

THE FUTURE OF CRIMEA IN THE CONTEXT OF UKRAINE, RUSSIA AND TÜRKİYE

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ABSTRACT

The political crisis between Ukraine and Russia led to Russia's invasion of Crimea, and then a war broke out between the two countries. The occupation of Crimea and Crimea's importance for Ukraine, Russia, and Türkiye will be analyzed from a political, historical, social, and economic perspective. Today, the status of Crimea has become a key for the security and stability of the Black Sea, and the plans of Ukraine, Russia, and Türkiye on Crimea have begun to affect the relations of these countries with each other. Türkiye is historically and strategically related to this region. It also thinks that this region should be given to Crimean Tatars and that Crimean Tatars were forcibly removed from this region. Türkiye has undertaken the protection of the Crimean Tatars, the Ottoman remnant, and supports these people in living freely in their own homeland. Russia penetrated into Crimea with its settlement policy and considered Crimea as the final point that could reach the Black Sea. This region has great strategic and economic value for Russia. Ukraine, on the other hand, finds this region strategically important and sees it as a key point to becoming a regional power and developing its economy. In this study, the stance of Ukraine, Türkiye, and Russia on the Crimean issue will be examined, and the historical, social, and cultural position of the Crimean Tatars will be discussed.

Keywords: Crimea, Türkiye, Self-Determination, Russia, Human Rights, Ukraine

UKRAYNA, RUSYA VE TÜRKİYE BAĞLAMINDA KIRIM'IN GELECEĞİ

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ÖZET

Ukrayna ve Rusya arasındaki siyasi kriz Rusya'nın Kırım'ı işgaline neden olmuş ve sonrasında iki ülke arasında savaş çıkmıştır. Kırımın işgaliyle başlayan süreç, Ukrayna, Rusya ve Türkiye açısından önemi siyasi, tarihsel, sosyal ve ekonomik açıdan ele alınacaktır. Günümüzde Kırım'ın statüsü Karadeniz'in güvenlik ve istikrarının anahtarı haline gelmiştir. Ukrayna, Rusya ve Türkiye'nin Kırım'a ilişkin planları bu ülkelerin birbirleriyle ilişkilerini etkilemeye başlamıştır. Türkiye tarihi ve stratejik olarak bu bölgeyle bağlantılıdır. Ayrıca Türkiye, bu bölgede Kırım Tatarlarının yaşaması gerektiğini ve Kırım Tatarlarının bu bölgeden zorla uzaklaştırıldığını düşünmektedir. Türkiye, Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun bakiyesi olan Kırım Tatarlarının korumasını üstlenmiş ve bu insanların kendi vatanlarında özgürce yaşamalarına destek olmuştur. Rusya, iskân politikasıyla Kırım'a girmiş ve Kırım'ı Karadeniz'e ulaşabilecek son nokta olarak görmüştür. Bu bölgenin Rusya için büyük stratejik ve ekonomik değeri vardır. Ukrayna ise bu bölgeyi stratejik açıdan önemli bulunmakta ve bölgesel güç olma ve ekonomisini geliştirme açısından kilit nokta olarak görmektedir. Bu çalışmada temel olarak Kırım sorunu üzerine Ukrayna, Türkiye ve Rusya'nın tezleri incelenecek ve Kırım sorunu Kırım halkının tarihsel, sosyal ve kültürel açıdan pozisyonu ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kırım, Kendi Kaderini Tayin Hakkı, Türkiye, İnsan Hakları, Rusya, Ukrayna.

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INTRODUCTION

Crimea has a strategic geopolitical location in the Black Sea, has been occupied by numerous powers, and has been the site of numerous conflicts throughout history. This region, a huge peninsula beginning in Ukraine and continuing to the Black Sea, has emerged with a major political challenge. During the Soviet Union period, Crimea was given to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic on February 19, 1954, under the pretext of the anniversary of the founding of the Ukrainian state. Technically speaking, the transfer of Crimea did not pose a risk to the USSR at that time, as it was seen as a change of hands between two socialist republics that had the same ideology and purpose and were in the same state mechanism. However, after the collapse of the USSR, Crimea began to be seen as a problem between the Russian Federation and Ukraine (Şöhret, 2017, 2). In order to establish dominance in the region, Russia was careful towards Western states and began to take the necessary measures against their dominance. One of them was under Ukrainian control. There was a political conflict between Western supporters and Russian supporters in Ukraine, and then internal turmoil and uprisings broke out. As a result of the uprising and internal turmoil, Russian supporters took refuge in Russia, and Russia imposed wide-ranging sanctions against Ukraine. Crimea was also included in these sanctions. Since Ukraine has historical and strategic importance for Russia, Russia has taken initiatives not to lose Ukraine, which has developed good relations with the European Union and western countries. Afterwards, Russia, which could not get what it wanted, annexed Crimea, which is a very strategically important move. Crimea, which has a significant Russian population as of March 2014, came under Russian rule after 60 years with a referendum. Russia's annexation on Crimea caused discontent in the regional countries, and there were significant reactions against the annexation from European states and America. Additionally, Türkiye condemned Russia's occupation of Crimea. Harsh economic sanctions have been imposed on Russia. The process, which started in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea by Russia, continues increasingly, and after Russia's annexation of Crimea, it has set its sights on other lands of Ukraine (Konak, 2019, 82). In addition, with Russia's annexation of Crimea, the principle of self-determination came to the fore, and Crimea's declaration of independence from Ukraine and its attachment to Russia created an international crisis (Zengin, 2019, 1). The right of self-determination is also part of universal human rights law. In human rights law, self-determination is seen as a collective right.

