

PEOPLE OF “THE GREY ZONE”

Witnesses
of Russian annexation
of Crimea in 2014

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Authors of the project:
Anna Andriievskya, Olena Khalimon

Translator:
Olha Tymchyshyn

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This book of testimonies concerning Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 describes the part of history of “Crimean spring” which Russian propaganda conceals and distorts. More than fifty stories refute the myths that the annexation of Crimea was bloodless and “Crimean people didn’t try to resist and willfully chose Russia”. How did Crimea become a part of Russia and how did that turn out for Crimean residents? What methods do Russian special agents and power forces use against peaceful citizens on the peninsula? Crimean people who became witnesses and victims of Russian military seizing of the peninsula in 2014 provide the answer on these and other questions.

Photo materials are provided by the participants of the project.

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***To our descendants and all those
who suffered from Russian aggression***

Foreword from authors of the project

“In 2014 Crimea became the part of Russia without a shot being fired”, Russian functionaries, their supporters and pro-Kremlin journalists like to repeat this statement. They try to strengthen this concept both in Russia as well as in the world using formidable resources: political, financial and informational. Indeed, this statement has become deeply rooted in the atmosphere of lack of reliable and exhaustive information about the events in Crimea in March 2014, so-called “Crimean spring”. This book in your hands is aimed at formation of the complete picture of this story and, particularly, representing those facts, which Russian leaders, Russia-controlled media and journalists prefer not to mention or which were fabricated by Russian propaganda.

We wrote this book together with Crimean people, for whom “joining” of the peninsula to Russia marked the beginning of life in the “grey zone”, where the laws of the civilized world are not effective and people with weapons and almost unlimited opportunities concentrate all power in their hands. How did the peninsula become under Russian control? Who helped Russian forces to accomplish this? How did this military operation affect residents of Crimea? What methods did Russian special services and security forces use to restrain any signs of dissent on the peninsula? The answers to these and other questions were given by Crimean people, witnesses and victims of the military annexation of the peninsula by Russian forces in spring 2014.

This book contains half a hundred testimonies, which break myths about the annexation of Crimea without bloodshed and victims, and that “Crimea residents didn’t try to resist and joined

voluntarily to Russia". Certainly, not only these stories have to be unburdened Ukrainians and the world. Therefore, we propose to start with them.

Without these stories of Crimean journalists, activists and ordinary people it seems to be impossible to display an objective history of the events of 2014 and further life of the peninsula. These stories are important for the modern history of not only Ukraine or Russia, but also Europe and the entire world, for everyone who advocates the supremacy of human rights and respects the basis of world order.

We intentionally and voluntarily didn't interview any politician or statesman to avoid a possible conjuncture. Moreover, their statements have been included in other publications. This book is the first one contains testimonies of Crimean people, which contested against Russian militaries by peaceful protests without any authority and deputy mandate.

To all those, who in XXI came to know soviet repressions being captured by Russian mercenary and undergoing fiendish tortures in FSB.

To all those, who lost own homes rescuing themselves and their relatives from savage reprisal for non-recognition of "Russian Crimea".

To all those, who, having lost everything, continue to fight for returning of Ukrainian Crimea. We, contemporaries, need these stories for awareness of the exhaustive information about this situation. Our descendants need these stories to know real betrayers and heroes, and won't be misled by somebody in his political or personal interests.

Two realities of one peninsula

When at the end of 2013 in Crimea the actions of solidarity with Kyiv Euromaidan had started, its participants explained: “We want a better life and European future for our children”.

When Crimea had become under control of Russian militaries and “self-defense” units, their supporters said: “We want to live in Russia and in the world, where every bit as good as it was in Soviet Union”. At that time these two assertions have divided residents of the one peninsula into two barricades: one part wanted European future, and others – soviet past.

“What is part constituted the majority in Crimea?” This question is often raised by observers and even Crimean people. Indeed, it is the most pointless question you could imagine. Since any answer doesn’t change the core of events in spring 2014. The will or unwillingness of Crimean people to live in Russian was inconsequential in terms of affecting Kremlin military operation in Crimea. All those who expressed their pro-Russian position with tricolors in hands, unwitting or not, helped to accomplish that operation. Indeed, it was beneficial to Kremlin to show the world outpouring the support from Crimean people. Even though residents of Kerch city saw that many buses with unknown people arrived from Russia to the ferry crossing controlled by Russian soldiers, and those unknown people took part in the pro-Russian actions later on.

The result of February-March 2014 events is the transformation of Crimea into a military base, a ground for special agencies with unlimited opportunities, “a grey zone”, where the right of power dominates all human rights. The only thing from the Soviet past embodied in practice, there are repressions.

When one part of Crimean people tell us about Russian benefits in terms of high salaries and pensionary payments, other part is tortured in FSB and imprisoned for political commitments or religious convictions. These two worlds coexist within one peninsula, without overlapping.

Soviet reality was the same. When one part received free apartments and obtained high positions in the government, others were announced as enemies of the nation and destroyed millions. The truth about these crimes was hidden and marked as classified. Therefore, descendants of political repression victims had gotten a chance to find out the truth after years of the Soviet Union's collapse.

Nowadays, political persecution is also commonly used practice. I am one of the victims and because of me affected people close to me. That was one of the reasons I became a co-author of this book.

From 2014 FSB officers are torturing and intimidating my fellows and demanded not to tell anybody what happened by no manner of means, and not to cause the alarm. Only in this way torturers can escape from the punishment and their victims are losing all chances to be protected. However, the world history shows that the silence about the past crimes leads to their occurrence again. With the aim of avoiding mistakes of the past it's important to know and to provide not only sketchy pictures of happy activists with tricolors, but exhaustive information about Russian annexation of Crimea and its consequences.

In comparison with soviet times, today we have a significant advantage. We live in the era of rapid development of information technologies, which do not give somebody possibility to create an "Iron Curtain". Society seeking for the truth has more opportunities to hear and see it. All we need to do is a desire to face the truth.

Anna Andriievskia, journalist from Crimea

Crimea is Ukraine, but we still have a lot of work to do

When somebody asks me: “How did you spend two years in Crimea?”, I reply: “Mainly uncomfortable”. Before moving to the peninsula (from Volyn) I didn’t meet a lot of people dreaming about the Soviet past. In the store to my request in Ukrainian: “Give me a bread, please”, nobody paid attention to me before, and when I paid for ticket in the bus and said in Ukrainian: “One ticket”, I have never heard anything bad about me. In Crimea people often asked me why and how long I was going to stay in Crimea, and why Ukraine is better than Russia.

Of course, day by day the immunity was formed no those people and events... Meetings and acquaintance with pro-Ukrainian activists, public figures, politicians, even though they were not often, inspired me for future work. By the way, most of them after the annexation of Crimea had to leave the peninsula.

Crimea has taught to persist and survive in the toxic environment, to distinguish “professional Ukrainians” and Ukrainians, forced to turn on analytical abilities and search cause-and-effect relations, if something required explanation.

Here are a few stories, one of them has a continuation nowadays.

First story

March of 2016. Kerch. Training for the members of local election commissions – the head, deputy and secretary. Hall for 300 persons. At that moment certified trainers, my colleague and I, of the Central election commission were on the stage. I first took the

floor and explained how to fill in the election documents correctly. I walked to the microphone and start to speak in Ukrainian. I heard the noise, which was moving on from the last rows to the first ones. I asked: "Do you hear me well? I can speak more loudly". There is no answer. The noise was continued and rose. I repeated: "I cannot talk over your noise. Quietly, please". There is no answer. The noise was continued. Then one of the participants bursted: "Don't speak in Ukrainian, speak in Russian" [speaking in Russian]. I asked the audience: "Excuse me, but how will you fill in all the documents? I remember you should do it in Ukrainian".

In addition, I mentioned about the criminal liability for the incorrect completion of the documents. Silence. The first rows stopped to clatter and started thinking, the middle and the last ones continued to clatter enthusiastically. I looked at the room full of sarcastic smiles, which had been waiting the coach's reaction. I had been thinking for 3 seconds, and then I walked to the microphone and said: "The Central election commission has already paid me for this training. If you don't want to listen, I wouldn't tell you about your responsibility before the Ukrainian law. I shouldn't face trial, you should". I don't know the real reason why they had stopped: information about the court, money or fact that I had sat on the chair, straightened legs and started to read booklet...The first rows have regained their consciousness: "Speak, we understand Ukrainian, no, we are interested in this information and we have to listen you..."[speaking in Ukrainian]. At that moment several persons from the last rows left the hall. In a minute the training has started in Ukrainian.

Second story

I knew one journalist. She was born and raised in Crimea. Let's give her name Alla. Her father is from the Western Ukraine. He went to earn money in Moscow. Her mother was from Crimea. She is a teacher. Alla was a little bit interested in history, also she knew a little both Ukrainian and English. She loved and criticized Ukraine,

according to the situation. It so happened that she had to move to Sevastopol because of her job. There she acquainted with the Russian military. They began dating. Then the occupation of Crimea has started. Periodically, we corresponded with each other in the social media. The Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine has continued, we actively fought with the criminal regime. At that moment I have already lived in Kyiv. Alla was tracking my messages, asked a lot of questions, but then she has disappeared from the social media, however, at parting she sent private messages in farewell: "Stop nazi Ukraine". I asked if everything was okay, but she didn't answer. After a year Alla appeared again in the social media (she had already married with the above mentioned Russian military) and started to post different fake news about Ukraine and fake information about "the great and the powerful [Russia]" on her page. So far she didn't write me anything and I also kept silent. But now I know one of the reasons why people convert into the supporters of "Russian world".

What conclusions can be made today from these stories? They won't be here. The Ukrainian authorities have always a lot of things to do on the peninsula, however, with the Russian military invasion of Ukrainian territory the amount of work has increased significantly.

Had I good memories associated with Crimea? Surely. And they are brighter than negative experiences. For example, an experience gained in organizing by three people in March 2007 in Simferopol "Ukrainian Film Week", dedicated to the 65th anniversary of the creation of Ukrainian Insurgent Army and 100 anniversary of its commander Roman Shukhevych. At that time we were also invited to Sevastopol. There were numerous meeting with people who still keep in touch with me. The most delicious peaches picked by myself in one of the gardens near Bakhchysarai. I also keep in mind the sea and Crimean mountains! And I know exactly that Crimea is Ukraine, but we have a lot of things to do. So, let's start, "don't let heat or cold stop us".

Olena Khalimon, journalist, psychologist

Chapter I

From Crimean Euromaidan to “Crimean spring”

According to Russian propaganda, in 2014 “radicals from Kyiv Euromaidan” had to carry out mass executions for anti-maidan sentiments and support of Russia. They assure in this way that there were no other views on the peninsula, which could influence upon that situation. The fallacy of such claims was proved by Crimean actions of solidarity with the Euromaidan, which had started on the peninsula in winter 2014. Dozens and hundreds of active Crimean residents attended street rallies with pro-European slogans. It’s not a large amount, since a lot of people couldn’t participate for some reasons.

Severe pressure of Crimean authorities of that time forced Euro-maidan supporters to create an underground movement. However, that step has only strengthened the public movement.

Finally, it has deepened into the mass action for the support of joining Ukraine to the European Union in Simferopol in January 2014, and mass action of thousands participants under the walls of the Crimean Parliament against the initiative of “joining” the peninsula to Russia.

These events have shown that the resources of the Russian authority which more than 20 years had financed the pro-Russian movement on the peninsula didn’t exculpate themselves. Progressive part of Crimean residents sought the future in European Ukraine. Having nothing to counter that, the Kremlin leader has decided to use the Russian army forces against these people.

In this chapter we paid especial attention to the date of February 26, 2014, since it became the key point in the process of beginning

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

the military scenario of Russian annexation of Crimea. On that day at the meeting organized by the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People side by side with the Crimean Tatars were football fans of camp “Tavria” and pro-Ukrainian activists of different nationalities. They pushed back participants of the pro-Russian meeting and took control over the square near Crimean Parliament having proven in this way that pro-Russian views do not prevail in Crimea.

That event has shown not only the prevalence of pro-Ukrainian forces in Crimea, but also became the beginning of the peaceful resistance of Crimean people to Russian annexation of the peninsula which started on the next morning, on February 27, 2014.

This peaceful resistance has not stopped even after years Crimea being under the Russian control. Even though, Russia makes everyone expressing a dissenting opinion to pay for it with their personal security and life.

The history of Russian annexation will not be complete unless we mention the death of two Ukrainian soldiers – Serhii Kokurin and Stanislav Karachevskiy. The first one was killed by the members of illegal armed groups (under the command of Colonel of FSB Ihor Hirkin) during the assault of 13th photometric center in Simferopol. The second one was killed in the confrontation with soldier of the Russian Black Sea Navy in the officer’s hostel of Novofedorivka village. However, Russian leaders chose not to talk about these facts at all, since these shameful episodes are bad for the artificial public picture of “polite persons”.

Crimean authorities avenged for their shame in the way of persecutions of pro-Ukrainian activists who supported Ukraine at the meeting on February 26, 2014. Ahtem Chygoz, Deputy Chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, was sentenced to 8 years of prison in Crimea. Two Crimean Tatar activists Ali Asanov and Mustafa Dergemendzy have been waiting for trial for 2 years.

After Russia had declared that the Euromaidan was a “military coup”, coordinators and participants of its Crimean actions became

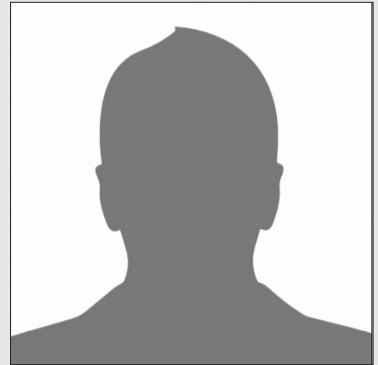
the objects of prosecution on the peninsula. Most of them had to leave Crimea. However, two activists were imprisoned for the assaulting officers of “Berkut” unit in the protest actions in Kyiv. For the same reason Oleksandr Kostenko, Crimean resident, got 3 years and 6 months of prison.

In February 2016 another Crimean activist Andrii Kolomiets was sentenced to 10 years in prison. He was accused of the attempt on life of the officers of “Berkut” unit.

How did the Crimean resistance movement develop in 2014? How did Russian annexation destroy Crimean families and life? What has made Crimean people to leave their homes? In this chapter the answers are provided by participants or witnesses of “Crimean spring”.

The Identity of the Witness Is Hidden for Security Reasons: Rumors about the Collapse of Ukraine Have Been Spread in Crimean Establishment

He lived in Simferopol. Specialty – journalist. At the age of 30 years he had to leave Crimea due to its annexation by Russia. The native language is Ukrainian.



On March 27, 2017 when the Russian army (also so-called “little green men”) captured Crimea, local people could not imagine that the annexation would be so fast. Simferopol lived its life. Some people drawn parallels between the Euromaidan and the Orange Revolution of 2004-2005. They thought: “They have made noise and will calm down in Kyiv”. Among my friends only a few persons believed those stories about “Nazi atrocities” on the Euromaidan or “train of friendship”, which were key statements of “the most honest” Russian TV to frighten its audience.

Relations between journalists during the Euromaidan were normal; there were no discussions and quarrels on political topics. However, the words “Ukraine” and “Maidan” made local mad persons and ukrainophobes blush and tremble with anger. Yes, such things have happened. After the Russian annexation of Crimea they started to share on social media information that all members of Crimean “authority” were the agents of “hunta” and impeded “Russian people” to implement their dream – to die in Russia.

In the Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council) of Crimea, where I had access as a journalist, nervousness prevailed at the begin-

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

ning of 2014. In the middle of February 2014 there was no way most deputies could have anticipated what happened in more than a week. However, there have been alarming rumors about the collapse of Ukraine. As far as I know, Hryhorii Ioffe¹, the then first vice-speaker of Crimean Parliament and shortly thereafter the Head of the occupational “Civil Chamber” of Crimea, was spreading them. Ioffe was persuading his colleagues that Ukraine couldn’t overcome the crisis and would be divided into two or three parts. Probably, at that moment he has already been in close contact with Kremlin “handlers”.

In fact, those pre-term statements about “the collapse of Ukraine” played further a key role in the decision-making of many statesmen when they have chosen the way of collaboration with occupants.

At the same time, other deputies started to claim that Crimea had been joined to Ukraine illegally. The first real wake-up call was on February 19, 2014. At that moment nothing foretold the further events of the occupation of Crimea. On that day deputies has adopted a regular appeal concerning the social and political situation in the country, and requested Ukrainian authority to “keep order” and to stop the protest actions in the country.

On that day, the 19th of February, Mykola Kolisnychenko², the deputy and the former party functionary, took the floor. In the Soviet time he was the Head of the District Party Committee of Communist Party.

1 Hryhorii Ioffe was a vice speaker of Crimean Parliament as at March 2014. In March 2014 he was the Head of working group on organizing of “referendum”. He is the former journalist; he has been in Crimean politics from 2009. At that time he was elected as Deputy of Crimean Parliament from the Party of Regions and appointed as the first vice-speaker. Crimean pro-governmental media calls him local ideologist of the process of “separation of Crimea from Ukraine”. After those events he became the Head of “Civil Chamber of Crimea”.

2 Mykola Kolisnychenko was a Deputy of Crimean Parliament from the Party of Regions. On February 19, 2014 he claimed from the rostrum of the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea: “If the authority of the country didn’t establish order in Kyiv, Crimean deputies would have to raise the issue of the returning Crimea to Russia”. Local media stated that Crimean Deputies had received his speech with applause.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

Speaking from the rostrum Kolisnychenko announced that the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 was “a terrible event”, since “the Crimean people had been separated from Russia”. However, history is silent how “Russian patriot” has got the Ukrainian surname. He summarized his speech with a statement that if the authority of the country does not establish order in Kyiv, Crimean deputies “would have to raise the issue of the returning Crimea to Russia”.

This statement frankly surprised most journalists in the hall, even those who followed the pro-Russian views. They began to ask each other: “What the hell did he just say? Is he on drugs?”

At that time the President Viktor Yanukovich has been holding his position in Kyiv. No one could have anticipated his escape to Russia. Probably, that speech was some kind of test prepared by Russian special agencies to check the reactions of different people. Then the chief of local communists, Leonid Hrach³, confessed in the interview that at the beginning of February 2014 Russian special agencies had been overly active in Crimea.

However, on February 19, 2014 only a few deputies knew the real sense of Kolisnychenko’s words. They said to each other: “What Russia? This is a true separatism. We will go to jail if do that”.

Indeed, the reason is that Crimean deputies perceived the Euro-maidan from the perspective of the Orange revolution. They thought that when new authority would come they have to reach arrangements with Kyiv. As you can see, even for Crimean elite, which saw a

3 Leonid Hrach is Crimean politician, the former People’s Deputy of Ukraine, the former speaker of Crimean Parliament, one of the authors of the Constitution of the AR of Crimea. He has been a representative of Crimean communists for many years. Before Russian annexation of Crimea he had been retired. After the events of spring 2014 he became the Head of Crimean department of the party “Communists of Russia”. In 2017 he confessed journalists that he had been offered to become a Head of Crimean Parliament. According to Hrach, he spoke with Oleh Bielavientsev, close friend of the Minister of Defense of Russia, who supervised the process of the annexation of Crimea. Leonid Hrach agreed to hold this position, but Serhii Aksioniv was appointed to the post of the Head of Russia-controlled Crimean government at the last minute.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

lot, such brave (silly?) statements were unusual. The last time similar statements were announced by the first and the last one President of Crimea, Yurii Mieshkov in 90th years of previous century.

On March 27, 2014 Russian troops have publicly captured Crimea. The true occupation had begun a week before the military invasion; however, most Crimean people did not notice that.

In my point of view, the ostentatious event happened on March 5, 2014. In the evening I was in the downtown of Simferopol. Homeless looking cossacks and strange people were wandering around streets at that time. I walked down Karl Marks Street to the military unit which has been trying to be blocked by assault troops of “Russian titushky”, representatives of the petty crime of the Kuban with a fiery glance of glass eyes.

Moreover, the base was “guarded” by a small group of the supporters of Crimean Euromaidan. At that moment there were not a lot of “titushky”. Then they all went in the direction of Rosa Liuksemburg Street, where the Republic Psychiatric hospital, well-known in Crimea, was located.

Then someone of the defenders of military unit said that at the crossroad of Pavlenko and Rosa Liuksemburg Streets there was some kind of chaos. I went there. Actually, near the café “Videnski bulochky” an impromptu action has started. The participants were different: Russian titushky, “cossacks”, bullies of “self-defense”, journalists with cameras, crowds of young clowns with Russian flag. They stood near the doors of café and chanted: “Berkut! Berkut! Berkut!” Later Russian television used that to show the picture of “uprising of Crimean people”, however, cossacks and bullies had stormed the café not for eating some Viennese pastry.

I have been standing there for several minutes and decided to go downtown. In a couple of meters from the café I saw the “Lanos” car with black numbers (or number was painted over, I don’t remember exactly). Then an unknown man in camouflage stepped out of the vehicle. He had a chevron of the Russian Marine Corps

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

on the sleeve. He has followed all events near the café with an interest.

Further, I have learned from the news that it was Robert Serry, the secretary general of the United Nations, who had been blocked in the café that evening. He had come to Crimea to investigate what was happening there.

The presence of that unknown man from the Russian Marine Corps could indicate that the operation of “neutralization” of Robert Serry had been planned by Russian military forces. Russian “titushky” and “self-defense” just impersonated Crimean people demanding Robert Serri not to become involved in Crimean events and forcing him to leave the peninsula. And this process led the Russian officer, whom I saw.

Serhii Mokreniuk: a Friend Did Not Hide that He Had Stood near the Crimean Parliament for the money



Photo from the archive of Serhii Mokreniuk

Co-coordinator of the movement “Euro-maidan Crimea”; co-organizer and participant of Crimean mass actions for the support of the European integration and solidarity with the protestors in Kyiv in winter of 2013 and 2014. Crimean resident in the third generation, he was born and lived in Feodosiia. A lawyer by profession, he practiced law and was engaged in social activities. In 2014 he had to leave the peninsula due to its annexation by Russia. Now he lives in Kyiv.

I was born and raised in Crimea. My father and grandfather were born in Crimea too. On February 3, 2014 everything has changed. Absolutely everything: place of residence, communication among families, job, friends, and home life. Now I live in another city that I have never planned to move. Personal pain doesn't give me an opportunity to practice law now, as I did (quite successfully) in Crimea. I don't have a chance to talk with our relatives. At home, we visited our relatives once a week. Now we have not seen most of them for years. We have recently reviewed our wedding video and photos, and found out that out of 120 guests attending the wedding now we still keep in touch with only a few persons. It's hard to realize.

On February 26-27, 2014 I was near the walls of the Verkhovna Rada of the AR of Crimea. Personally, I saw how Aksionov and Konstantynov had talked to the cameras about the events of February 27. I noticed how in Konstantynov trembling hands. It was physi-

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

cally hard for him to speak. I wrote down everything, but, unfortunately, my tablet and phone were stolen.

I have spent virtually all winter of 2013-2014 on the Euromaidan in Kyiv. On February 25 I came back to Crimea.

In the morning of February 26 I came back to Simferopol and went to Verkhovna Rada. I was there at 11 a.m. In front of the building I saw a huge crowd. It was clearly that the crowd had been divided into two big parts: people with Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian flags were on the left hand and people with the flags of Russia and the AR of Crimea – on the right. In the middle a conditional “corridor” was located. When I came nothing was happening. It may be called “standing”. It seemed all participants were waiting for a command. At a certain point, two parts started to approach and push each other.

On February 27 the Verkhovna Rada and the Council of Ministers of the AR of Crimea were blocked by police. Policemen said that the building was seized by someone armed. At 10 a.m. they allowed people to get closer, and surrounded the building. They stood in a circle 50 meters away from the building facing the crowd. It was strange to hear about armed people in the Verkhovna Rada and, in the same time, see the police in the bulletproof vests of the 2nd class standing back to the potential opponent.

Early in the morning people from different Crimean cities were brought to the Verkhovna Rada of the AR of Crimea. I met my friend from Feodosiia. He did not hide that he came to stand for the money. Residents of Simferopol didn't support such people. I have been on the square near the Parliament all the time. It was damp and cold. At the same time, I saw only one woman who had brought some tea. It was a certain indicator for me. My friend from Feodosiia was together with me. We saw other his fellow townsmen. They all were “local drug addicts from Gen. Zhukov”.

I didn't understand all that events. I was confused because of misunderstanding situation. I wasn't ready to believe that the military invasion of Ukraine by Russian army is taking place.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

Probably, my activities in that period could be called “the attempts to draw public attention” to surrounding “trash”. The most virtuous act was our support (mine and my friends and relatives) of the military base of marine corps located near the stadium “Cristal” in Feodosiia. We offered them to get their families out of Crimea. However, they refused. We were buying them petrol, electric wires, lamps and plugs, that they asked us for. Money has been raised in a matter of days via Internet. We found an electric generator and handed it over to the base.

Another aspect of our activity included the organization of journalists’ presence in Crimea. I drove foreign journalists to Perevalne of Simferopol region, Kerch, I was looking for equipment and organized the stream from military bases. Moreover, I also mobilized people from Feodosiia to attend the meetings in Simferopol. There were attempts to organize mass actions in Feodosiia. We also joined the action against a war in Crimea on March 8.

The conflict in Crimea has changed my relationship with friends and relatives. For example, I have not talked with my brother since 2014. I have completely stopped communicating with godfathers and godmothers (three families) of our children, and I can’t communicate with my godchildren.

The Russian Federation has systematically worked on the annexation of Crimea for many years. It was a long professional operation which has been started in 90-ies years of previous century.

Russia has used many instruments, for example, enormous representation in Crimea of Russian organizations, cultural and economic expansion, cultivation of “mistrust to Ukraine”, “insolvency of Ukraine”, “artificiality of Ukrainian state”, artificial division of Crimean Tatars and Slavs, artificial division of Crimean Tatars into internal groups, artificial division of Slavs into groups, proliferation and support of paramilitary formations by the Russian Federation, infiltration of Russian agents into Ukrainian law enforcement agencies of the AR of Crimea.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

All these things worked in comprehensive and systematic manner.

I think that systematic professional activity of Russian special agencies is the main reason of the fast occupation of Crimea.

In the morning on March 10, 2014 I took my wife and children into the car and left Crimea. We had only a small suitcase of children's belongings. I had to leave Crimea since I was one of four coordinators of the Crimean Euromaidan. At that moment police detained Andrii Shchekun and Analolii Kovalskyi and handed over to Aksionov persons. Only one coordinator, Ismail Ismailov, had been remained free. The next one should be me and several most active participants – Sasha Dvoretzka, Mykyta Shabanov, Liuba Kalmakova. I have understood that we could not organize an active resistance and had to “retreat for reformatting”. Crimea was full of Russian soldiers, Ukrainian soldiers remained besieged, “Berkut” and Russian army stood on all departures from Crimea. At any time I could lose the opportunity to leave Crimea. But I did it.

The first our destination was Mykolaiv where our friends lived. We wanted to stay there for one day, but all members of our family had caught a cold, so we had been staying with a high temperature for a week in Mykolaiv. Then we went to Kyiv where we are living until present time. We decided to settle in Kyiv since we have a lot of friends and acquaintances here, who helped us (and still help) on many issues, such as: housing, food and job.

Crimea isn't native land for Russians. The biggest thing that I fear that the longer Crimea is under the occupation, it will be more destroyed. We will come back to ruins and have to restore everything. I don't afraid of the recovery process, but I am afraid of complete destruction.

I have not been in Crimea until I left it, since I don't want to be imprisoned or become a missing person. I wish one day Russian militaries, police and administration would disappear from the peninsula. I am ready to join the recovery process of peaceful life and reconstruction of Crimea after this locust, which is now eating my homeland.

Ismail Ismailov: There Were Leaflets on the Streets That We Are Traitors of Crimea



*Photo from the archive
of Ismail Ismailov*

*Co-coordinator of the movement “Euro-
maidan Crimea”. Co-organizer and
participant of Crimean mass actions
for the support of European integra-
tion of Ukraine and solidarity with pro-
testors in Kyiv in winter of 2013-2014.
He has lived in Crimea from 2004. He
obtained a higher economic education.
The native language is Crimean Tatars.
At the age of 28 he had to leave Crimea
because of the threat from pro-Russian
forces. Now he lives in Kyiv.*

I remember the rally on February 26, 2014, we came there together with like-minded people to support Crimean Tatar rally. There were Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian flags. Pro-Russian forces also came there and organized own spontaneous rally with Russian flags on the opposite side. I knew that this action had been organized by Crimean Tatars, however, I hadn't heard anything about pro-Russian rally. I asked pro-Russian activists what they wanted. They replied that they wanted a referendum. I noticed several persons I know. They were radical and marginal.

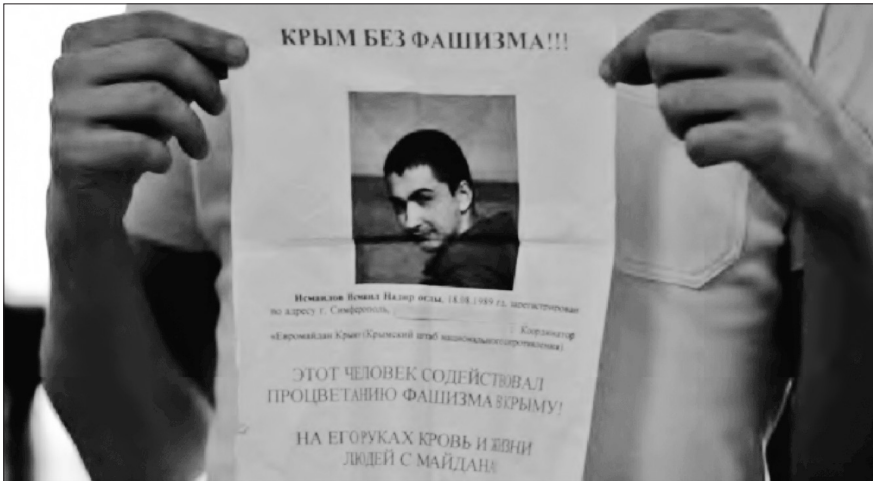
Then clashes erupted. There were injured persons. I helped one of them. He was beaten, I pulled him from the center, he was very dirty, had a lot of bruises, but I saw no blood on his body. He was helpless, laid on the ground; he could be trampled by the crowd. Unfortunately, I don't know the future of this man. In the evening of that day I heard from the media that several people had died.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

At that moment, we didn't understand that occupation had been started since it has been started officially on February 20, but we understood this only on February 27 when the Russian army invaded the peninsula. Before that we had the action dedicated to the anniversary of death of Noman Çelebicihan and the car rally on which we were attacked by “titushky”. On February 24 we also have the mass action. On that day the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC had to address the issue of independence.

When we started our actions we didn't know that it would take so long time. Through the organization “Euromaidan Crimea” we were able to organize the protest movement promptly. Everyone understood own area of responsibilities, where and with whom events could be organized.

On March 18, 2014 I left Crimea. We held our actions every day and one day there were leaflets on the streets with our photos and text that we are the traitors of Crimea and are wanted by Crimean “self-defense”.



The leaflet with photo of Ismail Ismailov that was distributed in Crimea in February-March 2014.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

That “self-defense” was established from semi-voluntary, semi-bribed marginal people who had become the heroes of the streets at one moment.

Before that on March 9 co-organizers of the movement “Euro-maidan Crimea” Andrii Shchekun and Anatolii Kovalskyi had been kidnapped by the “self-defense”, other two co-organizers, Serhii Kovalskyi and Serhii Mokreniuk, left Crimea. I didn’t leave since there were a lot of our activists and it was wrong to leave them. Ernest Suleimanov, my good friend, helped me to organize mass actions. However, at that moment it was extremely hard to do that since our forces were not compatible with the FSB. Moreover, in any moment they were able to stop us and, even more, they would remain unpunished. There was no Ukrainian authority, only militaries remained, and police sided with occupant.

I moved from Crimea to Kyiv, and then I moved to Azerbaijan. Now I live in Kyiv again.

I believe in returning Crimea to Ukraine. But I don’t know when this happens. When I lived in Azerbaijan some local people drawn parallels between Karabakh conflicts and Crimean events, others saw no similarities. When someone said that we could return Crimea in a year I didn’t believe, since Azerbaijan has been hearing the same phrase all time: “A little bit more...” I knew that we would have problems with internally displaced persons, even before they had appeared. And then there were problems with housing. The situation in Ukraine is a little bit different: we have the Budapest Memorandum and international guarantees, so I hope the pressure on occupant will be stronger and we will return our homeland.

Serhii Kovalskyi: I Have Figured Out that I Was “Hunted” and Guards Took Me Out of Crimea

Co-coordinator and participant of Crimean mass actions for the support of European integration and solidarity with Kyiv protesters in winter of 2013-2014. He was born and lived in Crimea until 2014. A lawyer in specialty, entrepreneur. Native languages are Ukrainian and Russian. At the age of 30 he had to leave Crimea due to the threat posed by pro-Russian forces. Now he lives in Kyiv.



Photo from the archive of Serhii Kovalskyi

Due to my active and principled pro-Ukrainian position during the Euromaidan and the occupation of Crimea I have faced a persecution, and had to leave the peninsula with the assistance of specially trained individuals, and moved to Kyiv. Besides me, active “hunting” was started for my father, Anatolii Kovalskyi, he was captured by the Russian mercenaries who were torturing him during 11 days.

I along with like-minded people were among those who have organized and coordinated gatherings on all protests against Russian aggression since February 24 of 2013 till the day of pseudo-referendum. In those days we took part in all rallies, organized distributing leaflets, hold many actions – we did everything possible “for waking up” Crimean people and to stop the occupation.

An appearance of armed occupants was quite surprising, since we didn’t expect and, probably, underestimated the determination of our enemy. At that moment Yanukovych has escaped from country and we thought that Russia would use political, economic,

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

informational pressure, “titushky”, but not the regular army of the Russian Federation. We understood that after such step we couldn’t stop the aggression of the Northern neighbor with the help of active public position.

We didn’t feel any fear (we took the edge off this kind of feelings at the time of Maidan), a deep silence of 3 days, from the morning of February 27, was oppressive and it presaged something bad. There was an understanding that rates raised to the level of antiterrorist operation, which can turn into a war. In respect of me, I personally expected that security forces could perform an antiterrorist operation to clear two buildings from terrorists who captured the government agencies in Crimea. However, we saw that the confused security forces and the current authorities had chosen the opposite side. It became clear that the time was needed for the occupant in order to demonstrate to confused Crimean people who is the new “master” and the fact that Ukrainian authority are not going to defend them, but rather to leave Crimea, so now everyone should serve the new authority.

Everything was followed by high-quality propaganda, seizure of Crimean TV channels and, in fact, we felt that we were losing Crimea. Personally, I think that these three days of February were fatal, since the power passed to the occupant. Actually, we didn’t know whether it was a mistake, or inconsistency, or betrayal, but after that three days it became clear that Crimea was occupied and we had only a few minutes to stand up for it.

Therefore, we (“Euromaidan Crimea”) have decided and were the first and the only who had the courage to demonstrate our position and dissent, after Russian army had appeared on the Simferopol streets.

Due to the fact that rallies were allowed at that moment Russian media as well as global media had a picture of Crimean people wanted to join the Russian Federation. Therefore, we were working hard on the informational front and, in my point of view, we have

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

succeeded in that sphere. Even though Crimean resident’s hearts were completely covered by Russian propaganda, global media showed all over the world the picture of multi-thousand demonstrations, they showed how people fought back and came out with Ukrainian flags demonstrating their position. We have managed “to raise” a lot of Crimean people to resistance. As a result, many active individuals joined our movement and the number of those who were ready to defend own land was increasing exponentially. That was the main argument that nobody of them didn’t want to live in Russia and that event was the occupation, but not the returning or joining.

Nobody could defend us, but Crimean people carried out the protest up to March 16 and had been fighting again and again. We understood that we could lose health and life. I think that these people were true patriots and heroes who don’t shout about this, since they believe that it was their duty to the homeland.

We were discussing the current situation with the acquaintances at that time. It was felt their thoughts had been changed from February 27 to March 16. The propaganda was successful, however, Russia as motherland has been regarded by not a lot of people. My relatives had a similar position to my and minority was silent. That question was not about pro-Ukrainian or pro-Russian views, rather it was a civilization choice...

It’s our common fault that we underestimated the enemy and didn’t respect ourselves and our country. The whole generation of statesmen has become thieves which helped individuals like Yanukovich to destroy our country. It wasn’t only the fault of Yanukovich. He was just like others, but had a bigger power and appetites. Indeed, we had impoverished ourselves until the resources presented 25 years ago declined. We deserve all we have, but we can change ourselves and change the future of Ukraine.

The occupation could have been avoided if we started to work systematically beforehand, and if we acted together without wait-

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

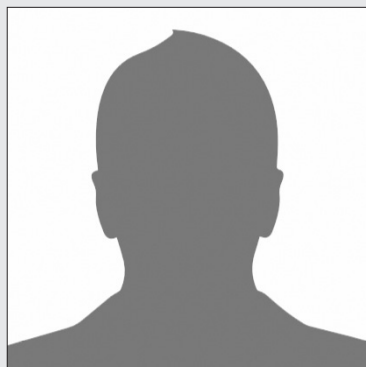
ing for the invasion. We had to send the message to society about the necessity to attend mass actions and to defend our homeland, but instead all of us were asked to stay at home. Only such actions could affect the informational sphere and in this case a war in Crimea could be started, and Donbas events would have never happened, or having no grounds Putin wouldn't order to kill unarmed people since the overall picture wouldn't meet the desired.

