The Crimea Problem in Ukrainian-Russian Relations: Historical and Political Background

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This article researches historical origins and political framework of the Ukrainian-Russian dispute over territorial belonging of Crimea. Broad source base allowed authors to the conclusion that Ukraine has historical, political, legal and economic grounds to demand the return of the Crimean peninsula territory annexed by Russia.

In March 2014 Russia annexed Ukrainian Crimea. Using the change of power in Ukraine, which resulted in the overthrow of the pro-Kremlin Yanukovych criminal regime, Moscow armed separatists and occupied the Crimea. All attempts made by the Ukrainian authorities and the international community to return the Kremlin to international law did not yield results, as the main motive for the "return" of the Crimea to the Russian government was emphasizing the "unlawfulness" of the Crimean Oblast transfer from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954 and therefore full right of return to the "lost" territory. In this regard, the question of clarifying the historical foundation of problems in Crimea and Ukrainian-Russian relations arises.

The Crimean peninsula has a long and varied history. Located to the south of the Azov-Black Sea steppes, being for millennia a nomadic territory, it was a natural niche of respite for many people. Some of them stayed for a long time on this peninsula, and for the Crimean Tatars this territory was site of the formation of their state. On the other hand, the region has been a subject to encroachment by many empires - ancient and modern. In ancient times Greeks and Romans inhabited it, during medieval - Genoese and Turks built their fortress there; in the modern era the Crimea became part of two empires - firstly the Russian Empire, then –the Soviet Union.

Since ethnic Ukrainians bordered the territory of Crimea, the historical fate of Ukraine and Crimea were interconnected for many centuries. Specifically, this close relationship began in the last third of the eighteenth century, when the Russian Empire, with the valuable support of Ukrainian Cossacks, after the victorious war with Turkey of 1768-1774 incorporated the Crimean Khanate. Under the Küçük Kaynarca peace treaty signed between Russia and Turkey in 1774, Russia took control of some parts of the Azov coast, the area between the Dnieper and Bug rivers, as well as the Kerch and Yeni-Kale fortresses in surrounding areas, that gave Russians the right of free navigation and exit in the Black Sea through the Straits into the Mediterranean. The Crimean Khanate had been under the patronage of the Ottoman Empire since 1475 and then became independent. However, the independence of the Crimean Khanate proved misleading, since it turned into a new dependency –under Russia. The official liquidation date of the Crimean

Tatar state was April 8, 1783, when the Russian Empress Catherine II signed the Manifesto of the incorporation of Crimea into Russia. The Crimean Khanate ceased to exist, despite protests from the indigenous population, which were suppressed by Russian regular army. The loss of independence led to the mass migration of the Crimean Tatars to the Ottoman Empire.

In 1802, Crimea was incorporated into the Taurida Governorate. In the early twentieth century the Taurida Governorate consisted of five Crimean districts (area of 25.6 thousand Square Kilometers with 740 thousand residents) and three counties in northern Taurica (an area of 35.1 thousand sq. kilometers with 1760 thousand residents). In the mainland province, most of the population was Ukrainian - on the Crimean peninsula - Russians and Crimean Tatars (Kulchytskyi, 2004).

In an effort to clearly define the boundaries of ethnographic Ukrainian lands on the eve of the negotiations between the Ukrainian Central Rada (UCR) delegation and the Provisional Government of Russia on the autonomous status of Ukraine as a part of the future federal Russia, UCR in 1917 initiated separation of the Taurida Governorate on the mainland and the island. During the proclamation of the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR) in November 1917, UNR stated a claim only on the mainland counties. Later, Dmytro Doroshenko, the Foreign Minister in the Ukrainian State government of Hetman Skoropadskyi, pointed out that the UCR abandoned the Crimean peninsula for nothing. Indeed, the leaders of UCR could have considered Tauridaas a single economic organism as it existed for more than century. Within the whole province, Ukrainians were the majority, 60% of the population, as attested by the first all-Russian census in 1897 (Kulchytskyi, 2004). But at that time, UCR chairman M. Hrushevskyi, a historian, had his understanding that it was important to define boundaries of ethnic territory because, as the modern Ukrainian historian S. Kulchytsky said, "won ... not economic, but ethnographic approach" (Kulchytskyi, 2004).