This article mainly focuses on the Crimea issue and the relations between Ukraine and Russia on the issue of Crimea. Ukraine is one of the most important countries with regards to Eurasian geopolitics. Ukraine's importance can be appreciated through classical and contemporary geopolitical theories. Ukraine's historical relations with Russia, both positively and negatively, have affected Ukraine's policy and future. One of the most important problems between Ukraine and Russia is the autonomous Crimea. Ukraine is a very important and undeniable country in Russian politics because of the most important border between the European Union (the NATO) and Russia, and Russia has a dominant population in the east and south of Ukraine. After Ukraine became independent, they started being close to the European Union.

Especially the turmoil and alteration that started in 2000 in Ukraine's political affairs are highly connected with energy competition in the Black Sea area and Ukraine's identity affair. This article analyses affairs regarding the Black Sea Fleet and Crimea's status. The paper consists of two sections. The first section examines the history of Crimea, which is divided into eight parts. In the second section, the paper focuses on the importance of Crimea as a current issue, which is divided into three important powers' perspectives about Crimea which are Russians, Türkiye and Ukrainians. Also, the perspective of Crimean Tatars will be analyzed in terms of their historical, social, and cultural position. A literature review was used in this study, and the study basically investigates the thoughts of foreign researchers and analyses and interprets what experts do and think. The research adopts logical and analytical methods such as discourse and historical analysis. Document analysis is used in the research.

1. THE HISTORY OF CRIMEA

Crimea is a province positioned in southern Ukraine, which includes a district of 25,5 thousand square kilometers and a very long shoreline positioned in the north Black Sea. There is a highly important port in Sevastopol. The capital of Crimea is Simferopol (Akmescit) (Umerov,2012,1). Crimea has always been a multicultural and multinational area. In 2001, the Ukrainian Population Census stated that in Crimea, Russians have the majority (58.5 percent), Ukrainians' population is 24.4 percent, Crimean Tatars' population is 12.1 percent, Belarusians' population is 1.5 percent, Tatars' population is 0.5 percent, Armenians' population is 0.4 percent, and Jewish, Polish, Moldovans, and Azeris population is 0.2 percent, etc. Crimea covers more than 125 nationalities and 2 million people (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2001). In spite of the wide use of the Russian language, Crimea can be called a multilingual society, and 76 percent of its inhabitants speak Russian; Crimean Tatarian is used by 11 percent of people; and Ukrainian is used by 10 percent of people in 2001 (All-Ukrainian Population Census, 2001). However, by 2014, the Crimean Tatar population had increased much more than in the census data because the Tatars had returned to Crimea continuously from Central Asia. In October 2014, Russian-based institutions stated that the population of Crimean Tatars had decreased to 10.5 percent. But Russia may have manipulated the data so as to legitimize the occupation of Crimea by showing the increase of Russians by 67.9 percent (Shapovalova,2016, 7). Also, Ukraine's Ministry of Culture stated that, in Crimea as of January 2014, 42.7 percent of citizens chose Christian Orthodoxy, 29 percent chose Islam, 20 percent chose Protestantism, and other citizens chose other religions (Institute for Religious Freedom, 2014; Shapovalova,2016, 7).

1.1. Crimean Tatars from Ancient Times to the Golden Horde

The earliest residents settled in Crimea in the 15th-7th centuries 138BCE. The Tauri lived in the same region in about 9th-8th centuries BC. Scythians lived in Crimea in approximately the 7th century BCE. They invaded the steppe part of Crimea until the 3rd century BCE.

The ancient Greeks started settling along the Black Sea shore in the 5th century BCE. Later, Crimea was invaded and conquered sequentially by the Goths in 250 CE, Huns in 376, Bulgars 4th-8th centuries, Khazars in the 8th century, Kievan Rus in the 10th-11th centuries, the Byzantine Empire in 1016, Kipchaks in 1050, the Tatar-Mongol Golden Horde in 1223, the Ottoman State ruled Crimea for nearly three-hundred years (1478-1774), the Russian Empire for almost two-hundred years (1783–1917); Crimea entered the USSR rule (1921-1941), of German dominance (1941-1944), back to the USSR rule (1944–1991), and although Ukraine gained its independence following the collapse of the USSR(1991–2014) it was occupied by Russia in 2014 (Biletska,2012, 37-38).

Crimea was first called as Taurica Chersonesus in the 6th Century BCE (Korologou,2013). In 1220, the army of Turks and Mongols (the Golden Horde) conquered Taurica Chersonesus, began converting inhabitants to Sunni Islam, and called that place Crimea (Albion,1995, 1). Although the Russian Empress Catherine the Great wanted to change Crimea to Ancient Greece in 1783, in official documents, the Russian Empire used Taurica instead of Crimea, but this name could not have been permanent, and after a while, the name Crimea began to be used again (Bekir,2011).

Turks began to live in Crimea in the 1200s. The army headquarters, called Tatars, was composed of a Mongol clan. But the army mostly consisted of Kipchaks who settled in Crimea. Later, Oghuz Turks settled in the region as well. The Giray Khanate, which ruled Crimean for approximately 350 years, was considered Mongols. But most of the Golden Horde army was Turkish. After the Golden Horde was defeated by Tamerlane in 1441, Crimean Khanate was established (Ortaylı,2014).