Anyway, cowards and traitors are still justifying themselves and say that they had no opportunity to act. Inactivity in that case was equal to betrayal. I left Crimea on March 11 in the evening. At that moment my like-minded persons, in particular, my father was in captivity, and nobody was ready to fight. Ukrainians in Crimea were left alone. I was warned that the “hunting” for me had been open. When I had found out about it my guards, professional and armed 12 persons, got me out of Crimea. I still remember that sunset on the road with the border of Kherson region and the feeling that there was nothing more you can do. After 4 months of struggle for Ukraine it was very painful. I didn't want to see or hear anybody... I felt despair...

I do not visit Crimea nowadays, since there several criminal proceedings were initiated against me. I am sure the day will come when I see the sunrise on my homeland. I think it will come true when Kremlin FSB system falls. It is just a question of time and, certainly, we will see this in 10 years as sunrise and sunset of Crimean warm sun!

The Identity of The Witness Is Hidden for Security Reasons: Crimean Deputies Have Played along with Kremlin Being Convinced that They Made Historical Decisions by Themselves

He was born and lived in Crimea until 2014. He was engaged in scientific activity. The native language is Russian.



On February 26 I went to the center of Simferopol to work. I saw a crowd near Crimean Parliament. One part of them were chanting: “Ukraine”, others: “Russia”. I was watching around 20 minutes, then went to work and continued to monitor events on TV. At that time ATR channel conducted on-line translation of the rally. I didn’t pay any special attention to that rally, but I was a bit frightened of clashes and conflicts on the ethnic ground.

The most interesting thing is that the clashes started immediately after the first support group had arrived from Sevastopol at around 2-3 p. m. That people got off the bus near the Council of Ministers of Crimea, crossed Lenin’s square and went along Gorky Street to the Parliament of Crimea. As I could see from the window of my office, the group consisted of 400 individuals. In ten minutes the clashes started. Thus, the first provocations were made by people of that group.

Moreover, I want to say about the appearance of red and black flags, which were actively discussed by Russian propaganda, with blaming “Pravyi Sektor” (“Right Sector”) in provocations. I know

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

the person who kept that flag. He isn't an extremist, as Russian media announced. He is an intelligent person, PhD, who has worked in Crimean University for many years. He came with that flag in order to declare that Crimea is supporting the Maidan and those forces which had won in Kyiv in February 2014. It was the way to state the position of people, which live in Crimea even now. It needs to be mention that 1% of Crimean residents voted for “Svoboda” party in 2002.

The rally outside the Crimean Parliament has been finished, and nothing foretold troubles.

Next morning, on February 27, I didn't have to go to work and I didn't hurry. But my father told me that mother's director had called and said that the downtown was blocked off. I have browsed the Internet and saw the information about the seizure of administrative buildings in Simferopol. It was difficult to understand who and why had captured them. Because exposed Russian tricolors could tell nothing at that moment. It could be a diversionary tactic.

On the first day of the occupation of Crimea I wasn't confident that it had been Russian army.

Everything became clear when the Crimean government headed by Anatolii Mohyliov had been dismissed. It became apparent that Crimean statesmen had started own game to blackmail the official Kyiv.

As far as I know, several days before the occupation of Crimea, on February 24, the meeting of the Premier of Crimea Anatolii Mohyliov⁴, the speaker Volodymyr Konstantynov, the first vice speaker Serhii Tsekov⁵ and the permanent representative of the President

4 Anatolii Mohyliov is the last legitimate Premier of Crimea. His government and he were dismissed on February 27, 2014. Deputies adopted this decision on the meeting without journalists. At that moment Russian soldiers were in the building of Crimean Parliament. According to Mohyliov, after his dismissal he left Crimea.

5 Serhii Tsekov is one of the leaders of pro-Russian movement in Crimea, the former Speaker and Deputy of Crimean Parliament. In 2014 he was the first vice-speaker of the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea. After Russian annexation of Crimea he became the representative of Crimea in the Federation Council of Federal Assembly of Russia.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

of Ukraine in Crimea Viktor Plakida⁶ had been held in Crimean Parliament. No decision was adopted on that meeting, but all have heard each other and went own ways.

Around the Mohyliov’s dismissal there was an interesting situation. Deputies of the Crimean Parliament tried to rid of the so-called “Donbas-Makiivka yoke” in which they had to live for several years. Some deputies discussed with each other that they were tired constantly to be “the second one” and for the first time in their life they had a chance to affect the situation. They considered the dismissal of Mohyliov as the returning themselves the right to vote. Thus, most of them sincerely supported that decision. And there is no connection with the rejection of Maidan, it is “a Crimean issue” only. More precisely, Maidan has been just a reason for the Crimean Council action.

I know that Anatolii Mohyliov tried to keep on its own position and turn the situation to his benefit. For that he needed some time to reach agreements on the formation of “own” majority in the Crimean Parliament. However, he had not enough time.

One of the former deputies of the Crimean parliament from “Party of Regions” told me that on February 27 he had to go to the Crimean Parliament on session, but the telephone call had stopped him. According to him, it was Mohyliov asking not to take part in the session. Moreover, Olena Netetska⁷ and Olha Udovina⁸ also called him with the same request. And he didn’t go. On this first session of the Crimean parliament, where the armed individuals were, journalists were not let in. However, as far as I know, there was no unity among

6 Viktor Plakida is the former Premier of Crimea, Minister of Fuel and Energy of Crimean and permanent representative of the President of Ukraine (Viktor Yanukovich) in Crimea. After Russian annexation of Crimea he has been a director of state enterprise “CrimeaEnergO”. In October 2017 he was fired.

7 Olena Netetska is the former People’s Deputy of Ukraine from the Party of Regions.

8 Olha Udovina is the former Deputy Prime Minister of the government of Anatolii Mohyliov, managed the department of personnel policy and public service.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

the deputies regarding the appointment of Serhii Aksionov as the new prime minister. As witnesses told the deputy Lentun Bezaziiiev⁹ nominated Rustam Temirgaliev¹⁰ for that post, the deputy Oleksandr Melnyk¹¹ nominated Viktor Plakida, and the candidate Serhii Aksionov was nominated by Serhii Tsekov. It is important to understand that at that moment there were not any discussions about Russia or change of the status of Crimea.

Oleksandr Melnyk tried to approve his candidate: “Our group has 25 voices. We nominated our candidate Viktor Plakida for the prime minister post of Crimea. If you don’t take into consideration our decision, we will stand up and go”. That group of 25 deputies consisted of members of the Party of Regions.

Then Kostantynov announced a break and members of “Party of Regions” went to fraction meeting. Interestingly, three deputies of party “Russkoye Yedinstvo” (“Russian Unity”) of Aksionov were on the meeting. Not all present understood why meeting was held together with them. Serhii Tsekov told to deputies: “I ask you to support the candidate Serhii Aksionov nominated by me. This can-

9 Letun Bezaziiiev is the former Deputy of Crimean Parliament from the Party of Regions, Deputy Prime Minister of Crimea, Head of the Council of Crimean Tatar Representatives under the President Viktor Yanukovich. After Russian annexation of Crimea he became a Deputy of Russia-controlled Parliament from Russian pro-regime party “United Russia”.

10 Ruslan Temyrgaliiev is the former Deputy and member of the Presidium of the AR of Crimea, he represented the Party of Regions. He is a post-graduate of National Academy for Public Administration under the President of Ukraine. He is the former Head of Crimean voting bloc “Ostriv” (“Island”) of Ukrainian politician Inna Bohoslovskva. After Russian annexation of Crimea he was appointed to the post of the first Vice-Speaker of Russia-controlled government of Serhii Aksionov. However, he was fired in September 2014 and transferred to the post of the permanent representative of Tatarstan in Uzbekistan. However, six months later he was fired. After that he started to run the business again and periodically appeared in different regions of Russian and China.

11 Oleksandr Melnyk is the former Deputy of Crimean Parliament. He was a representative of the Party of Regions, but he wasn’t a member of this party. He was called “kingmaker” in Crimea who had a great impact on political processes in the region. The former Head of Crimean Main Department of Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Hennadii Moskal claimed many times that Melnyk was connected with criminal group “Seilem” which had existed on the peninsula in 1990s. However, Melnyk refuted it. In 2010 the regime of Donetsk-Makiivka group led by the deceased Vasyl Dzarta, and then Anatolii Mohyliov began to emerge on the peninsula, and the impact of Oleksandr Melnyk faded away.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

didate has been agreed upon with Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. I ask to take into account this fact”. At that moment deputies were surprised by that phrase and didn’t understand the role of Putin. According to formal procedure, a candidate should be agreed upon with Yanukovych.

When Serhii Aksionov was elected the prime minister, deputy Melnyk, as witnesses told, shouted at Konstantynov in the session hall: “You are the bastards and the scoundrels!” It is the consequence of direct old conflict between Melnyk and Aksionov since 90th.

Why the candidate Aksionov was approved? Probably, Putin’s name had an effect on deputies, or the preparation was held, the promises made. Apparently, at that moment they didn’t understand that, indeed, Kremlin had controlled the situation in Crimea and they blindly played along with it being convinced that they made historical decisions by themselves.

Further, Crimean statesmen have openly started to play along with the new regime. I didn’t know any head of the district who didn’t seek to be of service for the new authorities. The only exception was the Head of Bakhchysarai district government administration, Ilmi Umerov, and Bilohirsk mayor, Albert Kanhiiev. Moreover, the mayor of Yevpatoriia, Andriy Danylenko, removed himself. He didn’t carry out a campaign promoting the referendum, even though he has occupied his position for several months after annexation of Crimea.

The annexation of Crimea has become a challenge for many individuals from the top of Crimean authority. Not too many deputies have become richer after Crimean occupation, except for Aksionov, Konstantynov and the closest to them. I didn’t know any more. Somebody has lost money and power. It’s supposed to be a lesson for them.

Olena Dolia: My Acquaintances Were Seeing Russian Militaries on APC When They Rode to the Shop to Buy Vodka



*Photo from the archive
of Olena Dolia*

Crimean retiree, a daughter of the messenger "Bereza" of Ukrainian Insurgent Army. She has lived in Crimea from 2002. She is a seamstress. At the age of 65 she had to leave Crimea due to Russian aggression. She moved to Kropyvnytskyi.

From February 2014 my life has changed and not for the better. Mental anxiety after occupation... A lack of contacts with patriots from Crimea....

With tears in the eyes I think of sermons in Ukrainian churches of Kyiv Patriarchate: Kumove, Ostrozke, Oktiaberske villages, Simferopol city (Simferopol and Crimean Diocese), Perevalne village, Saky city. The Diocese was headed by Lord Klyment.

The priest of the above mentioned churches was Father Yaroslav Hontar. We was especially happy to build own church-cradle in Yevpatoriia. Every supporter of Ukrainian church took part in its construction. I couldn't help due to physical problems but I prepared food for everyone who took part in the process.

On December 3, 2013 Ukrainian community and I particularly went on the Maidan to Kyiv and in that night our church was poured a flammable liquid and burned down. Fortunately, God safe it and it wasn't fully burned. I came back on December 5 in the morning and was shocked by that event. Like a knife in the heart. It's a big thin to

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

offend the holy place. Local police was very “skillful” and, probably, they have been looking for intruders until now.

We were in a depressed moral condition, but we constructed a new cupola for money raised on the Revolution of Dignity in Kyiv. I remember one moment: when we had constructed the new cupola we consecrated it and inhabitants of neighboring buildings watched, smiled, felt happy and asked to sprinkle some of the holy water on them. And then the occupation has started...

On February 26-27, 2014 I monitored the events on TV. I felt pain, sadness and fear that bloodshed could start at any moment. I had been crying round-the-clock. I was afraid of losing the part of Ukrainian heart – our Crimea.

Then I have participated rallies. I attended the mass action in Simferopol organized by Andrii Shchekun and his fellows of “Euromaidan Crimea”. Similar mass actions were held in Yevpatoriia city. I personally wrote posters: “Dirty hands off Crimea”, “To kneel only before God”, which FSB actively took pictures of. All rallies were held near the monument of Taras Shevchenko in Yevpatoriia... Poor Taras had to stand with us in a joy and sorrow... By the way, at the end of May 2015 my former Crimean neighbors informed me that “strong” men with shaved heads had come and asked concretely: “Where does Dolia live? Where is she?” The neighbors told them that I had left Crimea for good.” Just think why they looked for me.

We discussed with my like-minded people the question of occupation and future life. Most Crimean people were zombied out, they told me: “Yelena Mihalovna, where did you see the militaries?” At that time Russian soldiers with submachine guns were walking around Yevpatoriia. I saw them. The Yevpatoriia’s streets were hanged out with a lot of Russian tricolors. I remember I saw the portrait of Putin in the café of one of the well-known Ukrainian networks on the corner of Lenin Avenue and Frunze Street... In Yevpatoriia, on the side closer to Saky, people I know saw Russian mili-

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

taries on APC (armoured personnel carrier) who were going to the shop and bought vodka.

I didn't have close relatives there. But there were people close to me as relatives. Before my departure when I had sold my apartment and got ready to leave I went to say goodbye and thank them for our friendship. In our conversation about the occupation of Crimea I mentioned Chechen people, in masks and without them, I had seen on the block posts on the border of Crimea. I told that one of them had a submachine gun and other – a launcher. They wore a pair of breeches with patches, papakha (type of hat) and sneakers. “Kazaki” (Cossacks). They roughly treated people in the process of car inspection. My neighbors were delighted by this fact and told: “Well done. Nobody comes to Crimea.” After such “saying goodbye” I was shocked and hardly found my bus to get home since my soul was sick.

My telephones were tapped: I have heard unknown sounds, the telephone could off by itself. My relatives who have been living in mainland Ukraine had started to worry about me and demanded me to leave Crimea.

I decided to sell my apartment. I found buyers quickly. Having received an advance I transported money to my family on the mainland on me (I wore the funeral closes). In the bus one woman sympathized me and looking in the window (on the border) told: “These fascists (Ukrainians) have hidden tanks underground.” I was crying all the way, but when I saw the Ukrainian flag on the border my tears started to run faster. I experienced the excitement. But when I saw our soldiers standing in rubber boots of the same tone as uniform (green) I felt pain...

Now I live in Kropyvnytskyi city since my children also live here. It was hard to start a new life. Morally, physically, financially. It was sad to leave Ukrainian community, friends and colleagues in Crimea. I couldn't bring with me everything and had to leave many things in sold apartment. I had to buy everything on a new place:

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

furniture, refrigerator, laundry machine... My health got worse in the process of the forced movement, therefore now I spend enormously big part of my retirement benefit for pharmacy.

I go to the church and pray for the peace in our country and returning our territory. I don't visit Crimea now. I can't afford this financially. Moreover, I can be in the list of FSB.

I plan to come back after de-occupation since my mother's tomb is there. I am very grateful to our Ukrainians which have stayed there and are looking after my mother's grave. My mother had a difficult life. When she was young she was a messenger of Ukrainian Insurgent Army named “Bereza”. Friends went to us and said: “To the meeting with Olenka under Bereza”.

I believe, hope and wait for returning of Crimea. But our authority has to make wise cardinal decisions. We can't leave away the national heritage to the people who are “devils-intransigent”. We won't give them the satisfaction, since “Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!”.

Halyna Balaban: I Was Told: “You Are Young and Hothead. Attend Mass Actions for All of Us”



*Photo from the archive
of Halyna Balaban*

Crimean activist. At the age of 27 she has supported the peaceful movement against Russian aggression on the peninsula. Co-founder of Ukrainian cultural center, which was established in Simferopol after Russian annexation of Crimea. For this reason she was called for questioning to FSB.

She was born in Ternopil region, and then she moved to Crimea after marriage. She is a teacher. The native language is Ukrainian.

From February 2014 my life has changed dramatically. I knew about events near the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea on February 26, 2014 at around 5 p.m. from Internet. I haven't TV at home and did not see TV programs for more than 8 years. The next day I couldn't stay at home and went for a walk around Simferopol. On the left hand, I tied two pair of ribbons: blue and yellow, red and black.

I have walked around, watched, heard and all events filled me with dread. I have understood that I had to search for like-minded persons. For the security of my closest persons I didn't take the keys with me to the apartment, just only ones to the front door of the building. The real danger was “Crimean self-defense” units: at that moment within its ranks were a lot of alcoholics, addicts and other hard-men, which had left city streets to enter into the self-defense. Further, its staff was reduced.

What I was thinking about at that time? I didn't believe that such situation could happen in the XXI century. That was the breach

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

of international treaties that could lead to a military conflict and moreover nobody in Europe wanted a war.

I took part in each pro-Ukrainian actions which it could be possible to attend. Not all people I know supported me, but... My husband and mother-in-law told me: “You are young and hothead. Attend mass actions for all of us.”

After the occupation, it was difficult to visit somebody or even talk to... All contacts are available now only via Internet. Our relatives from the Russian Federation congratulated and reassured us: “Now all money will be directed to Crimea, this and this clean up the mess.” They have not understood until now why Crimean people are not satisfied. So, now we try not to discuss politics at all with Crimean relatives... everybody has own point of view... we don’t discuss this situation.

Numerous people are guilty of the occupation. Ukrainian authorities are guilty, since they knew about the situation in Crimea and Eastern regions, and that situation could have been changed. Crimea had to have a status of the region. Crimean statesmen told that all bills have been implemented approximately for 8 months later in Crimea than in other Ukrainian regions.

Moreover, the Verkhovna Rada of the AR of Crimea was one more gang of robbers with the privileges. Ukrainian authority have doubted at the time when it had to act. Probably, it was a shock. Perhaps, such an act of Russia wasn’t expected.

Russian authority is guilty, since it hit Ukraine in the back in the difficult moment. The myth about Russian brotherly people has disappeared.

Crimean authority is guilty: it made its choice by itself, where the best place to live.

Crimean people are guilty, since most of them were inactive, thought only about own problems. They were not cohesive. Probably, there was nothing we could change, but we didn’t give up. Our

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

mass actions have not been seen on the mainland of Ukraine. A fear has stalked our hearts.

I think the annexation could be prevented. On February 27, 2014 unidentified persons were just an organized criminal group, but well-armed. Police couldn't neutralize it or didn't want to. An army could be involved for that purpose. Officially, they weren't Russian soldiers. Such an operation would be successful and the Russian Federation would disavow any connection with the participants of the seizure. And who knows, probably, it would be the end of that story... But the authority left Crimea and all of us.

Now I live in Crimea, I had to discontinue the use of Ukrainian language everywhere, except home. I didn't speak with statesmen, but ordinary people argued with me and threatened me, fortunately, without serious conflicts. We, activists of Ukrainian cultural center, were detained on the basis of laying flowers to the monument of Hetman B. Khmelnytskyi in Simferopol on October 14, 2015. We have problems with crossing border with Kherson region. However, I have started again to use Ukrainian on the streets and in public transport since 2017.

Surely, I am afraid of war, repressions, but most of all I am worried that Crimea would become a bargaining chip and de-occupation will never happen.

I hope Crimea will be returned to Ukraine. I wish this would happen as soon as possible, in the following two years. Probably, it will be a long process. However, it makes additional problems: children has already attended classes in schools or universities where they are brainwashed and destructed psychologically by the lie about “returning to the native harbor” and e.g. I concede a possibility of military conflict and full-scale military operations in Crimea

I hope that all will be solved at diplomatic level and through the pressure of the world community.

But... Hope for success, but be prepared for failure.

Serhii Hromenko: Russian Soldiers Scared Me Noticeably Less than Crimean “Titushky”

A scientist from Crimea, PhD in history, journalist. He had lived in Simferopol until March 2014. At the age of 29 he had to leave Crimea due to Russian aggression. He moved with family to Kyiv.



Photo from the archive of Serhii Hromenko

From early morning of February 26, 2014 I have been in the polyclinic located on the other side of the city downtown. On my way to home, I was driving through Sovietska square. At the bus stop a woman run into the bus and started to shout that Crimean Tatars were gathering near the Verkhovna Rada, building barricades and preparing a bloodbath. That woman also appealed all to get up and go to defend our people. Who were “our” people she didn’t mention.

It is worth to note, that there wasn’t any reaction of passengers: nobody got up and reacted to her words. Then she started to scream loudly: “Are you not men?! Are you not Russians?! Why won’t you help our people?” Then I decided to go out and understand what was going on.

The bus stopped on the Lenin’s square and I went to the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea. On my way I met an unknown man of 20 years that asked me what time was. I paid attention on him since at that place everyone knew about a big clock on the office center. It was absurd to as ask “what time” at the railway station.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

Moreover, I noticed that the boy had a special Russian dialect different from Crimean. I told him time and then he asked me where the Verkhovna Rada was located. At that moment I was completely sure that he wasn't local. Then I found out, that's exactly that moment Sevastopol residents had been coming to support the “Russian Unity” near the walls of the Crimean Parliament.

Then, on my way to the Parliament I turned to closest backyard where a gun shop was located. I saw several persons inside the shop who didn't allow anybody to enter. At that moment I heard that one of those men was speaking on the phone and told somebody about rallies near the Crimean Parliament and necessity of sand bags for blocking the shop entrance. After that I went to the Parliament.

When I had come there, I saw who were “ours” and “not ours”. At that moment, around 12 a.m., pro-Russian forces were in a minority. There were more Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian flags. I have stayed some time near the Parliament, watched the clashes near the entrance to the Parliament and participated in the rally. Later, having estimated the strength of both sides I thought that my help wouldn't be useful and decided to go home.

Only in the evening I got to know about conflicts and victims of that rally. Next day we woke up with Russian flags on the administrative buildings. At first, I thought that it was the work of cossacks and self-defense. Later it was a version that it was the acts of “Berkut” which had come back from the Euromaidan to Crimea and had been disembodied until that moment.

However, the first alarming call rung for me when deputies had been allowed to enter the building of the Parliament and they had voted for dismissal of Anatolii Mohyliov. I understood that the occupants had a handheld parliament and we needed to be prepared for anything.

The second alarming call was on the next day when so-called “little green men” who at that moment hid their Russian origin, had captured the airport of Simferopol. It was clear, that it is not the

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

work of “Berkut”, but rather Russian soldiers. The forecasts about Russian capturing Crimea from the media have become a true. After that second call I have understood that the space of decision-making regarding my future life became narrower. I mean nothing would be the same as before. And I have realized straight away that the fate of “the grey zone” would await Crimea.

From February 27 we have tried not to go outside without any necessity and come back until evening twilight to escape “self-defense” units. Russian soldiers scared me noticeably less than Crimean “titushky” from which Aksionov’s units consist of. I thought that Russian soldiers had to be loyal to locals not to discredit Russia in their eyes. On the contrary, drunken local members of “self-defense” represented a real danger since nobody was responsible for their actions. Further events reaffirmed my fears. I mean the kidnaping and murder of Reshat Ametov. The third call for me rung on March 6, 2014 when so-called referendum was set and contained the item of joining to Russia. I understood that the other options wouldn’t work. And I realized that there was nothing to do in Crimea.

That week all family gathered together and I told them my view of the situation. Having discussed it, we made a decision that my pregnant wife and I would leave Crimea as soon as possible. I was frightened that after the voting the results of which were easy to predict the transportation by railroad would be stopped and we would be a prisoners on the peninsula. I remember when I got our suitcases from the apartment I met the pro-Russian neighbor of my wife. She asked where we go. I lied her, that we were going to the sanatorium before childbirth. Even at that moment I understood, that I needed to be prepared for anything from the supporters of “Crimea Is Ours”. People had anti-Ukrainian hysteria; they were zombied by the fear of “banderivtsi” so providing them an information that you supported Ukraine could lead to problems. The neighbor was sincerely surprised that we had preferred childbirth preparation to “referendum”.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

We left Crimea on March 14, 2014. To get on the train we went not from the central part of the Simferopol railway station, but from the most distant corner near the “tail” of the train. In that way we avoided a search by “Crimean self-defense” units located mainly in the central part of the railway station. From the beginning of the occupation I have been afraid of only one thing that it would be impossible to leave that territory. I don’t want my child would be born on the occupied area. I was worrying about my family’s safety as any other man.

Further, I’ve been convinced countless times that it was a right decision to leave Crimea. My son was born in Khmelnytskyi where we had lived with my grandmother. Then I found a job and apartment in Kyiv.

I don’t think I’ll go back to Crimea. I don’t want to see those who were happy to see Russian soldiers. I couldn’t come even to my native school since there are also collaborationists teaching children to glory Russia. There’s nothing to talk about with them.

Olena Dubrova: the Announcement in the Elevator Talked to Inform FSB about Pro-Ukrainian Activists

Crimean activist of the peaceful resistance movement against Russian annexation of Crimea. She was born and lived on the peninsula. The native language is Russian. After Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 she had to move to Lviv.



*Photo from the archive
of Olena Dubrova*

The events of February-March 2014, which, in my point of view, were impossible, were suddenly possible. It is still hard to believe that Crimea have become a hot point on the global map. All I knew from movies and books became a reality in my city.

I remember that moment when I realized how bad it had gotten: I went by bus through the bridge and saw that a camouflage tractor was digging a hall and unknown men put something into the hall in front of all citizens. I couldn't believe: armed people have captured your city, military machines on the streets, sound of siren, helicopters, airplanes, a lot of contradictory information on news, captured military bases, blocked city, people in camouflage were searching all cars in the city center, identity check, every day news about detained and missing people, the common feeling of fear and chaos.

From March we have felt how to live in the period of repressions, when you didn't know whether you could come back home and then you couldn't sleep since they could come at night. In early March I had to change my apartment since the lessor told me that would

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

report me for pro-Ukrainian position. It took 40 min to pack my belongings and I went to my friends. At that moment I didn't know that I would have to move again and again. My new address knew only three persons. The announcement in the elevator talked to inform FSB about pro-Ukrainian activists, I saw it every time when went to work in the morning or came back home in the evening.

A lot of things have changed during that half a year. I saw how my Simferopol has changed from day to day, how we lost part of our freedom with every removed Ukrainian sign, how borders, detectors and identity check have become the commonplace. How people have stopped looking into the eyes of each other and how discussions of important things were replaced again to the kitchens.

I remember the common feeling of fear and misunderstanding on February 26-27 and the sounds of sirens I can't hear even now. All those events didn't fit into my understanding of things which could happen in XXI century. I couldn't believe that Russia has invaded Ukraine and my city was controlled by armed unidentified people in masks.

Such kind of fear I have never felt in my life. The feeling that there is nothing you can do to change the situation, that you don't know what can happen in 5 minutes and will you come back home today or not.

In early March I went through the park and military plane was flying over the city at low altitude. Everybody in the park has quieted and not moved until the moment it flew away. Nobody knew the plans of occupational authority and had all grounds to wait for the worst.

There was also another fear. One day I was sitting in a bus, and a little girl asked her mom about Ukrainian flag, and mother had to shut up her daughter, since it was very dangerous even to talk about Ukrainian symbols. It was weird and unusual for me. That atmosphere of the total fear has been supported by the occupational authority until present time.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

I have grown up in the country where everybody was allowed to express own views freely, freedom of speech and assembly were inalienable rights, but then that rights have been removed for several days.

I was surprised by the position of some people, which I had known for many years and I have never thought that our friendship would stop because of political reasons. I have not been talking to most of them from February 2014. But it was also the opposite cases when I stood together with people, who had nothing in common with me, but we have found the common aim – this is the defense of Ukrainian Crimea. And even after the occupation there were many people, who wore Ukrainian symbols, and you could just smile to an unknown person in a bus, and he or she having noticed blue and yellow ribbons smiled to you too. Those moments were especially helpful at that moment.

Fortunately, the conflict did not affected my relationships with relatives, probably, we have become even closer to each other. However, they still live in Crimea and a distance of 1000 km divides us. We have only rare meetings in Lviv once in several months.

When the occupation has already started I didn't think that it couldn't have been stopped. Military action could be started. The Russian army was ready for them, but Ukrainian, at that moment, wasn't. This scenario would not help to release Crimea, but there could be a lot of victims. Ordinary Crimean residents did all they could, but unarmed civil people had no chance to win in the fight with armed Russian special agents.

I left Crimea in spring of 2014. Until summer of that year I had hoped that we could do something and Crimea would need such people as I, but then I understood that there was nothing we could do on the lowest level we were. Every step of activists was under control of security forces and any careless word could trigger transferring to Siberia and such result couldn't help to end the occupation of Crimea. Therefore, I decided to leave Crimea. It was hard

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

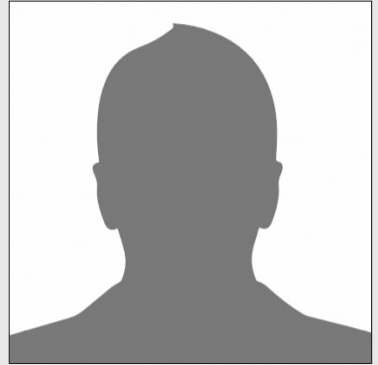
and, at the same time, well-considered decision. I love Crimea very much, but life there has become impossible so I visited my favorite places in Crimea that summer, said goodbye, packed my belongings and went.

After moving I have visited Crimea several times. From year to year the pressure has become stronger there and visiting relatives has become more risky.

I will certainly come back to Crimea when the occupation ends. Lviv has become my second home and I am very grateful to it, but I love Crimea, want to live there and to develop it. I like mountains, sun and sea, sunsets and sunrises in the steppe, fields of sunflowers and lavender, vineyards and peach gardens, salty lakes and smell of sage in the steppe – all these are close to me. I am afraid that Russia would create a testing ground from Crimea and destroy everything we love. I am worried about people which have to live there. They have different reasons, but I understand how hard for them to live in Crimea now. I think that the economic crisis in Russia would lead to necessarily returning of Crimea in several years.

Oksana (Surname is Hidden for Security Reasons): “Self-Defense Told Us: “If You Don’t Disappear, We Will Come to Your Home””

Crimean entrepreneur, activist of the peaceful resistance movement against Russian aggression. Native languages are Russian, Ukrainian and Polish. After annexation of Crimea she has lived in Crimea for 3 years. Then she moved to Europe.



I remember the rally beneath the wall of the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea on February 26, 2014 and further actions before “referendum”. One day my husband and I were near the military base on Karl Marks Street. A group of Turkish journalists was together with us. We held posters concerning the illegal occupation and “little green men”, when we were talking to Turkish press a group of people, assistants of little green men came to us, and took away our posters, broke my mobile phone and pushed back my husband. They were “Cossacks”, or foreigners from Kuban, but certainly they weren’t Crimean. We understand that they aren’t locals due to their language, clothes, they didn’t know our city. Probably, thanks to journalists we avoided clashes.

To say we were shocked by the events in Crimea this is an understatement. We hoped it was temporary and all that mess would be stopped, we would restore everything and Ukrainian authority would stop it (they talked on TV that everything was under control). We didn’t believe that, so our obligation was to be on the streets, protest and hope to be seen, heard and understood our position against the occupation.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

We couldn't realize that in the third millennium armed people in unmarked uniforms told us that they had come to keep order. What order? Where? Where are you from? Why do you come? We understood that they are Russian soldiers, but they denied this. And people from Kuban region looked like hoodlums or bandits. I didn't feel any fear, I wanted it all to be over and to believe that our country defends us. Every day our hope faded away. Yes, I was crying and not a one day. I had hysteria, because I was terrified of that events.

At the beginning our family stood with posters against the annexation. Then we joined the movement “Women for peace” and stood with posters in Marino. It was terrible, unknown people came to us, threatened us, promised to beat us and plucked out the posters from our hands.

Then we were preparing food for Ukrainian soldiers from the blocked military units. We went there together with my husband since I needed to take bags and pots. We went to Perevalne to our militaries. But we weren't allowed to get into. Unknown people (not from Crimea) had already been there. They thought that we worked there since we came with other three women. When we started to carry bags they came and pushed us back. There were up to 10 persons. Our men carried bags with plov and patties. Occupants were sitting near fire, they all were drunk and empty vodka bottles were scattered near them. Journalists started to ask us about the situation and our view on events. That drunken people from the self-defense were listening to all what I said. Then they said: “If you don't disappear, we will come to your home.” Then the clashes were and we run to our cars very fast since they were chasing us. Remaining part of the food we passed through the secret entrance (locals showed us) unknown for occupants.

We discussed the situation with the friends, neighbors and colleagues, since everyone was shocked. It was on February-beginning of March since I received messages – congratulations from friends with International Women's Day: “Glory to Ukraine!”

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

and “Crimea is Ukraine!” All my relatives live on the mainland of Ukraine and in Poland, so I did not have any conflicts with them. The only thing it was sad to read that we, Crimean people, were called “traitors”. Volunteer’s movement have started from Crimea and our help to Ukrainian militaries. They told us that they were ready to defend, they were ready to fight, even street fighting. Soldiers warned us that Russian militaries came armed for street fighting. Thus, it was war. A lot of soldiers said goodbye to their families.

Russia was always present in Crimea. All those events have been prepared for a long time and almost all knew about that. Both Crimean authorities and Ukrainian authorities were informed about the possible development of events. We couldn’t believe it, our family was recommended to withdraw money from the bank account in November 2013.

Now we see a lot of Russian propaganda on TV, big boards with Putin everywhere, his unintelligible phrases... Nerve period of Crimean people had been over, 3 years have passed, but the feeling of nausea still remains, it is uptight and does not allow to regain consciousness.

The feeling of horror has not disappeared for 3 years and I want to escape from this. Repressions, mass actions, weird police, Guards Tape are everywhere...

More and more phrases “Crimea is Ukraine”, or more often “Putin – h**lo” (smiles) are appear on the streets. These letters then are actively painted, but after some period of time, they appear again – and it makes people laugh.

It’s nice to see people in embroidered shirts on the Independence Day of Ukraine, someone wearing blue and yellow earrings, or shirt, or ribbons in hair. Sometimes in shops blue and yellow towels or pens are put together... such kind of passive protest.

The current situation in Crimea represents the Soviet Union in not the best light. Statesmen behave as in Soviet time – it’s diffi-

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

cult to make an appointment, electronic queues don't work. Or in a bus you can hear that today “appeared” tickets for visit of endocrinologists. Can you believe that? Doctors said that their salaries decreased in two times. Dissents are under the pressure. Everyone knows persons who are prosecuted now or have been already jailed, all of them our mutual acquaintances, for example, Volodymyr Balukh. The atmosphere of fear and terror exists on the peninsula.

Hope that Crimea would return to Ukrainian control exists, but this is a faint hope. Something must happen in Russia – it can't stay up in this state. I can't believe that the state of absurd could live long.

Viktor Merzhvynskiy: I Am Also Responsible for Anti-Ukrainian Teachers of Crimea

Crimean activist of the public resistance movement against Russian aggression. He has lived in Crimea from 1996. He was a teacher of Ukrainian language and literature in Crimean Institute of Post-graduate Education. At the age of 37 he had to leave Crimea together with his family due to Russian aggression. He joined the armed forces of Ukraine in ATO zone. Having returned he became a chief editor of Ukrainian newspaper "Krymska svitlytsia" ("Crimean chamber"). The native language is Ukrainian.



Photo from the archive of Viktor Merzhvynskiy

My family and I were not prepared internally and externally to accept the situation in Crimea of spring 2014. We didn't agree with that artificial realities proposed by that "authority": the change of flags, structure, citizenship, state etc. That effected our decisions and actions, and now I am one of those so-called "forced resettler".

On February 26, 2014 I was beneath the walls of Crimean Verkhovna Rada and joined the mass action. The next day I went to work and saw that Simferopol downtown was blocked, primarily, those streets leading to the Verkhovna Rada. Regarding the emergency Anatolii Mohyliov issued an order of suspending the work of public enterprises on that day to ensure the security. When I came to work we were discussing the current situation and thought what would happen next. Indeed, it was a time of uncertainty, panic and hopeless predicament.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

I felt fear near places of mass actions at that time. I met people in camouflages and with ribbons of Saint George on the way from the Verkhovna Rada to Simferopol railway station along Rosa Liuksemburh Street. That people walked down the street and enjoyed ongoing events.

I tried to take part in pro-Ukrainian events in Crimea. I had participated in rallies of pro-Ukrainian activists before February 26, 2014. Moreover, I met my colleague on one of them. Having noticed me he tried to hide, but finally he joined the formation of human chain which pushed back the pro-Ukrainian activists from the Verkhovna Rada. Then he became one of the deputies of Simferopol city council.

At the time of occupation I worked in the Department of Philology of Crimean Republican Institute of Post-graduate Education. The Department consisted of methodologists who supervised teachers of Ukrainian, Russian, Crimean Tatar language and literature, English and French languages. We were openly discussing the situation with some of them. All of them agreed that the current situation was temporary and we would see real faces of those who would repent.

Having returned and appointed as the Acting Dean, Oleksandr Rudiakov invited me into his office several times and tried to convince me that step in Russian direction had been magnificent and “position of deficiency” was narrow-minded. It was weird for me to hear the cliché of Imperial Russia from the Professor, PhD in philology. He tried to show me that Ukrainian language and literature as well as Ukrainian state are defective. I realized why he did it so I didn't fall for provocations.

The annexation affected our relationship with relatives. Some of them still live in Crimea: ant, cousin with his wife, nephews. Understandably, now we are not in touch, we have lost contact. We have no intention to renew our relationship.

It is particularly remarkable that some of our neighbors have started to call my wife “banderovka” and told her other nasty things.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

It was additional alarm call for us and we understood that drunk “opolchentsi” (I saw them constantly on the streets of Sevastopol) could come to our home, so we decided to leave Crimea for safety reasons.

I want to provide you with an example of the situation in Crimea that had developed over the years as a result of the lack of well-thought-out state politics and Ukrainian product. I have ended the school year (June 2014). The last advanced training group consisted of 50 teachers of Ukrainian language and literature. Everyone understood that our lectures are no longer relevant and most of the students said that they would study Russian language and they didn't need that. We often discussed the political situation and as things turned out 60% of teachers (attention!) of Ukrainian language and literature were pro-Russian. What could they teach their pupils and how did they raise children?

Everyone is guilty in the occupation. I am also guilty since I should never have allowed the Dean or our Institute to graduate students whose activities could be potentially destructive for pupils. But, I didn't do that, since I thought I couldn't succeed alone. I am also responsible for Crimean anti-Ukrainian teachers of Ukrainian language and literature in Crimean schools. I feel guilty. All thought that time would “heal”, but nobody felt that time was against us.