However, after the government of Hetman Skoropadskyi came to power in Kyiv in April 1918, the fate of the Crimean peninsula and the question of it joining Ukraine became the subject of his attention. During the peace talks between the Ukrainian State and the RSFSR, which began in May 1918, the problem of Crimea was one of the most critical problems.

Its sharpness was intensified by a difficult political situation in the peninsula. In December 1917, representatives of city councils took power in Crimea. Public and political organizations established the Council of Representatives, of which the Kurultai proclaimed the Crimean Republican Bakhchysaray, which was recognized by UCR. But in January 1918,Bolsheviks seized power in Crimea and on March 21 created Soviet Socialist Republic of Taurida.

Displacing Bolshevik troops from the territory of Ukraine, UPR Colonel Corps P. Bolbochan went to the Crimea in late April 1918, but German troops that were in Ukraine on the invitation of UCR did not support this attack and ordered the Ukrainian unit to leave the Crimea. Supporters of the "one and indivisible Russia" took advantage of this situation and created the Crimea Regional Government headed by General Sulkevich who restored the validity of all the laws of the Russian Empire. Sulkevich said he wanted to start building a regional army and put forward claims on the part of the tsar's fleet.

Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi drew the attention of the German Government to the strategic importance of the Crimea to the Ukrainian State in his note dated May 10, 1918, directed to Ambassador von Mumm. He wrote:

Ukraine could not become a strong state without Crimea, especially for economic reasons. So unnaturally cut from the sea, Ukraine would have to necessarily increase its aspirations to capture this seacoast, and because of this, relations with the state, to which would be directed toward the possession of Crimea, will worsen. (Doroshenko, 2002)

However, the plans of the Germans didn't include creation of an East European young, economically strong state, so using a formal occasion in III Universal position (20 November 1917) it proclaimed the creation of the Ukrainian National Republic. Where a region was not included in Ukraine, they continued the course of supporting the puppet Sulkevich government (Universals of the Central Rada, n.d.).

This led the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Ukrainian State once again to explain the German side position of the government on the Crimean issues and in particular the provisions of the Universal III. In an official

note, directed by Foreign Minister Dmytro Doroshenko on May 30, 1918, it was stressed that:

...above all the Universal in general said only about main Ukrainian territory, meaning that those lands in which Ukrainian population has not an absolute majority will join later. This method of border installation, at first only in general terms, is explained by the fact that at that time the Ukrainian National Republic was seen only as part of a federation with Russia. Similarly, the Crimea, where he joined voluntarily to Ukraine, would also be a federal unit of Russia and so ... in this case Ukrainian State would not lose ties with Crimea, Ukraine economic outpost. Now, when Ukraine was finally on the road to full political independence, a link to the Crimea, as a federal unit may break completely. (Doroshenko, 2002)

To prevent this, the Ukrainian government proposed the accession of Crimea on autonomous basis, but the Sulkevich government supported by Germans did not want any dependence on Ukraine and continued to spin a flywheel anti-Ukrainian campaign. Commenting on the implementation of the principle of self-determination of peoples, the Skoropadskyi government was convinced that the population of the peninsula favored a union with Ukraine. Indeed, even Tartars, while the idea of their own state was very popular among them, did not object to the inclusion of Crimea in Ukraine. This idea was also supported by German colonists, Karaimes and many Russians.

