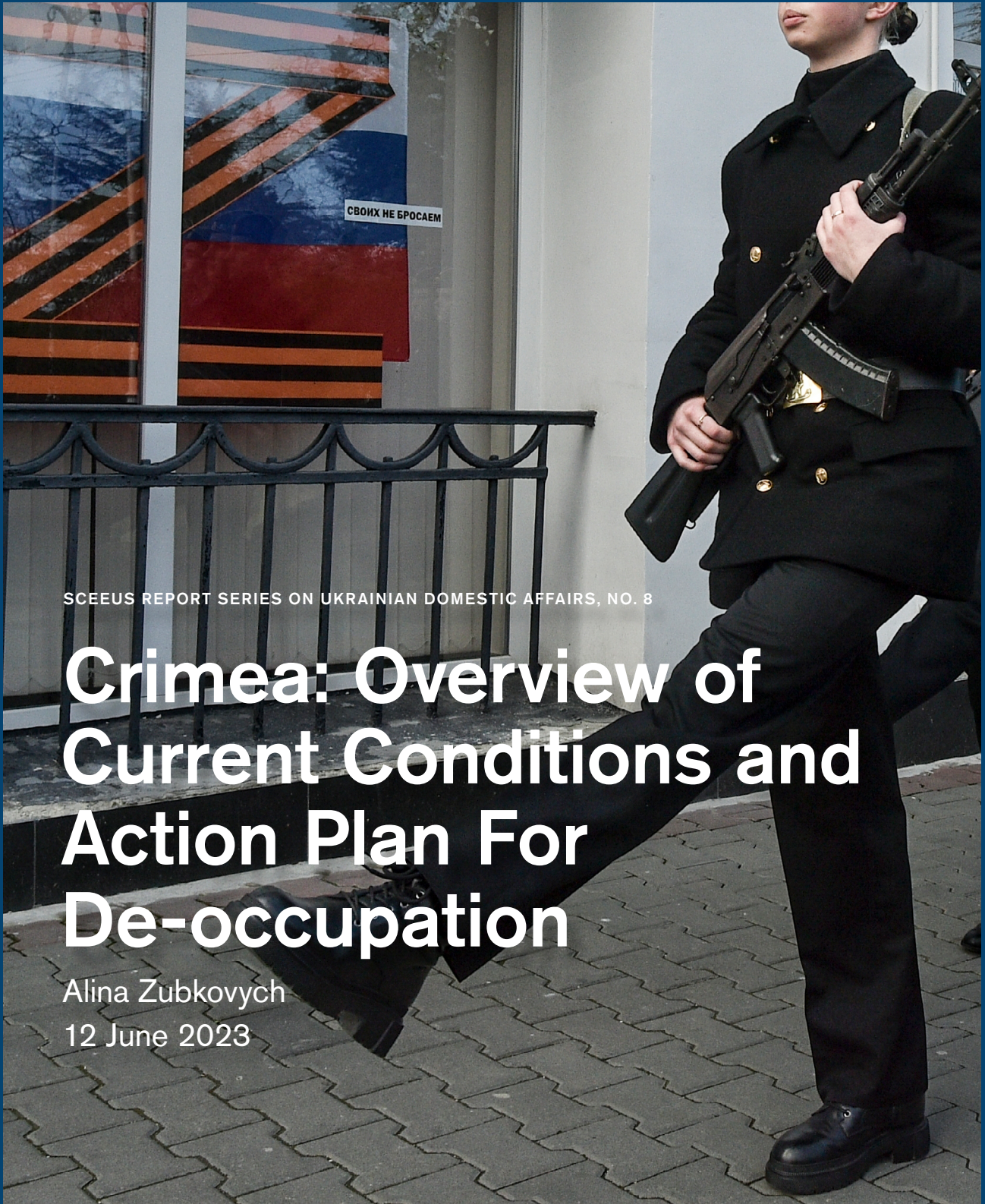


SCEEUS REPORT SERIES ON UKRAINIAN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, NO. 8

Crimea: Overview of Current Conditions and Action Plan For De-occupation

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Executive Summary

Since the occupation of Crimea in 2014, Russia's occupying authorities have instigated a set of illegal actions and practices against the local population. These include colonial-style attempts to restructure the ethnic composition of the population, and to remove or physically eradicate individuals who express disloyalty to the regime. This has been accompanied by a passportization policy that aims to create a loyal Russian majority. There is evidence of the militarization of youth through propaganda education and of the erosion of memory that connects Crimea to Ukraine. These actions are being conducted in combination with the removal or destruction of cultural heritage. Heritage sites are at the risk of damage, while valuable artefacts are being transported to Russia.