I saw how newly-formed units of “self-defense” provoked conflicts and I thought that it was one of its tasks. Organized groups of pro-Russian aggressive men came to pro-Ukrainian actions, places where pro-Ukrainian activists the meetings held, in particular, beneath the walls of Ukrainian military bases. Those groups had to provoke conflicts and did that according to plan: buses came, men with ribbons of Saint Georg and sticks got off the bus and tried to provoke us. They provoked us to start the conflict.

After dismissal from the work I left Crimea on August 2, 2014. We sent our belongings on the mainland of Ukraine using “Autolux” (“New post” were functioning only intermittently at that moment).

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

We received our belongings already “inspected”, something was missing. We moved to Zhytomyr region since my wife and I were born there.

Having moved to Zhytomyr region I went to the recruitment office, I had only the military registration card, since I had never served in the army before. I told I want to be registered. Internally, I want to go in ATO zone and kept it in a secret from my wife and mother. I was sure I would help our forces there and my physical health showed that I could be even better than many others. When I was applying I saw my classmates, which were happy that they are not enrolled. I was shocked at that moment and told myself that I should go. I was persuaded from that step at the recruitment office. They told me why you did it, you have children, family. I have served in Military forces of Ukraine for 15 months, 10 of them – in ATO zone.

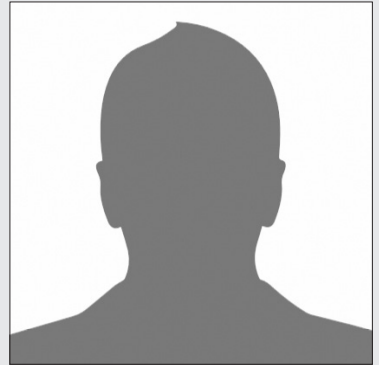
Now I don't visit Crimea. Taking into account the fact that I participated in ATO I am prohibited to enter Crimea. Moreover, my students actively shared that information on social media. I am sure that I am in the informal list of persons which “could enter Crimea, but once”.

I plan to return to Crimea after the occupation since I have a lot of things to do there (laughing). Most residents of Ukraine don't understand the importance of our peninsula. I heard soldiers phrases: “I don't care of Crimea, I have never been there and don't want”. I have lived in Crimea, I remember it not only as uncomfortable, I mean, in particular, reactions on my child or my using Ukrainian language, when everyone was staring at you in public transport and called you “banderovets”, “hohol”.

I know that Crimea is destructing now: its nature, environment, potential and positive image. We knew that Crimea is a sea, a sun and a light. Now all of this is under the threat. Those who come there today don't feel it and its value since they know that they stay temporary there.

Olha (the Surname is Hidden for Security Reasons): During Occupation of Crimea Ukrainian Was No Longer Used in School

Crimean teacher of Ukrainian language and literature. She was born and lived in Crimea until 2014. She had to leave the peninsula due to the Russian aggression. The native language is Ukrainian.



On February 26-27, 2014 buses with Russian flags have departed from Yevpatoriia bus station. There were a lot of people (local men in the state of euphoria). Ukrainian flags were removed from all state buildings. It was felt that everyone was afraid of discussing ongoing events.

At that moment I was depressed, virtually suffering from shock. I realized that there was nothing I could do and therefore I could only watch and wait for what would be happen next. I couldn't sleep and every morning I was crying of helpless.

Personally, I didn't take part in the resistance movement since I didn't have a possibility to go to Simferopol where the center of events was located.

We were discussing the events only with like-minded people. I tried to avoid contacts with other people since I just didn't see any sense in these contacts. Everyone was shocked, and didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Children stopped to attend school; Ukrainian was no longer used in school.

Nobody knew what was going to happen. I had gone to the mainland of Ukraine a week before "the referendum", but then I came

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

back and in a week left Crimea for good. I realized that I could not live under the occupation in Crimea.

I have chosen the northern region of Ukraine as a place to live. I didn't care where we go but I understood that it will be financially easier there than in Kyiv and other big cities.

Now I am engaged in human rights work and social activity.

If the occupation ends I wouldn't come back. On the new place I have started new active full life for developing democratic Ukraine and consciousness of civil society.

I am afraid that Crimea is transforming into the military base instead of place for tourists taking into account its climatic conditions.

The big problem of water supply exists in Crimea (Crimean channel hasn't worked from the beginning of occupation), therefore, Crimea should be together with Ukraine. Even though I wish Crimean people would make this choice consciously.

Danylo Myhailychenko: Some Teachers of Ukrainian Gymnasium Were Proud of the Fact that They Would Be Working for Russia

Crimean activist of the peaceful resistance movement against Russian aggression. He studied at Ukrainian gymnasium in spring 2014. At the age of 16 he had to leave Crimea together with his family. Having moved to Kyiv region he worked as journalist. Native languages are Ukrainian and Russian.



Photo from the archive of Danylo Myhailychenko

The annexation of Crimea has started when I was a school boy of the ninth form. I studied at the Ukrainian gymnasium* in Simferopol and we had especially “good time” there. When “little green men” came the school was blocked by the administration, pupils were allowed to leave school only with their parents. It was indicative to observe different views of pupils. One part was going along corridors and chanting: “Russia”, others: “Ukraine”. There were the third part, neutral, they didn’t shout anything since didn’t know what position to choose out. There were conflicts, but only verbally, not involving physical force.

Teachers of Ukrainian gymnasium were also divided. Some of them packed their belongings and left Crimea with tears on eyes, contrarily, others were proud of the fact that they would be working for Russia.

That situation was really hurtful. I also felt anger that our home, our Ukrainian Crimea, was rudely taken away. Moreover, it was

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

hurtful to hear that some teachers of the Ukrainian gymnasium said that Russia was a savior of Crimean people.

My former teacher of Ukrainian history has become a bright example of this. He actively demonstrates his pro-Russian position on social media, posts photos with Russian tricolors. It is noteworthy that sometimes he writes on social media that teacher's salary doesn't allow him to feed the family. However, he always delates such posts and writes again: “Glory to Russia!” Probably, I'll never understand him.

Other interesting example is my former swimming trainer. He has never been an active supporter of Ukraine, spoke Russian and held a neutral position. However, as I got to know after my moving from Crimea he couldn't find a common language with new pro-Russian director of gymnasium and had left, although he was an honorable man, professional and many pupils respected him.

However, I see many pupils of the former Ukrainian gymnasium reciting Ukrainian poetry on social media. People continue to move to the mainland of Ukraine. They said that Ukrainian gymnasium was virtually destroyed under Russian authority. There are no unique programs, and sport events as before, but teachers are actively propagating “Russian world” instead.

In spring 2014 our family immediately decided to leave Crimea. Then we started preparation: search for potential buyer of our apartment in Simferopol and new apartment in Kyiv region. My parents have submitted application forms for the renunciation of Russian nationality. To do that they had to stand in a long queues at the Russian Federal Migration Service Office. Interestingly, instead of the document of the renunciation of nationality they received a piece of paper without any stamp and signature where should be indicated that application had been taken into consideration.

Then my parents went to arrange our new apartment. Two sisters and I were staying with our grandparents in Crimea at that time.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

Mother came to Crimea in July 2014. At that moment railway transportation still was working. We came to Dzhankoy where the border crossing post was located. We got on the train to Kyiv. We were carefully inspected by Russian frontier guards. They checked our belongings and documents. My sisters had birth certificates and there were no questions to them. All the trouble started when they came to me. On April 29, 2014 I turned 16 years and I had to obtain a Ukrainian passport. At that moment Ukrainian Passport offices have not worked in Crimea and I couldn't obtain the document. For this reason I have been denied exit permission. Interestingly, they didn't recognize that document of the renunciation of Russian nationality and said that such document could be provided by everyone. Thus, they doubted the authenticity of the document provided by their institution! Because of that three armed frontier guards took me off the train. You could ever imagine my mother's feelings.

There were other twenty people in the same situation on the platform. At that moment Ukrainian telephone service hasn't worked in Crimea and all that people couldn't inform their relatives what has happened.

I was in Dzhankoy where I hadn't any relatives or friends. Mother contacted grandfather who picked me up from the train station. Without that, I don't know where I'd be.

Having put off the train we were taken to special territory. They checked all our documents again there and allowed us to go. I stayed at the railway station and waited for my grandfather. When I was waiting for my grandfather, I have changed my seat twice. Then frontier guards came to me again and asked what I did there and why I was moving around the territory of the railway station. They started to inspect me and asked me again. They were rude and asked me: “What are you doing here?”

“What do you want here?” After that I was left alone. My grandfather came and we went home.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

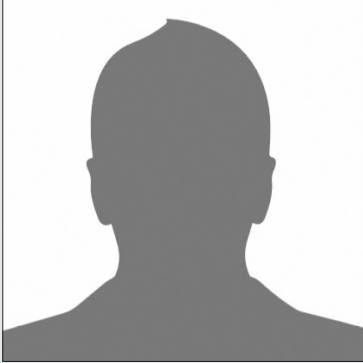
I have finally received a possibility to go to my family after a while. My parents have been able to obtain a Ukrainian passport for me and I left Crimea with them. I will come back to Crimea if only it becomes Ukrainian. First of all, it is dangerous for me as a journalist. Secondly, the situation there makes me sick. I can't just watch what is happening there and to keep silent.

* Ukrainian gymnasium in Simferopol was one of the best Ukrainian-language secondary educational institutions in Crimea. Its work was built on the basis of Ukrainian Studies. Ukrainian gymnasium was established in September 1997 at the initiative of the second President of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, who had laid the foundation stone of future gymnasium and the capsule with wishes for future generations.

After Russian occupation of Crimea had been started, the Ministry of Education in Russia-controlled Parliament of Crimea declared that the language of gymnasium would be Russian. It implied the actual death of the gymnasium and, therefore, generated a wave of protests of the administration and teachers of the gymnasium, as well as parents of pupils. Representatives of so-called “self-defense” organized mass actions for the dismissal of the Director and transformation of the gymnasium in a Russian-language institution. Russia-controlled Simferopol administration threatened the Director, Natalia Rudenko, to be prosecuted. She was forced to resign and move to the mainland part of Ukraine.

Having changed the specialization of the gymnasium Russian-speaking children from families of Russian statesmen and power structures' workers which moved from Russia to study there. Special interest to this institution is connected with its developed infrastructure provided with the funds of Ukrainian budget.

Elzara (the Surname Is Hidden for Security Reasons): in 2014 Crimean People Was Looking for Guns to Fight for Crimea



Crimean activist of the peaceful resistance movement of Russian aggression. She has come back to the peninsula from the places of deportation of her family in 1989. The native language is Crimean Tatar.

On February 26, 2014 I was alone at home; my husband was at the rally. Everybody was waiting for the support from the mainland of Ukraine. Probably, that day, or next day they would show separatists where they were. In the evening of February 26 we felt ourselves as winners. However, my husband thought that our people had not to go home and stay outside the state buildings if they wanted to protect own interests as people had done on the Maidan in Kyiv. Probably, the result would be different.

When the Verkhovna Rada of ARC had already been captured, we also kept hope alive that Kyiv would help us. We waited the moment, when our special agencies would break up the crowd of weird “perpetrators”. Every time when we were driving near the Verkhovna Rada and the Council of Ministers my husband asked policemen: “Have you already got kicked out them, haven’t you? Why? When will you do it?” The answer was: “We are in the process”, or they just stayed silent.

I was afraid; I couldn’t understand why Kyiv didn’t react to that event. I felt bad for young men, soldiers of Ukrainian military bases trapped by militaries of unknown army. They were also afraid. We

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

came to them and tried to encourage them. My husband told them that they shouldn't be worry; people would support them and fight together with them. When my husband tried to be registered with the Recruitment Office he was denied. Interestingly, the Recruitment Office was working as usual. One time we came to the District Recruitment Unit and saw that they had a day off. In several meters the blocked military base and Russian APC were located, and they had a day-off also. It was on Wednesday or Thursday, I don't remember. Everybody was shocked, but all were waiting. We couldn't believe that Crimea just would be handing over without any efforts to defend it. It was shameful. The first decision was to take the kids out since we didn't understand the commitment of the militaries in unmarked uniforms. Many people were looking for any guns. Somebody who had found it, bought. There were people ready to fight for Crimea.

We were afraid of military actions; we were worried about our children, parents and ourselves. Walking past the soldiers in unmarked uniforms we were waiting that they could start shooting for any reason, even if they didn't like you. They wore masks, had guns and APC. It was like a nightmare. At that time I was reading a lot about Russian aggression in Georgia and Moldova. I realize how that event could end up.

Personally, I attended a rally near the Taras Shevchenko monument in Simferopol only once. There were only a few of us. It was really fearful at the moment when athletic young men, all similar and very aggressive, came to us. There were TV and police, but I didn't feel myself in the safety. My husband attended all protest rallies and even left job for that reason.

At the beginning of the occupation in Crimea views of many people (vast majority) coincided with my own ones, but then most of them were afraid of discussing those issues, especially at the moment when everybody understood that nobody could help us. They have accepted new realities and adapted. I have a full understand-

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

ing and support with relatives. They think the same way. They are still waiting for...

In 2014 we had to change not only place of residence, but also a job, a school and a kindergarten for children. We had to leave all relatives and friends in Crimea. We had to leave home. However, our life has not changed for the better. Personally, I think that an executive decision concerning the confrontation wasn't made. I believe that on the stage of the rally of February 26 and following several days when state building was captured our authorities had a great possibility to resist or even prevent the next actions of Russia. At the beginning it was only “probing”. Indeed, the Council of Ministers and Vekhovna Rada was captured by several dozens of men. I think we should act in that moment. However, my husband believes that Ukrainian Parliament did everything possible. I think that he just justifies such inaction not to be completely disappointed. I hope we would properly assess all actions of Ukrainian authorities and occupant.

Our family left Crimea before the referendum. We didn't want to participate or even watch that events. Now we live in Kyiv since we found a job here.

Sometimes it's very hard, but I think that it would be much worse in occupied Crimea. It's extremely difficult to see Russian flags everywhere as well as understand that there is nothing you could do. You feel lost. My husband decided to take part in the Anti-Terrorist Operation. He was denied joining the army several times, even more, he was asked a bribe. However, he met the goal and now he defends Ukraine from Russia on the East.

I visit Crimean once a year now, in summer. My husband does not visit Crimea since he had an active position against Russian occupation and didn't hide his views.

I am afraid that Crimea under Russian control will become devastated. Now environment, cultural and historical heritage are suffering. The settlement of Crimea by Russian citizens and militaries

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

is still ongoing. I am worried how we will get rid of them when the occupation ends. I am especially worried about children studying in Crimea now, which are taught propaganda against Ukraine. We have to answer these questions now and to be ready for returning Crimea.

We'll definitely come back home when the occupation ends, and we keep this hope.

Oleksandr Siedov: Many Crimean People Have Accepted the Fact of Occupation



*Photo from the archive
of Oleksandr Siedov*

Crimean engineer. He has lived in Crimea from 1984. The native language is Russian. He had to leave the peninsula due to Russian aggression. He lives in Kyiv region now.

On February 26 after the rally outside the Verkhovna Rada of ARC, and the declaration of deputies not to consider the issues concerning a referendum, there was hope that Crimea would calmly traverse the dismissal of Yanukovych and change of the Council of Ministers. (On those days I was in Kerch and monitored the events on TV).

In the morning of February 26 it was reported that the building of the Verkhovna Rada of ARC had been captured by unknown armed men. The seizure of the building is a crime and it should be left for law enforcement agencies. Thus, setting up a perimeter was a regular reaction of the police. It is not normal that several deputies were allowed to get inside the building captured by armed people; these deputies adopted decisions there, law enforcement agents considered that decisions legitimate and started to implement them.

Obviously, I was irritated by militiamen's calls to Russia and Russian APC coming from Sevastopol to Simferopol, but I didn't believe that Russian authority would adopt a decision about the occupation

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

and what’s more the annexation of Crimea. Therefore, on February 27 after Aksionov had made a statement about holding a referendum (at that day it was sounded like “referendum for expanding authority of ARC”) it was frightening but I was sure that Ukrainian authority would react to that.

At the beginning I had no fear, but anxiety riddled me. I couldn’t understand why Kyiv had been slow to take action concerning Crimea. Fear has come when Putin had obtained a permission to send the corps in Ukraine and those corps started to cross the border and move across Kerch, when schedule and questions of the referendum were starting to change drastically.

I felt anger towards stupidity of surrounding people, which believed in that delirium created to fright Crimean people (about “bamderivtsi” going to Crimea to kill local people, about tea with drugs on the Maidan, etc.). I felt anger towards some people I know who didn’t want to understand that capturing of Crimea wouldn’t be recognized by the world society and those who really enjoyed Russia coming have condemned themselves and their children to live in “the grey zone” occupied by a totalitarian state where the rule of law is absent.

I felt fear that Russian actions could lead to world war. I discussed the situation with others. Not a lot of people supported the events on Maidan, but only a few stated frankly that they wanted to live in Russia. Putin’s call to the Council of Federation¹² concerning sending the corps in Ukraine was a shocking event for most people I know. However, when aggressive people with St. George ribbons had come, when “Cossacks” had appeared and when finally Russian soldiers had openly blocked Ukrainian military bases and state enterprises, but Ukraine didn’t react. Many Crimean people said that Russia was more powerful and Ukraine couldn’t effectively counter

¹² The Council of Federation is the upper house of the Federal Assembly of Russia which consists of 170 members (senators).

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

the attack and just accepted it. A lot of people were disappointed and thought that Ukraine didn't really need Crimean people. In fact, I had a feeling that Ukrainian security forces in Crimea didn't know what to do. Most of them were openly sabotaged.

I left Crimea in June 2014. I allowed my child to finish the school year and went to Kyiv. When ordinary people found out that I am from Crimea they asked me about the situation and offered a helping hand.

I have not visited Crimea for six years. I don't want to go there. I don't want to see Russian flags, Putin's portraits, the Russian army, etc. in the city where I have spent all my life. Moreover, many friends live in Crimea now and I don't want to spoil relations talking about politics. Extremely aggressive propaganda is being undertaken in Crimea now, and it will be difficult to speak with people until it ends.

I am worried about the children in Crimea, which are the most vulnerable to propaganda, especially from teachers.

Returning Crimea is possible only as a consequence of international sanctions against the Russian Federation, but more severe than present ones. For the first time after World War II the Russian Federation has created the situation when one country annexed a part of another state by military aggression. There is no way to pretend that we could be blind to these events. From the other side, Ukrainian authority shouldn't forget that citizens of Ukraine live in Crimea and they are in more vulnerable state than other people on the mainland of Ukraine. It must be understood that residents of Crimea are divided into occupants and citizens of Ukraine and these categories shouldn't be compared. So, how quickly Crimea will be released from occupation depends on fulfillment of these two conditions

Stanislav Yermakov: in 2014 Outside the Parliament Somebody Commanded to Start and Two Lines Met.

Crimean activist, professor. He was born and lived in Simferopol for 29 years. He had worked at the Crimean University of Culture, Arts and Tourism before the Russian aggression. In 2013 he took part in Crimean mass action for the support of the Euromaidan and in spring 2014 he has joined the resistance movement against Russian aggression on the peninsula. He had to leave Crimea due to the persecution by local authority. After that he took part in military operations in ATO zone.



Photo from the archive of Stanislav Yermakov

Until Russian aggression started, I had worked at the Crimean University of Culture, Arts and Tourism. Before that I worked in the Crimean State Archive. I planned to become a professional historian. When the Euromaidan had started I supported it immediately. At that moment, I followed closely the activities of “Svoboda” party but I wasn’t its member. I needed that to know what actions were organized to support the Euromaidan in Crimea and demonstrate my own position. From December 3, 2014 I have started to attend Euromaidan actions organized by Crimean activists under the leadership of Andrii Shchekun and Serhii Kovalskyi. At that moment I didn’t know them personally, but we have already started to recognize each other at the events.

The situation in Crimea oppressed me, many people tried to dissolve in the “Party of Regions”. Most staff members of my university have supported the “Anti-Maidan” under the pressure. On

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

the instructions from the Director of the University, Oleh Habrielian, the list of people who were ready to go on the “Anti-Maidan” was created. Those who had refused to do it were put to “the black lists”. It could lead to problems in the further professional career. All staff members had year contracts and that was used to punish those, who had refused to join “Anti-Maidan”: they were denied to conclude contracts for the next year.

In late December 2013 the round table was conducted at the university and all staff members had to express own position concerning Kyiv protest actions in the presence of the Director. Several young lecturers presented a report that the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the European Union would be a bondage agreement leading to the ruins and destabilization of all state. Another woman said that she had been on the Euromaidan in Kyiv and observed there “fascist coven”. Therefore, they expressed views of the “Party of Regions” which could be heard from any place at that moment in Crimea.

After that I raised a hand and asked whether they thought that protest rallies in Kyiv connected with illegal and violent acts of police, and the key reason is in the actions of the former authority.

Then staff members were actively criticizing my view. The Director also has remembered my position.

My participation in Crimean actions of the Euromaidan also threatened my career as a professor. The Head of my department emphasized: “We know that you go there and it’s not good for you”. And I realized that it would have consequences for my close future.

When on February 2014 Yanukovich regime had collapsed I understood that it would affect Crimea and we had to be prepared to any unpredictable events. Therefore, I started monitoring the information about political and public actions in Crimea.

I learned from posts on Facebook that on February 26, 2014 a rally outside the Crimean Parliament was scheduled by pro-Ukrainian forces of the peninsula. It was hard to understand the

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

reason of that rally, but it was highlighted that everyone must attend it. At the same time, I learned that pro-Russian forces were also going to organize a rally at the same place. At that moment after the Maidan events had occurred concepts like “other political position” or “person expressing other views” didn’t exist, instead I preferred to use definitions “our people” and “enemies”. Many people felt the same way, so mental war in our heads has already started at that moment.

I remember clearly that a couple of days before the rally I went to the bookstore on Pushkin Street in Simferopol. Store managers told each other: “If banderivtsi or maidanivtsi came to Crimea, surely, there would be some bastards, who will meet them with the flowers”. In their heads some pictures of the World War II appeared.

On the eve of February 26, 2014 I told some people I know about action. An hour before the rally, we met in the city center near “Silpo” shop to assess the situation. That people didn’t belong to any nationalistic movements. However, further Russian propaganda started to convince that only nationalists from Kyiv had stood for Ukraine. Indeed, there were ordinary people: one of them was musician, other person I don’t want to speak about in details, since he stay in Crimea. However, those people didn’t come to Crimea from the Maidan, they are native residents of Simferopol. And expressing similar political views we found each other.

When we met in the center of Simferopol it was the first time that I had the feeling that I didn’t know where our people and where enemies. I have had that feeling for a long time. At that moment in Simferopol I met different people, but I didn’t know who I could ask for support.

At that moment we noticed a group of people near “Silpo” shop in the center of Simferopol. We came to them saying: “Glory to Ukraine!” They replied us: “Glory to heroes!” And we have understood that those people were also going to the Crimean Parliament.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

As it turned out, they were supporters of different public movements, particularly, anti-fascists. One of them was Oleksandr Kolchenko. Then I saw Hennadii Afanasiev on the rally.

All that guys are also native Crimean people. We have joined and walked together to the Parliament.

We were prepared to resist against an attack of pro-Russian forces since we realized that confronting rallies wouldn't end peacefully. We hadn't any weapons, but we had other facilities to repulse a possible attack: these are pepper sprays and steel rebar.

I met Andrii Shchekun near Crimean Parliament. Only there he told me the real reason of the rally: the Parliament tried to adopt the decision to separate Crimea from Ukraine. Thus, I have ultimately decided that I had to stay there.

On the rally we met Crimean Tatar activists which asked us about our position. We were discussing and explaining each other our views. Then I noticed a red and black flag not far from me. I told my friends: “We have to go there. Probably, these are our people!” We went to flag. I saw that young man was holding the flag and other young men were standing around him. The supporters of ultras¹³ “Tavriia” were among them. That group was chanting: “Komuniaku na hilliaku (Communists, get out!)”, “Zek (convict) get out!”, “Glory to Ukraine!” Having understood that security agents would be against that rally, activists had masks to hide their faces from cameras.

I would like to underline that Crimean activists didn't understand what was going on. What's more, for that reason there were conflicts as they tried to get rid of that people had called them provocateurs. They needed to explain them who were those people and why they had to stand with us there.

By the way, when the supporters of ultras have been asked who they were, they replied: “We are the “Right Sector””. Even though

¹³ Ultras are the fans of football club “Tavriia”. They took active part in the pro-Ukrainian rallies on the peninsula in 2014.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

they hadn't any relation to that movement but they dreamed about the glory of the “Right Sector” on the Euromaidan. Further, Russian propaganda called them real members of the “Right Sector” and provocateurs from Kyiv.

Those young people were standing near the Parliament. Suddenly, I noticed a tricolor from the opposite side. Then there appeared an idea to take away that flag. And we went there. We came and stood in front of the tricolor. Pro-Russian activists were tense having noticed men in masks among us and red and black flag. Then they relocated the tricolor inside the crowd. Strong men stood in the line in front of us and distance between us has reduced to half a meter. The tense has increased to a point when somebody commanded to start and two lines have met. Pepper sprays have been used immediately by two sides. I remember I have inhaled it a lot.

We have met with pro-Russian line several times. They wanted to take away our flag and we wanted their one. As a result, they have broken our flagpole, but we saved the flag. At that moment I saw Crimean Tatar activist with his national flag and asked to put red and black flag together with a Crimean Tatar flag on the same flagpole.

It was really fearful since nobody knew what this all could be completed. Clashes could lead to massive confrontation. However, we had the following tactic: push, make a corridor to allow people to go out from the center, push again, make a corridor and push again.

Thus, we have pushed away pro-Russian activists from the inner courtyard of Crimean Parliament¹⁴. Then I noticed that one of pro-Ukrainian activists had broken a lock on the door and people started to get into the Parliament.

14 Russia-controlled leaders of Crimea and Russian investigation accused the chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, Ahtem Chyigoz, and two participants of the rally on February 26, 2014, Ali Asanov and Mustafa Degermendzy, in organizing of massive unrest and damaging property of Crimean Parliament within the criminal “case of February 26”.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

After four hours of confrontation we have pushed away pro-Russian activists from the inner courtyard of the Parliament and they were standing on the last staircase. The Head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, Refat Chubarov, took the floor and told protesters that everyone could go. And people have started to go away.

I left the square exhausted and with feelings of uncertainty since, personally, I thought that it was a very strange decision. I believe we shouldn't leave that place. If we had stayed there and blocked administrative buildings it would have impeded the desired outcomes of Kremlin leaders. If we were inside the Parliament and the Council of Ministers of Crimea, we would have changed the development of “Crimean spring” events starting on the next day.

Oleksandr Boltian: I Was in Kyiv, but Crimean Mass-Media At The Same Time Had Been “Detaining” Me in Crimea

Crimean activist. He was born in Yevpatoriia. Psychologist by the specialty. At the age of 39 he had to leave Crimea due to Russian aggression. Having moved from Crimea he took part in military operations in ATO zone as a soldier of “Karpatska Sich” Battalion. Now he works in the National police of Ukraine.



Photo from the archive of Oleksandr Boltian

My family had to leave Crimea due to its occupation. My family has lost a house, which I built by myself before the occupation, but we were living there only during 3 years... Now I can't come back to the occupied territory. I have no chance to buy a new apartment honestly in close future. I spend all money on food and rent.

On February 26-27, 2014 I took part in rallies. I hope that Ukrainian forces would win; what's more, we have pushed away pro-Russian activists from the Verkhovna Rada of ARC. However, they had a plan “B” — armed invasion — and Ukrainian authority wasn't prepared for such events. I said on Crimean TV that local Security Services of Ukraine had to control the movement of armed people. They knew about that, but didn't resist them and didn't do anything.

I remember that in Yevpatoriia leaflets “Traitor of Crimea, extremist” have appeared in public transport, on the streets and bus stops. I was in the list of pro-Ukrainian activists which were closely monitored by Russian forces.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

At the beginning of the occupation I had a feeling that Ukrainian forces would win. Then I realized nobody needed Crimea and nobody wanted to make any decisions. I was disappointed in the inactive authority.

We didn't stay at home. I took part in rallies. I have organized several actions in Yevpatoriia. Together with other activists, we have supported Ukrainian military bases – we brought them water and food.

We were discussing the situation with relatives. We understood that changes would be but we didn't think about an occupation. Nobody knew anything; nobody was discussing the situation with neighbors. Neighbors said that all things were going to be okay and then they were happy to meet the occupant. I have not kept in touch with any of my relatives. They have stopped to visit a grandmother.

The annexation of Crimea happened so quickly due to deep political crisis in Ukraine. It happened since Ukrainian leaders were inactive and thought that the problems would take care of themselves. It was because most Crimean people held passive position. And all thought that the situation couldn't worse if Russia came.

Ukrainian authority is guilty since it couldn't provide a clear coordination of militaries in Crimea. In that situation military actions were more important since public participation does not have a significant influence on those events. Ukrainian authority has not done anything to prevent the occupation. We could have prevented the occupation if the Armed Forces of Ukraine had been more determined as it was in 1994 (when Yurii Mieshkov was the President of Crimea) when there was a risk of the separation of Crimea from Ukraine and only robust military actions had helped to stop that process. Moreover, in the early 2000 when the question of Tuzla Island was raised the authority had stopped all processes: the Armed Forces of Ukraine were put on alert, some military unit were relocated to Tuzla to reinforce the defenses of that part of Crimea.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

However, we saw absolute inaction in 2014. If somebody had been making attempts to give orders nobody have not followed them. I have left Crimea in March 2014 due to the threat to be detained by separatist forces. Due to my active public and political position I was in “the list of Poklonska”¹⁵ containing those, who had to be detained on leaving Crimea.

I have already been in Kyiv for a week, but Crimean controlled mass-media was showing video where I was “detained” near Yalta, Armiansk. They demonstrated that I was dealing weapons to Crimea – rubber truncheons for destabilizing the situation before the ongoing “referendum”.

I know that several criminal proceedings were initiated against me due to my pro-Ukrainian activity. Occupants have indicted me for extremism.

Now I live in Kyiv. I am a policeman of Special Forces Regiment “Kyiv”.

I will come back to Crimea when the occupation ends since it is my homeland. I am sure that the occupants will disappear as fast as they have come. That will happen when Russia isn’t able to maintain this territory financially and economically. Crimea costs too much for the Russians and they have already understood it, a year after the occupation. They can’t live that for a long, maximum 5 years at most.

15 “The list of Poklonska” is a document published by Crimean media that was generated by Russia-controlled Prosecutor’s Office. This list contains approximately 50 persons who, according to then prosecutor of Crimea N. Poklonska, were involved in organization of the Euromaidan on the peninsula. Well-known lawyers, activists and ordinary people were included in that list. Particularly, the Head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, Refat Chubarov, Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis, Ahtem Chyigoz, so-coordinator of the movement “Euromaidan Crimea” Andrii Shchekun, family of Kovalskiy, the former People’s Deputy of Ukraine, Eduard Leonov, and other Crimean people were in that list.

Serhii Vikarchuk: to Leave Crimea I Half a Year Had Been Developing a Plan for Escape



*Photo from the archive
of Serhii Vikarchuk*

The former Crimean statesman. He lived in Yevpatoriia. Economist by the specialty. The native language is Ukrainian. He had to leave Crimea due to Russian aggression. After moving from Crimea he took part in the military actions in ATO zone as part of 21st battalion of 56th brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The first things that have changed in my life from February 2014 are principled commitment, confidence and belief in good and evil. We have lost everything in Crimea and moved to another place. We have started everything from the very beginning.

On February 26, the day of the rally outside the Crimean Parliament, I was at work. It was something urgent and important and we had to be at work. I didn't believe that Crimean Ukrainians or Crimean Tatars would rise in revolt. Having seen people I wanted to go to that place, however, I had to perform my duties (it's weird, but even now I can't recall what so important thing I had to do at that moment). On the eve of that day I was agitating my friends to go, but most of them decided not to come and that was a background why I wasn't there. Time and people showed that everybody did not care about the truth. They were worrying about own welfare.

At that time I felt proud and appreciated my nation. I took part in the protest movement against the "Russian world" where it was possible. However, being a statesman of local authority I realized

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

what the law says for such as I was. I wasn't allowed to take part in such rallies. I often joined such actions in Yevpatoriia and tried to go unnoticed by people I know from police or the Security Service of Ukraine which recorded all people for some reason.

We were constantly discussing the situation with colleagues. I could think and speak only about that. I asked the officers and statesmen, but they were reassuring me that everything would work out and didn't answer the question about the oath. In the most unexpected places I often met such patriots who nobody has been thought about. There were persons who have changed their opinion. I also often saw as understanding as well as misunderstanding.

My relatives were divided into two parts: for and against Ukraine. When they were speaking about traitors I clearly derided them and called their actions treacherous. I have a lot of like-minded people.

I left Crimea in the late August 2014. I half a year have been developing a plan for escape, looking for a job and a place to live. I just couldn't not stand that clown act and circus. All things turned into some kind of marasmus. All things started to back to the conditions of 1900 or even to 1937.

Now I live in Kyiv. I took part in the military actions and now I am organizing vacations for Ukrainians in warm countries. I have obtained a certificate of “forced migrant” and it gave me a possibility to find kindergarten and a school for children and get the temporary assistance and certain privileges in hospitals. People asked me why I had arrived to Kyiv whether the situation in Crimea is so good but Kyiv isn't infinite. I replied them that I participated in military actions and they stopped to ask such stupid questions.

I plan to come back to Crimea when the occupation ends, since we would have to restore all that things destroyed by the Russian Federation. Now I take the experience and all these

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

things should be implemented. Generally, it would be better to develop all reforms for Crimea today and start the process of reoccupation with this step. I want to be useful. I wish my children would live on their own land given by God. However, there's nothing to do there until Russian fascists leave Crimea. Crimea will return to Ukraine but nobody knows when war will be over. We just know it is an inevitable process.

Liuba Kalmakova: I Was Afraid of Crimean “Self-Defense” which Were Walking along Simferopol Streets with Bats and Axe Handles

Crimean activist of the peaceful resistance movement against the Russian aggression. She was born and lived in Simferopol. She is ethnic Russian. Economist and lawyer by speciality. The native language is Russian. In February-March 2014 she organized and took part in many peaceful actions for the support of Ukraine. For that reason she was under severe pressure of pro-Russian forces and had to leave Crimea. In March 2014 she moved to Lviv.



Liuba Kalmakova

Photo made by Anatolii Kovalskyi

From 2014 my life has changed completely: new place of residence, education, city and job. Surrounding people and usual social network formed in Crimea have been lost forever after moving. My contacts with the friends, relatives and fellows have been lost due to impossibility of personal meetings. My habits and traditions have been ruined. I have lost count how many weddings, birthday parties of my friends and their children I missed and had no chance to congratulate them personally. For example, in 2017 I couldn't come to my mother's 60th birthday party since she celebrated it in Simferopol. My life has changed totally and dramatically and the saddest thing is that I had no choice in the matter. I didn't want to leave Crimea for good without any possibility to come back.

When I recalled the events of the late November 2013 – March 2014 in Crimea I feel that we had mass actions every single day and I attended all of them, I remember those feelings of tension, stress, those concerns about the situation in our state. I just keep seeing those pictures which I saw at 11 p.m. on social media where the

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

building of Crimean Parliament was, unknown people was building barricades and there wasn't even a single journalist or Ukrainian policeman.

On February 26, 2014 I was at home monitoring all events of the rally organized by the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People online on TV and watching live-streams. I have decided not to go to the rally since I knew that it would be called the rally of Crimean Tatars and representatives of other ethnic groups, especially ethnic Russians, would be forgotten. That actually happened. Personally, I think that rally had no impact on the further events in Crimea. Those forces which were relocated to Crimea and formed for Crimean occupation could prevent it at the planning stages. If it was allowed to be held someone needed it.

I don't understand what the phrase “Russian world” means. I am an ethnic Russian and people hurt me using this term, trying to discredit ethnic Russians, in particular, citizens and patriots of Ukraine.

In February I haven't thought about the moving and it was insulting to hear the question from the foreign journalists: “Where would you go if Crimea was a part of Russia?” At that moment I couldn't believe that it only took several weeks to capture the administrative part of the state using occupants and assistance from the local traitors. How could the international community allow that? I had mixed feelings: from revulsion to fear. As a result, I couldn't stop my tears from going, while realizing inevitability, helplessness, and inability to influence the outcome of the events. I felt shame since the state, which I am a citizen of, wasn't able to defend its own territory against alien attackers.

Filled with emotions I had to think about my own safety. I was afraid of retaliation for my participation in pro-Ukrainian rallies, actions against “little green men” (men with guns unmarked by flag or any emblem) and “self-defense” which was walking along Simferopol streets, being aggressive and drunk and having bats and axe handles. I was frightened because they were unpredictable, un-

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

controlled and nobody knew what order they had regarding people demonstrating a pro-Ukrainian position. I was afraid since the moment that the Prosecutor’s Office and police in Crimea were no longer the security services of Ukraine in Crimea; they did not make individuals feel protected and haven’t inspired any trust either. When leaflets appeared, saying that activists, particularly me, were traitors, some of the activists appealed to the prosecutor’s office. I decided not to do that since the security services in Crimea had been discredited at that moment.

From November 2013 I was taking part in actions of the movement “Euromaidan Crimea”. When speaking about European integration was no longer on the table due to a rebellion of Ukrainian citizens against bandits on the Maidan, who called themselves the authority of Ukraine, and killing on the Maidan, the movement “Euromaidan Crimea” has increased and changed into pro-Ukrainian movement against the occupation of Crimea by Russian and pro-Russian forces.