1.2. Times of Crimean Khanate and Ottoman Suzerainty

By the fifteenth century, the Crimean Khanate had already been established by Crimean Tatars and conquered both the Crimean Peninsula and Black Sea coastal regions. In 1454, by signing an agreement with the Ottoman State to seize and blockade Keffe, then ruled by the Genoese, in 1454, Crimea asked for help from the Ottoman State. In the meantime, the Ottoman State and Crimea improved their relations (Subtelny,2000, 78). After Hadji Giray's death in 1466, crucial problems caused a crisis about the heritage and the future of the throne and Hadji Giray's sons (Nurdevlet and Mengli Giray) tried to gain the throne. For the next 12 years, the Golden Horde, the leader of the Şirin clan, and the Ottoman State had a power struggle for Crimea. Upon Mengli Giray's request for help from the Ottoman State, the Ottomans helped and later conquered the southern coast of Crimea, by taking over the remains of the Golden Horde. In 1478, Mengli Giray took the power, and transformed Crimea into a vassal state of the Ottoman State. In other words, Crimea was an independent country for less than 4 decades (Fisher,1978, 16), until the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774). Crimea was ruled by the Ottoman State for almost 300 years.

1.3. The Crimean independence and the Russian Invasion

Crimea came under the power of the Russian Empire in the late 18th century, after the Russian Empire defeated the Ottoman State in two successive wars in 1768–74 and 1783. In the 18th century Crimea was invaded three times by the Russians who massacred Crimean Tatars and deliberately destroyed Crimea. During the catastrophic war of 1768–1774 Crimean elites saw the Ottoman inability to protect Crimea and chose to compromise with the Russian Empire. The Russians first gave the impression of supporting Crimean independence against the Ottomans, and the defeated Ottomans were compelled to recognize Crimea as an independent state, but the Sultan maintained his spiritual influence over Crimean Muslims. Nevertheless, the Russian support was soon proved to be only a trick to invade Crimea and all its territories extending from Dniester to Circassia in 1783. Crimean independence continued for just nine years (1774-1783) (Beybulayeva, 2015, 13). Crimea was completely occupied by Russia in 1783, and the Sultan lost his spiritual power over all Crimean Muslims. The Russian administrations embraced a systematic plan to expel and assimilate the Tatar-Turkish Muslims from Crimea in order to convert the peninsula into a Russian base for future expansion in the south. Russians looted Crimean Tatars' lands, pursued a contemptuous policy to force Tatars to leave their lands and emigrate to other Muslim religions, and engaged in a systematic policy to eradicate Turkish-Tatar culture on the Crimean territories (Inalcık, 1994). Crimea, as a Part of Russian Empire, continued until 1917.

1.4. Crimea Under the Soviet Rule

After the 1917 Russian Revolution, the situation in Crimea became chaotic for Russia. World War I triggered an identity and loyalty crisis in Crimea against Russia. Especially the Crimean Tatars supported any movement that could eliminate the supreme authority of the tsar and wanted to dispel the power of the Tsarist Empire out of their institutions (Beybulayeva, 2015, 16). In the Russian Revolution, Tatars fought for Communists against the tsarist regime. In December 1917, in return, Çelebi Cihan proclaimed the self-determination of Crimean Tatars. But it did not last long because the Bolsheviks had gained influence again in Crimea. In 1918-1921, people witnessed the severe struggles between different interest groups in Crimea. For instance, in a short time, Germans, Bolsheviks and the White Russians invaded Crimea for a while.

During the 1920s and 1930s, some achievements were made by Crimean Tatars, such as the national identity, and during this time, Crimean Tatars suffered from famine and deportations. However, they achieved the goal of making Crimean the official language of Crimea (Williams, 1998, 290). In 1923, 76,000 Crimean Tatars died as a consequence of famine. The population of Crimean Tatars decreased from 719,581 to 569,510 between the years 1921 and 1923 (Chubarov, 2005). When Germany entered Crimea in 1941, Russians accused Crimean Tatars of betraying Russians, and argued that Crimean Tatars had cooperated with the Germans. After the Russians took Crimea back, Stalin deported Crimean Tatars to Central Asia. Deported Crimean Tatars protested and wanted permission to move back to their homeland (Asanova and Chubarov, 2005).

With the help of Nikita Khrushchev, constraints against Crimean Tatars were, at least to some extent, abolished. In 1945, Nikita Khrushchev gave Crimea to Ukraine, which was an autonomous state in Soviet Russia. At that time, this action was not important because Ukraine was totally dependent on Soviet Russia. Crimea was dependent on Ukraine for electric power and water (Ortaylı,2014).

1.5. Expulsion of the Crimean Tatars from the Homeland

In the Crimean history, there have been two major expulsions experienced by Crimean Tatars. The first one is the 1783-1883 deportation, and the second one is the 1944 deportation.

1783-1883 Expulsion: The 1783-1883 time period can be seen as the worst period for Crimean Tatars. Muslim Crimean Tatars were forced to change their religions to Christianity or leave (Kırımlı, 1996,7). The Crimean Tatars were not used to living under a non-Muslim government, and they preferred to leave for regions under the control of the Caliph (Kırımlı, 1996,8). Özenbaşı (1997,65) said that 500.000 people left Crimea between 1783 and 1853. Gözaydın (1948,103) thought that in 1785-1788, 1789-1790, 1812, and 1828, mass migrations occurred. The Ottoman sources stated that, between 1854 and 1864, about 600.000 people emigrated from Crimea, and 120.000 of them started living in Dobruja (Karpat,1984/85,7). After the Ottoman-Russian War in 1877-1878, a massive number of people left their homeland between 1891 and 1902. The 1897 census stated that the Crimean Tatars were reduced by no less than one half, and their proportion to the entire population dropped to 35.1 percent (İzmirli, 2008, 230). Gözaydın argues that, between 1793 and 1914, the number of migrants was 5 million, and only 238.000 of them stayed in Crimea (Gözaydın, 1948,103). In 1920, due to the famine, 50.000 Crimean Tatars ran away to Romania. Karpat (1984, 66) said that between 1783 and 1922, a minimum of 1.8 million Crimean Tatars ran away to the Ottoman State.