General Sulkevich's government began to struggle with "Ukrainian propaganda" pursued in pro-Ukrainian newspapers and Ukrainian communities by prohibiting taking of government telegrams from Ukraine in Ukrainian language. Under these conditions, the Council of Ministers in mid-August 1918 adopted the draft of Foreign Minister Dmytro Doroshenko on an economic blockade of Crimea: rail and sea traffic and trade were suspended. Under the blockade a complete dependence of the peninsula from the continent was very clear: its economic life was totally paralyzed. This made the Crimean side really look at the things that were happening; additionally, food products supplies from Crimea to Germany were on the verge of collapse. On September 6,The Chief-of-Staff of the German troops in Ukraine, Lieutenant General Hrener addressed the Head of the Council of

Ministers of the Ukrainian State Fedir Lyzohub with telegram, which stated that "due to the fact that the situation of the business relationship between Ukraine and Crimea in recent weeks has been strained in political and in economic terms, that if in the near future there will be no changes a possible threat of further growth problems may occur, and it will be harmful to the interests of Ukraine and Crimea." (Hanza, 2004) Hrener offered to hold talks on this subject in Kyiv with the participation of all parties.

In mid-September 1918, the Crimean delegation arrived in Kyiv, but, as the course of the negotiations, it intended only to seek renewal of economic relations with Ukraine, not to solve the question of Crimea territorial ownership. The Ukrainian side refused to further participate in negotiations and suggested sending another Crimean delegation - representatives of the main ethnic groups. During the negotiations, it was able to produce a provisional condition for joining ofthe peninsula to Ukraine. This document noted that "Crimea is connected with Ukraine as an autonomous region."(Hanza, 2004) The competence of the Ukrainian government included foreign policy, leadership of the army and navy, a common financial system, operation of railways, post and telegraph. The region received its Regional Government, the national assembly, which developed local laws and a territorial army, administration and Secretary of State for the Council of Ministers on Crimean issues in Ukrainian State. It was planned that peninsula would have its own budget. These conditions were reviewed and approved by the Crimean Tatar Kurultai congresses and national public organizations of Crimea, but the uprising against Hetman Skoropadskyi in November-December 1918 made by the Directory marked the end of the intentions of the Crimea to be part of Ukraine.

At the same time, a fiasco happened and Ukraine lost the fight for the possession of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF) of the Russian Empire. The problem of control of the Black Sea Fleet, which as of April 1917 in total was composed of 177 warships and more than 220 vehicles for various purposes with the number of attached personnel reaching 30 thousand people, actualized after the October 1917 coup in Petrograd: claims to own it were expressed by the Bolshevik People's Commissars and the Ukrainian Central Rada.

We know that throughout its history the Black Sea Fleet was geographically connected with the fate of Ukrainians, who for centuries inhabited the Black Sea region. Provision of logistical and other needs of the Black Sea Fleet was carried out usually by Ukrainian regions. At the end of the First World War, the Black Sea Fleet personnel by 80% was staffed basically from Ukrainian lands. Naturally, this approach to staffing BSF facilitated ongoing regeneration on it by pro-Ukrainian sentiment that during National Democratic Revolution of 1917-1921 helped to implement the process of Ukrainianization of fleet as well as deployment Ukrainian naval construction.

UCR declared the desire to form a national navy by the creation of the General Secretariat of Maritime Affairs on December 22, 1917, which has made the approval of "Temporary Law on fleet Ukrainian People's Republic" on January 14, 1918. It was first formally described the concept of naval doctrine of UCR. Under this law, Ukraine has assumed all costs associated with the maintenance of the Black Sea fleet, which passed into the ownership of the UPR. However, the implementation of this law in real life was prevented by the first Ukrainian-Bolshevik war in the winter of 1917-1918 as well as BSF unresolved problems and the territorial affiliation of Crimea in the Brest-Lytovsk negotiations, and the fact that the UPR and Central Powers deprived the UCR of real influence on Black Sea Fleet.

The Bolshevik seizure of BSF plan was fairly simple: using revolutionary slogans as soon as possible to involve fleet into the maelstrom of civil war, which actually began in Russia. In order to strengthen his regime in Crimea, the Council of People's Commissars provided significantly to local Bolsheviks - 49 million rubles. At the direction of Petrograd, Sevastopol Bolsheviks launched an extensive campaign to discredit the Central Council, and after the overthrow of the Provisional Government qualified them "only as a bourgeois-nationalist counterrevolution." In December 1917 terror started in Sevastopol: pro-Bolshevik sailors committed a series of acts of mob justice, which resulted in 34 officers being shot.