I attended those rallies, actions, and meetings in February and March. In March we decided to establish women’s movement “Crimean Women for Peace” in order to organize some events. We hoped that undesirable alien elements and “self-defense” wouldn’t attack women because of these actions. However, they were aggressive, provoked conflicts, pushed us to the road, tore our posters, used unacceptable language, especially when we were singing the anthem of Ukraine. We had to go to the streets to draw the attention of foreign mass media and show continental Ukraine and world society that pro-Ukrainian people existed in Crimea.

On March 9, 2014, the action near Taras Shevchenko monument was the last pro-Ukrainian event in Crimea that I have attended.

That day Andrii Shchekun and Anatolii Kovalskyi were kidnapped. It was both a shock and a signal that we, pro-Ukrainian activists, had to be more careful. Anyone of us could be next and nobody would be able to help us.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”



Slogans on the rally for the support of Ukraine in T. Shevchenko Park in Simferopol in March 2014 (Liuba Kalmakova holds poster on the left, photo from her personal archive).

In March 2014 I was staying home all the time since I was afraid of the massacre. The risk was higher from day to day since at that moment there were cases when people with Ukrainian symbols were kidnapped, or exposed to a severe psychological pressure in Crimea. When I realized that I had a tattoo of a trident on my body, my fear became more intense.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

In the morning of March 11, 2014, I bought a ticket on the train to Khmelnytskyi an hour before its departure from Crimea. Then at Khmelnytskyi railway station, I bought a ticket to Lviv. I thought that I would stay in Lviv for 2 weeks. I still have kept that one-way ticket. As a result, I have suffered from depression or post-traumatic stress, whatever they're calling it, a disorder for 2 years... It was hard since all the plans I had in Crimea have been ruined due to the change of place of living and new plans, wills or dreams have not appeared since I had lost a whole sense. It was hard to find a new sense and interest.

I have not visited my homeland since March 11, 2014. I didn't feel that I would be safe there, on the territory that is not controlled by my state of citizenship. Moreover, I know that the “security service” of occupants is still asking about me.

I have not seen even a single action from the Ukrainian authority to promote the returning of Crimea. My choice whether to come back to Crimea or not will depend on the future status of reoccupied Crimea. I attended actions for pro-Ukrainians in Crimea. It is an important and principled question for me whether Ukraine will take into account the interests of ethnic Ukrainians and pro-Ukrainian Russians in the process of reoccupation. I think this kind of questions are strategically important for Ukraine in the long term.

Valentyna Eminova: I Continued to Speak Freely and Ridicule “Militiamen”



Photo from the archive of Valentyna Eminova

Crimean journalist. She was born and lived in Crimea. She is a teacher of Russian language and literature. At the moment of Russian annexation of Crimea she has been working at the “Crimean newspaper”, a commercial publication but controlled de facto by Crimean Government. She has joined protests against Russian aggression in her network and had to leave native Simferopol. She moved to Kyiv together with her husband.

Frankly speaking, I didn’t pay attention to the rally on February 26. That day I was working on a report and all events of that day I knew from other people who were there. When the rally ended I asked who won. I got the answer: “We won”. At home, my husband described me the details. He was there as a journalist. We spent the night with the thought that it was the end there.

Next morning the Deputy Editor-in-chief of the “Crimean newspaper” called and told me that I didn’t have to go to work. Journalists of the editorial office were allowed to work at home. Then I read the news and I was shocked. I remembered all the conversations of local journalists and politicians which had been heard for many years, which have been perceived as quite unrealistic: Russia could attack Ukraine and we couldn’t fight back since our army had been robbed.

Then the Chief said that we would be working in the editor’s office of other newspaper. I was afraid that military actions or shouting could start at any time. However, I told myself: “Valia, you are a journalist! Tanks are on the streets but you will not see that! How

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

will you live with yourself?” I was going to work through the city. As I noticed at that moment the city has frozen up, everything was silent, the atmosphere was very disgusting.

Almost all my friends and relatives did not support Ukraine. Fortunately, my husband and I were and still are on the same page. Even though I have never been involved in politics and tried to avoid political issues at work; I have never been a true patriot. However, in the spring of 2014, I have become one, and it had stayed like this until now.

90% of my colleagues were pro-Russian people, approximately 5% openly supported Ukraine and others were pro-Ukrainian but tried not to express their views.

On capturing administrative buildings in Simferopol the editor’s office of the “Crimean newspaper” responded with the silence. Colleagues were rarely discussing the situation and it was apparent that most of them were waiting for how the situation would turn out to be.

I understood that it would be better to keep my mouth shut, but I continued to speak freely and ridicule stupid “militiamen” recognizing slowly that it pained some of my colleagues. It turned out that their relatives had taken part in the separatist movement, particularly in “the militia”.

At the beginning of capturing of Crimea, the editorial policy held a neutral position. All staff had to go on 2-weeks holidays. Personally, I think that step was made to decide what position should be taken and take the winning side. So that’s what happened. At that moment the Editor-in-chief, as well as his Deputy, have already gone to Kyiv. I was alone with Liudmyla Konovalova who held a pro-Russian position. All information about the support of Ukrainian soldiers was deleted from my articles. For example, that censorship touched upon my article about the blockade of the Ukrainian military bases by “self-defense” units and Russian soldiers. I tried to get in touch with the Ukrainian border guards and soldier and asked them what

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

kind of assistance was required and then wrote about that. The Acting Editor-in-Chief deleted words about help and moral support. I was attempting to prove otherwise, but she was firm in defending her position. Meanwhile, our newspaper has been gradually falling down and started to publish: “We are in Russia. It’s not so bad. Let’s adapt to this”. The Acting Editor-in-Chief and colleagues have reacted positively to all events and they were acceptable to them.

Every day I passed the “self-defense” group standing near a bus stop, eating patties and drinking cheap coffee. They were unshaven, dirty, disgusting and drunk, in spite of this, they were staring at the ladies. I always tried to pass them quickly not to attract their attention. I was afraid since I realized they were drunk little criminals and they wouldn’t be punished if they hurt me.

Other people felt the same way. It seemed at the time like all the city was afraid. Everybody tried to assess each other: for or against Russia, “banderivets” or not? It was felt everywhere. It was some kind of paranoid multiplied by two, a holiday of confusion. It was seen even in private life.

I often went to the handicraft shop where managers knew me. After the annexation of Crimea, I went there to buy yellow and blue ribbons. They reluctantly sold it after giving me a suspicious eye. Another time I went to them to buy a scheme for embroidery. They asked me: “Why do you need them now?”, and gave me a bunch of schemes: “This is all we have. We will not have anything new”.

After the referendum, my husband and I decided to leave Crimea. I couldn’t live in that atmosphere anymore. It has just become intolerable when you understood that it had been “an expression of the will of Crimean people”, but you had been appropriated like slaves and now they told you what to wear, what language to speak and imposed on you a hatred of all Ukrainian things and symbols. Personally, I think that the annexation of Crimea was a filthy betrayal. It was disgusting for me to join that. We left our apartment in Crimea. We just have finished its repair. Sometimes I thought it would be

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

better to stay in Crimea. However, what kind of work I could do? I didn't want to be a journalist in that situation. I didn't want to walk on these streets and meet these people.

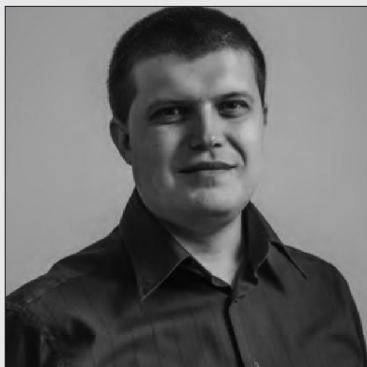
I remember now that I was friends with Kateryna Kozyr¹⁶, we invited each other to birthday parties. In 2014 everything has changed. We didn't talk anymore. The situation was almost the same with other colleagues. For a while, I felt too harshly towards my relatives and friends since nobody supported me. Then I understood that it shouldn't be a surprise since they always were like this. They have considered Russia better than Ukraine; Putin always was the best president and everything Russian was better than Ukrainian. I didn't remember anybody of my former friends who could be called a Ukrainian patriot. I knew one journalist who has been always advertising Lviv and loved all the Ukrainian things. However, she got married to Russian man and has become just like him.

I left my home and never came back. First of all, it is disgusting. Secondly, I am afraid. I can say that I almost don't miss Crimea as the feeling of home. It has passed. I don't speak with my relatives – we cannot get on the same page at all. However, sometimes my heart hurts when I see a woman who looks like my mother. When I remember how we were shouting at each other because of the annexation of Crimea I understand that it is better for us to live in different cities.

Now Kyiv is my home, but I am waiting for the liberation of Crimea. I promised to prepare chebureks for all staff of the editor's office in Crimea when Crimea will be returned to Ukraine. Now thanks to this book the promise was documented and I will have to fulfill it.

16 Kateryna Kozyr is a General Director of the channel “First Crimean” established on the basis of the national television and radio company “Crimea” seized by pro-Russian forces. Before Russian annexation of Crimea she had been worked a correspondent of this channel for many years. Kozyr is called a classmate of the Vice-Premier of Crimean Parliament, pro-Russian Dmytro Poklonskyi and people talk that for this reason she became the General Director of the channel. However, she and Poklonskyi didn't comment this.

Yevhen Buket: Probably, Crimea Was Given to Russia to Prevent the Attack on Kyiv



*Photo from the archive
of Yevhen Buket*

The Editor-in-Chief of the Ukrainian newspaper "Culture and Life". His wife is from Crimea. He has visited Crimea many times before and after its annexation by Russia. He supports the Crimean movement of resistance against Russian aggression.

My reaction on the events in Crimea from February 2014 was unambiguous: Russia had started the invasion into Ukraine. I was shocked by the position of the former Ukrainian leaders; in particular, I remembered words of the Acting President of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov: "Just what we need!" and other ones: "What are you asking me to do?" I had the feeling that Crimea was "thrown" deliberately. Demoralized army, police and special agencies... All have played into the hands of Russia.

Here, in Kyiv, we were afraid after the Federation Council had adopted the decision to allow Russian armed forces to conduct military operations outside Russia. We were frightened that the Russian army would begin an attack on Kyiv moving through Chernihiv region and Yanukovych would come back together with repressions against the participants of the Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity.

Self-defense was prepared to partisan's resistance against occupants, and ordinary residents of Kyiv were getting ready to leave the city. There was a growing anxiety. However, fear has gone until the end of March 2014. Every single day postponed the possibility

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

of a fast Kyiv seizure. I think that having started the annexation of Crimea Putin have lost the only opportunity to capture all Ukraine. Probably, Crimea was given to Russia deliberately to postpone or prevent the attack on Kyiv.

In my point of view, Ukrainian authority has “thrown” Crimea deliberately. Further, right steps to return Crimea, especially on the international level, have been made. It would be better to straighten Ukrainian positions concerning Crimea in the information area.

Pro-Russian views have been prevailing in Crimea for years since Ukrainian authority wasn't caring about Crimean problems, didn't implement national pro-Ukrainian policy there and, indeed, was playing into the hands of Russia in many questions. My wife is from Crimea so I know the situation. Almost all her relatives still live there and we contact them via the Internet.

After the annexation, I have visited my almost native Feodosiia only once, in 2016.

These are my recollections. Only a few people were on the beach. Ukrainian car numbers of AK, KK, CH, IH series have been prohibited in Crimea from the 1st of April 2016: fine up to 5000 ₴ with the possibility of confiscation of the driver license. Thus, I was pleased to see locals on cars with Ukrainian registration. However, those were only isolated cases.

In 2016 everyone was silent in public transport, the combination of Crimean and Russian tricolor was darksome and blue and yellow paintings have already been seen as an extremism. Even Crimean Tatars in Crimea depicted their yellow tamga not on blue but on the blue turquoise background.

Only in distant villages, the road signs in Ukrainian have still remained, on the main road all Ukrainian language had been removed carefully. Sometimes you could see old Ukrainian signboards of Feodosiia bakery “Bulkin” or other Ukrainian brands.

However, when you see ruined cinema “Ukraine” in the city center you realize that on the peninsula occupants try to eliminate

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

all small signs of its affiliation with Ukraine. How ironic that the Ukrainian language had remained on the official sign of Feodosiia City Council. I often saw a ribbon of St. Georg. Moreover, stickers portraying the two-headed eagle, tricolor and soviet medal dedicated to the victory in the World War II.

Actually, Russian flags, emblems, and Putin’s portraits were put everywhere. Moreover, there was a lot of social advertising in the Imperial traditions of Russia: pictures of Katerina, Suvorov, deputies of the State Duma from Tavria province, etc., and they were located even in the most absurd locations. That was my first time in occupied Crimea but locals told me that the number of souvenir products had been decreased in 2016.

In my point of view, only locally produced food commodities could be bought. There was nothing produced from continental Ukraine in shops. Russian food commodities weren’t tasty and often didn’t match well-known Ukrainian principle of price-quality ratio. There were all Crimean brands of wine in shops, a lot of new kinds of beer and also “Chernihivske” and “Obolon” beer bottles with Russian barcodes could be bought.

Yevhen Sukhodolskii: not All Prosecutor Could Take a Decision to Quit

The former staff member of Saky District Prosecutor's Office of Crimea. He supported the public movement of peaceful resistance against Russian aggression. He was born and lived on the peninsula until 2014. At the age of 21, he had to leave Crimea due to the Russian aggression.



Photo from the archive of Yevhen Sukhodolskii

On February 27, 2017, I had to attend workshops in the Central Prosecutor's Office of Crimea. Therefore, I planned to go from Saky to Simferopol. In the morning my colleagues called me and said that workshops had been canceled since unknown "little green men" had captured buildings of the Verkhovna Rada and the Council of Ministers of Crimea.

Certainly, I was surprised. However, I didn't take it seriously and decided to go to Simferopol. On my way, I saw military convoy near the entrance to the city. First, I thought that there were Ukrainian soldiers, which had come on the alarm. However, when I looked carefully and noticed that all the military equipment was unmarked I have understood that the situation was serious and ambiguous.

In Prosecutor's Offices, all reasonable staff members understood that the seizure of a state building was a crime and those responsible must be punished. On the website of the Prosecutor's Office of ARC, the information about initiation of the criminal investigation of that fact appeared in the first days after the capturing. Gradually, I have understood that crimes had been committed not by the ordi-

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

nary “bad men”, but by the special agents from neighboring country even though they hadn’t identified themselves.

Illegal decisions which had been adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea from February 27 allowed me to understand that there was a well-planned operation to separate Crimean peninsula from Ukraine going on. I didn’t only know what scenario would be chosen: “separated Crimea quasi-state” would be created, or the peninsula would be occupied and annexed by Russia? What will Ukrainian authority do? Certainly, in that situation, I couldn’t stay away. Working at the Prosecutor’s Office I wasn’t allowed to attend public actions, such as rallies and pickets. However, in spring 2014 the situation was extraordinary in Crimea and I decided to attend protests against the “Russian world” on the weekend. One of the rallies I had attended as an activist was dedicated to 200th anniversary of Taras Shevchenko in Simferopol.



*The action of Crimean women against the war in Simferopol. March 2014.
Published in the group “Crimean women for peace” on Facebook.*

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”



Building of the Prosecutor's Office of the AR of Crimea controlled by "Crimean self-defense".

I was discussing the situation in Crimea with my colleagues in the Prosecutor's Office. When the reason for all events had been known most of my colleagues were confused. They didn't know how the situation would turn out and who would win. Thus, they preferred not to discuss this issue. Among staff members of Saky District Prosecutor's Office, there were few people with pro-Ukrainian views. Such people were in 2014 in the Prosecutor's Office. We all hoped that Ukraine as the State would do something and prevent the worst scenario.

By the way, in my circle many people were discussing the processes and staying "neutral", people didn't convict and didn't support. Later, close to illegal "referendum" date, many "neutral" colleagues have started to support Russia.

I think they just haven't seen another way and had to do so. Not all prosecutor could take a decision to quit due to different reasons. Moreover, at that time Russian propaganda has been very active in Crimea convincing people that "we are fraternal nations of the for-

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

mer one state, thus, it couldn't be called a betrayer”. That propaganda was especially effective for old staff members who had worked in Soviet time. Even though they were majoring in law and understood the situation. I thought that they had assessed their own actions by themselves since they had been discussing “the time of hesitations and contemplations”. Certainly, Russian promises of “financial heaven” have played their role. It was their choice. May God judge them. For the sake of truth, it needs to be said that everybody was given a right to choose and I didn't remember any pressure. However, my colleagues from other Prosecutor's Offices told me about such facts.

Personally, when I understood that Ukraine had lost the control of Crimea I decided to leave Crimea. In late March I went to Kyiv to apply for a position in continental Ukraine.

Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine sent me to Rivne Region Prosecutor's Office. I have agreed. I have been working there for several years, then I was transferred to Kherson region closer to my native Crimea where my parents and grandmother have left. I saw them only virtually via Skype. I don't go to Crimea due to the lack of security guarantees. Surely, I am worried about my relatives and friends. There are systematic violations of human rights on the peninsula and no confidence in the future. Even the supporters of Russia have recognized this fact. However, all is in God's hands and I suppose that after the occupation I will be able to come back home. I would like to join examination and address the consequences of the Russian occupation of Crimea and restore the rule of law on the peninsula.

Some people consider that Crimea had been “thrown” by Ukrainian statesmen. I don't think so. Surely, at that moment there was an opportunity to free the captured buildings by the use of force. However, would this lead to even more bloodshed? Could Ukraine win in this scenario? The Russian army has been already on the border of Ukraine at that time, and the Council of Federation has already adopted the decision to send the corps to Ukraine. It would

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

lead to a complete loss of independence of the sovereign state. Apparently, the determining factor in the occupation of Crimea was not the position of Crimean people, but military forces of the occupant. Even the betrayal of Crimean authorities and security forces were just consequences of that.

Chapter II

Russian repressions in Crimea

The President of Russia Vladimir Putin is whitewashing the annexation of Crimea justifying it by the fact that the Russian soldiers tried to protect Russian-speaking Crimeans from the radicalized Ukrainians. However, such allegations could be easily refuted by facts. Most people interviewed for this book state that Russian is their native language; some of them identify themselves as Russians. However, they have been prosecuted in Crimea after its annexation.

From 2014 local statesmen and security forces have been practising mass repressions against everyone who in their opinion constitutes a serious threat to the regime. In the last 20 years a number of prosecution methods for political views have been legitimized. First of all, a package of anti-terroristic and anti-extremist bills and its obscure wording have been successfully used against the citizens.

The Russian security forces have carried out massive raids on Crimean Tatar homes. They usually come early in the morning when people are sleeping. The unexpected “guests” are rude and brutal, apply the techniques of psychological pressure, threatening, and intimidations.

Another paragraph (280.1 – public calls for the violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation) had appeared in the Criminal Code of Russia shortly before the annexation of Crimea, and entered into force on May 9, 2014, when the peninsula was under Russian control. It gave the opportunity to persecute everyone who denied recognizing the fact that Crimea is Russian. The country-intruder proclaims these people to be “separatists” and everyone

violating the above mentioned paragraph is threatened with up to 5-year imprisonment.

The first criminal proceedings based on the break of the law described in the paragraph were conducted against Crimean journalists and activists who had publicly stated that Crimea is a part of Ukraine. Among the prosecuted ones were Crimean journalists Andrii Klymenko and Mykola Semena (the last one got 2,5 years of suspended sentence with 3 years of probationary period and ban of any public activity), and also the co-author of this book Anna Andriievska.

The Head of the Mejlis of Crimean Tatar People, Refat Chubarov, an activist of the Crimean Tatar nation movement, Suleiman Kadyrov (got 2 years of suspended sentence on the territory of the peninsula), and the former Head of Bakhchysarai district government administration, Ilmi Umerov (got 2 years in a settlement colony), were among those accused of separatism.

In apartments of those who couldn't be sentenced for separatism the security forces suddenly found ammunition and sent them to prison, as it happened to Volodymyr Balukh, a farmer from Serebrianka village. Usage of the Ukrainian symbolic and pro-Ukrainian posts on social media are brutally punished by beating and criminal chasing as the example with Ihor Movenko from Sevastopol shows.

You can either be accused of the extortion and subjected to torture in detention units, as in the cases with Oleksii Nazimov, a blogger from Alushta, and Pavlo Stepanchenko, an opposition deputy.

The Crimeans are also being prosecuted for their religious views. Massive and brutal operations are carried out by the FSB staff and the Russian security services in houses of Crimean Tatars and Muslims of other ethnic groups. More than 20 Crimean Muslims, mainly Crimean Tatars, were charged with involvement in Islamic religious organization "Hizb ut-Tahrir" prohibited in Russia and sent to prison. This practice continues.

The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars, a representative body of the Crimean Tatar society, has come under a threat too. The priests of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate as well as members of various religious organizations are being prosecuted.

From time to time the Russian security forces organize special operations to arrest those accused of terrorism, espionage and subversive activities. Moreover, attention is always focused on the Ukrainian origin of the detained to create a myth about a “dangerous neighbour”.

From March 3, 2014 till 2017 ten people were reported missing in Crimea. “Six Crimean Tatars, three ethnic Ukrainians and one person of mixed heritage (Russian-Tatar). They were all men. Seven people disappeared in 2014, two in 2015, one in 2016”, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported in September 2017.

This Crimean repression shocked even experienced Russian lawyers who had seen a lot in their practice. What challenges did the Crimeans who had taken a public stand against the Russian annexation of Crimea experience? What does the Russian authority call people “terrorists” or “extremists” for? What methods do the Russian security forces apply? You can read about these facts in narrations of the witnesses.

Oleksandr Popkov: the Most Terrible Prosecutions Have Been Practised in Crimea

Russian lawyer of the International Association of Human Rights Organizations "Agora", the former military investigator. Since 2014 he has been defending in court the Crimeans subjected to political criminal proceedings launched by the Russian security structures.



Photo from the archive of Oleksandr Popkov

I have lately observed a serious deterioration of the criminal justice system in Russia concerning the use of various methods of influence on people. After the events in 2014 these methods have been used in Crimea.

It's worth mentioning that FSB prefers to tap telephone conversations and read posts on social media. To get a court order to do this special agencies use all reasons even those that cannot be proven.

To demonstrate this we can turn to the criminal proceeding for call to separatism against a Crimean journalist Mykola Semena. FSB turned out to have accessed his computer and monitored all his publications before the court order was obtained. Based on the information obtained in that unfair way FSB searched his apartment.

In the court the representatives of special agencies explained the necessity to tap Semena's telephones and the control over his pages in social media and his correspondence assuming that he had cooperated with the publishing office "Crimea. Realities" (Radio Svoboda/RFI RL) that was actively engaged in subversive activity in

the area in question. They provided no evidence of that. However, the adjudication was made in favor of FSB.

In this example we see how court decisions legalize FSB actions to control people with no reasons and despite the lack of facts. Thus, FSB could tap phones of anybody.

A Russian investigator confided in me once that taping of lawyers working on similar criminal proceeding wasn't a problem. Therefore, we, lawyers, could also be spending our lives "on air".

Another Crimean tendency is FSB attempts to search apartments without court permissions. It's noteworthy that searching could be conducted only within a criminal case and the security forces have to act within the Criminal Procedure Code of Russian Federation.

In the 2000s I worked as an investigator in Sochi and remember how hard it was to obtain a search warrant. Prosecutors thoroughly approached this question and you needed serious basis to get a permission of that kind

Now things have dramatically changed. When there are no reasons to start a criminal proceeding the tactic of searching an apartment could be used veiled as investigative activities. This eliminates the restrictions of Criminal Procedure Code. Thus, they can do whatever they like without any restrictions of law.

For example, the security service came to detain a Crimean Tatar, a lawyer, Emir Usein Kuka. At that moment no criminal proceeding had been instituted against him. However, Russian special agents captured him on the street, beat him up, threw into the car and drove away. Then they brought him home with words : "We are going to search your apartment", although it was illegal.

When Emir Usein Kuka was being under the attack on the street by armed people he asked them to identify themselves and show the documents. The bystanders who were there and saw what was happening also demanded to show the documents to make the situation clear. "Our documents are coming" was the only answer.

Then a car with armed people came, and they started to disperse the crowd of the witnesses.

When we tried to appeal against the actions of the security service concerning Emir Usein Kuka in court the security agents said nonsense misrepresenting the event as though the lawyer had attacked two armed men and tried to beat them up. To prove that they provided the court with a medical report detecting bruises on their arms two month after that event.

As it turned out in the process of investigation, the criminal proceeding against Emir Usein Kuka was triggered by personal grudge of an FSB officer towards him. The officer had tried to recruit Kuka. When he refused, the FSB officer started to threaten him and finally he managed to start that criminal proceeding against him as a revenge.

It needs to be mention here that it is very hard to appeal against the security service actions in court. Local courts avoid taking action on these complaints finding formal excuses.

Another tendency noticed in epy Crimea is the active use of various false-examination in criminal proceedings. Namely, when an inexperienced and poorly-educated expert just re-writes statements from books of methodological recommendations and on this basis draws conclusions appropriate for an investigation.

In the case of Mykola Semena there were a lot of grammar mistakes in the text of the examination conclusions, particularly those of the primary school level: incorrect tenses usage, misused cases, wrong words which do not exist in the Russian language. When my colleagues and I asked that expert, she replied: "These aren't my mistakes. It was written in my methodological recommendations. I have just copied them". It seems like a person who is trying to find crime in the words of other people cannot write in Russian correctly. One can understand the professional level of that specialist who hasn't got any scientific knowledge of the subject and works in the interests of investigation.

Before that I had taken part in the criminal case of a Maikop ecologist accused of the incitement to hatred and enmity. A linguistic expert, lieutenant colonel of the police, seriously stated in court that a word “lamb” was negative and could be used to incite enmity against the Adieni and Adigeni women. We invited three experts to court to prove that the word “lamb” couldn’t have any negative connotation in the context it had been used.

In my point of view, most searches carried out by the Russian security forces in Crimea and Russia are unjustified and senseless. For example, FSB representatives came twice to a Crimean resident, a Ukrainian activist Volodymyr Balukh and they didn’t find anything. When they came third time they found bullets. Apparently, it was a part of fight against dissidence on the peninsula.

Massive searches with the use of force and aggression are being carried out in Crimea. There is a huge difference between using of such methods against armed terrorists and attacking peaceful people sleeping at home. Those facts are widespread in Crimea. We are talking about the unacceptable exceeding of cruelty threshold by the staff of security structures.

Another massive method of pressure includes forced DNA sampling. This method is often used against the Crimean Tatars. After Friday prayer in the mosque people are picked up by buses, taken to the closest police office where their saliva samples and fingerprints are collected. These methods remind me Gestapo actions. Most significantly, Crimean judicial system is terrible. Most local judges try to demonstrate their own allegiance to the Russian authority and close their eyes even to those types of violation which are strongly prohibited in Russia.

The most appalling people prosecution methods are implemented under such conditions. My colleagues-lawyers and I are worried about the possibility of their spread throughout Russia.

I don’t want it.

Oleh Sentsov: I Don't Know What Your Beliefs are Worth if You Aren't Prepared to Die for Them

A Crimean resident, a Ukrainian film director. In winter of 2013-2014 he took part in Euromaidan. Further, he said about this: "It is a main deed I've made". In 2014 he actively participated in the movement of resistance against Russian aggression on the peninsula. He helped Ukrainian military servicemen trapped and stormed by Russian soldiers and the "Crimean self-defense forces". In May of 2014 he was detained by Russian FSB suspected in "plotting terroristic acts".



Photo from the archive of Oleksandr Popkov

In August 2015 North-Caucasian District Court sentenced him to 20 years of strict regime in a colony. When the verdict was being brought in, Sentsov started to sing the Ukrainian National Anthem. Later he was sent to serve his term in a penal colony (in Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District) 3000 kilometers away from Crimea.

Oleh Sentsov's last word in North-Caucasian District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don city. The text was published in mass-media on August 19, 2015.

I hope these aren't my last words. I am not going to ask you for anything, to be merciful to me now, etc. Everything is pretty clear here. Court of occupants couldn't be fair a priori. No offense, Your Honour.

There is another thing I wanted to say. Pontius Pilate – if you remember this character - had plenty of time on the Moon to realize what he had done. Then when he was walking along the moon path with Ha-Nozri he said: "You were right. The worst sin on the Earth is

cowardice”. This was written by the great Russian writer Bulgakov in his book “The Master and Margarita”. I agree with him: cowardice is the main and the worst sin on the Earth. Betrayal is a distinctive form of cowardice. Sometimes betrayal of enormous depths could start with a little fear, as it happened to Chyrnii¹⁷, when somebody put a bag over your head, beat you up and in half an hour you are ready to renounce your views, to slander yourself about anything in the world, to slander other people if only they stopped beating you.

I don’t know what your believes are worth if you aren’t ready to suffer and die for them. I am very happy that Hennadii Afanasiev could push himself beyond the limits. He tripped up and then understood that he had a chance. He acted very courageously and faithfully. I was very surprised at it and glad for him. The thing is not to mess things up, to bring somebody into trouble and then to be justified. No, nothing of that kind is going to happen. I am simply glad for him; he will move on with his life and feel as a person who wasn’t scared.

I have already been in your wonderful country for a year. I’ve been watching your TV. “Vesti”, “Vriemia” are very “good” news programs. Your propaganda works perfectly. I believe that most Russian residents believe what they are told: Putin is a great person, there are Nazis in Ukraine and Russia is doing everything right, but enemies are everywhere. It is a good propaganda.

However, I also realize that some people are smarter than you, for example, the statesmen. You understand clearly that no Nazis are in Ukraine, Crimea was joined to Russia illegally and your military forces are now in Donbas region. Even being here in prison I know about your troops in Donbas. Our detention cell is full of “militiamen” sent there as heroes, on your tanks and with your

17 Oleksii Chyrnii is a Crimean resident, the fourth participant of “the case of Oleh Sentsov”. He was sentenced to 7 years of strict regime colony on the charge of organizing terroristic attacks in Crimea. After torturing in FSB, Chyrnii agreed to cooperate with investigation: he provided testimony as FSB desired and didn’t appeal against the sentence. Now he is serving a sentence in Rostov region.

guns. They go to war thinking that they are waited back at home. They come back with ammunition, but you detain them on the border and put to prison. They wonder: "Why? We are heroes. We were sent to war by our people to protect them!". They don't understand that it was a one-way ticket. Even there in prison everyone knows this. I met your agent of GRU, a soldier who is on trial for a crime now. He took part in the operation of capturing the Crimean territory. On March 24 (2014) they came by ship to Sevastopol, and blocked Ukrainian military bases. The soldier blocked that military base in Yevpatoriia I used to supply with food and clothes. There are some interesting things happening in our life. His unit also took part in the battle of Ilovaisk. These are obvious things, accessible for everyone. If you don't close your eyes you see them.

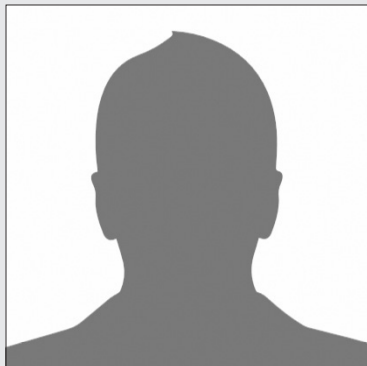
There are voices of your regime. They also aren't silly guys, they know the truth. They continue to lie, to do their job justifying themselves. They might excuse themselves saying that they have to raise children, they have to do something. But what do we raise a new generation of slaves for?

However, there is also the third part of Russian residents who know exactly what's going on in the world and what terrible crimes Russian leaders committed. But for some reasons these people are afraid. They think that nothing can be changed, everything will remain the same, the system cannot be brought down, that there are few of them sharing the same opinion and they all will be destroyed, killed, so they go underground and keep silent.

We also had criminal authority but we stood against it. They didn't want to hear us – we knocked at trash bins. They didn't want to see us – we were burnt tires in streets. And we have won.

Sooner or later, it will happen in your country. I don't know how and I don't want somebody to get hurt. But I want criminals stop their control over you. The only thing I could wish the third informed part of the Russians is to overcome their fear.

Oleksandr Kolchenko: Having Put Us into Prisons This Regime Just Got Closer to Its End



A Crimean activist. In 2014 he took part in the movement of resistance against the Russian aggression. In May 2014 he was detained being suspected in “plotting terrorist acts” as a protest against the “the case of Oleh Sentsov”.

In August 2015 North-Caucasian District Court sentenced him to 10 years in a strict regime colony. When the verdict was being brought in, Kolchenko started to sing the Ukrainian National Anthem. Then he was sent to serve his term in prison of Irkutsk 5000 kilometers away from Crimea.

**Last words of Oleksandr Kolchenko in North-Caucasian District Military Court in Russia on August 19, 2015.
The text was published in mass-media on August 19, 2015.**

I don't agree with the accusation and I claim myself to be innocent. I consider this case against me to be fabricated and politically motivated. It could be proven by the fact that the criminal proceeding was instituted only ten days after the arson had been committed within the paragraph 167 (an intentional damage or destruction of property) and was later re-categorized after the false testimony of Afanasiev and Chyrnii had been obtained.

Concerning the form of the wording of the accusation, it is following “He was involved in committing the arson to destabilize the authorities’ work in the Republic of Crimea purposed to affect the decision-making process of authorities of the Russian Federation concerning the secession of the Crimean Republic from the federation”. From the perspective of the investigation and prosecution policies, it implies that when a couple uses contraceptives they do it to destabilize the democratic situation in the state and reduce the defensive capability of the latest. If you criticize a statesman you do it to underrate the state image on the international scene. The list of such illogical parallels could be continued indefinitely.

During this proceeding we had a chance to hear about the use of threat and torture by the FSR officers against Sentsov and Afanasiev. It is interesting that people using such methods of obtaining a testimony feel free to accuse us of terrorism.

Imprisonment of Oleksii Sutuga¹⁸, our proceeding, proceeding against Nadiia Savchenko¹⁹... All these are aimed at prolonging of this regime. However, having put us into prisons this regime just got closer to its end. Those who believed in law and order yesterday have lost their faith today observing such cruelty and break of humanism. Tomorrow or day after tomorrow these people will destroy this authoritarian regime themselves. Moreover, I would like to mention that in the written statement of Afanasiev articulated by the lawyer Dinze I heard that the investigator had told him: “The

18 Oleksii Sutuga is an activist of Russian movement of antifascists, known as “Sokrat”. He was sentenced to 3 years of prison on the charge of an attack on visitors of Moscow café who were members of extreme-right movements. Sutuga didn’t admit his guilty and considered this case political motivated. The Human Rights Centre “Memorial” had the same opinion and recognized him as a political prisoner. He was released on May 4, 2017.

19 Nadiia Savchenko is the former Ukrainian soldier, People’s Deputy of Ukraine. She was sentenced in Russia on the charge of murder of two Russian journalists during military conflict on the East of Ukraine. The Human Rights Centre “Memorial” recognized Savchenko as a political prisoner. In 2016 she was exchanged for two militaries detained in Ukraine, further she was awarded the title of “the Hero of Ukraine”. Having become a People’s Deputy, she was accused in organizing a coup d’état and criminal proceeding against her has been instituted in Ukraine.

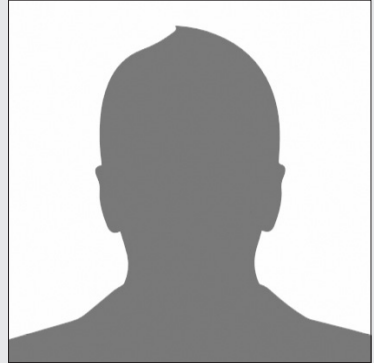
FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

day you testify in court will be a day of a lifetime for you”. Probably, Afanasiev took to heart these words and did it in his own way. I was very impressed by his remarkable and brave deed.

Apart from this all I would like to thank those of you who have supported Oleh and me. I agree with arguments of my lawyers and consider them well-reasoned and fair. I’m not asking the court for anything. That’s all.

Osman Pashaiev: While We Were Being Detained We Heard People Screaming Next-door

A Crimean journalist. He was born in Uzbekistan where his family had been deported to in 1944. He came back to the Crimea and lived in Simferopol. The native language is Crimean Tatar. At the age of 37 he had to leave the peninsula due to the prosecution by the “Crimean self-defense” and the local security agents controlled by Russia. Now he lives in Kyiv.



It was on May 11, 2014. Our editor's office was renting a room in Kirov Street in Simferopol. We were constantly near the locations of so-called “self-defense”. Therefore, we used to come across²⁰ them and they threatened us from time to time when we made streams from the city downtown captured by the “little green men”. One of such situations ended with our being taken by force to the police station.

Members of the “Crimean self-defense” reasoned our arresting with our documentation of violations of the Ukrainian laws having been committed at that time in Crimea. For example, the Simferopol passport office of Kyiv district had stopped to issue Ukrainian passports and residence registration before the “referendum” and the Director of that office told people that they would issue Russian passports soon. When you stream such situations you record a violation of the Ukrainian law automatically. Next time bandits appeared

²⁰ Stream refers to simultaneously broadcast an event in real time via Internet using communication equipment.

followed by the “Crimean self-defense” servants. It is hard to understand who is who: a bandit, a member of “self-defense” or an officer of Russian GRU.

Sometimes it could be inferred from their speech: the Crimean Russian dialect differs from the dialect of those who came from the Krasnodar Territory of Russia.

Another example of our “acquaintance” with the “Crimean self-defense” happened on May 18, 2014. That day the occupant authority banned a mourning rally dedicated to the anniversary of the Crimean Tatar deportation on Lenin square in Simferopol. I took the risk to see what would happen there that day.

We went there together with my colleagues (there were four of us: 3 camera men and one driver). At that time we had to take precautions: we arranged the filming process in such a way that when somebody was streaming the event his colleague was filming him, so when something went wrong everything would be on the Internet immediately. While walking down Chekhov Street, we were asking people about their attitude to the prohibition to hold the rally on Lenin square which had been held there for more than 20 years. No fighting and no litter could ever be noticed after such gatherings. Thus, all horror stories of the occupants concerning the safety of people and brawl clashes were the same as fighting with non-existing terrorism in Crimea.