1944 Expulsion: On May 18, 1944, Stalin claimed that the Crimean Tatars worked together with Germany during the Second World War and decided to deport them. Although there were many Crimean Tatars who fought in the Soviet Union and received awards, Stalin branded all Crimean Tatars as traitors. Crimean Tatars were put on trains *en masse* and sent to Uzbekistan, the Urals, and Soviet Central Asia. Approximately 191,000 Crimean Tatars, regardless of women and children, left their country overnight (Uehling, 2004, 3). Because the conditions on the trains were very harsh, Crimean Tatars became ill, and many people passed away due to hunger and thirst. The People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs claimed that approximately 22 percent of exiled Crimean Tatars passed away on the way and in the first months, and according to the Crimean Tatars, 46 percent of the expelled population died (Fisher, 1978, 151-153). Crimean Tatars were forced to live in special settlements in Central Asia and were subject to control in villages. Soviet Russia banned broadcasting using the Tatar language from 1944 to 1957 (Beybulayeva,2015,43). During the Khrushchev period, Crimean Tatars began to defend their national and civil rights. The pressure applied to the Crimean Tatars was partially abolished in April 1956. Thousands tried to return to Crimea in 1967- 1968 (Allworth,1998,281).

According to Williams, between 1989 and 1994, a quarter of one million Crimean Tatars returned to Crimea from Central Asia, mainly from Uzbekistan. Williams argues that between 240,000 and 250,000 Crimean Tatars returned to Crimea by 1993 (Williams,1998). Official information of Central Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine in Crimea declared that 249,700 expelled Crimean Tatars started living in Crimea again as of January 2009 (Dannue MVS Ukrainu, 2009).

1.6. Crimea as a Part of Independent Ukraine

Crimea's status was altered again with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990 and 1991. Following the 1991 referendum held in Ukraine, Crimea became an autonomous republic within the independent Ukraine (Ortaylı,2014). On December 5, 1994, the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances (UN Document A/49/765) was signed by Ukraine, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America (the U.S.). According to this agreement, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. promised to protect the Ukrainian territories altogether and respect Ukraine as an independent state and in return, Ukraine promised to destroy all nuclear warheads or send them to disarmament facilities in Russia upon the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Synovitz,2014). It meant that Russia recognized Crimea as a part of Ukraine. Following the Orange Revolution that occurred in 2004, Ukraine, led by Victor Yushchenko, who was elected in 2004, began to change its policy and direction toward the European Union until 2010. Crimean Tatars intensely supported transformations in Ukraine (Aydn,2004,85). However, in 2010, upon Victor Yanukovich's coming to power, Ukraine started becoming close to Russia. Yanukovich delayed the integration process and agreements helping integration between Ukraine and the European Union. After a while, in 2014, an upheaval against Yanukovich compelled him to leave his office. Russia protested this revolution and invaded Crimea.

1.7. The invasion of Crimea by Russia

On February 27, 2014, the Crimean Parliament and Council of Ministers building was raided by masked people. The Russian Federation claimed that these people were not sent by Russia, but a few months later it was said that Special Forces were sent to Crimea by Russia to protect the local people and to hold a referendum (Beybulayeva, 2015,52). On March 16, 2014, a referendum was held in Crimea. There were options on the voting list that citizens could choose from. The first of these was: "*Are you in favor of the unification of Crimea with Russia as part of the Russian Federation?*" The second was to make minor changes to Ukraine's status, but under this option, Crimea would remain part of Ukraine: "*Are you in favor of reinstating the 1992 version of the constitution of the Republic of Crimea and the status of Crimea as part of Ukraine?*" (Brenner,2014; Sneider, 2014). Official figures showed that 83.1% of citizens living in Crimea participated in the polls and approximately 96.77% of those who participated voted in favor of annexing Crimea to Russia. However, Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians boycotted the referendum and did not vote (Mihaylov,2015).