In addition, because of mismanagement and the primitive method of extracting underground water, salinization of the soil could lead to a huge ecological catastrophe. The peninsula is highly militarized, and the occupying authorities are closing access to beaches, as work is underway on building defensive fortifications. The planned counteroffensive by Ukraine could largely define the outcome of the war and the future global security architecture.

Purposeful Politics of Restructuring Crimea's Ethnic Composition

From the date of the annexation, it has been Russian policy to transform the ethnic landscape on the peninsula. The main goal is to form a loyal population with no intention or capability to oppose Russia's illegal practices or the fact of annexation. Right from the start, conditions were created in order to 'squeeze out' of the territory non-loyal people, including citizens of Ukraine of any ethnicity, who opposed the illegitimate referendum of 16 March 2014. A special category of targeted people was and remains Crimean Tatars. The criminal justice system was used by the occupying authorities to force all independent media to leave or to cease operations. Similarly, various instruments were used to force activists, employees of educational institutions and administrative, medical or religious institutions that expressed an unwillingness to cooperate with the occupying authorities to leave the peninsula. The same methods are still being used today. Colonial-style practices to purposefully restructure ethnic composition are not new but were used by the Russian Empire and by the Soviet Union in 1945, involving mass-deportation of Crimean Tatars and their substitution with Russian peasant households.¹

There has been a practice of kidnapping people who are disloyal to the regime since the occupation in 2014.² There is also strong pressure to persecute and arrest independent lawyers and journalists. Four lawyers of Crimean Tatar origin have been arrested, and three more have been deprived of the right to defend in court. It is becoming increasingly hard to protect people in the courts in Crimea.

1 Andrii Klymenko, Black Sea News <https://www.blackseanews.net/allnews/crimea>

2 Tetiana Pechonchyk at the Reintegration of the occupied territories, Crimean Platform, Croatia, 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7b1t6A0-hXs>; Alina Zubkovych, 2020/1, Report. The Politics of Language Use among Crimean Tatars in Ukraine: Multiple Contextuality and Practice. *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*

Of the 285 political prisoners or those persecuted by the occupation authorities, the vast majority (194) are political representatives of the Crimean Tatar people.³ There is a strong consensus among experts and practitioners that only the de-occupation of Crimea will bring the rule of law back to the peninsula.

Passportization

Since the occupation of Crimea in 2014, the population of Crimea has expanded to roughly 2.3 million people.⁴ A significant proportion of the inflow are military personnel and their families, as well as employees of Russian security structures, such as the Russian Security Service (FSB), the prosecutor's office and the courts. This has led to a replacement of the local population with officials of the occupation. The occupying authorities state that 2.5 million people are living in Crimea in 2023.⁵ This number is likely to be an exaggeration due to the fact that budget subsidies are calculated by size of population.

Residents of Crimea have been forced to obtain Russian passports to gain access to services to cover their basic needs. Without Russian citizenship, many services, including medical treatment, are denied. The issue of regaining Ukrainian citizenship for former Ukrainian citizens and children born after 2014 will be part of the challenge of transitional justice after the de-occupation.

Militarization of Youth via Propaganda Education

The education system is being widely used as an active tool of Russian propaganda to implement a colonial identity discourse and construct a loyal, militarized and controlled younger generation raised on an ideology that favours and legitimizes Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Around 29,000 children have been involved in militarist youth movements such as the Russian Young Army Cadets National Movement (Yunarmiya or Юнармия). The organization is under EU and US restrictions,⁶ and is known to be training children to use weapons.⁷

Similar goals are being implemented for younger children aged between 7 and 9 through the 'Zarnitsa' movement. A militaristic mindset and glorification of the war conducted by Russia in Ukraine are part of the ideological programme of the 'children's movement'. At the same time, 230,000 children were given school propaganda lessons in 2022 alone.⁸

3 Crimean Tatar Recourse Center, April 2023 <https://ctrcenter.org/uk/projects/zhertvy-okkupacii?fbclid=IwAR1LdTVSJ2yoD6wYc1X1HRqJqEBCRJRGg2YfmO9nli3GXS3caYC6BHYHErw>

4 Federal service of state statistics Results of the population census in the Crimean Federal District https://web.archive.org/web/20160928225301/http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/demo/perepis_krim/KRUM_2015.pdf