We had finished filming one woman before two men ran up to us. As it turned out, they were brothers, one of them introduced himself Samvel. Actually, his name was Armen Martoian and his brother’s name was Manvel Martoian. Further, seven people in masks and uniforms, which, according to the Russian President Putin, Russians bought in “Military store” (“Voentorg”), joined them. Two of them had got Kalashnikov machine-guns.

Two brothers started to shout at us that we were provokers. They started to take our cameraman who was Turkish and couldn’t understand a single word in Russian down. They tore his camera out of his

hands and tried to take away the other equipment. Then they grabbed me, my operator, and one of my workmates from Kyiv who was being on air broadcasting what was going on. Moreover, they captured our driver who had driven us from Kyiv to Crimea. Every single means of communication was taken away: mobile phones and tablets.

They were escorting us through surrounded Lenin Square. People were standing near the positions of police. When we were walking past the crowds one girl recognized me and said: "They are taking Osman Pashaiev away!" And I managed to shout to her to inform via Facebook that we had been detained since I had no opportunity to do that myself at that moment. As it appeared later, somebody must have posted about our detention and the wave of searches started.

We were taken to the former office of the Crimean organization of Communistic Party of Ukraine in Kirov Avenue near the Council of Ministers of Crimea. That's where it all began.

From swear words and emotional abuse to threats to undergo physical force and any other form of abuse... They made us stay face to the wall. While we were being detained there we heard other people screaming next-door. Apparently, they were being abused.

So we were staying face to the wall in the corridor. Those people commanded us: "Wide legs!", "Close legs!", and beat us on the legs. We didn't know who exactly did it since people were coming in and going out of the room. They demanded nothing. It just was a process of humiliation.

At the same time those people were studying our phones. In one of my phones they found a photo of people killed on the Maidan. I took it in Khreshchtyk Street when I was in Kyiv. Then they designated me as a suspect in the Crimean officers' murder of "Berkut" on the Maidan and told me that I would have to take responsibility for this.

We were made to stay like that facing the wall for 4 hours. Then they put us into a car, similar to a prisoner transport, with a grid inside and brought us to the Central District Police Office in Futbolisty Street in Simferopol. A dramatic story started to unfold there.

At first, the Chief of Police Division came to us, and then an FSB officer arrived. They tried to take our fingerprints and photos of us, they drafted some kind of a document, and then another officer was brought to shout madly at me. It was like a request show, a ridiculous situation.

By the way, at the police station I got back my mobile phone for a few minutes. At that time my colleague from the ATR²¹ channel, Elvina Seitbulaieva, called me. Funnily enough, she told me that people were looking for me and the information about my disappearance had already reached the U.S.A. Embassy. Nevertheless she managed to reach me by phone. When we ended our conversation my phone was taken away again.

I demanded a lawyer and told them that I wouldn't say anything without my lawyer present and wouldn't sign the protocol. In the evening the lawyer Emil Kurbedinov and the chairman of the Mejlis Teyfuk Gafarov²² back then came to the police station. They reached an agreement to release us as soon as we did everything demanded from us by the police. However, the police officers hadn't drawn any record of extraction money and equipment. Instead we were told that it all could be regulated next day in the Investigation committee of Russia.

I threatened to apply to the police for an assault and a robbery. I insisted on the officers accepting and registering my application, and that they had to figure out where we had been captured for several hours when the representatives of the "Crimean self-defense" were tormenting us.

21 ATR is the first Crimean Tatar channel which live broadcast from Ukrainian institutions captured by Russian soldiers or Crimean "self-defense" in 2014. Later, its video became the evidence of those crimes committed by Russian forces against Crimean people in 2014.

22 Teyfuk Gafarov is Crimean lawyer, the former Head of Legal unit of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people. After Russian annexation of Crimea he was appointed to the post of vice-mayor of occupying administration of Simferopol. In December 2016 Gafarov announced his resignation.

РЕШЕНИЕ

**организационного комитета по подготовке и проведению мероприятий,
приуроченных ко Дню памяти жертв депортации из Крыма**

17 мая 2014 года

г. Симферополь

*О порядке проведения
мероприятий, приуроченных ко
Дню памяти жертв депортации
из Крыма в 2014 году*

В целях надлежащего проведения мероприятий, приуроченных к годовщине массового незаконного выселения из Крыма крымских татар, армян, болгар, греков и немцев, предусмотренных Распоряжением Совета министров Республики Крым от 22.04.2014 №232-р, принимая во внимание напряженную политическую обстановку на юго-востоке Украины, продолжающиеся события, в результате которых есть жертвы и пострадавшие со стороны гражданского мирного населения, организационный комитет по подготовке и проведению мероприятий, приуроченных ко Дню памяти жертв депортации из Крыма

РЕШИЛ:

1. В соответствии с постановлением Верховного Совета Крыма от 26 марта 1993 года №285-1 «О Дне памяти жертв депортации» органам власти Республики Крым, органам местного самоуправления Республики Крым, предприятиям, учреждениям и организациям 18 мая 2014 года прислужить государственные флаги Республики Крым.

2. Провести в городах и районных центрах Республики Крым памятные мероприятия, приуроченные к Дню памяти жертв депортации, 18 мая 2014 года в период с 11 - 00 до 13 - 00.

3. Признать нецелесообразным проведение памятных массовых мероприятий в центре г.Симферополя, поддержать предложение о проведении памятных мероприятий для граждан, проживающих в г.Симферополе, в районе мусульманского кладбища Абдал.

4. Председателям районных государственных администраций, руководителям органов местного самоуправления Республики Крым

The decision of the committee on preparation and organization of the events to commemorate the victims of the deportation from Crimea. It was published on the page of Russia-controlled Council of Ministers of Crimea on Facebook on May 17, 2014.*

принять участие в памятных мероприятиях, приуроченных к Дню памяти жертв депортации в городах и районных центрах Республики Крым.

5. Заместителю Председателя Совета министров Республики Крым Ислямову Л.Э., председателю Республиканского комитета Республики Крым по делам депортированных граждан Смирнову З.Р. провести в средствах массовой информации и в общественных объединениях разъяснительную работу о необходимости соблюдения принципов толерантности, избежания организации массового скопления граждан в целях их безопасности.

6. Рекомендовать жителям Республики Крым поддержать проведение 17 мая с 20 – 00 до 23 – 00 акции «Зажги огонь в своем сердце» в рамках которой зажечь свечу памяти по жертвам депортации.


7. Председателям районных государственных администраций, руководителям органов местного самоуправления Республики Крым определить с конкретным местом проведения памятных мероприятий в городах и районных центрах Республики Крым, ориентировочным количеством участников, организацией мер безопасности, о чем проинформировать Совет министров Республики Крым до 18 - 00 17 мая 2014 года.

И.о. Главы Республики Крым,
Председатель организационного комитета



С.В.АКСЕНОВ

По поручению членов оргкомитета


Л.Э. ИСЛЯМОВ
14.05.14
З.Р. СМІРНОВ

* In May 2014 Crimean Tatar people were denied to organize a rally dedicated to the anniversary of deportation from Crimea in 1944. This decision was adopted by the committee on preparation and organization of the events dedicated to the Day of victims of the deportation from Crimea and signed by the Head of Russia-controlled Crimean government, Serhii Aksionov, on behalf of Lenur Isliamov and Zaur Smyrnov.

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

The police officer responsible for the case applied for made me assess all extracted belongings in Russian rubles and all that procedure lasted until 1 a.m. Then we were released, however, our money and equipment weren't brought back. We got back only our documents; I discovered my Ukrainian passport to be slightly damaged. I don't know where it happened: in the “self-defense” office or in the police. Except of this, the other documents were fine.

I got a summons to appear in the Investigative Committee of Russia to testify in the criminal proceeding. I had to go there together with Emil Kurbedinov. While he was waiting for me and calling I told him that I was on my way to the Investigative Committee, however, in reality I was approaching the administrative border of Crimea to leave the peninsula. Thus, I practically lied to the lawyer. But I had no other choice in the situation of 24-hour tapping by the Russian special agencies. I had understood that even the best lawyer couldn't defend me in that criminal proceeding since its main purpose was to shut us up and to make us quit our activities as journalists. Thus, I left Crimea while it was still possible. I have never returned there.

Serhii Mokrushyn: They Were Beating Vladlen's Head against the Wall with Enough Force to Break Acrylic Glass



*Photo from the archive
of Serhii Mokrushyn*

A Crimean journalist, the author of many journalistic investigations dedicated to the abuse of power by the local authorities, a public activist. He was born in Kerch and lived in Simferopol. The native language is Russian. At the age of 27 he had to leave the peninsula due to the persecutions of the “Crimean self-defense” and security agents controlled by Russia. He lives in Kyiv now.

On March 1, 2014 in the Simferopol “Center of Journalistic Investigations” was captured by the “Crimean self-defense”. It was Saturday, a day off, but we were at work since we hadn’t had any weekends since Crimea was occupied. Not just every day had we been working, but 24 hours a day.

Oleh Khomenok, the trainer on media from Kyiv and the former founder of our press-center, called us. He was watching a stream of events in Simferopol downtown. He told us: “They are going to capture your office!” We couldn’t believe that. We had never imagined this go that far. However, when we heard a sound of crashed glass on the ground floor of the House of Trade Unions where we were renting the office we understood that they came for us.

While the “self-defense” task force was going upstairs we ran into one of the office rooms. Then they came into our press-center (the keys were provided by the staff of the House of Trade Unions with no problems). They stated that now it was their territory and they were going to carry out their own affairs there. They offered to provide us with food if we did everything they said.

They tried to get into the office where we were hiding. They tested locks on the doors to see if somebody was there. However, as far as I understood, nobody told them that we were inside. We lurked, since we were afraid to lose our video archives and the equipment in case they found us. We had a lot of valuable information which couldn't be given to them, so we decided to be quiet and not to show that we were there. We spent for 2-3 hours hidden watching their press-conference carried out right next door. It was pretty funny.

We expected somebody to come to help us out of that trap.

We had no opportunity to learn how many people were in our office and whether they had guns. We got all information only from the video-translation of that press-conference in our office. Suddenly somebody called them and they left. Probably, they got an order to get out from our press-center since at that moment a new space for mass-media had opened at the State TV and Radio Company "Crimea" which had already been under complete control of the occupants. When they left our office our colleagues from other mass media companies came to us and we could relatively safely leave our shelter. We realized later how dangerous it was to be there with all the technical equipment and the piles of documents we possessed. This is why we move from our editor's office. I think we were very fortunate that they didn't know that we were in the editor's office and we were not captured. Otherwise, the consequences would be more disastrous.

Three months later the Crimean "self-defense" caught me. It was on June 2014. We were walking around the Simferopol downtown together with Vladlen Melnykov. When we were passing Lenin square we shouted three times: "Putin hu...lo! La-la-la-la"²³.

23 "Putin – hu...lo. La-la-la-la" is a slogan of football fans of Ukrainian football teams "Shakhtar" and "Metalist". It was performed for the first time in March 2014 on the onset of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Then it has become very widespread. In June 2014 Andrii Deshchutia, then-acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, uttered this slogan outside the Russian Embassy in Kiev.

It was our protest against the Russian occupation of Crimea.

We were seen by the “self-defense” group. Approximately ten people were chasing us and I understood that there was absolutely no point in running.

We were taken to the former office of the Communist Party of Ukraine at 26, Kirov Street which the “self-defense” had equipped for their own needs. We were inspected and beaten up, my phone was taken away. Then we were asked whether we were agents of Ukrainian or Western special agencies. Further, the interrogation was continued by representatives of the Governmental Public Council of Mohyliov, Anatolii Petrov and Oleksandr Yuriev. “Self-defense” members called them and they came to the place of our detention. As far as I understood, they were cooperating with the “self-defense”. Those activists asked us whether we were spies, whether we had obtained Russian documents and what political views we had. The beating was severe. They beat Vladlen’s head against the wall with enough force to break the acrylic glass. I was beaten on my chest and legs with a truncheon. I felt pain in my chest which was the consequence of that beating for half a year after that day.

We were lucky to stay alive only because they hadn’t taken away Vladlen’s phone and he sent a text message to the Head of “The Center of Journalistic Investigations”, Valentyna Samar, under excuse of going to the toilet.

She came to the place of our detention together with a lawyer and also called the police. When the butchers realized that the police were coming they stopped beating us.

Another bright memory about the events is my visit to hospital after the detention in the “self-defense” office. When I came to hospital for medical examination and verifying induced injuries the doctor asked me what I had against Putin. It happened in Simferopol City Hospital №6.

The experience with the Crimean “self-defense” made me understand that the community was consisted of the representatives of

marginal social classes who either didn't have a permanent place of employment, or their salary was so unbelievably low, that they agreed to participate in kidnapping and torturing people.

After that I lived in the occupied Crimea for several months more. I decided to leave the peninsula after being present during the apartment search of Oleksandr Kostenko²⁴. When I saw that FSB operatives came together with their official witnesses, young girls who would go to the restaurant with them after the search, I understood that they were going to "find" any guns or anything prohibited in Kostenko's apartment anyway. This is why I agreed to be an official witness to the request of the Russian lawyer Dmytro Sotnikov.

FSB officers didn't like my participation in the investigation. They made me clearly understand that they knew who I was and I would have problems after that. I didn't wait for those problems. Moreover, the next day apartments of my colleagues, journalists Anna Andriievaska and Natalia Kokorina were searched as well. I understood that I shouldn't wait. Then I left Crimea and haven't come back after that.

24 Oleksandr Kostenko is Crimean activist of "Euromaidan", who was sentenced to 3 years and 6 months of prison by Russia-controlled Crimean court on the charge of causing bodily harm to "Berkut" officer during protest rally on the Square of Independence in Kyiv in winter 2013-2014. Kostenko didn't admit his guilt and claimed that his case was politically motivated.

Stanislav Yurchenko: I Wasn't Afraid to Het in Prison, I Was Afraid to Be Detained in Basement



*Photo from the archive
of Stanislav Yurchenko*

A Crimean journalist, a press photographer, a camera operator, the author of many reports, photos and videos of the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014. He was born in Kerch and lived in Simferopol. He studied Ukrainian philology in Taurida National University of V.I. Vernadskii. The native language is Russian. At the age of 21 he had to leave Crimea due to the Russian aggression.

In early March 2014 I went to “Simferopol” airport as a member of the camera crew. At that moment the airport was captured by the Russian special division called unofficially “little green men”. I was young and brave so I even made a stand-up²⁵ video on the background of the armed men. I kept chasing them asking: “Who are you? Who are you?” It was very dangerous but I didn’t understand that because of my carelessness. However, I learnt a lot of life lessons soon.

In March the members of the Crimean “self-defense” attacked me. It happened when Dunja Mijatović, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, came to Crimea. I was supposed to go on the meeting with her. A day before that meeting a female demonstration against the war took place not far from the place where Mijatović was, near the Simferopol military base.

²⁵ Stand-up is a reporter style, in which a journalist being on camera describes an event from the scene of it.

I was trying to take a photo of the “little green men” standing near that military base when I was attacked by three men from the “self-defense”. Two of them started to twist my arms and the third one threatened to kill me if I took a photo. They attempted to take away my camera.

Fortunately, my colleague, another press photographer, saw that and helped me out of their hands managing to take a couple of snapshots. When the guys saw that they had been noticed they released me.

Then I came to the meeting with Dunja Mijatović and told her what had happened. She listened to me carefully but didn’t react. That incident didn’t draw the attention of OSCE. After that I don’t trust this organization that much.

My next meeting with the Crimean “self-defense” was in June 2014. I came to see off my parents and brother at the railway station. They were leaving Crimea for Kyiv. When their train left I went to the editor’s office. In the subway at the railway station two unknown men asked me to show my passport. I showed refused to give it into their hands though. Therefore, they decided to teach me a lesson.

I was taken to their office – a small room not far from the railway station where I had been detained during 40 minutes. They searched my, found my notebook, read my notes, found my profile on “Vkontakte” and read all my posts of the last six months. One of them recognized himself in the photo posted on my page. He was the one twisting my arms near the military base in March. He started asking me why I had taken a photo of him and posted it on social network with no permission. I was threatened to be sent to prison. Then they called the Russian police to arrest me.

Police officers came but didn’t arrest me, on the contrary they released me. They were shocked themselves by such lawlessness.

Another incident happened after the Russian annexation of Crimea when “Self-defense” members were capturing “Kurortna”



Stanislav Yurchenko surrounded by members of “Crimean self-defense” in Simferopol (photo from the archive of Stanislav Yurchenko).

station in Simferopol. I was filming all the events on a flip-camera since it was dangerous to use a professional one. Members of the “self-defense” came and asked me to delete all photos. I deleted those pictures. At that moment I tried not to confront them since I had been technically prepared for such situations. Then I went to the editor’s office and recovered all the deleted data.

Then members of the “self-defense” got into such tricks. This is why they stopped demanding to delete pictures, instead they took away video cards or just broke them or pierced them with a knife. But we managed to outsmart even these tricks. In order to deliver data to the editor’s office we did the best we could.

It is necessary to note that another negative effect of the “Crimean spring” was imposing strict censorship on the Crimean me-

dia. It also affected the publishing house of “Argumenti nedeli – Crimea” where I worked at the beginning of the annexation of the peninsula. When I quitted, FSB officers came to the office and confiscated all photo and video materials of the rally outside the Crimean Parliament on February 26, 2014 and those of the following days of seizing Crimea. As far as I understood, some of these data were used in the “case of February 26”, the proceeding against Ilmi Umerov and others. Prosecution used these photos and videos against the defendants.

Living in the conditions of the political occupation I had to master such ability as “throwing off a tail”. When you are walking along the street and stop to take a picture and person overtakes you. In several minutes you stop to tie a shoelace and the same person overtakes you again. Then you stop again several times and the same person overtakes you over and over again. This is when you make sure you aren’t paranoid, it’s an obvious you are being watched. It’s easy to check. I knew several yards in the city which had two exits to the same street. I found that my pursuer was looking for me every time I turned off the way and took another exit.

In several months they started following me openly and impertinently. I could notice several times a day an unmarked car with two men inside. That car followed me to different districts of the city and also to the yard of the building where I lived. It means that they wanted me to notice them, they wanted me to know that I was being watched. Otherwise, they would use another inconspicuous car. It was an exemplary intimidation. To set myself free of the spies I used different routes and quickly changed buses, etc.

I wasn’t afraid to get in prison, I was afraid to be detained in the basement or to be found with broken bones somewhere in bushes. There was a fair chance to get into serious trouble. In fact, after the Russian annexation of Crimea every day I woke up with the feeling of playing “Russian roulette”: you could wake up on

your own, wake up from knocking on doors or doors being blown up could wake you.

In 2015 I left Crimea. That decision was hard. I resisted it till the last moment. It was emotionally hard to live there; however, it was important for me as for a journalist to be there. Since I realized that I would have no chance to come back due to the threat of persecution by FSB. However, the stakes of being there were too high. I knew names of many journalists who had a clandestine job due to the refusal to work for the authority of the occupant, and who weren't watched by the special agents since the latest didn't know about them. I understood that FSB is the structure where various methods of torturing were applied. And I wasn't so confident to think that I wouldn't break under their pressure. Only few could be like Sentsov.

Serhii Dub: I was Glad to Be Taken to the Police for the First Time since They Could Take Me to Forest

A Crimean doctor, anesthesiologist. He works in the Crimean Perinatal Center. He was a participant of the peaceful public actions against the Russian annexation of Crimea supporting Ukraine. For this reason he was watched by the Russian military agents. He was born in Kazakhstan but has been living in Simferopol since 1980. The native language is Ukrainian.



Photo from the archive of Serhii Dub

Before the Russian aggression I had been the Head of Intensive Care Unit of the Crimean Perinatal Center in Simferopol. I was invited to hold this position after the establishing of this center and I had to start from scratches, to recruit personnel and to organize all processes. My life was fine: a wife, three children, I was building a house for our family.

Before the seizing of Crimea when the Euromaidan was taking place the administration of the Ministry of Health and the Director of the Perinatal Center were representatives of the “Party of regions” and used to make all employees attend all Anti-Maidan rallies. I, as a Head of the Unit, also got calls from the the Chief doctor secretary and was told to attend the “anti-fascistic rallies”. It was a direct instruction to gather the employees of state-funded institutions. I didn’t answer anything and didn’t gather people since I understood what kind of anti-fascistic rally it was.

The last call of that kind was at the end of the working day on February 25, 2014. The secretary assigned me to gather people for the rally the next day on February 26. I thought it to be another

regular anti-fascistic rally and, surely, ignored that instruction. On February 26 I came to work and saw on TV what was going on next to the walls of the Crimean Parliament.

Only now I understood that, according to the plan of the occupants, on February 26 cossacks and employees of state-funded institutions had to gather near the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea to ask Putin to deploy troops and those troops had to enter the peninsula at the request of “working people”. However, the Crimean Tatars messed up the overall picture and, therefore, they got into disgrace of the Russian authorities. It became obvious that it was the military aggression and not “the act of expression of will”.

From the first day of the seizing of Crimea I went to work every day passing people with guns. I couldn’t accept that situation. I couldn’t live with a sense of injustice. I was born in Kazakhstan. I had lived in Crimea since 1980. I am a Russian-speaking person. My father is Ukrainian, my mother is Russian. However, I have always considered myself Ukrainian. I am an absolute opponent of “sovok” (assessing a world using a system of myths of the Soviet times) and in this case “the watershed” was based on this principle.

It’s not about having no fears, but I’m used to being always honest and having a clear conscience. I understand the responsibility for my words, but I have never abandoned my views on life. Moreover, if Russia wanted to be a part of Europe and Ukraine wanted to the Soviet Union I would support Russia.

In 2014 on the Day of the Ukrainian Flag I took one, attached it to my bike and went to the T. Shevchenko Park in Simferopol. My post on Facebook invited anyone wanting to join me. On my way a lot of drivers beeped me and shouted out: “Glory to Ukraine!” At that moment nobody was afraid.

There was a policeman at the entrance to the park and, as I understood from our conversation, he wasn’t local and came from Russia. I came up to him. He asked me: “What is this: a rally or an action?” I replied: “None, it’s the Day of the Ukrainian Flag today. I am just

having a ride”. He called somebody, reported about that and told me that he had no questions, but asked not to ride near the Shevchenko monument. So I entered the park and met there several people. When we were talking, an old woman passing by started cursing us promising to call somebody and to complain.

When I was on my way home near the park entrance a minivan stopped not far from me. An unknown man in civilian clothes got out of the car and asked for a direction. As soon as I stopped he attacked me and broke my arm. At the same time another man in camouflage ran

up to us. They started shouting: “On the ground!” I resisted their orders and they weren’t able put me down on the ground for a while. I asked them who they were and they replied: “We are working for the Crimean Government”. I tried to explain them that I was going home and was ready to remove the flag if it was the matter. Then a bus came with approximately 20 people inside. They put me down on the ground and handcuffed me.

They got me and my bike inside the bus. The flag was immediately torn and thrown away. In the bus there were disadvantaged people, those of the lowest social level who had probably joined the “self-defense” to earn money illegally detaining people. Some of them looked like former criminals. Five-six people in bus were wearing in masks and black uniforms. As far as I understood, they



Serhii Dub at the police station of Armiansk in 2015 during detention.

were former officers of “Berkut”. Some of them started to work for FSB. At the moment of my detention they, probably, were waiting for approval of their documents being valid, so they had to do such things meanwhile.

When I heard that they were taking me to Futbolist Street (where the Central District Police Station of Simferopol was located) I felt really glad for the first time to be taken to the police. I had thought that they would take me to forest. Indeed, it is scary to be alone with twenty men you didn’t really know what to expect from. Moreover, at that time it was known what they had done to Reshat Ametov.

Finally, I was taken to the Police. To get me into the Station they twisted my arms and my head was near my knees. There they finally removed the cuffs. The policeman I was handed in was from Russia. He interviewed me about the events in the park. At that moment the Head of the Police Station entered and asked whether I had any complains about those who had brought me there. I said that I didn’t have any claims and wouldn’t report about anything. They made me write an official paper as a proof of my words. However, according to their words they had got a task from the self-defense quarter to arrest me under any possible reason referring to Aksionov.

The policemen appeared to be shocked themselves by the nonsense of the order. They offered to get me detained and to issue a protocol on the case of saying bad words and being rude. I was soon let go home and got my reporting paper back. The false administrative protocol was sent to the court. The judge figured out the real facts about the situation and offered me to pay a minimum fine – 500 Rubles. She said that was all she could do for me. As it can be clearly seen from all this, both the police and the judges understood what was going on.

After a while I was severely reprimanded at work for a dusty ward with no patients inside reported by the inspection carried out two months before the events mentioned. Then my friend – an anesthesiologist - came up to me and said: “Serhii, I’ve received

an offer to hold your position”. I suddenly got inside the matter: a rebuke now, then a dismissal if I didn’t behave well. I went to the Director of the Perinatal Center and asked what the problem was and why he was against me. I tried to make him understand that there was no connection between the ride with a flag through the park and my professionalism. He replied: “There is another opinion”. The conversation ended with my application to transfer me to a position of an ordinary doctor. The whole thing was designed so that I volunteered to go myself, it was my own will. Actually, things aren’t as clear as one could think.

However, my adventures didn’t end there. In 2015 on the Vyshyvanka Day we went to Armiansk with some activists of the Ukrainian cultural center to take pictures near the stele “Crimea - land of partisan glory”. When we arrived there a police car was already waiting for us. When we took the first group photo they started inspecting our car and searching for something. One should have seen their disappointment when there appeared to be nothing of their interest! One of the policemen called somebody and reported: “Nothing has been found. Work full program? Okay!” We were taken to the Police Station in Armiansk. We were detained for 6 hours. Each of us was interrogated, taken fingerprints and photos of.

It is hard to imagine a better “Vyshyvanka Day”. The funniest thing happened when one of the policemen made sure that we really had come to take pictures and told us: “You can take photos everywhere you want, except out District, please, to cause us less trouble”. Despite all this negative experience happening to me, the most terrible things took place after the Russian annexation of Crimea.

I had a 25-year-old daughter who suddenly got sick. She started to complain about back pain. At that time she hadn’t got her Russian passport yet and the ambulance refused to help her. One day she felt exceptionally terrible, “the ambulance” came but the doctors found no reason to hospitalize her immediately. It took

RUSSIAN REPRESSIONS IN CRIMEA

them 2 hours to decide what to do next. We called the ambulance at 7 p.m. and at 9 p.m. my daughter was taken to hospital with a heart arrest. As it turned out, it was a septic shock. I lost my child. I had saved a lot of lives for years of work in the hospital but I failed to save my daughter due to the annexation and a mere formality – she didn't have a Russian passport.

Olena Lysenko: I Was Afraid that They Would Kill Me and My Child Would Be an Orphan

A Crimean journalist, the former owner and the Editor-in-Chief of the TV and Radio Company of Kerch "Bryz" which was denouncing abuses of local authorities. She was born in Simferopol and lived in Kerch. The native language is Russian. At the age of 40 she had to leave Crimea due to persecutions by the "Crimean self-defense".



*Photo provided
by Hromadske Radio*

At the beginning of 2014 before the events of the Russia annexation of Crimea people who used to call themselves Russian lawyers came to our editor's office. Pro-Russian activists brought them. They wanted to find out whether the mass-media I was supervising was ready to spread provocative information. In an alliance with pro-Russian activists they tried to spread through our channels false information as though they had stopped a bus with "banderivtsi" in Crimea heading to the Kerch car ferry to get to Sochi after that to disrupt the Olympic Games and burn tires there. They brought that information to different Crimean media. There were no buses, no "banderivtsi" inside. However, I noticed that serious people were working with the Crimean journalists. Now I realize that they could be sent to inspect the situation on the peninsula.

At the very beginning of the Russian seizure of Crimea somebody tried to burn my car. Previously I had got a series of threats on the e-mail of our editor's office from the representatives of pro-Russian forces which were capturing the authority in Kerch at the time.

I had a memorable meeting with FSB and Russian “cossacks”, hiding their faces under a nickname “Crimean self-defense”, on the day of seizing of the Kerch car ferry. That day people in masks and with guns blocked the car ferry and pushed aside Ukrainian border guards and the ferry personnel. My colleague and I arrive at the place. I noticed the man who had supervised the operation of capturing Kerch. I recognized him since I had met him during the filming next to the Ukrainian military bases. He guided the Russian forces and negotiated with Ukrainian soldiers. He told me that he had come from Russia. That man also recognized me. An old woman appeared no far from us. She asked the personnel of the ferry whether Ukrainian young conscript guards were okay. They replied that there weren’t any conscripts on the ferry, they were all contract workers, healthy and alive. I got close to them and started filming that conversation.

At that moment that officer came up to me and told that filming was prohibited there. Referring to the Ukrainian law I asked for what reason they prohibited me to film there. Then he gave a waving signal with his hand and approximately eight men dressed as cossacks ran up to us. I mean I don’t believe that they were real cossacks. They weren’t local and had an obvious Russian accent. Besides a uniform the “cossacks” had whips. I saw the same dressed man near the Ukrainian military bases. I think they had to keep the picture of politeness of the Russian militaries, to show how tolerant the latest were, to demonstrate that Russian militaries didn’t beat journalists and didn’t kidnap activists, this is what it was all about.

The cossacks came up to us and started to push us to the exit. We had left our car 200-300 meters from the entrance and those men accompanied us all our way to the car. They spoke to us rudely, said that we had no rights there. I am still keeping a record of that talk.

It’s almost impossible to describe that feeling. Seven-eight aggressive men were escorting us; Russian militaries with guns and military equipment were around us. They could do everything with us and nobody would help us.

RUSSIAN REPRESSIONS IN CRIMEA



*Russian soldiers near Kerch Strait ferry-line on March 3, 2014
(photo made by Olena Lysenko).*

I was crying walking past all these weapon and machinery because it was insulting and humiliating. Through the tears I said that I could be nobody in my native city where I was born and that I was a daughter of a soviet officer. Probably, it helped us. They didn't beat us up and didn't take away the equipment. Finally, we were pushed to our car this way and those men left us alone. However, one of them came back. I thought: "That's it. He is going to take away the camera or the video card". But all he did was saying "sorry".

Their leader, their ataman was the most active in humiliating us. Several days after that incident I learnt that he had died of a heart attack on the Kerch car ferry. For the first time in my life I was happy to hear about somebody's death and I felt ashamed of that.

A the Russian officials claimed, those "cossacks" weren't from the "Crimean self-defense". They weren't even Crimean residents.

I heard the Russian accent in their speech, they were from Central Russia, even not from Kuban region, since people have an accent similar to Ukrainian there. They came to Kerch in ordinary clothes and then changed them in the churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate. After that they went all across Crimea.

I knew those masked men abused a Kerch journalist of the newspaper that belonged to the mayor of the city back then, Oleh Osadchyi. She had supported the seizure of Crimea and had come to the voting station to film an exclusive video before the beginning. Those Cossacks didn't allow her to go inside the station; they beat her up and broke her camera. She was shocked. Then she quitted journalism at all after that.

After those events I lived in fear during several months. I constantly received messages with threats of revenge. These threats came even from one of my coworkers sharing the ideology of the Russian occupants who intended to report about me to FSB.

Most of all, I was worried about my son. At that moment he was 12 years old. I was afraid that they would execute him instead of me. It was also horrible to think that they would kill my husband and me and my child would be left an orphan.

A year later I decided to leave Crimea. I couldn't accept that injustice. All in all there are laws of morality and a Christian commandment: "Thou shalt not steal". Crimea was stolen rudely, illegally and unfairly.

I left the peninsular for the sake of my son too since I wanted to give him a better life than that on the occupied territory. It was a hard decision because I left a few people dear to me, an apartment and my parents' graves back there in Crimea.

Natalia Kokorina: I Left FSB Devastated, with the Feeling Like I Had Been Raped not Physically, but Morally

A Crimean journalist, the author of Crimean journalist investigations of abuses committed by the local authority. She was born in Mongolia. The native languages are Ukrainian and Russian. At the age of 25 she had to leave Crimea due to the persecution by Russian FSB.



Photo from the archive of Natalia Kokorina

With the beginning of the annexation of Crimea I developed a feeling that one day FSB officers would come for me too. My days used to begin at 6 a.m. with waiting for a sound of the doorbell. It had lasted for several months before they came indeed. In March 2015 at around 8 a.m. my phone rang. An unknown man introducing himself as a policeman told me that the doors of my parents' flat, not far from the place where I was living at that moment, were open and nobody was at home, and neighbors had called the police. The neighbors would have definitely called me if they had my phone number. It became clear what was going on.

I called my parents but their phones were turned off. I was already running to their apartment when I made a couple of calls to my colleagues-journalists I trusted the most.

Near the front door of the building a Mayor of FSB met me, asked me to turn off the phone and invited me inside the apartment. In the apartment I saw an investigator of Investigation Department of FSB. There was also another man who was inspecting all techni-

cal equipment at home: laptops , memory cards and other carriers of information. Meanwhile the investigator was woving around my apartment and examining my belongings.

They showed me the decision of Kyiv District Court of Simferopol according to which the search was being carried out as a part of a criminal case on the fact of publication on the site of “The Center of Journalist Investigations”. They asked me to provide them with all the documents related to functioning of “The Center of Journalist Investigations” and all equipment. I refused and demanded to call a lawyer. Then they started persuading me not to call the lawyer since it could delay the process. “We are just questioning you as a witness. What do you need a lawyer for? Why are you complicating the process? Why to waste your time?”, they persuaded me.

As it turned out, my colleagues who I had called in the morning had already called a lawyer Dzhemil Temishev and he arrived soon. However, the investigators didn’t allow him to come in. I didn’t know that he was waiting for me behind the door.

The investigators removed laptops of my parents and mine and several old documents of “The Center of Journalist Investigations” dating back to the times before the occupation. I didn’t remember what kind of documents they were but nothing serious must have been there.

The search lasted for 2 hours. They didn’t make a mess; they put all things on their places. They finished at around 2 p.m. A white “GAZelle” came to the front door of the building. My colleagues and the lawyer were waiting there. FSB officers tried to hide themselves and me from them. The “GAZelle” was parked close to the front door with this aim – to make the whole thing unseen. I was taken into the car, brought to 13, Franko Street in Simferopol. Those who had carried out the search were in the “GAZelle” together with me. We were all silent but they were watching me in order to prevent me from switching on my phone.

Near the FSB headquarters Dzhemil Temishev was waiting for me. When I saw him I said that I wanted him to represent my interests. However, they told Dzhemil Temishev that I didn't want him to be present during the interrogation. Even though I had already said that he would be my lawyer, they continued to state that I refused from any lawyer. All in all Temishev went together with me, we signed an agreement according to which he was supposed to be with me during the whole interrogation (more than 6 hours).

The interrogation started very slowly. It took much time for the investigator to log on her computer, to prepare documents and other. Then something else interfered with her work. She finally started questioning me about my biography, journalist activity and my work at "The Center of Journalist Investigations". Some questions were focused on my relationships with a journalist Anna Andriievska: whether we were friends, whether we kept in touch, where she was, whether I knew about the paper "Volunteers of Crimean battalion" that was the reason to start a criminal case.

I answered that I hadn't read that material. They gave me a printed paper from the site to read and asked whether Andriievska had written that and whether I could recognize her writing style. Actually, the question was silly. I replied that to distinguish between the poetry of Block and this of Pushkin would be possible for me but to recognize the style of writing as the one belonging to my colleague was a really ridiculous task. There were a lot of quite appropriate as well as weird questions.

During the interrogation I felt a constant pressure. It was taking place in the building of FSB where you couldn't go to the toilet without a convoy, where all your words and gestures were under close attention. The investigator repeated several times that everyone had left me alone and gone to Kyiv, and I would be in charge of everything and, therefore, I had to "behave myself" and take their side. They tried to persuade me to cooperate with them in exchange for saving my procedural status only as a witness. "You should un-

derstand well that we can change everything and you will become a suspect instead of a witness”, she told me.

I didn't feel any fear at that moment. I felt other emotions that couldn't be sufficiently expressed by words. The only thing I had decided was to tell the truth and I did it. Moreover, I had nothing special to tell them. Even though those people were good at convincing others. They tried to blackmail me with my weaknesses, they mentioned my relatives, dear people and told that my willingness or unwillingness to cooperate could affect them. And if you had one moment of weakness the pressure would become stronger and at that moment it would get really scary. If you resisted they would decrease the pressure, as if testing you.

After the interrogation I was left devastated, with the feeling like I had been raped not physically, but morally. At that moment I truly realized for the first time in my life that my actions would affect others. I could only stare into nothing and think about nothing. Everyone called me, but I couldn't speak at that moment. I just couldn't find the energy. After the search and questioning I tried to stay in Crimea. Believing that we could still change something, I chose not to keep silent and took the initiative

I really wanted to stay in Crimea and to continued my journalist activity. However, at one moment I understood that I couldn't affect anything and my attempts didn't work. Then I realized that if I continued my work and went to prison for it I would never make a difference. It made me leave. I could do much more in the continental Ukraine than on the peninsula for its reoccupation.

Dmytro Andriievskiy: I Was Taken through My Native Village under Heavy Guard Like a Criminal

A Crimean pensioner, the father of a Crimean journalist Anna Andriievskya. He was questioned in the criminal proceeding instituted against his daughter in 2015 for “public calls for violating the territorial integrity of Russia”. He was born in Kharkiv region, but has lived in Krasnohvardiisk region in Crimea for more than 30 years. The native languages are Russian and Ukrainian.



Photo from the archive of Andriievskiy family

It was around 7 a.m. when FSB officers came to our home on March 13, 2015. We were sleeping when we heard the doorbell ring. My wife thought it was our grandson who used to pop in quite often on his way to school.

She opened the door and in a few seconds she called me. I left the bedroom and saw armed people in the corridor. There were seven men in balaclavas and with guns. We asked who they were and what they were doing in our house, however, with no answer they asked instead: “Have you got any guns or drugs at home?” I answered they had the wrong address since we had never had such thing at home.