In March 1918, with the approach of German troops allied to Ukraine closer to Crimea, Soviet Russia Council of People's Commissars in order to prevent conversion of the fleet under Ukrainian jurisdiction, said to

the BSF command that the fleet is "the property of the Soviet Republic and not a single ship can not go under the Ukrainian flag." Simultaneously, the Council of People's Commissars demanded immediate evacuation of the newest ships to Novorossiysk, the rest - subject to destruction. As a result of the confrontation between the Russian Council of People's Commissars and the UCR, the BSF underwent significant human and material losses. It destroyed a large part of its property; the fleet lost a huge number of the newest ships and cargo ships.

Not promptly resolved at the Brest-Lytovsk negotiations, the Crimea Black Sea Fleet problem was the most serious obstacle for UCR implementation of naval policies. This prompted the Ukrainian government to make a desperate step: chieftain Pavlo Bolbochan was ordered to enter Sevastopol ahead of German allies. Sailors who were waiting with hope for Ukrainian troops coming raised Ukrainian national flags on the Black Sea Fleet on April 29, 1918; however, at the beginning of summer 1918 virtually all remnants of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea and Crimean Peninsula as a whole, were in German hands.

In late summer 1918, the Germans began leaning towards giving back the Black Sea Fleet and embankments to Ukraine. But at the same time they put forward the condition that Ukrainian fleet should be sailed under the Ukrainian flag in the Mediterranean Sea for armed demonstrations against the Entente. This requirement was strongly rejected by officials in Kyiv. Given the strong position of the Ukrainian State, the German government agreed to transfer vessels and infrastructures of Black Sea Fleet without such conditions. In mid-August 1918, on behalf of the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian State, captain Svirsky went to Berlin, where together with German representatives, he helped produced a plan to transfer military and commercial ships that were in the hands of Germans to Ukraine. Forming the basis of the Ukrainian Black Sea Fleet were 35 new ships. Completion of the Ukrainian Black Sea Fleet was prevented by UPR Directory rebellion against Hetman Skoropadskyi and the defeat of Germany in World War I.

After the withdrawal of the German army from Ukraine, the French and the White Army landed in the Crimea. They formed White Guard Regional Government, which, however, did not last long, because in April

1919 the peninsula was taken again by Soviets. D. Ulyanov, Lenin's brother, headed the Government of the Crimean Soviet Republic. This republic lasted about two months. Using troopers from the sea, Crimea was captured by Whites in June 1919 who held out there until November 1920, when they were finally ousted by Soviet troops under the command of Frunze. This enabled the Bolsheviks to announce in October 18, 1921 the creation of the Crimean autonomous republic within the RSFSR.

Republic Taurida was announced in March 1918, and the Crimean Autonomous Republic, formed in 1921, had become an outpost for the penetration of Bolshevism in the East. This confirms the creation of a special Crimean office of the Comintern, which was tasked to intelligence gathering and creating conditions for the deployment of communist revolutions throughout the Black Sea basin.

The importance of Crimea as a communist outpost of the Kremlin is the fact that for nearly two years after the Civil War, the Bolshevik Moscow Center held a huge army on the Crimean peninsula, fearing another attack from Allied troops. In case if such an attack took place, then inevitable hostilities with the enemy had not lead by RSFSR, but the government seems to be an "independent" state - the Crimean Autonomous Republic. For this purpose a kind of "loophole" was made in the Crimean ASRR constitution. This could be interpreted as a autonomous republic, and as an independent entity, equal to other Soviet republics.

In RCP (B) the Government of USSR planned to provide assistance to Crimea. Telling is the fact that for nearly two years after the dissolution of the Southern Front in December 1920 M. Frunze held a position that was called "commander of Ukraine and Crimea." From the name of the position it was understood that Russia intends to keep Crimea.