5 Rosstat https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/PrPopul2023_Site_.xlsx

6 Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2022/1270 of 21 July 2022 implementing Regulation (EU) No 269/2014 concerning restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32022R1270&fbclid=IwAR1StG5ahQ99FEcMbHKW0TQDfqqlQ7m-UCHjGxTJsRyld_m_X9rrUAGOUrc; US Department of the treasury, Russia-related Designations <https://ofac.treasury.gov/recent-actions/20230412?fbclid=IwAR0DtItrBgQZHkPAbw6Kkl478NRCJHL-q7V8glO3Pllyeex9MBvI7PQVEaw>

7 <https://understandingwar.org/background/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-april-13-2023?fbclid=IwAR1I69itfobGXeqqogNcG3g3RAXqzcNjXdykNqpfVmaiDX2zZrxcvgiCagU>

8 Tetiana Pechonchyck at the Reintegration of the occupied territories, Crimean Platform, Croatia, 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7b1t6A0-hXs>

This forcible militarization of youth is being conducted in combination with the systematic replacement of textbooks produced before the occupation, and the replacement of non-loyal teachers. The removal of Ukrainian literature from the libraries is also a common mechanism used to erase or eliminate any connection between Crimea and Ukraine and to Ukrainian identity.

Removal and Destruction of the Cultural Heritage

Architectural monuments are disappearing or being destroyed. All traces of the Ukrainian presence are being removed. The monuments to honour the Ukrainian author Taras Shevchenko and Cossack hetman Petro Konashevych-Sahaydachny in Sevastopol have been dismantled. Valuable heritage artefacts are being transported to Russia.

Under the guise of restoration work, the authenticity and value of cultural heritage associated with the Crimean Tatars are being destroyed. This practice of cultural erasure is visible at the Bakhchisaray Palace, a site of the medieval importance. This object of huge cultural heritage is showing signs of damage since its 'restoration'.

Khersones Tauride, a monument of antiquity that connects the history of Crimea and Ukraine with Europe and the Mediterranean, has been turned into a base for Moscow orthodoxy that promotes the destruction of Ukraine. This UNESCO World Heritage site is under threat, together with 4,000 objects of national importance.⁹

Salinization of Water

During the time of the Russian occupation, the soil in the northern part of the peninsula has become unsuitable for agricultural use. The Russian military blew up a man-made dam in 2022 and satellite images show that one of the largest reservoirs, Mezhgornoe, is now empty. An excess of water from the Simferopol reservoir was dumped into the Salgir River in the summer of 2022, flooding several villages. The canal bed is overgrown in many areas and the slabs are cracked. Pumping stations and at least 12 blocking structures are in need of repair. Half the Dnipro water that flows to Crimea goes underground.¹⁰ Mismanagement and the primitive methods used to extract underground water have caused salinization of the soil.¹¹ Russia's environmental mismanagement could become an ecological catastrophe.¹²

Fortification of the Peninsula

The Azov Sea is currently being used as the inner sea of occupation regime. Recreation centres and entire villages are being deployed as military bases, both in the Azov Sea area and in Crimea. According to Ivan Fedorov, the mayor of Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia oblast, about 250 recreation centres and hotels have been looted or occupied in Kyrylivka alone. Other areas are being used to transfer cargo and weapons.

9 "They will take everything out." Ukraine may lose exhibits from Crimean museums, Liberty Radio, 2022, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/krym-viyna-muzei-eksponaty-rosia-vyvezennia/32163978.html>

10 Has the water problem been solved in Crimea?, Crimea.Realii, March 2023 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_Yak8St9Mc

11 Tamila Tasheva, *Экоцид в Крыму: оккупанты нанесли непоправимый урон почвам - Флот 2017* (flot2017.com) 20.04.2023

12 Alla Hurska, Jan 2022, Water Crises and the Looming Ecological Catastrophe in Occupied Crimea and Devastated Donbas, The Jamestown Foundation, https://jamestown.org/program/water-crises-and-the-looming-ecological-catastrophe-in-occupied-crimea-and-devastated-donbas/?fbclid=IwAR04V1xjHzw5BdE9Bj_UtpJzqL3eQdhfXe5s2ErOGyDHorn7kvGw0eJI9UY

All over the peninsula, the occupying authorities are closing access to the beaches, as work is underway to build defensive fortifications there. Construction of fortifications in the western and northern parts of the Crimean Peninsula is especially visible.¹³

Currently, Ukraine controls only 20% of its coastline from the Danube River to Dnipro River.¹⁴ The rest is occupied by Russia.¹⁵ Without control of its coastline, Ukraine does not have freedom of navigation – all ports are blocked. Only the grain initiative allows partial usage of the ports. Preparations for a counteroffensive by Ukraine constitute a crucially important event that is predicted to largely define the outcome of the war and the future global security architecture.