We were shocked from the first seconds of the conversation, since we had never met armed people, moreover, at our place.

When they asked again about guns and drugs I understood that they could plant them, since I couldn’t trust these people. I demanded to move around my house only in my company. Then they calmed down a bit. Probably, our being ordinary people instead of criminals or terrorists comforted them.

The noise woke our grandmother who was recovering after a microstroke. She got very scared and started calling us. It was difficult to decide what was more important in the situation: to listen to these intruders or to go to the grandmother. We invited them to come into the room, they sat down on the sofa and showed us a search warrant within a criminal proceeding against our daughter – a journalist Anna Andriievaska – who was a suspect of a crime due to one of her publications on media. They started demanding all her belongings, particularly, photos. They threatened to mess everything up if we didn't provide them with what they wanted.

Moreover, they examined all the rooms searching for something. After that two of them went to the staircase near our doors to hold the guard. I didn't know why they were behaving that weirdly in a peaceful little village. Did they think that we would escape? Or did they try to prevent anyone to go inside the apartment? Many of our neighbors passing our doors in the morning noticed their presence and could testify if needed. Meanwhile they continued searching and questioning. They took away our laptop with my work documentation and our personal photo archive. It pushed me off the track at work for quite a while as it took me much time to recover all those files relying on my own memory.

During the interrogation I got a call from work as my workmates needed me to sign some documents. They would be delivered by car. However, the security agents refused to let me out. I could leave only with a convoy of men with guns.

Just imagine the picture, I was taken through my native village under a heavy guard like a criminal. It was humiliating, offensive and embarrassing.

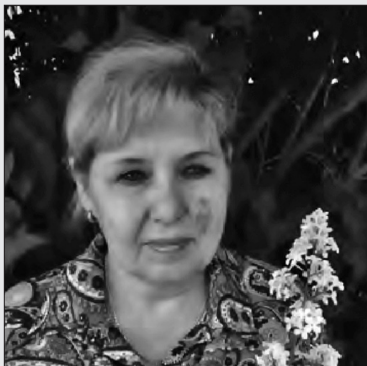
Having come back home security agents filled in the protocols of search and left my apartment. Then I was called for the interrogation to Investigation Department of FSB in Simferopol. My humiliation continued there. The interrogation was carried out by an investigator of FSB, Maryna Savchuk, but at first, an unknown man

in civilian clothes entered to take away the memory card. He was staying there during all the interrogation and even took part in it. That man talked to the investigator as to his subordinate. And she made me answer his questions.

I was questioned for five hours on the subject of what my daughter did, where she worked, where she lived and how we kept in touch. During the interrogation they told me that I had brought up my child badly and she had “betrayed Crimea”. I heard the same words from our pro-Russian friends and relatives. It was disgusting and unexpected to hear such words from close, as I had thought before, people.

I understand that we don't have to justify ourselves in the eyes of anybody. Our conscience is clear, but the situation is still hanging over us like the sword of Damocles. And we realize that they could do anything with us since nobody could help us.

Nataliia Andriievska: FSB Officers Blamed Me for Speaking with Them in Ukrainian



A Crimean pensioner, the mother of the journalist Anna Andriievska. She was born in Kyiv region but has lived in Crimea since 1980. The native language is Ukrainian.

Photo from the archive of Andriievskyyi family

In the morning of March 13, 2017 a doorbell ring woke me. I got up and went to open. I expected to see my grandson as he used to come sometimes before school. However, I saw armed men in uniforms. They literally broke into our apartment and one of them asked: “Have you got any guns or drugs at home?”

At first I thought that they had a wrong address. However, another man asked whether Anna Andriievska lived there. I understood that they had really come for us. I called my husband and he did most of the talk. They demanded all belongings of our daughter. However, we had only few things since our daughter had moved long ago and kept her stuff with her.

The search lasted for several hours. The FSB officers constantly called somebody and reported: “There’s nothing here. We haven’t found anything”. I was sitting next to an officer and I heard the answer: “Search carefully. There must be something”. So then they continued rummaging.

After the search they started questioning us. They showed me three pictures of young girls. On one of them was Anna. An FSB officer instructed me to recognize my child. Just imagine, a crowd of armed men demanded from me to recognize my child! I couldn't resist and bursted into tears overwhelmed by fear and helplessness. Probably, it was a moment of weakness; however, each mother can understand me.

Even my tears couldn't stop those men. They started blaming me for bringing up my child badly, and were irritated that I spoke Ukrainian to them. They demanded to speak Russian. Actually, I have always spoken Ukrainian from childhood, since all my relatives are Ukrainians and we always use the mother tongue. Even though I moved to Crimea to my husband's fatherland I didn't start speaking Russian even after 35 years of life together merely because I felt comfortable when I spoke the language which I had known from my childhood. Everyone knew about that and they had never reproached me for that. And now those armed men were trying to teach me how I should live, what language I had to speak and how I should bring up my children! They treated me with disrespect even though I had done them no harm.

When I politely asked them to speak quietly since my aged mother was in bed after a microstroke in the next room, they didn't listen. They didn't allow us to go to her during the search. Then they allowed to see how she was and ordered: "Don't make a noise!"

It seemed as if the guys had no aged relatives and had no idea how to behave respectfully or they did it on purpose. When the information about the criminal proceeding against my daughter received wide publicity and Ukrainian media started to talk about that, pro-Russian people we knew including our relatives joined the humiliating campaign. It was disgusting and unfair.

Consequently I developed health problems because of the stress I had to go through. I will never forget that.

Pavlo Veselyk: a Steel 2 Meter-long Crowbar Was Brought on for the Search of my Apartment



*Photo from the archive
of Pavlo Veselyk*

A Crimean journalist. He was born and has been living in Yalta. He was questioned by FSB in the criminal proceeding against Mykola Semena for “public calls for violating of territory integrity of Russia”.

When early in the morning FSB officers came to me with a search warrant I wasn't shocked.

A usual Tuesday, morning, I was sleeping... The doorbell rang... Mother went to the door and asked: “Who is that?” The answer was: “FSB!” She didn't believe and told “the jokers” to go away. Only their tenacious doorbell rings and heavy knocking on the doors which woke my brother and me made it clear that it wasn't a joke. Then I found out that they brought a steel 2-meter long crowbar to use in case I didn't open the door. I saw that tool. It didn't look like that special tool to break the door in films or video about “Alfa”... No. It was a usual crowbar.

When I was putting on my pants my brother opened the door and unknown men came in. There was a security group in full gear filling in our flat: two people with submachine guns and one person with a special sniper rifle “Vintorez” with a silencer. One of them pulled me out into the corridor politely, but firmly, where an investigator read aloud the search warrant. I had no time

to put on my shoes. I was funny to the search warrant half bare-foot...

Since spring 2014 I understood subconsciously that it would happen sooner or later taking into account those events that had happened to my colleagues-journalists. I asked myself from time to time what the reason for the search or interrogation would be.

As it appeared later, the reason was my status as a witness in the criminal proceeding against the Crimean journalist Mykola Semena which I was informed about while listening to the warrant. Surely, I was surprised that I could testify against a person I had never met, however, I realized that it was just a reason to break in.

Such operations were designed to be unexpected and provoke shock. Obviously, my mother experienced that shock as during the search she tried to offer the investigators some coffee... The presence of armed security agents in masks in the apartment made my aged mother really nervous.

They were more or less polite but they took away my mobile phone immediately and gave it back only after the search. Moreover, they didn't allow us to leave the apartment during the search. I understood that they were searching for my netbook and all carriers of information. They didn't really care about other things.

The men in masks admired my home library (a lot of good things to see) and wondered : "Have you read all of these?!" My library is really huge.

The special agents touched with a big interest the selection of my late dad's diver knives. One of the intruders must have been from a "samovar" culture since he kept telling much about the one which I had got from my grandmother.

Meanwhile one of the investigators in civilian clothes started to explore my mess. He asked: "What is inside this bag?" I replied honestly: "Dirty socks". "I told them we would need gloves", the investigator muttered, but didn't take the risk of exploring my socks.

After an hour of the search the things cleared out. I knew exactly that I had anything criminal in my computer. I had a simple push-button phone and there was nothing interesting for them. It added to my confidence when after the search I went to be interrogated by the investigators to their office in Yalta.

They got me into a car and drove to their Yalta office on Kirov Street. By the way, they had a cool jeep, I didn't know the exact model, but it was similar to the favourite car of cool guys in movies.

Everybody in Yalta knows that FSB is located on Kirov Street. Even realtors write in sale advertisements "in front of the FSB office". It is hard to understand how this information helps them to sell apartments. If you get inside you feel like the skies become heavier. On the checkpoint you should hand in your phone and from that momenton they could do everything, even tear you apart, and nobody would ever know about that.

So we came into the interrogation room. But it is only name given by me. Indeed, having noticed the brace for handcuffs in the corner you could understand that interrogations here could have different plots...

After four hours of interrogation I got experienced enough to give you a piece of advice: just listen to questions. Sometimes they are formulated in such a way so that any answer plays against you.

My netbook was removed for "expertise". As I said, there was nothing criminal or extremist in it and soon they returned it to me. Was it over? Was it the final point of pressure on me? I don't know. I am not really sure.

It is impossible to make a person, who is able to think, think otherwise. It is possible to make a person speak differently through torture. However, justice is the only thing able to make you change your mind.

Zair Akadyrov: Shambazov locked car's doors: “don't go to the base, straight to the basement”

A Crimean journalist, the former Editor-in-Chief of the edition “Argumenti nede-li – Crimea”. He was born in Tajikistan where his family had been deported to in 1944. He lived in Simferopol. The native language is Crimean Tatar. After the Russian annexation of Crimea he was persecuted by Russia-controlled security forces for his professional activity.



*Photo from the archive
of Zair Akadyrov*

On January 15, 2016 at around 10 a.m. I came to the building of the Supreme Court of Crimea on Pavlenko Street in Simferopol to attend a court session concerning the proceeding of mass riots outside the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea on February 26, 2014. It was that renown “case of February 26”, whose accused Ahtem Chygoz, the deputy chairman of the Mejlis of the the Crimean Tatar society, the activists Mustafa Degermendzy and Ali Asanovhad been spending almost a year under arrest. Several people were still in the trial and three more had been sentenced the previous year.

The meeting started at 12 a.m. During the meeting I was in the hall as a representative of the citizens, a blogger and a freelancer together with other people who had failed to get an access to the public court hearing with the participation of the Crimean prosecutor, Nataliia Poklonska. The reason was insufficient availability of seats in the court room. Nevertheless, journalists of the Crimean and Federal media who had been officially registered in Russia got the access according to predetermined list of those who had sent the motion requesting to attend the court meeting.

Ahead of questions of those who write that I as a journalist had to have a press card of the Russian or Crimean media, which had been officially registered by the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor), or a journalist's accreditation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, if we speak about foreign media, I shall answer that I was there as a publicity representative, a blogger and a freelancer. Collecting and spreading information are guaranteed by the law, as we all remember. At the entrance I showed my passport and went through metal detectors. Let me remind that the place of my last employment was the Internet edition "Argumenti nedeli – Crimea" (the founder – Russian "Argumenti nedeli") where I had been working for 2.5 years and was the Editor-in-Chief. I left that media in March 2014 when "polite men" had appeared in Crimea and the editorial policy changed.

At around 12 a.m. a man in civilian clothes approached me. At that moment I was sitting in the hall of the building and taking notes in my phone. He showed me his identification card, a police captain Ruslan Rinatovich Shambazov (the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation (MVD)), and asked me to follow him. I refused to go and asked what the matter was, he didn't specify and just said: "We need to talk". He was together with two other officers of the Federal Service of Court Bailiffs who demanded from me going with Shambazov. Outside the building I prepared for our conversation and turned on a recorder. The captain told me to go to a car near the Court building.

— You will be questioned at the Center for extremism prevention (so-called the Center "E" – a structural unit of MVD), – one of the policemen explained.

— What reasons have you got for this interrogation? There are official methods to call for interrogation. You don't have the right to detain me since you need to have serious explanation. Do you suspect me of anything or have you got a petition on me? – I kept arguing.

RUSSIAN REPRESSIONS IN CRIMEA



Russia-controlled power forces are escorting Zair Akadyrov to the police station. Simferopol, January 15, 2016 (photo from the archive of Zair Akadyrov).

— We have a petition on you. You will be questioned, probably, the suspicion turns out to be wrong, – another man, apparently, from MVD said. – That paper is at the place where we are going to invite you.

— We can't speak here without this document! – Shambazov stated nervously. – I have several questions to you. This is an inappropriate place to ask them. Can we move elsewhere?

After my refusal Shambazov began demanding to identify himself. I showed him my passport holding it in my hands.

— Give me the document! – Shambazov ordered.

— I will not give it into your hands, - I argued.

— Why won't you ? – Shambazov was agitated.

— What grounds have you got? – I asked him. – I've shown it to you but I haven't requested you to give yours into my hands.

After that Shambazov called officers of Federal Service of Court Bailiffs and OMON (special-purpose militia detachments).

— He, – Shambazov pointed at me, - has violated public order, and doesn't want to identify himself.

Somebody told them that I had already shown the document but it had no effect.

— Don't struggle, don't play for an audience. Walk normally, - an officer of OMON said holding my left arm.

— What grounds have you got to detain me? What kind of methods are you using? – I argued. It was pointless though.

I walked 30-40 meters and got into the car "Niva". The driver was on his seat and the Captain Ruslan Shambazov was on my right.

As I had a record, I could reproduce all the conversation inside the car which wasn't filmed by cameras. I consider it important for the further development of the events. That's what happened then.

— Let's go, - Shambazov told the driver.

— You are lying, - I told them hoping that they would release me after the conversation in the car.

— Phone! Phone, give it to me! – Shambazov shouted.

— I have already turned it off, - I replied and didn't give it into his hands.

— Phone, I said! – Shambazov repeated grabbing my right hand and having pushed on the button of doors to lock them.

I didn't give him my phone and just showed that it was turned off.

— We can put an OMON officer next to him, – the driver tried to scare me.

— Let's go! – Shambazov replied. – DON'T GO TO THE BASE, STRAIGHT TO THE BASEMENT!

— What are you doing?! – I asked and started struggling to break loose from his hands keeping me in the car.

— Let's call an officer or handcuff him? – the driver persisted.

I understood that they tried to press me and the police officer had seriously threatened me to take me to a basement (the actions

of the security agents scared taking into consideration the cases of kidnapping and missing people, groundless detentions and judicial proceedings in Crimea at the time). Moreover, they used physical force with no need to me and were acting illegally demanding to give away my phone. I tried to escape from the car to call for help.

The record of the conversation in the car follows:

— Sit down, I'm speaking Russian to you, don't you comply with the legal requirement of a police officer, do you?

— I will not sit down since you are using physical force against me. I am worried about my life, – I replied.

Then a police officer in a uniform came up and asked to obey.

Public representatives, who were near the Court and were watching all happening there, intervened in the situation.

— What grounds are you detaining him on?! He has already shown you the passport! Why does he have to go anywhere?! – the people protested.

Finally, we agreed on showing our documents to each other one more time. The policeman offered to exchange them. It was weird, but I read aloud the name and the surname of the captain. That moment was recorded too. Shambazov was getting anxious and remarked that I was escalating the situation.

Then the policeman in a uniform, who before the events of 2014 had been responsible for the public security issues in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, invited me to go to the Railway District Police Station.

— Go, don't make us apply other methods. You have been invited by the police to specify the circumstances!

— If you don't agree you could complain about the actions of the police officers, – a man in a uniform said.

The policemen insisted on going to the Police Station. They couldn't provide any arguments to support their actions with.

— I need to ask you some questions in private, – Shambazov replied.

— There is no trust to you, – somebody from the addressed the police officer. He also complained that many people had been kidnapped and imprisoned in Crimea with no reason.

There was definitely no point in arguing and proving anything in the unfolding situation and the policemen would eventually do everything possible to take me to the Police Station. Besides, other people could get hurt, so I gave up and agreed to go to with them. Several officers of OMON and Shambazov accompanied me on my way. Some public representatives went with me as well. On the way to the Police Station Shambazov called out:

— So, have you got what you needed? Have you made a show?

— I haven't made any show, - I replied.

At the Police Station I was taken to an interrogation room on the ground floor, they made me have a sit and empty my pockets, in particular, show technical equipment. The driver of the car we had come by supposed that I could have prohibited items, what was even more, they assumed that I was illegally residing in Crimea or had false documents (even though I had lived there for more than 20 years and I had a registration in my passport).

I got out my ID document, a phone charger, headphones and keys from my pockets. Shambazov asked where my phone was:

— I saw you filming at the Court. What did you do this for?

— I did it near the entrance when the fencing was being set up, – I said. – It is a notorious case and I filmed everything happening for a tweeter translation.

However, Shambazov continued to ask about my phone which I had given to a public representative to keep it safe.

Shambazov persisted to show the phone to check what I had filmed and what notes I had done in my phone. Again I had to explain to him that I had been in the building of the Court as a blogger and a freelancer. I published information on my social media profiles and wrote a blog in a LiveJournal.

Shambazov couldn't stop. Suddenly, he claimed that, as it turned out, I had been detained on May 2015 as a participant of a car rally with Crimean Tatar flags in Simferopol. I denied since I hadn't participated in that rally, I had been there as a spectator. I took photos and made videos and posted them on my Facebook page and in LiveJournal. I was detained that day for filming the events and the police registered my driver's license number. At that moment I understood that MVD had been watching me for a long time. Today they just used the opportunity to make pressure on me to punish for my public activity.

My words were thoroughly committed to paper by Shambazov. He asked where I lived, how long I had been staying in Crimea, what my phone number was, what I did for a living, why I was at the Court, why I spoke to the first Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, Nariman Dzelial, and the member of Kurultai General Executive Committee, the elected council of the Crimean Tatar community, Zair Smedlyaev in the building of the Court, where I published such information.

Surely, I had a legal right not to talk to the policemen at all, I could wait for a lawyer and further development of the events. What kind of? Having considered the pros and cons I decided to answer all his questions still hoping that they would release me after that.

I added something and signed the explanation paper. Shambazov got papers back and asked with a smile:

- Any questions, suggestions or complaints?
- Why are you acting like this?
- It's a part of the job, – he replied without emotions after a little time.

I was in the building for 40 minutes. They didn't use any physical force against me, however, they put psychological pressure on me. The protocol of detention wasn't drafted. More than ten public representatives met me in front of the building. I thanked them for

their support. The end would be different without their intervention.

Why did I write about this incident in details? I would like to show on this example how human rights are violated in Crimea and how officers of security services try to clear out informational field, to remove sources of alternative information for people. I am grateful to all friends, colleagues, people I know and unknown people, all those who didn't stay out of that situation near the Court. Journalists, lawyers, members of Mejlis, activists of the Crimean Tatar movement and others. You all have demonstrated solidarity, unity, mutual support and fidelity to your principles at that moment. Believe me it is great in our difficult situation. Сагъ олунъыз²⁶!

United we stand on the native land!

The text was published by Zair Akadyrov on his Facebook page.

26 "Сагъ олунъыз" means "thank you" in Crimean Tatars.

Halyna Dzhykaieva: FSB Officer Asked Me: “You Probably Know We Have Ways of Making People Testify”

A theater director, a Crimean activist of public movement of resistance against the Russian annexation of Crimea. The former artistic director of the Simferopol art-center “Karman” and the studio theatre “We”. She was born in Kryvyi Rih but lived with her family in Simferopol. The native languages are Russian and Ukrainian. At the age of 48 she had to leave the peninsula due to the persecution by the Russian special services.



Photo from the archive of Halyna Dzhykaieva

I was warned that FSB were watching me. People I know told me that Russian special agents had come to them and asked about me. One day somebody who introduced himself as Andrii called me. Then I found out that he was a former staff member of the Security Service of Ukraine. I don't remember his surname. He told me that he wanted to talk and appointed “a date”. It happened in July 2014.

Such “dates” was better to hold in the most crowded place and I agreed to meet in a café. I also asked my friend to come to that café and watch us. He would be a witness if I were detained. It was funny since he had been drinking a cup of coffee for 3 hours at that café.

Andrii came to the meeting with an unknown man who identified himself as Dmytro and said that he had come from Moscow. They showed me their identity cards of FSB of Russia. The meeting lasted for three hours. They told me that I was suspected in terrorism in the case against Oleh Sentsov. At that moment Oleh Sentsov, Oleksandr Kolchenko, Oleksii Chyryni and Hennadii Afanasiev had already been detained and some of them were testifying.

The FSB officers told me that the medical trainings which I had organized in the art-center “Karman” were classified as a terroristic activity in the case of Oleh Sentsov.

It was clear that objection was pointless with people behaving that way. I had indeed participated in rallies to support Ukraine, helped Ukrainian soldiers and proposed to host medical trainings at the art-center “Karman”. We organized them since at that moment in Crimea there were a lot of armed people and we had to think about the security of peaceful people. We didn’t know the exact plans of militaries; therefore, we were eager to inform people how to provide first aid. It was basic knowledge that could be helpful at any time.

A volunteer doctor worked under that initiative. The training had been carried out before “the referendum”. We held them three times. 10-20 people attended each of our training. It was quite a good number and we saw that they were interested in this information.

During my conversation with FSB officers they occasionally tried to give a chance to relax speaking about the Crimean theatre, wine and mountains. However, they also put in a question from time to time : “Who attended your medical trainings in the art-center “Karman” in 2014?” We continued to speak about mountains and wine again, and then one of them bent down to me and asked: “You probably know we have ways of making people testify”. This was a veiled threat.

They showed me photos of Crimean residents – pro-Ukrainian activists. Photos of Oleksandra Dvoretzka, Oleksii Arunian and others were among them. They offered me to write everything I knew about this case. I refused. Dmytro said that an investigator from Moscow was coming and they would summon me for an interview officially and I would have to sign the protocol.

I understood that every word written by me on paper would be used not only against me but also against other people. First and foremost, they would use it in the criminal proceeding against the detained men – Sentsov, Kolchenko, Afanasiev and Chyrynii. After that

we said goodbye to each other but they told me that it wasn't our last meeting.

Several days after that meeting Andrii attended a performance at the art-center "Karman". After the show he demonstrated me some pictures again and gave me a piece of paper to sign my testimony. I refused saying that I had a poor eyesight and had left my glasses at home. We arranged an appointment at 13²⁷, Franko Avenue where I would have to go to next day, July 25 with glasses.

I came back home, packed my suitcase in case I was detained. Next day we arrived at the building of FSB in Simferopol together with a lawyer I knew. She asked me: "Are you sure that you will get out of the building on 13, Franko avenue?" I answered that I wasn't sure. Realizing the danger we decided to go to my apartment. I turned off my phone, packed my belonging, said goodbye to my parents and she took me to a safe place in Simferopol. We were there until the night and then I left Crimea by taxi.

Strangely enough, on the border with Kherson region I had no problems with Russian border guards. They didn't try to stop me. I have never returned to Crimea since that time.

I went to my relatives to Odesa. However, I decided to move to Kyiv. This is the place of great creative energy I truly need.

An interesting thing is that the FSB officers tried to bribe me with sweet promises when they needed to obtain my testimony. They said that if I signed the testimony they would introduce me to a federal politician who provided funding to all independent projects and he would gladly sponsor our art-centre. Soon after the director of the art-center "Karman" tried to meet that politician but he didn't obtain any funding since I hadn't signed the testimony.

27 The main office of Crimean Department of the Security Service of Ukraine was located in the building on 13, Franko Street in Simferopol, but after Russian annexation of Crimea this building has been used by Russian FSB. Numerous interrogations of people, which, according to witnesses, were often accompanied by the torture and different methods of psychological pressure, took place there.

RUSSIAN REPRESSIONS IN CRIMEA

The administration of the art-center was made to organize a press-conference where they officially claimed to have nothing to do with me and the co-founder Anton Romanov and also reassured that they didn't share our political views. The time of Kurbas of 1933 returned.

Finally, the art-center was closed several months later.

After the described above events I was left emotionless and I accumulated everything inside for a long time. I had imagined my tears and happiness I would have felt upon crossing the border, but I didn't have any emotions. Only later I managed to cry this all out. I know that I will come back to Crimea. I will promote the Crimean theatre because somebody should clean out soviet "Augean stables" polluting the peninsula.

Zarema Bariieva: They Brought Our Home in Mess , Opened Closets and Threw All Things onto the Floor

A Wife of Eskender Bariiev, an activist of the Crimean Tatar national movement, a coordinator of the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights of the Crimean Tatar People. She was born in Samarkand where her family was deported in 1944. After returning to Crimea she lived together with her husband in Molodizhne villige of Simferopol district. She is a teacher of the English language. The native language is Crimean Tatar.



*Photo from the archive
of Zarema Bariieva*

In early September 2014 a car without any plates appeared near our house in Molodizhne village. It stood there for some time, leaving and returning occasionally. Our neighbors noticed that car. At that time my husband, Eskender Bariiev, was traveling a lot to Kyiv and Turkey where he informed people about the violations of human rights of the Crimean Tatars by the occupant authority. It made me suspect that people in the unknown car watched him.

The search of our apartment was carried out on September 16, 2014, on my birthday. Now my relatives and friends joke that I got a bouquet of “little green men ” instead of flowers.

Early in the morning knocking at the door and noise woke my husband and me. At first we couldn't understand what was going on and thought that, probably, there was a fire and our neighbors came to warn us. They kept kicking the door out about to burst it open.

RUSSIAN REPRESSIONS IN CRIMEA



*The mess in Bariiv's apartment after the search. September 16, 2014
(screen-shot from the report of TSN on 1+1 channel)**

*Photos from the video of Ukrainian TV channel 1+1 posted on its Youtube channel.

We got up and started to get dressed. Eskender went to open the door. There were 20 people on the doorstep. Some of them were in a uniform of FSB with balaclavas on their faces and guns; others were dressed in civilian clothes. They took away our mobile phones immediately.

My husband asked them to take off shoes since a little kid was inside. Our younger son was 6 months old. They took off their shoes indeed.

The search was carried out brutally. They rummaged everywhere around the flat, opened closets and just threw all things out from wardrobes onto the floor. They examined even the utility room with kid's toys; threw the construction kit onto the floor. All the time I was standing next to a man with a gun. I was watching him closely in order to prevent planting something which I could be questioned later. During the search my mother-in-law called on our home phone. She always called us in the morning to know we were all fine. I had enough time only to say in the Crimean Tatar language that we were having a search in our apartment. After that one of the security agents threw the phone: "Speak Russian, I've told you". I replied that according to the Russian constitution there were three national languages in Crimea, one of them was Crimean Tatar. Then he plugged out the telephone cable and we had no choice to inform anybody else.

During the search the security forces noticed our digital camera which we used to take photos of our children with. To keep it I had to show them several dozens of photos made by it. Sure that there were only photos of our children they allowed me to keep the camera. During the search a woman wearing gloves came into the kid's bedroom, to examine all the things in the closet. She threw them on the bed where my little son used to sleep. I asked her to stop but she didn't listen.

All things were orderly folded and put in stocks. She could have easily taken them and put back without that show.

The woman thoroughly searched even through our underwear, examining every single item of clothes and looking into every single pocket, even the smallest ones. They searched for weapon and drugs even in canned food. Fortunately, they gained their common senses and didn't open them.

At that time our neighbors had already woken up. Some of them were outraged by the search. They were not afraid to speak their minds and tried to help us. When one of them tried to break through the security on the fourth floor they didn't allowed her to come in referring to the search. She asked to explain the reason of the search and why she couldn't come into the apartment. She also wondered why they were carrying out a search in the apartment of honest people when real criminals were still free. A woman in civilian clothes, probably, a staff member of FSB too, told argued : "If they were law-abiding we would have never come here!" After the search they read out a protocol. When I was reading it carefully an FSB officer nervously hurried me up. There was no point in reading it again since my husband had already signed it. I asked him: "Are you in a hurry?" And I also added that I would never sign anything without reading it first: "I will read it despite the fact that my husband has signed it". Bringing back the protocol I told him: "Now I understand how Russia tries to build trust with the Crimean Tatars. You are behaving just like soviet soldiers behaved with our relatives in 1944. You won't be loved after all this."

I noticed that it was unpleasant to the FSB agent to hear such words. It made him feel confused and very soon he left the apartment. As a goodbye he uttered: "It was 1944 but now all procedures are performed in accordance with the law". I wished him and his family to feel the power of this "law" the way my family did. After that the squad of FSB left out apartment.

When they were gone, I burst into tears. I had a feeling as if they had rummaged in my soul and publicly revealed everything in it. It was a rude intervention in our life, our apartment, our bedroom...

When my older son woke up he asked: “Mom, what is going on?” The child was scared by the men in masks armed with guns. He was shocked when he saw his construction kit on the floor: “Mom, did they search any grenade launcher in my “Lego”? It was hard to explain to a child why all that was happening.

Shortly thereafter an FSB officer called me and informed that I could get back the removed equipment. I arrived at the Crimean department of FSB at the arranged time but that officer wasn't there. I had to wait for an hour and a half. He began apologizing politely but then he suddenly stated: “Now we have to draw an interrogation report”. Nobody had told me that I would have to testify, though. I refused to talk without a lawyer. Feeling that he had blurted out too much, he excused himself for a wrong formulation – it wasn't going to be an interrogation.

Anyway while compiling the documents needed to return the arrested equipment, he tried to figure out where my husband was, what he was doing and whether he used to come to continental Ukraine. He seemed to be extremely interested in any information about my husband.

It's worth mentioning that after the Russian annexation of Crimea the environment inside the peninsula changed significantly. For example, when I brought my son to kindergarten in 2014 I saw Putin's portraits hanging not only in the playroom but also in the kid's bedroom. On holidays our children were taught to play characters of the Russian fairytales. When we used to meet other children on our way home my son Emir used to ask me: “Mom, are these children Russian or Ukrainian? Our teacher says all children now are Russian since Russia has come”. You find it really difficult to explain such things to a child, you can't find the right words.

To end that nightmare we could only after moving to Kyiv. We left Crimea with two suitcases, we had nothing more.

People often ask us what gets free from the occupants we will do if Crimea. We never even raise that question in our family. We

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

know for sure that we will pack our belongings straight away and return to Crimea. We want to live there, undoubtedly. I am sad to hear my son Emir answer a question where in the world he would like to go to. When other children dream to visit “Disneyland” or European countries our son wishes he could go back to the peninsula. He remembers our life back there in every small detail. He even finds his “Crimean” toys dearer to him than any new ones bought here in the capital. It is a big shame. We need to change it.

Ahtem Chiygoz: Not Betrayers Faced the Trial, but Those Who Had Defended the Laws of the State

A deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, the former deputy of Bakhchysarai District Administration. Since 2014 he has been participating in public movements of resistance against Russian aggression in Crimea. At the age of 50 he was detained by Russia-controlled security forces accused of organizing mass riots outside the Crimean Parliament on February 26, 2014. The trial lasted for more than 2 years. All that time he spent in the detention facility of Simferopol. While being imprisoned he lost his mother who died of a serious illness. The Russian-controlled Supreme Court of Crimea sentenced Ahtem Chiygoz to 8 years of prison. After a while Ahtem Chiygoz together with Ilmi Umerov were transferred to Turkey and then taken to Kyiv.



Ahtem Chiygoz. Photo made by Zair Akadyrov

Last words of Ahtem Chiygoz at the Russian-controlled Supreme Court of Crimea on August 6, 2017:

Before my mother's death I had asked for her forgiveness. I couldn't be with her as a son during the last difficult days of her life. She told me bracing herself up: "I am proud that I have raised such a son". Whatever I do, no matter how rough it gets and whether I will stay alive I am afraid to be disgraced as a person, as a Crimean Tatar and to disappoint my nation that trusted me and elected me to the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people.

Several deportations which actually can be called genocidal were to clear the Crimean territory from the Crimean Tatar ethnic community, to remove their history and memory about the nation completely. Every Crimean Tatar takes an oath and feels the responsibility for the destiny of his nation and his motherland.

The nation elects its leaders by itself. Nothing has crushed the will of the nation, nothing could destroy the identity, love to own mother land which inherited by every next generation.

For the Crimean Tatars as well as for any other nation civic duty, patriotism and national dignity are big values. On February 26, 2014 the Crimean Tatars and other citizens of Ukraine protested against the threat of territorial integrity of Ukraine and demanded to bring all political cheaters and scoundrels to criminal responsibility. Further, at the time of the occupation the Crimean Tatars together with other citizens of Ukraine continue to perform their public duty despite all provocations of pro-Russian forces: kidnapping, murders, searches, arrests, ban on the memorial events, high fines for any manifestation of dissent, repressions.

The political criminal case that went down in history as a “case of February 26” has been lasting for more than 2 years. It is aimed at intimidating of the Crimean Tatars, suppressing and minimizing their actions to defend their rights, to support Ukraine and the world community which don’t recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea. It is obvious that the criminal case against Ahtem Chiygoz doesn’t exist. Those incidents, which happened on February 26, 2014 at the rally organized by the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, were provoked by those who further promoted the military occupation of Crimea. Not the betrayers are facing the trial, not those whose aims and intentions were to violate the territorial integrity of Ukraine, who have kidnapped and killed people, who have abused power, but those who have defended the laws of the state, the international standards and rules. The state-occupant carries out “the legal proceedings”, although it is not authorized to do so. In such a situation taking into account the true intentions of those who have their interest in this proceeding we cannot speak about objectivity and independence of the court. I was destined to accept this “court sentence” for the Crimean Tatar nation from the Russian Federation that had occupied my motherland.

*Published on Facebook on August 9, 2017 by Mykola Polozov,
a Russian lawyer of Ahtem Chiygoz.*

Volodymyr Balukh: Breaking My Vows Was Enough not to Be Imprisoned

A Crimean farmer from Serebrianka of Rozdolnensk district. He supported the Euromaidan and refused to recognize the Russian authority in Crimea expressing his protest by hanging out a Ukrainian flag and a plate "Heaven's Hundred Heroes Street" on his house.



*Volodymyr Balukh.
Photo provided
by "Crimea.Realities"*

Russian FSB started to persecute him for this. During two searches in his house Russian special agents attempted to threaten him and forcibly removed the flag. However, it appeared again on the house of the activist. He was fined and sent to a detention unit for this.

In December 2016 the third search was carried out in the house of Balukh. During that search Russian-controlled operative agents unexpectedly found ammunition and TNT slabs on the roof which was a good reason to get him charged for crime. During the trial, it came out that the removed ammunition was made in Russian Barnaul where Volodymyr Balukh had never been. He spent almost a year in the detention unit. He didn't admit his guilt in return for a milder punishment.

On August 4, 2017 Rozdolnensk District Court found him guilty of ammunition storage and sentenced him to 3 years and 7 months of a standard regime penal colony and a fine of 10,000 Russian rubles.

During the consideration of his appeal Volodymyr Balukh spent 1.5 month under a house arrest without a right to leave the house even to go to the toilet.

After the second hearing of the case the Rozdolnensk District Court reduced the sentence and changed it into a settlement colony for the same period of time. During hearing of “the case” against Volodymyr Balukh and his detention he was charged for two more crimes: disrupting the work of a detention unit and use of force against personnel of a detention unit.

Law enforcement organizations and government institutions of Ukraine and Europe recognized that Volodymyr Balukh was persecuted for political reasons, namely, for his public support of Ukraine in the annexed Crimea. His story has become a remarkable example of the methods used by the repressive machine of the Russian authority in Crimea against those who embody a peaceful movement of resistance against the annexation of Crimea.

The last words of Volodymyr Balukh in Russian-controlled Rozdolnensk District Court on August 3, 2017

I will not tell anything to the Court, I am speaking to people, not only those who are here, but to those who are outside this building.

I have to start by saying that there is no criminal case, only a comedy performed by those who were ordered to. The matter isn't any ammunition, any substance which the court recognized TNT, there are no reasons for that. The decision to send me to prison was made when the occupation of Crimea began. This complicate situation around me has lasted since 1999 when I took part in the elections not only as a candidate but also as a member of the District Election Commission for the first time. Since that time I have served at Election Commissions, both District and Local. The reason for the trial and all this attention to me is my principle position.

People often say: “We have not lived a normal life, let our children live happily”. Trying to earn a welfare for our children we often forget one simple thing: the happiness of our children can't be guaranteed if we don't bring up a generation with a strong need of free-

dom, a generation ready to punish the state authorities every time they abuse their power thus moving ahead and improving our lives. Life is a great gift given to everyone and a big test. Burning this life people should understand that their freedom, honor and dignity are only in their hands.

I don't know any state in history that defended human honor and dignity. Undertaking a certain function every state has a monopoly on violence and pledges to defend honor, dignity and rights which is only a small formality. Indeed, this monopoly is used for one single purpose: to protect from people, to abuse them, to make them do what needs to be done not for the sake of the state as a structure, but for certain people who were privileged to be chosen as politicians and got an access to particular resources and who act like monopolists for human rights and dignity.

If any person doesn't agree with any decision because of some objective reasons it is always possible to break his/her will, to destroy that person, to take away his/her health and life using a state machine. Such machine will always do what it takes since the most sacred things are at stake: money, an opportunity to own and use those things which belong to the entire world, to all people of the earth. Therefore, I think if one day, God forbid, people forget such words as freedom, honor and dignity, this world will cease to exist. The word exists until such people live. If God gives me that good fortune, the number of such people will increase, the state, without which we cannot exist at this moment of history, and its structures will have to be improved. Everywhere this happens only under the public pressure.

What is happening to me is a bright example of how a state machine shouldn't work. Nothing is sacred, there are no legitimate reasons, and nothing can affect the injustice you see. This is the first reason why I am here. The second one is my love to my motherland, everything I consist of, my nationality, memory of my forefathers. All of them were Ukrainians, decent people who maintained tradi-

tions. That's just how my parents raised me. My motherland for me is the same as my mother, my family and children.