2. THE IMPORTANCE AND FUTURE OF CRIMEAN THE CONTEXT OF UKRAINE, RUSSIA, AND TÜRKIYE

Crimea joined the Ukrainian territory, and after joining, it claimed a privileged status within Ukraine by using its population and strategic location. Finally, this status was obtained in April 1993, and Crimea gained the right to prepare its constitution, elect its own presidents, and have a certain degree of autonomy. Crimea was given the right to have a budget and administer its own territory. Crimea became the "Autonomous Republic of Crimea" on September 21, 1994 (Asker, 2014, 9). In the January 1994 elections, Yury Meshkov was elected Crimean president. Meshkov guaranteed to make a referendum on Crimea's independence in March, in spite of Ukraine's danger of "taking decisive action" against moves that would interrupt the integrity of Ukraine (*The New York Times*, 1994). Meshkov played a key role for Russia. In 1992, he advocated the idea that Crimea should be part of Russia as a separate entity from Ukraine, but failed and took refuge in Russia (Ben, 2023). This situation paved the way for conflicts between Kiev and Moscow over the control of the Black Sea Fleet and the future of Crimea. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the phase of sharing common values among the Soviet Republics began. An important part of this problem was about the status of Crimea between Ukraine and the Russian Federation and the future of Sevastopol, where the "Black Sea Fleet" is located. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Ukraine and the Russian Federation agreed that 80 percent of the fleet would belong to Russia and that the Ukrainian navy would only maintain a symbolic presence in Sevastopol. With this agreement, Russia would lease Sevastopol and its environs from Ukraine for 20 years for an annual fee of 97.75 million dollars and give a \$200 million loan for the transfer of nuclear weapons to Ukraine (Bilener, 2007). In parallel with the deterioration of Kiev-Moscow relations with the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine in 2004, parties began to express their differences of opinion on this issue. During this period, when the US's interest in Crimea increased, the Moscow administration announced that it intended to continue using the Sevastopol base after 2017 (Canar, 2012,60-61). On April 21,2010, Ukraine and Russia signed an agreement under which the Fleet would remain in Sevastopol until 2042 (Anlar, 2017, 200). With the agreements it made with Ukraine, Russia has the power to maintain its military presence in Crimea and maintain a navy in the Black Sea. Russia has tried to gain influence in Ukraine. Western Ukraine sided with the West, although the eastern part of Ukraine mostly supported Russia. Therefore, in the 2004 elections, Yushchenko, supported by Western supporters, won the election. Yuschenko stated that their ultimate goal is integration into Europe and NATO. Disturbed by this, Russia tried to increase its influence in the region for centuries within the framework of its plan to connect Crimea to itself and reach the sea, and the Tatars, who were in the majority in the region, were either exiled by the Russian government or were forced to migrate as a result of the oppression policy applied to them. Thus, Russians were settled in the places left by the Tatars. In Crimea, 60 percent of the region's population of about 2 million is Russian, 25 percent is Ukrainian, and 13 percent is Tatars (Tüysüzoğlu, 2011, 76). Believing that the influence on the peninsula was turning to its advantage, Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 (Görge, 2022,294-295).

After Crimea gained its independence and joined Russia, the right of nations to self-determination came to the fore. The right of nations to self-determination is closely related to the basic principles of international law and allows nations to determine their own destiny without being subjected to any interference. The acceptance of the principle of self-determination in international law was realized with the UN Charter (Pazarci, 2005). This right comes from the freedom of each country to choose how and in what way it will be governed, and is closely related to the human rights of the citizens living in a country. In addition, the right of self-determination is closely related to the principles of sovereignty of states, equality with other states, territorial integrity, prohibition of the use of force and non-intervention in internal affairs, and is a complementary principle of international law. Nations demanding independence have used the right of self-determination in the form of a slogan and tool. This right is also in line with human rights law, which states that all people within a country have equal rights (Zengin, 2019:1). The principle of self-determination is seen as one of the aims of the UN in the 2nd paragraph of article 1. Self-determination, which is regulated in the UN Charter,¹⁷ became a binding rule of international law with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1966. Both Conventions² state that all people have the right of self-determination and they freely establish their own political status and freely ensure their economic, social and cultural development. It is unclear what people's right to self-determination means and what exactly it achieves. Additionally, it is controversial in international law. In practice, the right of self-determination ranges from giving people secession and independence from the parent state (external self-determination) to giving people (national minorities) the right of the self-government or autonomy within the borders of its parent state (internal self-determination). Although there is no official stance on what the right of self-determination entails, the right of secession to preserve the territorial integrity and political unity of existing states is strongly rejected in international law. Exceptions to this rule have traditionally applied to people under colonial domination or oppression of some kind. Also, the right of secession from a state has been recognized in cases where a population has been deprived of civil and political rights and has been subjected to severe human rights violations (Cavandoli and Wilson, 2022: 387-388). Although there have been cases of human rights violations in countries, this situation must reach a certain stage for humanitarian intervention and the right of self-determination.

Crimea has become a center of attraction for other countries due to its location. Due to Crimea's location, many countries have fought for this region. In addition, due to the value of this region, many nations wanted to settle here, and many countries tried to gain influence here.

² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 1/1 and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 1/1.

Today, the status of Crimea has become a key for the security and stability of the Black Sea, and the plans of Ukraine, Russia, and Türkiye on Crimea have begun to affect the relations of these countries with each other. Türkiye is historically and strategically related to this region. It also thinks that this region should be given to Crimean Tatars and that Crimean Tatars were forcibly removed from this region. Türkiye has undertaken the protection of the Crimean Tatars, the Ottoman remnant, and supports these people in living freely in their own homeland. Russia penetrated into Crimea with its settlement policy and considered Crimea as the final point that could reach the Black Sea. This region has great strategic and economic value for Russia. Ukraine, on the other hand, finds this region strategically important and sees it as a key point to becoming a regional power and developing its economy. Therefore, the Crimean issue should be addressed mainly in the context of three countries.