Characteristically, the Bolsheviks of Ukraine, although they were subject to the Kremlin, also questioned the inclusion of the Crimean peninsula in the Ukrainian SSR. And it was a "headache" for RCP (B). On the one hand, during the Civil War Crimean close relations with Ukraine were very helpful for Moscow, as Ukraine has provided a variety of assistance for peninsula and quickly solved many issues. On the other hand, the central

government realized that it cannot continue similar contacts between Crimea and Ukraine. The leaders of Soviet Ukraine could "get used" to the idea that Crimea belongs to them.

There are several useful facts that the leaders of Soviet Ukraine were seriously concerned about regarding the idea of Crimea joining Ukraine. First of all, it is the attempt of the government of the Ukrainian Soviet People's Republic in early 1918 to create a South federation, which, together with Ukraine and other areas of the South, should include Crimea. In 1919 the chairman of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR Rakovsky tried to establish control on Crimea. There have been attempts to put on the agenda of the forthcoming submission of Crimean Autonomous Republic to Ukraine in 1921, however, all attempts of the Soviet government of Ukraine failed because of the position of Soviet Russia leadership. It was dangerous for Moscow communist empire to give Ukraine the peninsula, that itself has not been properly subdued by them. The Ukrainian national movement remained strong, and was a real threat to the long-range plans of the Bolsheviks needs to restore the Empire.

Another significant cause of the Crimean autonomous republic within the RSFSR was that the indigenous people of Crimea - Tatars - sought to restore what was lost at the end of the eighteenth century, their own state. The Proclamation of the Crimean ASRR allowed the Bolsheviks to take control of the national liberation movement of the Crimean Tatars that during the Civil War got used to the idea of the possibility of the restoration of its statehood. In order for the Bolshevik dictatorship to clamp down on threatening Crimean Tatar national liberation ideas, they (like all other national Soviet republics) moved it into the framework of a controlled Bolshevik leadership process. The "Appeasement" of Crimean Tatars was in the same scenario as in the Ukrainian SSR.

The vital question was what was the character of Crimean autonomy created by the Bolsheviks - national or territorial? Lenin's Council of People's Commissars originally created autonomy of both types, but at the end there was only national. The Crimean ASRR was a unique autonomous entity, which continued to preserve its territorial nature. However, playing with Kemalist Turkey, the leading positions in this republic were given by the Kremlin to mostly people of Crimean Tatar

origin. There was a false impression that Crimean autonomy was, like all other nations. In this case, Crimean Tatars, though an indigenous ethnic group were not dominant in the population of the peninsula.

According to the All-Union census of 1939 the population of Crimea was: Russians - 49.6%, the Crimean Tatars - 19.4, Ukrainians - 13.7, Jews - 5.8, Germans - 4.6%. During the Second World War the total population decreased markedly, and its ethnic composition has significantly changed. In August 1941 the first deportations were made by the KGB on a national basis. They took Germans out from Crimea, about 50 thousand. They were settled there mainly during the times of Empress Catherine II. The wording of the charges was "aiding the Nazi invaders." Instead, the Nazis during the occupation killed 25 thousand Jews. Almost everyone who could not or did not want to evacuate was killed. Together with the Jews the Nazis killed the unique people of small nationalities - Krimchaks. The Nazis thought they were part of 'Jewish race' as they professed Judaism from ancient times.

According to the statutes of the State Committee of Defense of the USSR on May 11 and June 2, 1944 from the Crimea were deported Crimean Tatars, Bulgarians, Greeks and Armenians. Total number of deported to special settlements in Uzbekistan amounted to 228 thousand people. Russians and Ukrainians began to dominate in Crimean population. If previously there was an objective basis for territorial autonomy of Crimea, after the deportation in 1944, this disappeared. By order of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR on June 30, 1945 The Crimean ASSR was transformed into the Crimean region of the RSFSR, in which it was before transfer to Ukrainian SSR in 1954

The origins of the decision to transfer Crimean Oblast from the RSFSR to Ukrainian SSR also should be seenas tragic to the peninsula history as the 1944 mass deportation of the Crimean Tatars, Greeks, Armenians, Czechs, Bulgarians and Germans caused a deep crisis of the Crimean economy in general and agriculture in particular. Official statistics show that during the war the population in Crimea dropped in twice and in May 1944 it was 780 thousand people, and after deportation about 500 thousand left.