The occupation of Crimea was a starting point. The details of 2010 didn't appear in this case coincidentally. The system has successfully absorbed and broken such people as me, many of them have accepted it. Since that is the way the system works: I had a choice. If I had forgotten my own principles confessing my guilt, breaking my vows would have been enough not to be imprisoned. This man right in front of me would have sentenced me not to 5 years and a month, but to 2-3 years instead and, probably, I would have got a probation – I just had to break my vows.

Well, I don't really want this world to cease to exist. I don't want to be blamed for weakness by my descendants and Ukrainian children. Surely, there were objective reasons, nobody wants to go through what I'm going now. Any person can be understood, but the best years of my life have passed and now I can't afford to act as a coward. Let things happen the way they do.

The only thing I want is to ask my sister to apologize on my behalf to my mother.

*Published on August 3, 2017 on the Internet page
of Crimean Human Rights Group.*

Natalia Balukh: This State Takes My Son Away from Me, I am Afraid that I Will Never See Him Again

The Mother of the Crimean activist Volodymyr Balukh prosecuted for public support of Ukraine. She was born in Ivano-Frankivsk. She has lived in Crimea since 1960. She is a pensioner. After her son had been sentenced by the Russian security forces in Crimea she sent a letter to the President of Russia, V. Putin.



*Nataliia Balukh.
Photo provided
by "Crimea.Realities"*

Volodymyr Volodymyrovych! I, Balukh Natalia Volodymyrivna, am appealing to you with bitter mother's pain and a call for prudence and honesty!

I think you know since it is not a secret that a massive campaign for "fighting terrorism and extremism", popularly known as fighting against dissent, has been launched in Crimea. I have doubts that any terroristic threat exists in Crimea, but the fact that the Crimean authority is removing dissenting activists and ordinary people under the guise of fighting terrorism became a well-known fact.

My son, Balukh Volodymyr Hryhorovych, a well-known activist in Crimea, Ukraine and elsewhere, hasn't escaped this fate and was sentenced to 3 years and 7 months of prison for made-up accusation and false evidence on August 4, 2017!

He is just a farmer, a peasant with a higher education. He has never violated moral standards and I am sure he will never break them. My son has taken part in all election campaigns as a member of the District or Local Election Commission since 1999, he has also stood

for a head of a village council several times. He has always advocated the legality of the elections, criticized openly and objectively illegal and sometimes criminal actions of the local authority and for that reason he was persecuted by representatives of the last one.

In December 2013 as a sign of solidarity with the Ukrainian nation – his nation – in its struggle against the anti-national regime of Yanukovych – my son hung up a Ukrainian flag on the house wall of his wife and refused to remove it after the events of March 2014 despite threats of local authority and security forces.

Having become emboldened due to the impunity for their criminal acts which had prevailed in FSB, MVD and any authority in general, on April 30 2015 security forces carried out an illegal search in the house of my son's wife and in our house. Supporting their actions by an absolutely false and made-up report they removed the national flag of Ukraine, stole son's personal possessions under the guise of the search of some details which had been stolen in the village located 25 kilometers away from our village. They didn't find anything "stolen", but left a complete mess inside the houses, garages and in the yards. Then during the next week they came together with an armed assault team, got into our houses without showing any documents and demanded to turn over our son who wasn't at home at that time to them. My daughter-in-law and I spent May holidays in such realities...

After a short peacefulness on November 14, 2015 they came with the second search. Using a similar false record they "searched" for a car stolen in the district center that time. They broke into the house, beat up my son, handcuffed him and took to the district police station, and carried out the search without him.

This looked like a shire armed robbery: all "officers" were in civilian clothes, drunk and even brought attesting witnesses from the district center, actually, former criminals. They didn't find anything; however, they blamed my son for insulting a police officer on duty and sentenced him to 10 days of administrative detention. But it

wasn't enough for them and on the fifth day of my son's detention they issued a criminal case against him according to the paragraph 319 of the Criminal Code of RF (insulting a police officer on duty) since they decided to punish him for the same action twice which was a direct violation of the law.

All year my son had to participate in the proceeding for fabricated accusations against him. During that year the representatives of the local authority threatened him and told him that they could find some drugs or ammunition if he didn't remove the Ukrainian flag from the roof and they "would start treating him differently".

My son openly told about his situation and threats of the authority to Ukrainian and foreign journalists. His interviews are in open access on the Internet and it could be easily checked.

However, the blind Lady Justice represented by two District and two Appeal Courts turned out to be also deaf and couldn't hear well-reasoned arguments and truthful testimonies of my son and his wife, and as a result it sentenced him to 320 hours of community service.

Being well aware that he was subjected to the defamation campaign to discredit him and, together with him, everything Ukrainian my son refused to perform such community service and continued to appeal against the sentence applying a paper to the cassation.

In autumn 2016 Rozdolnensk District Court changed 320 hours of community service into 40 days of settlement imprisonment.

Right after the decision was issued dozens of people came to my house and his wife's house with an order of special investigative operation.

I am not going to describe that act of brutality in details and will just mention that in our house they carried out a little search as a pure formality and immediately headed to his wife's house where he was at that moment. My daughter-in-law told me that two armed men wearing flak jackets and helmets broke into the house, immediately trapped my son in one of the rooms to deprive

him from an opportunity to move around the house and posted "a guard" with a gun at the door. He got refused to have a lawyer. There were about 15 of agents in the house and the yard behaving in a rude and violent manner. They removed the flag broke a detail of the roof to which a flagpole was attached, they didn't take off their dirty shoes, abused my son because of his nationality. Moreover, I would like to mention the fact that it was under the national flag of Ukraine, the reason of all persecutions, they found the ammunition (from the third attempt).

A significant fact in this regard is that one of the attesting witnesses was the Piatkovskyi who had written the false report making a reason of the search on November 14, 2015 aimed at making-up any accusations against my son.

The situation repeated and they heroically found the ammunition, handcuffed my son and took to the district center where the court issued a preventive measure in the form of imprisonment. The only argument in that court's order of preventive measure was possession of the passport of Ukraine!!!

I recall the scenes of chronicles from NKVD archives (The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, abbreviated in Russian – NKVD) where on an old piece of paper of execution cards of 1932-1938 under the item "cause of death" it said "Ukrainian"...

I feel sorry for the country where any innocent person could be sentenced to prison, where the law-enforcement system doesn't defend the law, but represents a repression machine, where using the resources of state people settle personal scores. I don't clearly understand whether they do this with your tacit approval or the officers of the Security Service of Ukraine who have become the officers of FSB of Russia by accident give you wrong information? If the first option is correct I am really worried about the future of Crimea.

If enthusiastic subordinates are attempting to get in favour of new directors this way, it is even more terrifying. It is terrible to

realize that a chairman can be tricked so easily. It's been 8 months since December 8, 2016, that I have not seen my son. The nefarious hand of the statesman has removed him from my life, locked him within prison walls, full of fleas, cockroaches, with antihuman conditions of life in Simferopol Detention Unit. I couldn't attend the court hearing for health reasons.

For those 8 months the accusation has not provided any evidence of his guilt. The only phrase states: "Illegally bought and kept". Where did he buy? Who sold it to him? When did he buy? The investigators didn't even try to find answers to these questions.

The defence appeal to check the affiliation of removed ammunition was denied. Even those incomplete assessment examinations which were appointed thanks to the efforts of the lawyers have proven that my son has never touched those things found during the special investigative operation. The testimonies of witnesses of accusation detected a huge number of procedural irregularities made by the investigators, policemen and officers of FSB. However, they didn't appear on the court hearing to testify despite all efforts made by the lawyers.

Besides there are also facts of the fabrication of materials of this criminal case by the accusation. Son's lawyers provided a series of evidence proving the case to be fabricated, but the judge ignored any evidence of the defense. Thus, my son was found guilty and sentenced to 3 years and 7 months of prison.

Instead of releasing him immediately, compensating his losses and bringing to justice those who had been promoted to higher ranks, violating all rules and laws ruthlessly!!!

Every day on TV you declare the power of your state, exceptional spirituality of the Russian nation and inspire the nation to preserve their "own" state and defend it from somebody.

You continue speaking from my TV-set, but I don't turn it off since I am afraid of being alone in my house, I just mute it and I am convinced with every cell of my painful body, every fibre of my being: the state that took my father and orphaned me at the age of 3,

RUSSIAN REPRESSIONS IN CRIMEA

that left me alone stroll around the world until I settled in Crimea, the state, being a head of which you are proud of, took away all my savings and left only joint disease, inguinal hernia and arthritis as a remembrance of rural labor “for the benefit of the motherland”. And now the same state is taking away my son whom I have not already seen for 8 months and who am afraid never to see again I wouldn’t wish it on my worst enemy when at the age of 75 the dearest person, your hope and support, is taken from you, the root linking you to this world is torn out from your flesh.

As it turned out we live in different states, Volodymyr Volodymyrovych...

My son isn’t guilty; my son will not make any compromises. We have lived in Crimea a happy and honest life and only now we feel “the smell” of repressions and lawlessness. Even though these repressions are carried out by the former security agents of Ukraine and those who “re-swore” to Russia, the President of Russia is the guarantor of the Constitution, human rights and freedom of the citizens. Otherwise, I must have misunderstood something if in the modern world powerful states are afraid of a particular person who tells the truth and loves HIS motherland so much that they are ready to send this person to prison by all means and neglecting their own Constitution?!

The appeal was published on August 8, 2017.

Archbishop Klyment (Pavlo Kushch): I Thought the Church Would Be Knocked Down, but, as It Turned Out, Terrible Things Happened in Crimea

An Archbishop of Simferopol and Crimea of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP). He was born in Crimea. He is the leader of the Crimean eparchy UOC-KP, its parishioner and churches have been subjected to attacks and repressions of "Crimean self-defense" since 2014.



Archbishop Klyment. Photo made by Anatolii Kovalskiy

In one of the UOC-KP churches a cross had excreted myrrh before the annexation of the Crimea. It happened in winter of 2014. In Yevpatoriia we were just finishing up building of the Church of the Precious and Life-creating Cross which was burnt down in November 2013 during the Euromaidan demonstrations. Before Christmas Father Yaroslav, the priest of that church, and I set up a new cupola and a cross for the money raised by Ukrainians on the Euromaidan after the arson. After that we served a Divine Liturgy. During the Divine Liturgy I noticed drops of colourless liquid pouring out from under the crucifixion of Savior Jesus Christ on the Cross. Father Yaroslav had also noticed it earlier. He explained to me that it had started soon after the arson of the church. We decided to mark that place with an icon's frame to see what would happen next. However, everything dried up soon, no sign of the liquid was left. The Cross was made of hard wood, the liquid poured out from under the iron cross which was attached to the wood cross. That fact impressed us, since if the drops poured out from the wood

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

fibers it would be understandable. Moreover, the cross was covered with a thin layer of varnish, thus, it wasn't a natural phenomenon, but it was a paranormal phenomenon. I remember saying that we had to get prepared for worse things. I thought the church would be knocked down, but, as it turned out, terrible things happened in the Crimea.

On February 26-27 I was next to the walls of the Vekhovna Rada of the Crimean Autonomous Republic together with a Ukrainian community and parishioners of Kyiv Patriarchate. We did everything we could. The Crimean Tatars were shouting: “Allahu Akbar!” The Ukrainians were shouting: “Ukraine above all!” We were together in that difficult time and defended our country from the enemy that had broken into our peaceful life. We defended the territorial integrity of our state. That day I received several calls from the Patriarchate, everyone was scared, it was hard to understand what was going on. In the evening Patriarch Filaret called me. He was definitely worried even though he tried to calm me down. When Russian militaries started to block Ukrainian military bases we received alarm calls from parishes, churches of which located outside Simferopol. In Simferopol we organized people and focused on work. An initiative group gathered within the church walls to develop a plan of actions. Our task was to defend a military base on Pavlenko Street since there was a risk that it would be blocked and captured. We organized several mass actions near the base for the support of the militaries.

The toughest test was a situation in Perevalne village when the military base was encircled and the church of St. Mary the Protectress located near the checkpoints of that military base was seized at the same time. I had to go to Perevalne although I still didn't realize how dangerous it was. When I arrived I finally understood that the situation was much worse. It was the first time I thought about how close the death was. The Holiest Patriarch Filaret called me several times that day, as if he felt something bad happening. I believe his call saved me since I was standing near the entrance of

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

military base at gunpoint and surrounded by cossacks. The situation was tense, but his call made me step aside.

The church hierarch Fedir came from Poltava. He brought food, clothes. At that time it was a heroic deed since he had passed the checkpoints of pro-Russian self-defense on his way. We went to other military bases with him. It was terrible to learn about the kidnapping of Andrii Shchekun, the leader of the movement “Euromaidan Crimea” (on March 9). This incident was a sign of bad times coming to our land. The effective resistance against the occupation of the Crimea had been almost eliminated.

As the Archbishop of Simferopol and Crimea, I did my best to defend the Ukrainian military bases against capturing by the Russian aggressors. Nowadays I am doing everything to preserve peace and tranquility in our country. We pray together with parishioners, take part in events organized by the community and our parishes. We are together in good times and bad ones.

They aren't persecuting me, but they are destroying our churches, our life, trying to break me.

For example:

— Attempts to extract a land plot of 0.5 hectares in Simferopol to build apartments for FSB officers in the Crimea;

— Prohibition on building a church in Simferopol due to the absence of Russian registration of our religious organization;

— The Head of the Village Council of Oktiaberske village of Pervomaisk district extracted a church house from the property of the religious community and provided it to the property of the Village Council;

— Due to the absence of the registration according to the Russian laws the electricity supply was disconnected in the church of Ostrovske village of Pervomaisk district;

— Attempts to prohibit sermons in the church of Yevpatoriia based on the absence of the Russian registration of our religious organization;

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

— Prohibition on using vehicles with Ukrainian licensed plate numbers.

On October 10, 2016 the administration of the Crimean Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate hadn't been re-registered according to the Russian laws. According to the Order of 2016 signed by the Head of the Russian Government Medvediev, the property of Ukrainian institutions and organizations which hadn't been re-registered in Crimea should be nationalized within the Russian law.

The Crimean Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate as a center of national, cultural and spiritual life in the Crimea are constantly facing persecutions leading to complete elimination of the Ukrainian Orthodox community.

Moscow is constantly pressing to make us re-register our church according to the Russian law. In case of denial they will raise the question about a complete elimination of the Crimean Diocese of UOC-KP. The absence of the legitimate registration was the reason of the court's refusal to give me a permission to visit Volodymyr Balukh in the detention facility, since my authority hadn't been proven by the Russian laws.

I am an Archbishop and have to be on the cathedra together with my parishioners, that is how all Archbishops were on their cathedra in the times of persecution and demolishing shrines. When all these events were beginning, the Holiest Patriarch Filaret said: “Christ was persecuted; prelates were persecuted and killed for their faith and truth, but if I am to be killed let it happen only serving to God. Since it is a big difference: to speak about that and to live it. However, God will help us”. Nowadays I can prove that his words are true. God helps us. It is my land where I was born. I am a native resident of the Crimea. My home, my parishioners, our church are there.

Before the occupation the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate in the Crimea used to have 52 registered religious in-

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

stitutions. 23 clergymen worked in the Crimean Diocese. Now only 9 communities exist in the Crimea and 8 clergymen work. Nowadays the Crimean Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate is endangered on the peninsula.

During those events of capturing the Crimea we were not afraid as well as we aren't now. When you are running through a minefield you have to run, since if you stop you will die. The Lord said that those who put their hands on a plow shouldn't turn around. I try to do everything honestly and from the goodness of my heart. There is no lie or falseness in anything I do, since lie is together with evil, but the truth is with God. Thus, I am not afraid because we are together with God and a prayer of our Holiest Patriarch Filaret. Everyone should be afraid of the own sins as this war discovered a lot of dirt.

For example, sometimes I have to speak with the Crimean statesmen, but the problems in question remain unsolved. Crimes committed in 2014 remain unresolved: seizure of the church by the representatives of Moscow Patriarchate and local squads of “self-defense” in Perevalne village of Simferopol region; an attempt to capture the Cathedral Church in Simferopol by the representatives of Russian “Taurid Cossacks”; the seizure of our church in Sevastopol; burning of bishop's summer house in Mramorne village of Simferopol district. These are the crimes of the first wave against Kyiv Patriarchate in the Crimea which are still uninvestigated.

In the morning of August 31, 2017 Russian occupying services blocked the Church of both Sacred Equal Apostles Volodymyr and Olha of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate in Simferopol. It is the main and the only church functioning in the city. Bailiffs injured my hand, when I tried to get inside and to defend the church they grabbed my hand and twisted it using physical force against me.

The administration of the Diocese appealed to the courts complaining about the capturing of the churches in Sevastopol city and

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

Perevalne village, and the illegal actions of bailiffs who tried to capture the church in Simferopol. The Courts tried to refuse, but they had to accept complaints. The Investigation committee and Prosecutor’s Office didn’t find any crime in those acts committed against parishioners of the Crimean Diocese of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate. How can we live in such a difficult situation in the Crimea?

We should pray since a prayer has a power which keeps us burning. It is faith and love. And we also hope for God’s mercy. I believe that the Crimea is Ukrainian. Where truth is, there is bound to be freedom. Therefore, we should never lose faith. Let God decide...

Ihor Movenko: Masked Men Knocked Me Down and Took into the Bus

A resident of Sevastopol city. He has lived there since his childhood. He works in the sphere of logistics. The native language is Russian. Since 2016 he has been persecuted by Russian security services for his pro-Ukrainian position. In September 2016 he was brutally beaten up in broad daylight since he had attached stickers with Ukrainian trident and flag to his bike as well as symbols of Ukrainian Azov Battalion.

Witnesses of that incident supported the attacker and were aggressive to beat Movenko. The video shows a policeman shaking hands with the attacker. Nobody helped Movenko that day. He received medical treatment only in hospital.

The resident of Sevastopol city returned to the police to find and punish the attacker, but the police refused to initiate any criminal proceedings. Then "Crimean Human Rights Group" found out that Ihor Movenko had been attacked by a former officer of the Squad of Special Assignment "Berkut" of Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine.

Since April 2017 Ihor Movenko has been persecuted according to the paragraph 2 chapter 280 of the Criminal Code ("public calls for extremist activities") for his posts on social media. According to his words, FSB officers attempted to get a confession out of him using beating and threats. On May 4, 2018 Haharin District Court of Sevastopol sentenced Ihor Movenko to 2 years of prison. The sentence imposed was more severe than the Prosecutor had requested. He requested a probation imprisonment.



Photo from the archive of Ihor Movenko

In 2014 before "the referendum" out-of-towners and local "scums" were engaged in the repressions against pro-Ukrainian people. I witnessed how they caught men in the street and took them somewhere.

 **КРЫМСКАЯ
ПРАВозАЩИТНАЯ
ГРУППА**

22.04.2017

**Полицейский, избивший
украинского активиста Мовенко в
Крыму, — сотрудник «Беркута»**



Крымской правозащитной группе стало известно имя «беркутовца», который в Севастополе избил украинца Игоря Мовенко за размещенную на раме его велосипеда украинскую символику. Им оказался бывший сотрудник подразделения особого назначения МВД Украины «Беркут» **Владимир Суходольский**, который в 2014 году изменил присяге и служит в российской полиции.

“Crimean Human Rights Group” found out that Ihor Movenko had been attacked by the former officer of the Squad of Special Assignment “Berkut”.

On the birthday of a Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, on March 9, 2014 near his monument 200 people gathered. It was the only one and last event here in support of Ukraine. The Local media were there. My wife and I also were there and we know exactly how that all ended up. After old people and families went home young people who were still there were attacked by a crowd of out-of-towners led by armed people. The Local police saw everything but didn't act. The demonstrators were beaten, but the local media showed that event as the apprehension of extremists despite the fact that only attackers were armed.

Since Russian has been ruling we lost many friends. Back then when the events were taking place I demonstrated my national identity as I could. Although many people, even pro-Ukrainian ones, used to criticize me and say: “Are you out of your mind? How could you show it in Sevastopol?! I’m not surprised that you have been abused”.

However, we are doing what we have to do. Putin turned me from a real admirer of everything Russian and Russia in general into a real Ukrainian, “banderivets” if you want to call me so. I started to analyze the situation deeply, learn history more carefully. Having an exaggerated sense of justice I considered that the truth was more important than consequences. I am sure that everything that had happened to me showed the world that even a peaceful and law-abiding man in the occupied Crimea could become a victim because of his nationality. This is a simple chauvinism, manifestation of racial superiority. I think that this is the national idea of the Russian authority and something that unites its supporters.

After the occupation of Crimea the justice is absent here. Any case fabricated in FSB will surely have consequences for an accused person since the Crimean judge just blindly follows instructions and political conjuncture. You may have the best lawyer but that would not prevent them from sentencing you. All your arguments would be ignored as it was in my case for the symbols of Azov battalion.

The case concerning beating me near a shopping mall in Sevastopol has not been issued yet. The Local security services have been impeding this process by all means. The investigator didn’t want to prosecute this case. Since the person who did that is a hero. I know exactly that he is a former officer of the Squad of Special Assignment “Berkut” who took part in assaulting of peaceful people during the Revolution of Dignity in Kyiv.

Moreover, when we started to file police reports they resorted to FSB.

In accordance with denunciation of “a concerned citizen from Sevastopol” they started verifying the version that I was an extremist. On December 16, 2016 I went to work. Unknown people were waiting for me on my way in two cars. Guys in masks and in civilian clothes got out of the cars, knocked me down and took into a van. Then they started to beat me. After that they took me to my working place, removed my phone and computer.

Then they took me home. They beat and abused me in the way. They confiscated the keys to my apartment and opened the door by themselves. My wife was at home. Fortunately, my daughter was at school at that moment.

They removed all computers from my apartment. They didn't allow my wife to call the lawyer, threatened. Then they took me to FSB of Sevastopol (the former building of the Department of Security Service of Ukraine). There they carried out an interrogation and attempted to make me confess that I had called people for extremism in my comments in “VKontakte”. FSB officers showed me printed screenshots of my comments on the Internet and claimed that the word “Shoot” was the appeal for extremism.

However, there were other posts which were considered by FSB officers as the calls. Now on the basis of this evidence they instituted a criminal case according to the paragraph 280 of the Criminal Code of Russia. Probably, I will be sentenced to a probation, prison or a fine.

Surely, you could ask me why I haven't left Crimea yet. First of all, it's hard to leave everything and go away. Secondly, we have financial difficulties for this step. My family and I plan to move from Sevastopol but not this way. I don't want it to look like an escape act. We have nobody in continental Ukraine who could help us. My only hope is security service. However, we would like to move to Odesa. I like this city and used to live near the sea. I think Odesa spiritually appeals to my family.

Valenyna Movenko: I Took Everything Out from the Bag: “Don’t Be Afraid, There Are No Bombs, Only a Ball”

A wife of Ihor Movenko who is being persecuted by Russian security forces in Crimea. She was born in Kerch. She works in the sphere of commerce. The native language is Russian. She lives in Sevastopol.

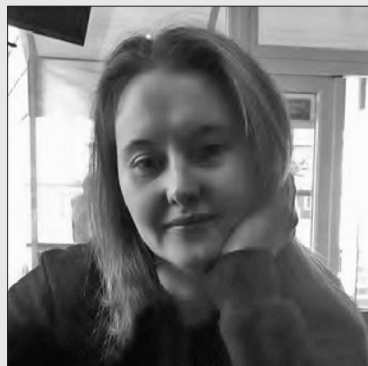


Photo from the archive of Valenyna Movenko

Personally, I think the occupation of Crimea looked like sinking “Titanic”: it was cold, unavoidable and full of maniacal hopes for salvation. It lasted until September 7, 2016.

On that day an unknown woman called me at midday and said: “Your husband is laying in a pool of blood near the shop “Novus””.

Everything changed at that moment. The speed of sinking into an icy hell was unbelievable: no signs of humanity in the crowd, ridicule of “security agents”, a trophy-winning pose of “a law enforcement officer” near his broken head. There weren’t any documents, any answers, just an order: “Step away from the detainee!” I took out everything from the bag: “Don’t be afraid, there are no bombs, only a ball”. I could only film everything with a low-quality camera of my phone.

Ambulance. The attacker shouted: “I would have killed him!” I have no doubts: he could kill him in other circumstances (in the evening, no witnesses).

Hospitalization of my Ihor. We went together: me with a ball, Ihor, the ambulance team and the convoy. Running around of doctors and convoy following them, an abusing interrogation of an officer from Department “E”. The fear of despair was so strong that it was hard to breath and I had no strength to cry. Conversely, I felt anger with occupants, traitors, helplessness, loneliness and that he had been there alone and I didn’t have any gun, they did though.

My friend came and brought the passport. Now it became his duty to guard the ball. Svitlana who had called me from the shop found me at hospital. Thus, I wasn’t sinking any more since my safeguards came. They all spoke to me, gave contacts of bloggers, journalists. Ira, a lawyer, had never seen nor heard me before, but she wrote about that incident everywhere she could. That was her who together with “Crimean banderivets” (nickname of the Crimean activist – Author) would search a lawyer and write to “Crimea SOS”.

At that moment I was out of the Internet (memorable meeting with “Trolls from Olgino”²⁸ was waiting for me at that moment), I was watching through the glass how five officers were questioning my husband not allowing him even to rake a seat. I couldn’t stop that and I helped him only by the fact that I wasn’t detained. However, Ukraine represented by its public and journalists was already together with us, we weren’t alone.

Another issue is Crimean courts. It is a funny demonstration of unity of local collaborators. They are not really worth describing them, being nervous and crying. Spontaneous decisions as well

28 “The Trolls from Olgino” is a group of internet activists who posted information and comments on different internet platforms for spreading of Russian propaganda. The term “Trolls from Olgino” is derived from the location of office equipped for Internet trolling, which was found by Russian journalists in Olgino village in the historical region of Russian Saint-Petersburg in 2013. Later this term has become general terms denoting trolls who spread pro-Russian propaganda.

as well-reasoned ones are absent. Their decisions represent what “law enforcement officers” ordered them.

The search. “Russian world” was represented by Yakut from FSB, the chief of convoy who smelt of booze and former officers of the Security Service of Ukraine and policemen. The rule of law was absent but the native street slang was presented. Ihor was “lost” for 4 hours. It couldn’t be planned, the lawyer was slightly shocked but I had a deeper shock. Then he was released. I am sure all Ukraine saved us. It supports us, as well as gives us the strengths to move forward. The occupants are afraid of the truth and publicity. Our confrontation is the fight of fears. They have betrayed, they have stolen, and they know that and they feel fear. Everybody is scared.

They will be tried and they understand that. Their new motherland can abandon them, let them down but they can’t help doing things they are told to even if the latest are unbelievably horrible. They are afraid, that fear is tearing them apart and turns into monsters, ready for anything, to protect their emperor. Having understood that, I have stopped being scared of phone calls.

Three months of silence. It’s not that I didn’t expect to meet FSB again, but I had a tiny hope... Our home computer was removed.

I was going to an interrogation, Okean Elzy “Bez mezh (Without limits)” was playing in my headphones. I don’t know how to thank Sviatoslav Vakarchuk for this album. I couldn’t help believing that everything would be fine. The strategy changed. Russian security agents found Criminal Code of USSR of Stalin era somewhere: bullies started wearing costumes and started to epitomize the justice. They were offended since Ihor had called traitors as traitors. They were searching for a way to clear their name.

I am holding on. We are holding on.

In the last several months I have lost many close friends. It is hard to realize. However, I found unexpected support in other people.

I didn’t call my friend of my childhood living in another city not to insert into this. When my husband heard his accusation I decided

RUSSIAN REPRESSIONS IN CRIMEA

to call her. I told her everything. I was afraid of judgement. We cried for one hour. Sometimes I feel despair. At such moments I remember every one of my relatives and friends, people I know who support us. They are in Ukraine, in different regions. I know they think about us and the lump in my throat disappears.

We will definitely be together.

Ilmi Umerov: Functionaries of Kremlin Tried “to Convince” Every Crimean Deputy to Vote for “Referendum”

The former Head of Bakhchysarai district government administration, an activist of the Crimean Tatar movement, a member of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People. Since 2016 he has been persecuted for public support of the Mejlis and Ukraine. In 2017 Simferopol District Court sentenced him to 2 years of settlement imprisonment for “public calls for violation of territorial integrity of Russia”. He didn’t serve his prison term since he was transferred to Turkish authority and then to Ukraine in exchange for Russians accused of spying in Turkey.



*Photo from the archive
of Ilmi Umerov*

I think that the decision to capture Crimea was made in Kremlin on February 23, 2014, even though this decision hadn’t been considered by the local authority yet. The Crimean leaders and deputies knew about the real plans of Putin’s subordinates not more than the other Crimeans. Nobody asked them, they only got an order to hold “a referendum” to legitimize military seizure of the peninsula.

I was the only one from the Heads of the district government administrations of Crimea who refused to participate in the preparation and holding that “referendum” and called everyone to boycott it. One more person sharing this view was the Bilohirst mayor Albert Kangiev.

Anyway, the “referendum” was prepared and held by representatives of the former “Party of Regions”. On the day of the “referendum” each voting station opened its doors to let the occupants in except for a couple of those that remained closed.

I would like to mention that before February 27 there was a moment when the other heads of the district government administrations doubted too whether they had to support the events that were going on. They were torn apart: on the one hand, they belonged to one party and its institutions demanded to take part in that “referendum” and its preparation, but, on the other hand, the Crimean government run by Anatolii Mohyliov called all heads of districts asking not to attend the session on which a question about the dismissal of the Crimean government would be considered.

However, I don’t know any head of the Crimean district who would make a public statement against the session and the government dismissal. Even if they understood something, anyway they kept on performing the general directives and chose to go with the stream. I became aware that Kremlin functionaries coming to the peninsula in 2014 used to pay a visit to every head of the district and deputies of the Crimean parliament together with “Crimean self-defense” and “tried to convince” each of them to vote for the dismissal of the Crimean government and arranging the “referendum”.

They didn’t come to me, apparently, since they couldn’t persuade me. I had publicly apoken my mind and wouldn’t change it.

My subordinates as well as the other Crimean statesmen had sworn allegiance to the peninsula at peaceful times. However, now they suddenly became such devoted supporters of Russia that not every pro-Russian activist could speak of the admired country as highly as them. They immediately betrayed Ukraine. After “the referendum” I continued to hold my position for the period of changes.

At that moment we worked according to the Ukrainian law. All the changes were initially supposed to be done until December 2014. In fact, it all ended in September when the elections for local councils of Crimea were held now in accordance with the Russian law. Our land started living the way the Russian constitution assigned.

I left my position in August 2014. The last stamp of Bakhchysarai district government administration with a Ukrainian trident decorated my employment record.

The criminal case against me was triggered by the live interview for the Crimean Tatar channel ATR on March 19, 2016. Russian investigation, in particular, paid attention to my words concerning a possibility of providing the support by international organizations and world's leading countries for the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People. I said that it was possible only for that part of the Mejlis which was in continental Ukraine. For the Crimean part of the Mejlis their support would be useful if they strengthened sanctions so that Russia abandoned the Crimea and Donbas itself. That's why Russian officers instituted the criminal case.

While I was giving the interview for ATR there had already been instituted the first criminal cases against Crimeans according to the article 280 paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of Russia. I understood that I would be the next accused... Claiming that I didn't know know about the possible consequences would be a lie I could foresee the outcome, but in my opinion it was wrong to remain silent in order to prevent this.

The only positive thing I could tell about is that the investigation was carried out more or less respectfully to me in comparison to the other cases. I often attend court hearings against my countrymen and see how their detention terms are extended and how rudely the judges and the prosecutors behave. Probably, I was treated better because I had been a statesman for a long time and many people in the Crimea knew me, or because of the fact that I was a member of the Mejlis.

All the accusations against me eventually fell apart. Obviously, the FBS agents hadn't learn how to work, but used to bribe prosecutors and judges. Therefore, if they fabricate any case they don't even try to do it carefully. They simply didn't think through my case well enough.

Due to the criminal persecution I spent a year with some restrictions. Restricted residence prevented me from leaving Bakhchysarai without the investigator's approval.

For some time I didn't feel any changes in my relationships with friends, former subordinates and ex-directors. Before the criminal case was arranged, everyone used to communicate with me when they saw me near the district administration building. But when my persecution started a Russian-controlled new head of the administration prohibited all the staff members to keep in touch with me. It is psychologically impossible to live in the occupied Crimea. The effect of Russia is everywhere here and due to this you feel desperate.

I had a chance to leave the Crimea in 2014. When Petro Poroshenko was elected to be a President, he offered me high positions in the Ukrainian authority. I said no.

I was ready to serve a sentence in a Russian prison if only I could have an opportunity to come back home. After the verdict of the Court I even packed a small bag with necessary items beforehand. However, everything went not the way I had expected.

After the verdict my health became much worse and I turned up in hospital. Due to this my serving of the sentence was delayed. I had to go to the settlement colony after after the discharge.

On the sixth day of my stay at hospital several people came to me. One of them identified himself as an officer of the Federal Penitentiary Service and told me that I had to see an order paper of President Putin concerning my "rehabilitation". However, I think that correctly such a paper would be rather called a presidential pardon. They didn't show me this document straight away but said that I had to see it personally in the office of the Federal Penitentiary Service and then I would be free.

I believed them since two weeks before FSB officers from Moscow had come to me and said that the agreement between Turkey and Russia concerning pardoning Chyigoz and me had been signed up. Only one technical detail remained: I had to write an applica-

tion form addressing Putin to ask for his pardon. I refused to write this application. They started blackmailing me, threatening me that I would be sent to Arctic region, Yakutia or Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area, mentioned Hart, city in Yamal. They also told me that the leader of the Crimean Tatar movement Mustafa Dzhemiliev and the Head of the Mejlis Refat Chubarov had left and were living a good life in Kyiv, traveling around the world, unlike Ahtem Chyigoz and me who would spend coming years in prison.

To make me write to Putin they tried to trick me. They told me that Chyigoz had already written such an application. That time our conversation didn't gain the desired result. I kept repeating that under no circumstances I would agree to leave the Crimea. I was ready to go to prison but I wouldn't leave my motherland in any case.

Officers of the Federal Penitentiary Service brought the ambulance to the hospital where I was and drove me to Simferopol. I couldn't see almost anything through the tinted car windows. However, in Simferopol I understood that they were taking me in the direction of the airport. Indeed, a plane was waiting for me there.

When I got on the plane I saw Ahtem Chyigoz and 15 Russian special agents who were escorting us. Since we had both refused to ask Putin for mercy I concluded we already were on our way to penal institutions. I just couldn't understand why they hadn't allowed us to take our belongings and why they had lured me out of the hospital in such a tricky way.

When the plane landed in Anapa city (Russia) for refueling I was sure that we would go to Russia. However, imagine my surprise upon learning about the destination — Ankara (Turkey).

I was so relieved to understand that Ahtem and I had become participants of some important political process. Soon we were transferred to representatives of Turkish special agencies.

Noone ever mentioned the presidential order and its conditions. It remained also unclear whether I could go back to the Crimea

again. The Turkish authority met us and in few days we went to Kyiv.

Various media reported that Ahtem Chyigoz and I had been released at the request of the mufti of the Crimean Muslims, Emirali Abblaiev. I don't really believe it and assume that the traitor and collaborationist Abblaiev could have signed a document prepared by FSB officers to get the formalities in order. Indeed, this story was plotted to get rid of Ahtem Chyigoz and me and to throw us out of the Crimea. However, I would like to emphasize that I don't want to leave my motherland. Especially now that I could do much more to return the Crimea under the control of Ukraine I would never leave it. I will try to come back to the peninsula soon.

I understand that the risk exists. Even if they don't allow me to return or start to persecute me again there, at least I'll know that I have tried to be on my motherland the best I could. Since 2014 fear has quite often seized me. But nothing frightens me more than the thought that the Russian authority will reign in the Crimea for a long time.

I imagine quite clearly the day of the Crimean returning to Ukraine. I am sure that one day Russia will decide leave without any military operations. I have no doubt about it. If this happens, I will forgive everything, I will forget my complaints. I am sure.

Oleksii Nazimov: They Promised to Plant Me Drugs if I Don't Stop to Criticize the Authority

A Crimean journalist, a blogger, and an Editor-in-Chief of Alushta media "Tvoia gazeta" ("Your newspaper"). He was born in Zaporizhzhia, but lives in Partenit (Velyka Alushta). In 2014 he accepted the Russian realities on the peninsula, but together with the deputy of Alushta City Council, Pavlo Stepanchenko, he actively criticized Russia-controlled local statesmen for their abuses. Since 2016 they have been both persecuted by Russian security services for extorting money from a representative of the party "Yedynaya Rossiya" ("United Russia"). They have been held in a detention unit for a long time.



Oleksii Nazimov and Pavlo Stepanchenko (from right to left). Photo from the archive of relatives

In October 2016 the Investigation Committee of Alushta instituted a criminal proceeding against me according to the article 204, paragraph 7, subparagraph "b" of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (a commercial bribery). I was charged with an extortion and obtaining money from a member of Alushna department of the party "United Russia" Oleksandr Ryzhkov (an assistant deputy of the City Council and the Head of the fraction "United Russia" Dzemal Dzanhobiehov) for concealing information that denigrated the party and him. Besides me, on October 4 a deputy of Alushta City Council Pavlo Stepanchenko and a cameraman Andrii Obliozov were detained for mediation of extortion and bribery too.

I suppose that it is clear to everyone now that using this criminal case the local authority of Alushta tries to punish a journalist and a

deputy who openly criticized its work, proved their incompetence and lying.

Earlier, I was repeatedly threatened by the representatives of Alushta authorities. They promised to plant me drugs or to commit a provocative act if I didn't stop to criticize the authority.