2.1. Russian Perspective

In 1783, Russia's Black Sea Fleet was founded in 1783 in Sevastopol and this fleet's aim has been to protect Russia's southern borders throughout history. Sevastopol is crucially important for Black Sea trade routes and permits Russia to spread the naval power in the Mediterranean. It serves as headquarters for Russia's recently established Mediterranean Task Force. The fleet's importance was stressed during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, when the fleet was utilized to make a blockade against Georgia (Paul,2015). After the Soviet Union collapsed, the future of the Black Sea Fleet became a matter of debate. The dispute over the Black Sea Fleet increased tension in 1992, when Ukrainian Ministers Antonov and Morozov declared that the fleet belonged to them, and the Russian Federation opposed this and also claimed that it had rights over Sevastopol. In May 1997, the two states reached an agreement, and Russia and Ukraine gained the rights to establish military centers in the area. Ukraine accepted that most of the fleet belonged to the Russians (Beybulayeva,2015,35). Ukraine, on the other hand, had sovereign rights over the city of Sevastopol and rented the facilities for Russia's fleet to the Russians for 20 years with an annual rent of 97.75 million dollars (Hedenskog and Larsson, 2007, 93). In April 2010, Ukraine reached an agreement with Russia to purchase natural gas at a discounted price in exchange for extending the lease until 2042 (Smith and Harari, 2014,20). Ukraine's aim was to pay off its debts to Russia and reduce its dependence on Russia. However, as a result of a dispute with Ukraine, Russia seized Crimea by force and annexed it to its territory through a referendum. Russia wants to increase its influence in the Black Sea region and take this region under its control. For Russia, the Crimea region is very important for the security and stability of the region. In addition, Crimea has geostrategic importance. (Alexandrova-Arbatova,2008).

On March 16, 2014, the Crimean Parliament decided to hold a referendum and requested to be annexed to Russia, with 83% of the vote being in favor and 93% voting yes. Russia made a decision to annex Crimea. According to the Russians, Crimea exercised its right to self-determination. Russia claimed that the procedures leading to the independence of Ukraine and Crimea were similar.

The Russians stated that Ukraine also declared independence and decided to hold a referendum. A formal authority, like Kosovo, was not consulted in the division of Crimea from the rest of Russia (Putin, 2014). Russia justified this action and Putin referred to the right of self-determination of Crimea in his statements regarding the problem, in the declaration of independence accepted by the Crimean Assembly, and his reference was made to the Kosovo example along with the right of self-determination regulated in the United Nations Charter (Cavandoli and Wilson, 2022: 385). Crimea, now under Russian authority considered the fact that the new government staged a coup and that the removal of former President Yanukovich was a violation of the constitution. The Crimeans under Russian rule argued that Crimea's annexation to Russia was not a violation of the Constitution since the constitutional system was suspended, emphasized that it had cultural and historical ties with Russia, and said that the majority in Crimea was Russian (Gürseler, 2014, 93; Çeven, 2019, 140-141).

2.2. Ukrainian Perspective

When Ukraine gained its independence, one of the states that was most disturbed by this was Russia. Russia considered Ukraine a part of the Great Russian Empire. Russians and Ukrainians are not only Slavic but also linguistically and culturally close to each other. The history of Ukraine and Russia is based on the three Slavic races of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, generally known as "Kievan Rus". Ukraine's population is 45 million and has a very diverse ethnic structure. However, Russians mostly live in the eastern region of the country, are 17.3 percent of the population and are considered as the largest minority group. In Ukraine, there are some historical reasons for the ethnic difference. Ukraine's eastern part has been invaded by Russia and Ukraine's western part has been invaded by Austria and Poland for centuries. At this point, settlement and cultural policies formulated by the invaders impacted the creation of Ukraine's current ethnic structure (Sönmez, Bıçakçı and Yıldırım, 2015,659). After Ukraine declared its independence, it wanted to save itself from the shadow of Russia and tried to pursue an independent foreign policy. However, even though Ukraine declared its independence, it could not act independently at first. Ukraine remained under the control of Moscow politically and could not break away from Russia for geographical, economic, cultural, and historical reasons. Ukraine has generally tried to maintain its relations with the West and Russia by following a policy of balance. After Ukraine gained its independence, it wanted to improve its relations with the EU, primarily due to its European identity, economic development, geographical location on the European continent, and historical ties. Although Ukraine could not pursue policies aimed entirely at the EU due to the Russian factor, the issue of EU integration has been on the agenda of Ukraine since the 1990s. (Sarı, 2015, 33 and 42-43).

Crimea has a geostrategic location and has convenient ports in Kefe, Kerch and Sevastopol. A state which controls Crimea also gains the control of the Northern Black Sea and Azov Sea regions. Crimea, in particular, is at the junction of the key connections of transportation and communication links from North to South and East to West (Hedenskog, 2011, 51).

Crimea contributes to economic growth thanks to tourism, maritime transportation, oil and gas resources, and pipelines (Davydov, 2004). In addition, Ukraine signed a lease agreement allowing Russia's Black Sea Fleet to enter its port, and thus Ukraine received certain income from Russia. Some of the Tatars were able to return to their homeland only between 1989 and 1990, after the exile. According to the census in 1987, out of more than 2,000,000 Crimean Tatars, only 17,400 Crimean Tatars remained. This number increased to 135,000 people after the exile ended (Davydov, 2008, 33-34). Ukraine helped Crimean Tatars to return to their lands. However, after their return, the Crimean Tatars had a difficult time due to settlement problems, unemployment problems, and economic situations, and Ukraine could not find a solution to these situations. However, Crimean Tatars did not display a hostile attitude towards Ukraine because they also experienced the same suffering. Even though Crimean Tatars could not receive the necessary assistance from Ukraine, they preferred Ukraine to Russia in the conflict. On March 16, 2014, Crimean Tatars boycotted the referendum and did not vote in the referendum.

