

THE CRIMEAN TATARS

Habitat: The original home of the Crimean Tatars was the Crimean Peninsula. They were deported from the region by the Soviet central authorities in 1944. The deported Crimean Tatars resettled mainly in Uzbekistan, in some areas of Tadjikistan and also in the Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Beyond the ex-Soviet borders there are some Crimean Tatars in Romania and Turkey.

Since 1967, despite difficulties, the Crimean Tatars have started returning to their homeland.

Population:

1793
160,251 (according to Simon Pallas)
1860
less than 100,000
1923
150,000 (25 % of the total population of Crimea)
1989
271,700

For a long time the Soviet Union failed to recognize the Crimean Tatars as a distinct ethnic group. For the purposes of censuses all Tatars were considered as one people. Thanks to the persistence of the Crimean Tatars they were recorded separately in the last census in 1989. It has been alleged that the official statistics arbitrarily decreased their number. According to the documents of the Crimean Tatar National Movement Organization the ethnic group is 550,000 strong. An impartial estimate of the number puts it between 360,000 and 410,000.

Language: The Crimean Tatar language has branched into the following dialects: the Northern or Steppe dialect, Central dialect and Southern or Coastal dialect. The Steppe dialect originates from the Kipchak-Nogay, the Central from the Kipchak-Polovtsy and the Southern from the Oguz type of Turkic. The differences between dialects are apparent on all linguistic levels. The Northern dialect has been strongly influenced by the Nogay language, the Southern by Turkish.

History: The Crimean Tatars discovered their ethnic identity on the Crimean Peninsula. The Khanate of the Crimea was founded in 1443 as a remnant of the Golden Horde. The Crimean Khanate exercised considerable power in Eastern Europe from the beginning of the 16th century up until the end of the 17th. For centuries it had an alliance with Turkey. In 1783, after numerous wars between Russia and

Turkey for control of the Black Sea, the Khanate was annexed by Russia. At that time the Crimean Tatars constituted 98 % of the population. In the 19th century the Crimea became the Russian's Black Sea bridgehead. The expropriation of land and deportations, especially in the 1850s and 60s, forced a large number of Crimean Tatars to immigrate to Turkey. At the same time an influx of Russians began. By the end of the 19th century the Crimean Tatars constituted a minority in their historic homeland.

The national awakening of the Crimean Tatars began in the last quarter of the 19th century nurtured by the rise of Pan-Islamism and the Pan-Turkish movements. By 1905, 350 national schools had been established in the Crimea. Following the Russian February Revolution the Crimean Tatars began to strive for their cultural autonomy. Later, this was expanded to include territorial autonomy.

In 1921 the Crimean Autonomous Republic was established within the Russian Federation and by 1930 more than a fifth of its population (about 200,000) was Crimean Tatars.

In the first years of Soviet power the development of Crimean Tatar national culture was tolerated: national schools were re-opened and the Tatars founded national research centers, museums, libraries and theatres. Tatar place-names were restored to use. Researchers at Tauria University, opened in Simferopol in 1925, studied besides other things, Tatar language and literature. Teacher training for national schools began. Liberalization came to an end in 1928. That year marked the beginning of suppression, sovietization and russification. From 1928 to 1939 about 35,000--40,000 people were imprisoned or deported. The intellectual class was completely exterminated. Study of the Crimean Tatar language and literature was out of the question and its teaching was forbidden. All Crimean Tatar publications and press were banned. In the course of russification all words of an Arabic, Turkish or Persian origin were substituted by Russian ones. Latin script was substituted by Cyrillic. After the mauling of the Soviets, in 1941, the Germans were welcome liberators.

Post-war, the Stalin administration used the Crimean Tatars alleged collaboration with the Nazis as a pretext for the ultimate solution of a demographic problem. The deportation of all Crimean Tatars (183,155 persons) took place on May 18, 1944. The majority were sent to the Uzbek SSR, to Molotov (Perm Region), or to the Sverdlovsk Region. Other regions, to a lesser extent, were also destinations for the deportees (Mari ASSR, Kasakh SSR, Kemerovo, Gorky, Kuibyshev Regions, Tadzik SSR, Bashkir ASSR, Tula and Ivanovo Regions, Tatar and Chuvash ASSRs). A total of 47 % of the Crimean Tatars died on the way, many in the concentration camps of Sverdlovsk. Two years later Soviet newspapers proclaimed two peoples -- the Chechens and Crimean Tatars -- traitors, and accordingly deprived them of autonomy. A connection is assumed to exist between the deportation of the Crimean Tatars and Soviet claims on the straits ruled by Turkey.

There followed campaign in the Crimea to russify all place-names. The forcibly vacated areas were colonized with central Russians. The mass media engineered a hatred against the Crimean Tatars. In 1945 the Crimean ASSR was downgraded to an autonomous region and in 1954 it was incorporated into the Ukraine. Until 1956, the Crimean Tatars were deprived of all rights, with no freedom to travel. Then, some

concessions were made to the partisans and soldiers of the Red Army. A newspaper, *Lenin Bayragi* (Lenin's Flag), the first since 1944, began publishing in Tashkent. In 1957 the Crimean Tatars began a campaign to collect signatures for petition to be allowed to return to their homeland. Its leaders were arrested, confined to mental hospitals, even killed. In 1967 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet issued a decree: 'Rehabilitation of the Tatars of Crimea'. Under its terms the Crimean Tatars were still not recognized as an ethnic entity and were not allowed to return home. Supposed autonomous districts were created in Uzbekistan, with the aim of making the Crimean Tatar settlement permanent but the Tatars rejected the plan. Strivings to return their historic territory began anew in 1987 with petitions and protest demonstrations. In return Moscow reaffirmed its justifications for the deportations and savagely suppressed the demonstrations. Still, in 1989 the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union adopted a formal decision which allowed the Crimean Tatars and the Volga Germans to return to their homeland and re-establish a local administration. However, there is not a single date in the document. The Organization of The Crimean-Tatar Ethnic Movement was founded to lead the struggle. The return home has been painful. By the mid-1990s about 90,000 Crimean-Tatars had returned to the Crimea. By the summer of 1991 the number had increased to 150,000. The Crimean Tatar Congress (*Kurultai*) approved a declaration in which they demanded privileges for the Crimean Tatars in the Crimea and the right to self-determination regarding the use of natural resources and resort areas. So far the Tatars have been allocated eight areas for settlement. These are considered unsuitable from a climatic point of view. Before the deportations these eight areas were populated by a mere 15 % of the Crimean Tatars, now they must be home to 63.6 % of the people.

The Russian population of the Peninsula is firmly opposed to the creation of a Crimean Tatar state.

Writing: The oldest Crimean Tatar texts date from the 13th century. The reform of the literary language began in the 19th century. Until 1927 the literary tradition was based on the Southern dialect, then the transition to the Central dialect took place. Until the end of the 1920s the Tatars used the Arabic script, then until 1938, the Latin alphabet, and finally the Russian.

The mass deportation of 1944 paralysed their culture. Far from home, scattered among foreigners, a whole generation of uneducated or ill-educated Crimean Tatars has grown up. Only in 1957, after thirteen years, were the Crimean Tatars allowed to publish their own newspaper in Tashkent. In recent years some other periodicals have appeared, including since 1989, a weekly in Simferopol