Policy Recommendations

The recommendations below are on two separate themes: Black Sea security and reintegration of the Crimean Peninsula into Ukraine.

Black Sea Security

At the April 2023 Black Sea Security Conference, Ukraine's Minister of Defence Oleksiy Reznikov set out an official strategy in relation to de-occupation of the peninsula.¹⁶ Successful implementation of a possible counteroffensive in Crimea and the south of Ukraine would bring about both the ideological defeat of the aggressor and the salvation of the people under Russian occupation in the territories adjacent to the peninsula. For such an operation to be successful would require further support with the delivery of weapons, further training of Ukrainian military units, increased exchanges of information on the region in the air and at sea, and a strengthened sanctions regime.

In order to return peace to the Black Sea region, three steps must be taken: (a) establish a permanent consultation group on political and defence levels to elaborate joint initiatives;¹⁷ (b) increased cooperation within the framework of the EU maritime security strategy;¹⁸ and (c) a strengthening of NATO and EU projects to develop systems for the protection of maritime infrastructure in the Black Sea region.

In the long term, after Ukraine has liberated its coastline, it will need to control its waters. This is essential not only to protect Ukraine's sovereign waters, but also to ensure that international food deliveries are not obstructed. This will require fleet cooperation with neighbouring Black Sea region partners such as Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey in a warship initiative to control territorial waters and ensure freedom of navigation.

13 [A web of trenches shows Russia fears losing Crimea - Washington Post](#), 3 April, The Washington Post

14 Andriy Ryzhenko, expert of the Center for Defense Strategies, <https://inshe.tv/important/2023-03-30/750434/>

15 Andriy Ryzhenko, comment, [the First Black Sea Security Conference](#)

16 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MYeLL60-KM> The First Black Sea Security Conference of the International Crimea Platform in Bucharest, April 2023

17 The Crimean Platform may serve as the place for sharing policy related activities and analytics <https://crimea-platform.org/en/>

18 Maritime Security: EU updates Strategy to safeguard maritime domain against new threats https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1483

Reintegration of Crimea Into Ukraine

A general roadmap might include initiatives on security issues, transitional justice and economic recovery. A joint NATO and EU cooperative action plan could set positive preconditions for a prompt response following the de-occupation of Crimea. Such a plan might include: (a) a programme on demining on land and at sea; and (b) a framework for transitional justice that includes resolving property and citizenship rights and residence-related issues, as well as lustration processes and prosecution of individuals in state-funded positions who collaborated with the occupying regime.

The courts have already produced a huge number of decisions during the occupation.¹⁹ Each decision may involve more than one person. All these decisions must be revisited. Moreover, early action should include resolving liability issues related to the occupying administration. Senior officials who contributed to the occupation regime and individuals responsible for crimes against humanity must be brought to justice. This should involve:

- Support for the indigenous population, such as Crimean Tatars, Karaites and Krymchaks. in their fight for political and other forms of rights on the peninsula.²⁰
- Economic rebuilding that includes investment in the development of tourism, new road infrastructure and the integration of Crimea into the European road network, as well as the development of high-speed railway connections.

It will be beneficial to encourage Ukrainian war veterans and other categories of citizen who contributed to the victory of Ukraine to relocate to Crimea by establishing programmes that provide beneficial conditions for them and their families. Education programmes and exchange visits allowing youth from all over Ukraine to visit Crimea would serve as an important tool of reintegration.

Conclusions

Further cooperation among partner countries will be needed on analyses of and information exchange on the Black Sea area, as well as a continued strengthening of project cooperation among NATO and EU member states in order to develop a system of protection for maritime infrastructure in the Black Sea region. In the long run, the de-occupation of Crimea could help to resolve such issues as demining on land and at sea, and environmental problems, as well as the set of challenging tasks around transitional justice. Fleet cooperation will be required among Black Sea region partners to ensure freedom of navigation and the global security of the region.

19 Court decisions/ Sudebnyye resheniya <https://xn--90afdbaav0bd1afy6eub5d.xn--p1ai/search>

20 Tamila Tasheva at the Reintegration of the occupied territories, Crimean Platform, Croatia, 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7b1t6A0-hXs>



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