After the annexation of Crimea by Russia, Ukraine strongly opposed Russia's claims on Crimea and dissolved the Assembly of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Many countries declared that the referendum in Crimea was held unilaterally and was a violation of the Ukrainian Constitution. The Autonomous Republic of Crimea is an autonomous state and is not authorized to hold a referendum on an issue that will affect the territorial integrity of Ukraine (Çeven, 2019, 141). The population living in Crimea, which forms an integral part of Ukraine, has become an integral part of the Ukrainian people on the basis of human rights. Crimea's right of secession may be valid if it is based on the decision of the entire Ukrainian people, including the population living in Crimea. The Ukrainian Constitution also regulates that the changes on the borders is only possible through a referendum in which all Ukrainian people will participate. Basically, the Russian population of the Crimea region wanted the right of self-determination. Tatars living in Crimea have consistently refused to secede and demonstrated this by boycotting the referendum held on March 16, 2014. Russians living in Crimea cannot be considered directly entitled to the right of external self-determination, as demanded by all the people of a state (Abdullahzade, 2014: 172-173).

2.3. Turkish Perspective

In order to understand Türkiye's reaction to the annexation of Crimea by Russia and its mindset about Crimea, it is necessary to look at Türkiye-Russia, Türkiye-Ukraine, and Türkiye's relations with the Crimean Turks. Economic relations between Türkiye and Russia date back to the founding of the Republic of Türkiye. After the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, important steps were taken in economic relations in parallel with the political relations developed between Lenin and Mustafa Kemal Pasha. In April 1920, the letter written by Mustafa Kemal to Lenin is considered the beginning of official relations between Türkiye and the Soviet Union government. In this letter, the establishment of diplomatic relations was proposed and Russia was asked to help the Turkish Government in its war of independence.

In return, it was emphasized that the Turkish Government and the Soviet Union would jointly fight against the imperialist powers. The Soviet Union was the first in the world to recognize the Turkish Grand National Assembly Government. The Soviet Union recognized the Turkish Grand National Assembly and took a decision in favor of establishing friendly relations with Ankara (Arbaç, 2017, 141). The economic relations that developed in the first years of the Republic were interrupted by the Second World War and Türkiye's membership in NATO. However, it seemed that relations were revived during the planned economic period that was implemented in Türkiye in the 1960s. The Soviet Union provided support in the implementation of industrialization and development policies in Türkiye, and economic relations and foreign trade between the two countries gained importance again (Aydın, 2021,173).

Türkiye, which is a neighbor of Russia and Ukraine, initiated strategic and commercial cooperation with these two countries in the first years of the downfall of the Soviet Union. Later, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization was created in 1992 and was created with the aim of establishing economic cooperation among countries in the Black Sea region. The organization, which was established among the countries geographically bordering the Black Sea, also aimed to prevent regional problems that may arise between the newly independent regional countries in the post-Cold War period - especially after the Soviet Union collapsed (Bakan and Güven, 2021, 530). In 1994, Turkish-Ukrainian relations developed especially with the visit of the President Süleyman Demirel of Türkiye to Ukraine. Demirel and Leonid Kravchuk expressed their determination to transform the Black Sea Region into a region of the permanent peace, stability and prosperity, and focused on Russian separatism in Crimea, the status of the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Sevastopol and the difficulties of "resettlement" of the Crimean Tatars (Kınıklioğlu, 1996: 33). Türkiye and Russia have successfully separated the areas of cooperation and conflict in bilateral relations since the early 2000s, and serious progress has been made in many issues in this direction. Moscow and Ankara have discovered the existing potential, especially in the fields of trade, tourism and energy, and have developed relations that benefit both parties (Koçak, 2017,8-9). Also, there are also strong relations between Türkiye and Ukraine. The first meeting of the Türkiye-Ukraine High Level Strategic Cooperation Council, held between Türkiye and Ukraine, was held in Ankara in 2011. In 2012, the visa-free travel period between the two countries started. The trade volume between Türkiye and Ukraine has reached 5 billion dollars. The establishment of the NATO-Ukraine Commission has taken the relations between Türkiye and Ukraine to a different dimension. Crimean Tatar Turks living in Ukraine have historical, social and cultural ties with Türkiye. A significant population migrated from Crimea to Türkiye and according to some sources, approximately 2 million Crimean Tatar Turks live in Türkiye. In history, major migrations from Crimea to Turkish territory took place in 1790, 1861, 1918 and 1944 (Balacan, 2021, 101). A significant portion of Crimean Turks live in the diaspora in Türkiye, have strong diasporas in many countries such as in Türkiye, make their voices heard, and maintain unity among themselves through foundations, associations, and non-governmental organizations (Çalışkan, 2020).

The history of relations between Crimean Tatars and Ottoman Turks lasted approximately 600 years. During the Ottoman State, Crimean Tatars had common religious, cultural, and historical values with the Turks. After Crimea was won without a war, the Ottoman State gave privileges and autonomy to the Crimean Khanate, allowed them to govern themselves to a certain extent, and allowed the Crimean dynasties to govern the khanate without appointing governors from the center. After the Ottoman State began to lose its power and the Russian Empire began to strengthen, Crimea became a problem between the two states and caused many wars. Crimea became an ideal place for Russians because Russia was looking for a suitable port to develop its trade and the Ottoman State was losing power. As a result of the Ottoman State losing Crimea to the Russian Empire, Crimean Tatars migrated to the Ottoman State. Today, the largest Crimean Tatar diaspora is in Türkiye (Özdal and Demydova, 2011,36-37). Recently, Ukraine has been developing its commercial and military relations with Türkiye in order to recapture Crimea and gain an advantage in the war. In addition, Ukraine attaches more importance to its relations with Türkiye for peace in the Black Sea region and strives to develop cooperation in every field (Togrul, 2011). Also, Türkiye's response to the annexation of Crimea was similar to the responses of Western countries. Türkiye stated that the referendum for Crimea was illegal and unacceptable (Kaya,2014). Türkiye emphasized that Ukraine should be resolved on the basis of respect for its territorial integrity and through dialogue between the two countries. It has often been stated that Ankara did not recognize the results of the referendum held under inappropriate conditions in Crimea and declared that the security and rights of Tatar Turks on the peninsula should be protected. It was emphasized that Turkish-Russian relations should not be allowed to be negatively affected by the crisis. While Türkiye underlined that the referendum held in Crimea was unacceptable, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu stated that Ukraine's territorial integrity should be protected in accordance with international law, and he stated that all segments in Ukraine should be represented equally and all peoples in Crimea should live together in peace without compromising the autonomy of the Crimean Tatar Turks, which Türkiye prioritizes (Yıldırım, 2020, 451).

