, a suspension on signing new deals between the Russian federation and the European Investment Bank (EIB). All of these measures aim to weaken Russian economic development.

- Economic restrictions on Crimea, an import ban on goods from Crimea and Sevastopol, restrictions on trade and investment in the area in certain sectors, a prohibition of tourism in the area, an export ban on certain goods from the EU. The aim of these measures is to weaken the area to indirectly weaken Russia and to force the administration to return the territory to Ukraine. These restrictions are currently set to last until the 23rd of June 2020 (at the time of writing this research report).
- Individual restrictions, 175 people and 44 entities have had a travel ban and an asset freeze imposed on them due to their direct or close involvement in the annexation of the peninsula. These measures have been extended up to the 15th of September 2020. In addition, more individuals have had their assets frozen due to the misappropriation of Ukrainian state funds.

The discontinuation of trade and investments with Russia has not only influenced the Russian Federation but also the EU as a whole, financial losses have occurred as a consequence of limiting trade with Russia and supplying aid to Ukraine. The losses have been estimated to be around €100 billion as of 2015. Preceding the sanctions around 10% of all EU exports were exported to Russia, the absence of such a large trading partner unquestionably led to economic losses. Germany has been hit the hardest by the measures as an estimated 30,000 businesses have been severely affected due to the crisis.

Timeline of Key events:

Year	Event
1783	The Crimean Peninsula is annexed by the Russian Empire following the Russo-Turkish war.

October 18, 1921	Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, the peninsula undergoes a chaotic period during which it changes authorities many times. This ends in 1921 when the peninsula becomes known as the Crimean Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, an autonomous republic in the Soviet Union.
February 19, 1954	The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (legislative bodies of the Soviet Union) ordered the Crimean Peninsula to be transferred to the Ukrainian SSR due to close economic and cultural relations between Crimea and Ukraine. Crimea formally becomes part of Ukraine
1991	Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Crimea becomes an autonomous region in Independent Ukraine known as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea
November 21, 2013	Viktor Yanukovich turns down a deal with the EU and favours a \$15 billion deal with Russia sparking up the 2013 Euromaidan protests.
November 30, 2013	Several protesters are killed, gaining international attention
December 8, 2014	800,000 protesters in Kiev topel a Lenin Statue
December 24, 2013	Ukraine receives \$3 billion from Russia, connecting Ukrainian debt to Russia
February 22, 2014	Viktor Yanukovich gets voted out of parliament and flees his Kiev office to Russia, sparking up protests from pro-Russians in Crimea.
February 27, 2014	Pro-Russian gunmen surround the Crimean Parliament
March 1, 2014	De facto Crimean Leader (assumed authority, unlawful leader), Sergey Aksyonov, requests help from Russia to maintain peace, allowing Russian armed Forces into Crimea.
March 16, 2014	Russia states that 95.5% of voters supported Crimea joining Russia. Although the referendum is not internationally recognised.
March 18, 2014	Russia gains control over Crimea and officially gains control over the area. The contracts, deals and papers signed are not recognised internationally which is why until this day many sovereignties do not recognise Crimea as being part of Russia and describe Russia as having illegally annexed Crimea.

Previous attempts to resolve the issue:

Solutions on the issue have been very limited due to the fragility of the situation and the lack of available measures to put in place to solve the issue.

Many different strategies can be used by administrations to work towards a solution, one is to put pressure on the opposing nation to force them to cooperate or discuss possible solutions. The first method has been explored already in this report; imposing sanctions, restrictions and bans have been very common; however, these have not worked effectively and have not led to a solution.

The UN has held many sessions concerning the Crimean situation in an attempt to find a solution. Two examples of adopted resolutions by the UN include resolution 73/194 (adopted in 2018) and 74/17 (adopted in 2019), however, both are non-binding, as a consequence, actions taken have been limited.

- The problem of militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine), as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, 17 December 2018, (A/RES/73/194)
- Problem of the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, 9 December 2019, (A/RES/74/17)

NATO also released a statement on the 18th of March expressing its thoughts on the matter. NATO called on Russia to end all human rights violations including the “automatic imposition of Russian citizenship, forced population movements, conscription in the armed forces of the Russian Federation, and illegal holding of Russian election campaigns”. NATO expressed its support for clause 5 of the UN resolution 73/193, which demanded for the release of crew members aboard certain vessels and allowance of free navigation in the Black Sea.

Possible solutions

Parties should aim to solve the issue by imposing strategies that leave the smallest possible negative footprint, in other words, the solution that benefits the most people at the same time whilst keeping the situation of the minorities in mind. Peaceful solutions are often the most constructive ones which is why the suggested solutions that will be explored focus on trying to solve the matter using minimal force.

Initially, the most logical action that could be taken would be to establish if the local Crimean population in fact is pro-Russian or if the 2014 referendum was false. The best way to determine the local opinion would be to hold a second referendum and do it under internationally recognised guidelines to ensure recognition from all UN-parties. This would require Russian cooperation which can hopefully be discussed during today's session.

The next stage of solving the issue depends greatly on the outcome of the referendum; there are two possible scenarios:

1. The local population is pro-Russian which then obligates parties to recognise the take-over as legal
 2. The referendum results turn out different and the Crimean peninsula deserves to be controlled by Ukraine.
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1. In the case that Russia gains control over the area, a possible solution could consist of two strategies. a) Demand Russia to allow foreign representatives to examine the peninsula at all times, To gain an unbiased view concerning the situation in the area. This would enable foreign countries to corroborate that Russian authorities are doing the right thing and are not abusing their power. b) Demand Russia to change the way local minorities are treated by following Human Rights guidelines and demand Russia to stabilis and strengthen the local economic and social situation. Both these strategies could be imposed during today's session.
 2. In the case that the referendum indicates a pro-Ukrainian opinion:
 - International discussions should be held on how to effectively hand over the peninsula to Ukraine. This process would require full cooperation from Russia.
 - Furthermore, the Ukrainian economy has been severely hit by the Crimean annexation and if it turns out that the local opinion is pro-Ukrainian, it would be logical to discuss a financial compensation from Russia for the damage they have caused. The financial compensation Russia would pay could help to support damaged businesses and improve the local infrastructure.

- To stimulate economic growth tax incentives or other strategies could be put in place to encourage international corporations to settle in the area. Re-starting the local economy should be one of the top priorities, one of the most efficient ways of starting the local economy would be to attract large and influential firms.

NATO strives “to safeguard the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means.” Even though a political and peaceful manner of solving the issue is favoured in extreme cases where the situation escalates and Russia shows no intention of cooperating, deploying military means would be the last resource option. Even though this option is not preferred it is a solution in the case that today’s session does not come up with any agreement.

Even though the current situation might seem extremely problematic and almost impossible to solve, an agreement is necessary as lives and a whole economy is on the line.

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