In summer 1944 there was already nobody to collect harvest in most of the Crimean villages. If in 1940 the sown area in the Crimea was 987.4 thousand hectares then in 1950 it had decreased by 100 thousand. (881.9 thousand hectares). In 1950 compared to 1940 Crimea's sale of grain had reduced almost five times, three times - tobacco, twice - vegetables. Going through a deep crisis and social affairs area: in late 1953 in all of Crimea there were only 34 bread stores, 18 - meat, 8 - milk, 2 - fabrics, 9 - shoes, 5 - building materials and 28 bookshops.

In this dire situation the leadership of Crimea not responded by any practical measures that the first secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Nikita Khrushchev did not like, during his secret visit to Crimea in autumn 1953, there was no mention in Crimean press about it. Only memories of the former editor of Izvestia newspaper Alexei Adzhubei, son of Nikita Khrushchev, who was accompanied by First Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee in an inspection trip to Crimea, show the reality of this fact.

Circumstances in Crimea during the fall of 1953, according to the memoirs of A. Adzhubeya, were so bad, that an outraged Khrushchev the same day immediately went to Kyiv, where he had a long conversation with the leadership of the Ukrainian SSR. Its main topic was the unpleasant impression of a trip to the peninsula. Using a powerful authority in the Government of the Ukrainian SSR, Khrushchev persuaded Ukrainians to help the revival of Crimean land.

At the end of 1953, by the initiative of Nikita Khrushchev the CPSU Central Committee launched a propaganda campaign in connection with the 300th anniversary of the so-called "reunification" of Ukraine and Russia at Pereyaslavs'ka Rada in 1654. Part of this campaign was the transfer of Crimean region to Ukraine.

According to scenario developed by the Kremlin, thefirst step was made by the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the RSFSR. Having agreement on principle of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Ukrainian SSR, it considered the transfer of Crimean region to Ukraine in the presence of the Crimean Regional Council and the Sevastopol city council. It made a positive decision in the favor of the following important factors: common economy, territorial proximity, close

economic and cultural relations between Crimea and Ukraine. A corresponding decree was sent to the Supreme Council. A few days later the issue was discussed at the Presidium of the Supreme Council. The act of transfer of Crimea was viewed as "a new vivid manifestation of boundless confidence and sincere love of Russian people, new evidence of immutable fraternal friendship between Russian and Ukrainian peoples." A resolution of request for the transfer of Crimean Oblast to Ukraine was also sent to the USSR Supreme Council.

On February 19, 1954, a solemn meeting of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR with the heads of the legislative and executive authorities of the RSFSR and the Ukrainian SSR, first deputy chairman of the executive committee of the Crimean Regional Council P. Lialin and heads of executive committees of Simferopol and Sevastopol city councils N. Katkov and S. Sosnitsky. First was the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the RSFSR M. Tarasov pointing out that Crimea is like a natural extension of the southern steppes of Ukraine, he concluded: "From the geographical and economic considerations the transfer of the Crimean region to the fraternal Ukrainian republic is expedient and in the interest of the Soviet state." February 19, 1954 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet unanimously adopted a decree "On the transfer of the Crimean Oblast from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian SSR." His text literally repeated the arguments from the decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the RSFSR.