Türkiye wants to protect the rights of the Crimean Tatars by supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine and does not want its economic cooperation with Russia to be damaged by this situation. It is possible to say that Türkiye still pursues a moderate, middle-of-the-road policy. Opposing Russia could pose a major threat to Türkiye. It could also jeopardize its unifying role between Ukraine and Russia. Currently, Türkiye is one of the rare countries that can negotiate with Russia and Ukraine. Turkey opposes the annexation, basically arguing that there are no conditions for the exercise of the right of self-determination in Crimea. While Türkiye continues to defend Ukraine's territorial integrity, it must also implement a policy of balance in its relations with Russia (Gafarlı, 2015,163-164). Cooperation between Russia and Türkiye has been ongoing for many years. However, since the past, it is a known fact that there has always been a rivalry between them due to geopolitical interests. Although the developments in Ukraine, Libya, Azerbaijan-Armenia, and Syria are expected to lead to a conflict of interest between Russia and Türkiye, they also result in Russia and Türkiye being able to act together in the multipolar world order (Sayan, 2022,111).

In Ukraine, Libya, Azerbaijan-Armenia, and Syria crises, Russia and Türkiye preferred to be among the playmakers and to act together against other powers. Although the Ukraine crisis generally draws a negative line for Türkiye, it has caused the energy corridor and route to exhibit a situation in favour of Türkiye in terms of energy policies. For example, in the Russia-Ukraine War, Türkiye reached an agreement with Russia to allow Ukraine to continue grain exports via the Black Sea (BBC, 2022). Türkiye's attitude, which follows a multifaceted foreign policy, varies according to time, place, conditions, and goals. Sometimes it follows a policy of balance, sometimes a policy of neutrality and independence, and sometimes a policy of peaceful and conciliatory but sometimes threatening policies. However, it does not break bridges with any state and can cooperate in other areas if it conflicts in one area. This shows Türkiye's vision and forward-thinking. If relations between Russia and Türkiye had escalated due to the invasion of Crimea in 2014, Türkiye would not be one of the rare countries that could negotiate with Russia and get results.

CONCLUSION

Crimea has a geostrategic location and has convenient ports in Kefe, Kerch and Sevastopol. A state which controls Crimea also gains the control of the Northern Black Sea and Azov Sea regions. Crimea, in particular, is at the junction of the key connections of transportation and communication links from North to South and East to West. Therefore, Crimea was invaded and conquered by many countries. After the Golden Horde, the region was converted to Islam, and with the help of Golden Horde Turks(Tatars) started living in Crimea. In the 18th century, the Russian Empire annexed Crimea, began to exploit Crimea, forced the Crimean Tatars to migrate, and sent its own citizens to the region in order to increase its influence there. Crimean Tatars were highly suffered by Russians. After Crimea became a part of independent Ukraine, Crimean Tatars started returning to Crimea, but they faced some difficulties. However, they preferred Ukraine and the European Union to Russia in the hope of a more democratic and respectful state of human rights. Crimea has an important geographical location and is a multi-ethnic region. Crimea's location is very essential for Black Sea countries on safety and stability, especially for Ukraine, Russia, and Türkiye.

The right of self-determination is also part of universal human rights law. In human rights law, self-determination is seen as a collective right. While self-determination has generally is considered a positive principle, the right of secession is seen as a negative and destructive principle. According to international law, the right of self-determination is valid within the limits of the principle of territorial integrity. Turkey and Ukraine oppose annexation, basically arguing that there are no conditions for the exercise of the right of self-determination in Crimea. However, Russia justified the right of self-determination of Crimea and its reference was made to the Kosovo example along with the right of self-determination regulated in the United Nations Charter.

Also, for Russia, the invasion could be seen as an answer to the U.S., who wants to surround Russia with colorful revolutions, make Russia weak, and Russia was very uncomfortable with European Union actions, making some former communist countries members of the European Union. Also, Russia saw Ukraine's problem as a threat to Russia's undisputable hegemony in its own area. For Ukraine, Crimea is a big loss. But the annexation of Crimea by Russia caused a lot of hatred against Russia in Ukraine and made Ukraine collaborate more with European Union. But Crimea could not be the only loss for Ukraine in the near future because Eastern Ukraine is highly influenced by Russia and they want to be with Russia. For Türkiye, Crimean Tatars are very important because they are Turkish and leftovers of Ottoman States. Although Türkiye states that the referendum for Crimea is illegal and unacceptable, Türkiye needs to talk to Putin, protect Crimean Tatars against discrimination, and pave the way for Crimean Tatars who live in Central Asia and want to return to their homeland.

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