The Kremlin did not lose anything from the transfer of Crimea, because the entire Ukraine had been part of the empire for 300 years. Indeed, no one could have predicted that someday Ukraine would separate from Russia with Crimea. Communist Party and Soviet leaders in dealing with Ukrainian-Russian territorial issues always took into account Russia's national interests. With all of Ukraine in submission, Ukrainian national interests did not bother them. From the above it follows that the Russian media concept of a "royal gift" of Khrushchev to Ukraine has no reasonable logic. Thinking that Khrushchev was an "agent of influence" of enslaved Ukraine in the Kremlin is simply ridiculous. Khrushchev defended imperial as well as Russian national interests as his predecessors Vladimir Lenin and Stalin. His national political decisions, including the

episode with Crimea, were driven by his interests in protecting the Soviet empire under changing circumstances.

It should not be forgotten that the final decision on the transfer of the Crimean Oblast from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian SSR was taken by the higher leadership of the party and Soviet government. Without the participation of the Stalinist old guard - G. Malenkov, V. Molotov, L. Kaganovich, K. Voroshilov, O. Bulganin - it would not have happen. So it's not a "gift from a drunk Khrushchev," as Russian chauvinists say now. Khrushchev's position in the party and the country at that time had not been so strong that he could arbitrarily decide the fate of a strategically important region like the Crimean peninsula. That is why the efforts of some Russian politicians and local Crimean separatists to put responsibility on Khrushchev are speculative. There is no document that confirmed the crucial role of Nikita Khrushchev in the transfer of Crimea in 1954, especially as an attempt to do some service for Ukraine. Moreover, in the documents of that time about this decision there is not even a mention of the 300th anniversary of Pereyaslavs'ka Rada, which seems to be the reason this "gift" was dedicated. It was a tough economic necessity.

For over 200 years lands of North Black Sea, which were neither Ukrainian, nor Russian ethnic territory were part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union - public entities, the core of which was Russian people. So when in 1954 Crimea became part of the Ukrainian SSR, the decision of the Union Center did not cause any objections from Russian Republican leadership. The question of the legality of the transfer of Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR was not raised by Russia after the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine July 16, 1990 approved by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Moreover, the democratic forces of two parliaments of the republics in August 1990 laid the foundation for a new framework of relations between Ukraine and Russia. The result of the interaction of members of Ukrainian Parliament, united in faction "People's Council", and their partners from the block "Democratic Russia" in Russia's parliament, was the signing of the "Declaration of principles of interstate relations between Ukraine and the RSFSR," which was based on the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine and Russia.

This document confirmed the unconditional recognition of Ukraine and Russia as subjects of international law, "sovereign equality" of the two countries; principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of each other

and the rejection of the use of force in their relations; inviolability of existing frontiers between the two countries and the rejection of any territorial claims; ensure political, economic, ethnic and cultural rights of the peoples of the RSFSR living in Ukraine.

Declared principles have been incorporated into a formal agreement between Russia and Ukraine, signed by the heads of Parliaments Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kravchuk in Kyiv on November 19, 1990. Special emphasis in this document is placed on the mutual recognition of the territorial integrity of both countries in their borders within the USSR. It is significant that both parliaments ratified the Treaty for a few days, although Moscow had already expressed doubts about the feasibility of its provisions in the part concerned the origin of Crimea as a part of Ukraine. After the proclamation of independence of Ukraine on August 24, 1991 other issues added to the Crimean problem, namely -the further fate of the Black Sea Fleet, terms of delivery of energy supplies from Russia and distribution of assets of the former Soviet Union, etc.

The collapse of the Soviet Union has led to the emergence on the political map of the world of 15 independent states, including the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Modern Russia, which covers the territory of 17.08 million square km and has much smaller size than its former Empire in 1903, the area of which amounted to 22.4 million square km, has sought to restore influence in the world in general and the former Soviet Union in particular. And one of the springboards to consider this is Ukrainian Crimea.

Therefore, the determination of the Kremlin leadership is not surprising. Using the objective weakness of official Kyiv after the events of the "Revolution of dignity", Russia realized his old plan for annexing Crimea.

Ukrainians should be confident that historical justice will be restored along with the territorial integrity of Ukraine. In order to receive this goal the Ukrainian authorities should persistently remind the international community about the problem of the Crimea and the need for appropriate punishment of the aggressor country, Russia.

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