A Deputy of Alushta City Council Pavlo Stepanchenko used to regularly receive threats. He was well-known for his active position against illegal building, unsanctioned trade and other violations of law. He was arrested together with me. I witnessed in summer 2016 that on a session of Alushta City Council Dzemal Dzanhobiev, the leader of the fraction "United Russia" shouted to him in front of all the deputies: "Shut up!" That happened after Pavlo had raised a question, important and thorny to all the residents of Alushta, but very awkward to the local deputies. According to Pavlo's words, when the session ended and the press representatives left, Dzemal Dzanhobiev threatened him openly: "You will have to pay for every word..."

Then Dzanhobiev together with another deputy of the City Council Alan Turiiev got Pavlo Stepanchenko to the end of the corridor and continued their conversation with threats... I was waiting for Pavlo nearby and heard some phrases. From time to time they changed the threats into offers to cooperate... Several months after the threats had begun Oleksandr Ryzhkov, the assistant of deputy Dzanhobiev, brought marked money to the meeting the subject of which was a cooperation on the Internet.

I refused to promote "United Russia", despite urgent requests of Ryzhkov, and said that I would create videos of provocative issues anyway.

There was a trying to find a compromise aimed at de-escalating the situation in Alushta, omitting the party "United Russia" in critical articles about statesmen, which I published on the Internet. And most importantly, it wasn't me who took the initiative, Ryzhkov himself proposed me to cooperate many times. I agreed not to

mention the party in general, the leaders of the city as members of the party “United Russia” and to write using general phrases, for example, “statesmen”, “authority”, etc. without calling names.

The criminal proceeding instituted by the Investigative Committee of Alushta was literally falling apart. Along with that, we were still arrested and held in the detention facility...

...On March 30 (2017) I was brought to a temporary detention facility of Alushta city to study the criminal case file which, as I have already mentioned, was fabricated by the Investigative Committee on the request of Alushta department of the party “United Russia” as if I had openly criticized the party. I immediately warned officers on duty that I would start my hunger strike and wrote a report about this in two copies addressed to the Chief of the detention facility. They took them, but didn’t register.

In the detention facility of Alushta I was in the cell №5 which was completely impossible to stay in: dirty, broken brooms scattered around, residues of lime on the bunk bed and floor. Rats were running around the cell. The sink was broken, there was no water supply, therefore, the toilet was out of order, there was no opportunity to wash hands. Besides I didn’t receive any clean bed linen (no pillowcase and no sheet), I got only a dirty mattress and a pillow.

I think that these actions were aimed at pressuring me and as a result, I would have to confess about the crime I didn’t commit.

At the beginning I was charged for a commercial bribery, but after 5 months of unsuccessful attempts of the investigators A.V. Skorin and A.N. Hulii to prove my guilt the criminal proceeding blew up like a beach ball. After a fast re-classification of the case formulation I was charged for extortion, but the investigation this time seems also to be unsuccessful.

From the letters of Oleksii Nazimov written in the detention facility and published by relatives on his behalf on Facebook

Natalia Kharchenko: People in FSB Make You Understand that They Possess Limitless Opportunities



Natalia Kharchenko. Photo provided by "Crimea.Realities"

A Crimean resident, a physician. Since 2014 she has been prosecuted by Russian special agencies accused of separatism. Due to this reason she had to leave the Crimea together with her husband.

FSB officers came to us to carry out the search at 6 a.m. My husband and I were sleeping. My father opened the door, then came into our room and said: "Guests from FSB have arrived to you". Then eight people in civilian clothes came into our apartment. They showed us a search warrant and started to search all closets in our apartment.

When one of them was drawing a protocol he told me: "You see, everything went quietly. We didn't break the door and didn't use violence". As far as I understood, they were ready to use violence against us if needed.

During the search the FSB officers took away all computers, which were in our apartment: father's and mine. They didn't take anything else though. They left yellow and blue ribbons, a Ukrainian flag, Ukrainian symbols which were at home. One of the operatives tried to inspect my bag looking for any other Ukrainian symbols, but his teammate stopped him.

During the search these people frightened our children. The noise woke them and they saw a lot of people they didn't know. The FSB officers didn't pay attention to this neither tried to be quieter.

Then they took my husband and me into a car and brought us for a questioning to the Crimean Department of FSB. It didn't take them long to question Andrii. He was together with his lawyer. As far as I understood, they didn't need him that much. They didn't allow my lawyer to be with me on the interrogation though. Obviously, it made it easier for the FSB investigator, Ihor Skrypka, to speak to me. He understood that I didn't know much about my rights and laws.

That first interrogation lasted for four hours. The investigator was very rude. Probably, it was connected with the fact that I was without my lawyer, or he was 100% sure that I would confess. He said: "You will have time to confess". Later, during one of the next interrogations he asked me: "Well, have you already confessed about your guilt?" When I said no, he was very surprised.

Before the first interrogation Skrypka had gathered all possible information about me. He asked me about my page on "VKontakte", about my posts concerning Ukraine and Russia on social media. Then he started to ask whether I had any connections to "Right Sector" and whether I was in ATO zone as a doctor. That question arose from the fact that I was a doctor and before the Russian annexation of the Crimea I had been a physician in a Simferopol hospital. However, I been to the ATO zone and hadn't worked there.

Things happening during the first interrogation was a psychological pressure, I reckon. Because the investigator treated me in a way as if I were global criminal deserving punishment. There were hidden threats after which the investigator said: "We are working in a humanistic way unlike Ukraine... If you write something against ATO they will come and take you straight away". Telling these nonsenses they tried to make themselves look better than they were.

Investigator Skrypka was interested in my post “VKontakte” saying “Russia is world evil and evil must be fought”. He was really angry and he even reproached me: “Why do you hate us so much?”

His words during the first interrogation: “We can institute a criminal proceeding to sentence you to 5 years (of prison)”, made me wonder what I had done to be punished this way. I just expressed my opinion which is guaranteed by the Constitutions both of Ukraine and Russia. I didn’t call for using guns against them, and didn’t appeal for a coup d’etat. I only used my freedom to speak my mind, and my thoughts didn’t exceed any legal or moral bounds. After my first meeting with Ihor Skrypka the interrogations continued. During 6 months when he thought whether he would institute a criminal proceeding against me or not I had been questioned six times. At first, they questioned me once every two months, but then they did it once a week.

I had an impression that FSB officer considered themselves almost gods, they made people realize that their opportunities and resources were limitless and they could do everything they wanted. After their questioning I reached my boiling point and I had to leave the Crimea.

I was afraid that I wouldn’t be allowed to enter continental Ukraine. On the administrative border Russian guards carefully examined my passport for a long time, then during 20 minutes he had been asking when I had been to Ukraine last time, where I was going, but finally he left me alone.

At that moment there was no criminal proceeding against me, but it may be instituted any time.

Before I left the Crimea I had understood that I couldn’t mentally live there. In 2014 we moved to Dnipro city. We stayed there for some time, but due to financial difficulties we had to come back to the Crimea. But, unfortunately, we didn’t find understanding even among the closest people.

RUSSIAN REPRESSIONS IN CRIMEA

My father thought that one day all the events of 2014 would be forgotten and everything would be okay. My mother supported Russia from the very beginning. She told me one day: "You've gained what you looked for. You will go to prison!" I replied that I was moving out of the house and I would better die in Ukraine than come back to the Crimea. My husband and I are trying to start a new life in Kyiv. I don't recognize the Crimea as a Russian territory. Why do I have to become a Russian citizen?! If I needed any help in 2014 I would have asked my country – Ukraine. I didn't ask Russian soldiers to defend me against my country.

Mykola Semena: This Is the Revenge for Criticism



Mykola Semena. Photo provided
by "Crimea.Realities"

A Crimean journalist, a blogger, a media examiner. Since 2016 he was persecuted by the Russian authority for a publication in my blog about the necessity of returning Crimea under control of Ukraine. In 2016 the Crimean Department of FSB instituted a criminal proceeding against him, within this case approximately twenty Crimean journalists were questioned. Searches were also carried out in their apartments. In 2017 Mykola Semena was sentenced by Russia-controlled Zaliznychnyi District Court of Simferopol for "public calls for violation of the territorial integrity of Russia" (article 280, paragraph 1 of Criminal Code of Russian Federation). He got 2.5 years of probation imprisonment with 3 years of prohibition on public activity.

Last words of Mykola Semena in Zaliznychnyi District Court of Simferopol

Your Honor! May it please the court, all the participants of the proceeding are witnesses that I was as open as possible here, I have been speaking honestly and sincerely as I have always written my books and articles in newspapers, journals and the Internet. I have always relied on the international law as well as Russian and Ukrainian legal frameworks and in every situation I used rational arguments to prove my position. I think that any conscious and loyal citizen of any country, in particular, Russia and Ukraine, are supposed to act in this way. And a country hasn't got any legal right to judge him for this as well as it hasn't got any moral right to blame him or her for this, since the Constitution guarantees the freedom of opinions and expression. Otherwise, the state is doomed to failure.

I don't understand how a journalist can be persecuted for a text in which he mentioned three times that it was his "personal opinion". The Constitution of Russia contains the article 29 dedicated to the right for a personal opinion and the article 52 which prohibit to restrict illegally this right that narrows this definition from a moral one to an exceptionally legal term.

I could be judged for breaking the law described not in the article 280, paragraph 1 of Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, but in the article 29 of the Constitution of Russia.

Moreover, all lawyers know that the article 280, paragraph 1 was hastily inserted into Criminal Code of the Russian Federation in December 2013 – May 2014, it serves ulterior purposes, contradicts the articles 29 and 55 of the Constitution of Russia. It is an instrument of political persecutions of dissent. It includes actions which aren't crimes. Expressing one's opinion on the subject of the constitutional system, the idea of joining any territory to the Russian Federation is the expression of citizen's opinion, his or her right for freedom and it shouldn't be considered to be a problem in the constitutional system of the State neither can it be a reason to adopt a lawful decision in this regard.

Thus, I could conclude that my opinion on the Crimean subject coincides with the one of other people, all international organizations, and governments of most countries. Moreover, it coincides with the opinion of most of Russian politicians who state openly that the Crimea belongs to Ukraine even according to the Russian laws. Russia, which brought me to trial today, comprises a minority and its positions aren't anyway based on the law. Consequently this criminal case isn't based on the constitutional requirements, the international law, which is compulsory for Russia as a member of the United Nations, and existing legislation of Russia.

What are the outcomes of the investigation in question? Obviously, considering the Crimea issue the authority has violated international laws, its numerous external obligations and internal

laws, regardless the agreements it signed, even though it had a chance to solve this question according to the international law and without all those complications. The rights of its citizens and the rights of neighboring countries have been abused. The war has been initiated. To avoid being criticized for violating laws and to escape justice, the statesmen of this county have modified the law and inserted the article 280 paragraph 1 for persecutions of all dissidents. Now this authority, which is guilty, tries to put the blame on someone else, for example, journalists and me, in particular, and it wants to establish a climate where the only opinion spoken out would be the one of theirs. However, this is not about violation of the Constitution. The authority is charging me for my claiming that it violated the law. Thus, this is not a court of law, this is a revenge for criticism.

During the investigation different people offered me to avoid the court. Probably, it was a joke, or a provocation, or they just wanted to test my nerves. However, at the beginning of the investigation I told my lawyers, they could prove it now, that we would do everything in accordance with the law. Due to my obedience to law I refused from any help and went through all the court hearings from the very beginning to the end. And I agree with every word of my lawyers. We were rightful and just because we didn't want to be a part of the state that violates its own laws, the standards and the rules according to which the whole world, lives today.

To realize the events happening around I re-read many books about repressions in Russia in all periods of its history, from the imperial times, from Decembrists until the present days. It could be assumed that as a result of all ongoing political processes in Russia, all present-day victims of repressions will be rehabilitated and a new powerful stream of literature written within prison walls is about to appear. There will be new Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn, new Chemiakin, new "Children of the Arbat" and new "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich", new "The Gulag Archipelago"

will be born. There will be a lot of new writers who will narrate in details the history of the Crimea of 2014-2017 according to the documents, they will describe the annexation, all these court hearings, this prosecutor's office and this is exact how this period will be recorded in history of Russia. It will not go down in history in such a way how it is described now by primitive Crimean newspapers and TV, contrarily, history will remember it from words of those who are persecuted now for the shame for Russia. History of Russia of 2014 will be revealed for public sooner than the history and the truth about the repressions of 1930s, the revelation is about to happen. 2014-2017 will go down in history as they were with all their lie and blood, wars and murders, national terrorism and kidnapping of people, with primitive politicians and their conspiracy.

I still can't comprehend why a big nuclear country would prefer the shame of prisons and concentration camps, political cases and courts, poverty and abusing the rights of its citizens although it could become the richest and happiest country in the world.

We've already experienced a period of our history when we thought that all repressions were in the past and that they would never seize our land again. We were sure that this country would never fall that low again but surprisingly the progress didn't win. Nowadays we can conclude that in the second decade of XXI century Russia returned to the horrors of the political repressions dating back to the second half of 1930s.

All this raises a question: why would Russia do all this, why would it happen in XXI century when all the world lives according to general standards, when all countries respect their citizens and citizens respect their countries, why would Russia demonstrate the disregard to its citizens and why would its citizens show disbelief to their country which is repressing and chasing them?

It is hard to understand such Russia, it can't be explained by the general common sense nor with the law!

Anyway I also know the other face of Russia; the society of progressive thinkers and people who will accept injured Russia and will heal it.

Therefore, it's obvious that Russia will face great qualitative changes in politics soon. I think it will take 2-3 years to change the political situation in the county dramatically. All political cases will be reviewed and their victims will be rehabilitated. How will the participants of accusation feel when the new times come? Let me imagine that in 2-3 years the global world society will resolve the question of the status of the Crimea and all possible options will be discussed: returning the Crimea to Ukraine, giving it a status of the Crimean Tatar National Republic and other options definitely different from what we have today. The decision will be adopted based on international laws and everyone found guilty of the law violations in 2014-2017 will be punished.

First of all, people's rights to express their opinions will be restored. Is it impossible that the United Nations General Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, OSCE, international and national unions of journalists of all Europe and PEN-centers, well-known Russian lawyers, finally, "Memorial" and 30 most authoritative human right organizations of the world were wrong and only one public prosecutor was right? Everyone has to realize that it just can't be so and things will go back to normal soon.

Unfortunately, today, as I've said before, we have a paradoxical picture of the Russian law. On the one hand, a part of legislation is consistent with international law and principle of the supremacy of law. On the other hand, new laws of recent time contradict the Constitution and previous laws, don't correspond with the principle of the supremacy, are politically tendentious and lead to political judgment. They contradict first group of laws, which have the status of the highest law of the land, and due to this fact they shouldn't come into force. We can't avoid this inconsistency since it is impossible to judge using these two controversial parts of the

law. Now the court has a choice to reach a verdict based on progressive part of the law or politically tendentious one. Justice and honor of the court is dependant upon this choice. Hopefully the society of today understands that this state is waging a hybrid information war against it. It is generally recognized that false journalist organizations have been established to create virtual non-existing reality in our minds. I It has false assessments, biased history and present time, and calls for primitive medieval values. Every show is a certain information operation aimed at deceiving its audience and readers. It must be stopped.

Areedom of speech is a fundamental function of any civil society that ensures the citizens' right to be informed. Only then a person can build and reform their country rightly when he or she has complete truthful knowledge about the processes in the society, when he or she is able to discuss everything freely and openly, without deceit and mistakes.

Thus, this verdict, even if it is considered , will be not against me, a Ukrainian journalist, but will challenge all journalism in Russia. Since without freedom of speech there will be no civil society, no honest judgment, no law system the citizens will cease to be such and will become vassals instead. The only one thing you need is the political will. And I hope we will develop it soon.

On the other hand, if acquitted this case will bring a hope to all journalists of Russia that not only their professional rights could be protected, but also their rights to know the truth about all events as the citizens of this country.

And now, Your Honor, I am in your hands because of all these political, economic, international, legal and literature issues. I've said things as they are and as they should be in life.

Published on September 18, 2017

Emil Kurbedinov: Staff Members of Detention Facility Treated Me Very Politely



He is a Crimean lawyer who has been a defendant in a series of political criminal cases which have been instituted against the Crimean residents by Russian security services since 2014. He was born on Krasnodar Territory of Russia. After returning from places of deportation of 1944 his family has been living in Simferopol. The native language is Crimean Tatar.

*Emil Kurbedinov with the prize from Front Line Defenders**

After my detention I was 90% sure that I would be arrested. After the Court they me into a car and followed by another one with Special Forces and OMON (Special Purpose Police Unit) drove me to a temporary detention facility located near the Kuibyshevskiy market in Simferopol. There were some preparations being made so we had to wait for 2 hours. All that time I spent in the car. When they brought me inside I was informed about the rules of detention and they placed me into a cell.

The cell was for four people but all 10 days I spent there alone. The cell was more or less warm, they gave me a pillow and a mattress. There was a toilet, four iron plank beds and a table with two benches.

During the first five days of the detention I wrote applications, complaints and requests. The next five days I spent reading the la-

* In 2017 Emil Kurbedinov won an award of "Front Line Defenders". This award is presented to lawyers who made valuable contribution to protection and promotion of human rights at the risk of his own life. Kurbedinov was selected out of 142 nominations from 56 countries. (Photo from the archive of Kurbedinov).

test news, laws, printed material brought by my colleague Edem Semedliaev. Thanks to him I knew what was happening in the world and how people reacted to my arrest, in particular.

Those serving an administrative detention have a right to make calls from a detention facility. Therefore, I tried to call my relatives for 15 minutes every other day. It helped them to stay calm.

The staff members of the detention facility treated me very politely. Officers on duty and the Chief came to me three times per day and asked whether I had any complaints. I replied that I had claims against those people who had sentenced me there. But I didn't have any complaints about the conditions of the detention.

Surely, there were many violations of The European Convention on Human Rights from the beginning of my detention. I think I have to appeal against all that to the national institutions first and, if we don't succeed I will appeal to the European Court of Human Rights. It's definite that these violations should be assessed properly. When I was detained they violated the attorney-client privilege, I wasn't allowed to go to my client whose apartment was being searched at that time. When I was sentenced to 10 days of detention, several court hearings concerning measures of restraint of other imprisoned in which I had to participate were carried out. It is an entire trail of negative consequences.

During the illegal search in my office some documents containing important information, which I had to disclose only at the Court, were removed: interrogations, questioning, lists of witnesses. Attorney-client privilege is a separate institute which was completely violated. Lawyer's society has to respond adequately to this not only in the Crimea, but also in Russia.

I understand that these illegal actions of FSB and my arrest were aimed at discouraging lawyers from defending the accused within political cases in the Crimea. However, I will continue to work with such people as I did before my detention. I will use all legal methods to defend them from this repressive machine. I

RUSSIAN REPRESSIONS IN CRIMEA

will talk about violations; I will require transparency during court hearings of such cases.

The Ukrainian authority should also use all opportunities to defend such people. We could do it. Everyone who violated the law has to face the consequences.

Chapter III

In Crimean torture chambers

Russian realities in Crimea include such shameful facts as kidnapping and torturing people. Even though these methods are prohibited by Russian and international law, they are actively used against prisoners by Russian mercenaries and FSB officers.

The first victim of the Russian aggression in Crimea became a resident of Simferopol region, a Crimean activist Reshat Ametov. He was brutally murdered at the age of 38 by unknown people.

On March 3 2014 he carried out a solo protest on Lenin square of Simferopol against capturing of Crimea by Russian militaries. He was standing silently and motionless in front of armed “little green men” when three members of so-called “Crimean self-defense” came to him, grabbed him under the arms and dragged him into an unknown car. The footage from a web-camera available on the Internet confirms this. After that anybody has ever seen him alive.



Reshat Ametov with children. Photo from the family archive.

On March 15 the body of Reshat Ametov was found bearing signs of torture in Bilohirsk region. According to witnesses his head was tied with a sticky tape and a pair of handcuffs was found nearby. The activist was buried on the Simferopol city cemetery “Abdal”. He left a wife and three kids.

In early April 2014 the Investigative Committee of Investigative Department of the Russian Federation in Crimea instituted a criminal proceeding under the article 105, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of Russia (a murder).

A criminal investigation is also carried out in continental Ukraine by the General Directorate of the National Police of Ukraine in the Crimea and Sevastopol under the procedural direction of the Prosecutor’s Office of AR of the Crimea. The murder is categorized under the article 115 paragraph 2 subparagraph 3 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (a premeditated murder of a kidnapped person). At the time of publication of this book no one responsible for the murder has been identified. The reason of torturing is also still unknown.



Decree of the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko on conferring the title of the Hero of Ukraine on Reshat Ametov.

On May 18, 2017 the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko conferred the title “Hero of Ukraine” on him posthumously. It happened three years after his murder.

One of the coordinators of Crimean Euromaidan Andrii Shchekun and a participant of these rallies Anatolii Kovalskyy were in torture chambers of pro-Russian mercenaries. Tortures were used as well to obtain testimonies from four Crimean “terrorists”: Oleh Sentsov, Oleksandr Kolchenko, Hennadii Afanasiev and Oleksii Chyryni. Similarly, in this way they made all accused in “sabotage” or “spying” confess about a crime. Renat Paralamov, a Crimean resident, went through torture in FSB and after that he left Crimea.

All victims of torturing describe being tortured with electric shock, severe beating, humiliation, attempts of offences of sexual inviolability, methods of aggressive psychological torture, death threats against family members, etc.

According to the words of victims, during the “Crimean spring” torture chambers of Russian mercenaries were located in Simferopol in a building 26, Kirov Avenue, in front of the building of Council of Ministers of the Crimea (the former office of a Crimean organization of the Communist Party of Ukraine) and in Crimean Republican Recruitment Office 152, Kyiv Street.

According to some of the Crimean residents, FSB officers used to have separate torture chambers. They were located at the former central office of General Directorate of Security Service of Ukraine that has been controlled by FSB since 2014.

The details of stories of the eyewitnesses are shocking.

The stories of this chapter describe scenes with violence content. We warn you about this and don't recommend under-aged children and especially sensitive people to read them.

Zarina Ametova: Before Killing Reshat, They Got Him Naked and Tortured, and Burnt His Clothes



Zarina Ametova.
Photo provided
by "Crimea.Realities"

The widow of the Crimean activist Reshat Ametov who was tortured to death after kidnapping by the members of "Crimean self-defense" in March 2014. She was born in Uzbekistan where her family was deported in 1944. After returning to Crimea she has been living in Simferopol region. She lost her husband at the age of 29. We tried to contact her but, as it turned out, she hadn't accepted her loss even several years after his death and avoided talking to journalists.

Therefore, we quote her words about her husband broadcast by "Crimea.Realities" (project of Radio Free Europe).*

Nobody told Rafat (Reshat's brother) whether Reshat was being detained in the basement of the recruitment office. After his death the investigators showed me residues of burnt clothes. I recognized them, the clothes he was wearing when he left home for the last time. Probably, he was also in the basement of the recruitment office and before killing him they had got him naked and tortured, and burnt his clothes to cover his tracks and nobody would ever know who was killed. His body was found near a village located on the road Simferopol – Feodosiia. He was tall; therefore, he, probably, didn't fit into the hole they had dug. Maybe they wanted to widen it, but other people could have noticed and scared them. Thus, they hastily dumped the body and disappeared. Next day a resident of this village found a body and called the police.

* From the interview of Zarina Ametova for Internet edition "Crimea.Realities" on March 18, 2017.

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS

After the funeral two unknown men in balaclavas appeared near our house and monitored everything from the street.

To my requests and claims to stop monitoring and to go away they told me that they had an order to guard us. When I went to the city on business I was always followed by an unmarked black car "Opel".

It's been 3 years my husband was murdered, the criminal proceeding hasn't been solved, the investigation is continuing, no suspects have been identified. I still cannot understand why he was killed. He carried out a peaceful solo protest on Lenin square in Simferopol. He just stood quietly there. Our three children were left without their father. I don't know how we will live on. I am grateful to our countrymen who don't forget us and help us morally and financially. It would be much harder without them.

Lierane Haibullaieva: Doctors Had to Collect Parts of the Body of Reshat Ametov as a Construction Kit



*Photo from the archive
of Lierane Haibullaieva*

A Crimean resident, a close friend of killed Reshat Ametov. She was born in Uzbekistan where her family had been deported in 1944. After her returning to Crimea she has lived in Simferopol. She involved in journalism and business administration. The native language is Crimean Tatar.

It was a usual morning. I was at home with a little child. Suddenly, I saw Zarina running along the street with her children. She was on her way to a neighbor who was a close friend of hers. I went out to her and asked what had happened. She replied through the tears: “Reshat has disappeared”. Zarina said he had left home and hadn’t come back, they had no connection with him and she didn’t know what to do and where to look for him.

I asked her to give me his photo and posted information about his missing on the social media, found volunteers who made an announcement requesting anyone to provide any information about his location. This way the information about his disappearing was spread not only in the Crimea but also far outside it.

A video announcement was broadcast at ATR channel. By the way, right after that they found the footage of kidnapping of Reshat Ametov on Lenin square in Simferopol and it became clear how he had disappeared and who had been involved.

Rashat's family went to the police, asking for help without any outcome. The body of Reshat was found on March 15, 2014. According to the official report, the cause of death was an injury into the eye with a sharp pointed object. I saw the photos of his body. It's a horror. I don't know how a human being could do this. I understand that it was a murder-for-hire. However, I still cannot understand why they didn't do it simply with a bullet. Instead, he was subjected to these animal humiliations.

His body was mutilated by multiple stab wounds, his ribs were broken, his mouth was open. I can't even describe what I saw in the photo.

His wife identified him by belongings and scars on the back of his head that remained intact.

Everyone searched for Reshat: journalists, activists, members of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People. The Head of Legal unit of the Mejlis and now a vice-mayor of occupying administration of Simferopol Teyfuk Gafarov called me and said that the body of Reshat had been found. It was in the evening of March 15. The current occupying mufti of Crimea Emirali Ablaiev was together with him. They came to Reshat's family and said that they had to recognize him.

Zarina took his death pretty hard. She said that when Reshat hadn't come back home she had felt that he wouldn't come back since in their family men always stayed at home at night or say where they would be.

Before going to Lenin square in Simferopol with the solo-protest he posted on his page in Facebook informing that he was going to protest and called for anyone to join him. Later, his laptop with an access to his account was quickly confiscated by staff members of the Investigative Committee of Russia.

Reshat was an interesting person. He had always been admired by his neighbours. To uphold justice, he always called journalists if something was wrong. Thus, it is hardly surprising that he protested against the Russian occupation of Crimea. It was all about him.

Reshat was also a good family man. There was a healthy discipline in their family and a healthy lifestyle. In the morning they used to listene to classical music, they liked to listen to Chopin, Bach. Reshat used to read works of Mahatma Gandhi. He tried to cultivate all values in his children. They could wear old shoes and clothes, but Reshat always tried to provide them with mental and spiritual food . Sometimes he played with his children among other mothers to help his wife.

His youngest daughter was 4 months old when he died. After he had passed away I went out with his children and Khatidze took his umbrella with her.

Reshat dreamed to be a lawyer, but he wasn't able to finish his studies, since he got married early and they had kids. Therefore, without an education he used to worke as a builder on temporary jobs.

When this horror happened I received a lot of letters from all over the world. Everyone donated what he/she could: diapers, drawing books, clothes of their kids, someone donated 5 hryvnias, another one – 5000 hryvnias. Even pro-Russian neighbors the Ametovs also helped them. They attached a Russian flag even to their doghouse as a sign of their deep patriotism, but they came and helped silently.

Having received an award for “Solidarity”, Mustafa Dzemilev, the leader of the Crimean Tatar people, gave a substantial amount of money to Zarina Ametova. For this money she almost finished building a house and equipped it with electricity. Later, other charity foundations helped her too.

Now Zarina is keeping to herself and doesn't want to talk to journalists. She couldn't accept the death of her husband. The three children are deeply hurt by the loss of their father.

Sometimes his son Ali becomes very aggressive. Probably, he shows his dissent with that injustice he saw when his father was killed. The oldest daughter Khatidze has become emotionally reserved. She used to tak his umbrella out for a long time and even now, when

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS

she sees someone like him she runs to him and calls: “Baba!” (“father” in the Crimean Tatar language). It’s very hard to see this. The youngest daughter doesn’t remember Reshat at all. Zarina spends all her time with the kids and then cry herself to sleep every night. Since the pain of losing her husband will never cease...

Andrii Shchekun: The Capturers Promised to Cut out my Liver



Photo from the archive of Andrii Shchekun

He was born in Lviv region. He lived in Bakhchysarai since 1993. He is a teacher of the Ukrainian language and literature, a journalist, a publisher and an activist. The native language is Ukrainian. He is a coordinator of the movement “Euromaidan Crimea”, an activist of the Crimean public movement of peaceful resistance against the Russian occupation. In March 2014 he was kidnapped at Simferopol railway station by members of “Crimean self-defense”. He was in captivity for 11 days. After that he couldn’t come back to Crimea. Now he lives with his family in Kyiv.

In 2014 I was in the captivity of pro-Russian mercenaries during an active stage of the occupation. Later, I was forcibly deported (forcibly brought) out from Crimea and having been exchanged previously. My family and I lived in Bakhchysarai. Once we noticed unknown men near our house who were asking our neighbors about us. Therefore, we were staying at my friend’s house all the time. We came home only to change clothes. My wife and the children had left Crimea for Kyiv before I was captured. I felt something bad would happen.

I was one of the four leaders of the movement “Euromaidan Crimea”. Our organization had several leaders to continue its work in case of capturing of one of us. Our first action was performed on November 23, 2013, when Yanukovych had to sign the Association Agreement of Ukraine with the European Union and everybody understood that he wasn’t going to do that. That day the Party of Regions organized an alternative rally against us on the central square

of Simferopol to which more than 5 thousands state employees were forced to come. Contrarily, approximately 200 demonstrators attended our rally, and when we went to the Representative of President of Ukraine in Crimea, we were approximately 400 activists. At weekends a thousand of activists came to support our movement. On weekdays several dozen people used to always organize such actions after 7 p.m. on the central square of Simferopol.

Members of the Party of Regions, communists and representatives of the “Russian Unity” aggressively spoke out against us. They even arranged a watch starting from January. Before that they hadn’t bothered us since our peaceful rallies aimed only at demonstrating an alternative opinion of the Crimeans which differed from the one being propagated . But in January things worsened and radical provocative actions with beating of activists, smashing cars, slashing tires started. Fortunately, the police didn’t allow them to do anything more cruel and kept defending the two forces from each other.

It became clear that an increase in number of participants would bring an increase in safety for us.

At the same time the aggressive actions of the local authorities began: they started to demonstrate videos in which they explained that we were traitors of the land, mercenaries from America and Europe. There were two attempts to set our office on fire so we had to move from that place. Since February we practically worked in the underground.

It was becoming really dangerous. Moreover, they set up surveillance on us. I was uneasy in my heart, but I also understood what I had to do in that difficult time as a citizen of Ukraine. Since 1993 I had been organizing the Crimeans, had arranged Ukrainian-language classes, published a Ukrainian newspaper, established a Ukrainian Internet edition, and had organized various cultural and educational events. On March 9, 2014 we were getting ready to hold an event dedicated to the birthday of Taras Shevchenko when I was captured by Russian separatists at the railway station.

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS



According to Andrii Shchekun, he recognized two persons of those who had detained him at Simferopol railway station in March 2014. They were on the video made by journalist in Crimea in spring 2014. (Screen-shots from VICE News channel)

That's how I ended up in captivity where I spent 11 days. I wasn't alone there; I was together with my close friend, 64-year-old Anatolii Kovalskyi, the former head of Committee of Forestry and Hunting of Crimea.

I endured tortures of so-called "profis", most likely, they were representatives of special agencies of Russia: they exposed me with electric shocks, beat me on the back. I fell down with the chair losing consciousness. They kicked me when I was down. These hits were professional: in the chest and kidneys.

They questioned me about any connections with the "Right Sector". They didn't give me any food and sometimes water. They cut off an ear of one prisoner since they thought that he was from the "Right Sector", but, indeed, he wasn't involved in any of these events. He got shots in both legs. They tortured another man more mercilessly, since they had seen his photo taken on Maidan in Kyiv. One day some people came and tore off our crosses, but when other ones found about this, they bought and brought the crosses back to us. Different people were among them. For interrogation we were taken to special agents, they were not local people, spoke differently, they put psychological pressure on us: they promised to cut out my liver, threatened to find my family. Probably, they were Chechens.

Every single moment we were under psychological pressure. I couldn't count how many times I heard: "We are going to kill you!", "Fascists!", "Drug addicts!"... One prisoner had to sing the anthem of Russia. They ordered me to recite poems of Shevchenko and Franko, they must have known about my pro-Ukrainian position. I recited them "My Testament", "My Thoughts", "The Eternal Revolutionary". They listened and then asked to recite poem of "any Russian poet". Anatolii Kovalskyi sang Ukrainian folk songs on their request. Some of the songs made them cry, especially "Dearest Mother of Mine", some of them filmed it for their mothers...

Our eyes were tied all the time. One night one of the guards started shooting at me with an air gun. He must have shot around

30 bullets at me... Later, in Kherson doctors extracted two bullets from my arm. There were no bullets in my legs, I had only 7 bruises on each leg marking the shots. Probably, my jeans had saved me and without them the bullets would have stuck in my legs too.

My only consolation was the fact that my wife and three children had already left Crimea. On March 20, 2014 I was released together with other 6 Ukrainians who also were in the captivity of separatists. The exchange took place near Chonhar village of Kherson region on the Crimean border. I can still see night dreams that I am in captivity again, that we have been captured.

It was hard to start a new life. I had left everything in Crimea: my apartment, possessions and other necessary things. Volunteers helped us to get a temporary place to live at with all necessary items. First of all, we started to search for new jobs to meet the family's needs. I can't go to Crimea now, since it is dangerous. My name is in "the list of Poklonska"²⁹ of so-called Prosecutor's Office of Crimea containing people accused of organization of actions for the support of Maidan. I believe in returning of Crimea under the control of Ukraine, but it will happen not earlier than in 20 years.

29 "The list of Poklonska" is a list contained approximately 50 persons who, according to then prosecutor of Crimea N. Poklonska, were involved in organization of the Euromaidan on the peninsula. Well-known lawyers, activists and ordinary people were included in that list. Particularly, Refat Chubarov, Ahtem Chygoz, Zair Smedliaiev, Andrii Shchekun, family of Kovalskyi, Eduard Leonov, Serhii Yurchenko, Serhii Meokreniuk and other Crimean people were in that list.

Anatolii Kovalskyi: in the Captivity I Was Afraid to Hear My Son`s Voive behind the Wall

A Crimean activist of Euromaidan and the movement of peaceful resistance against the Russian annexation of Crimea. He was kidnapped together with Andrii Shchekun by members of "Crimean self-defense" at the Simferopol railway station in March 2014. He spent in captivity 11 days. After releasing he hasn't come back to Crimea. He lives in Lviv and Chernivtsi. He teaches at the university.



Photo from the archive of Andrii Shchekun

Andrii Shchekun and I were detained by members of so-called "Crimean self-defense" at the Simferopol railway station in March 9, 2014. Andrii had spent a couple of nights at my house before the detention, since he had notices the surveillance on his apartment in Bakhchysarai.

In the morning of March 9, 2014 we went to the Simferopol railway station together to get a package from Kyiv: a batch of Ukrainian symbols. In Crimea the occupants were massively destroying them, so activists from Kyiv had to us with everything needed.

When we came to the railway station we saw many members of the "Crimean self-defense" on the platform. But actually they were people in camouflage who came from Russia. Later, I recognized the commander of Russian military unit in one of the pictures.

When we approached the carriage to get our package from Kyiv the members of the "Crimean self-defense" noticed and recognized us. Several men surrounded us. I know the man who detained me. His name is Dmytro Prostakov. He worked as a security guard for

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS

the former Head of the Crimean Parliament, Crimean Communist Leonid Hrach earlier. Prostakov always greeted me at all public events. And when the “Crimean self-defense” detained me, he pointed at me and said: “Don’t beat him!” And when he was nearby, they really didn’t beat me.

The worst thing began when they got us to the building of the former regional recruitment office on the circular road not far from road to Dzankoi. Our clothes were removed and we were beaten until we lost consciousness. Then Andrii Shchekun was severely tortured. When I regained consciousness, they didn’t beat me anymore. However, they threatened to shot my knee if I didn’t tell them a PIN-code of my card on which my salary and pension were at that moment.



Crimean activists released from detention. Anatolii Kovalskiy and Andrii Shchekun are leftmost and rightmost correspondingly (photo from the archive of activists of the movement “AutoMaidan”).

I remember they humiliated us all the time using the most de-meaning words, called us “banderlogs”. Once they tried to make me sing the anthem of Russia. I replied: “I don’t know your anthem and won’t sing it. If you want, I could sing you the Ukrainian one”. However, when Andrii and I started singing the Ukrainian anthem, our torturers got scared and told us to stop. One of them was Zhenia (“Malyi”), and another one was Denys (“Den”) Kovaliov. I heard that when they were talking to each other. I couldn’t see them, since all these 11 days in captivity I was blindfolded, but I remembered their voices.

By the way, I recognized their voices in the conversation concerning the Boeing MH17 that was shot down while flying over Donbas, which was intercepted by the Security Service of Ukraine and broadcast through the Internet. Apparently, they participated in shooting down this Boeing.

In the Crimean recruitment office Zhenia used to call his mom and I found out from their conversations that she was ill. Then I told him: “Zhenia, your mother is ill. Would you like me to sing you a song about mother?” And I sang him: “Mother’s Guelder Rose”. When I started singing, I heard him crying.

I also sang “Dear Mother of mine” and “White house”. I felt that all these people were touched by my songs a bit.

Actually, people who detained us in the captivity were professionals. I remember a night when our guard practiced throwing a knife into the wall. He threw it more than a thousand times and, probably, he missed only several times. The average person isn’t able to do it. Concluding from their language dialect, they were Chechens or other Russians with combat experience. They could be anybody but definitely not Crimeans.

The most terrible moments were those when Andrii Shchekun was taken out of the room for interrogation. I remember sitting and praying for him to come back. It was very hard to realize that my son, an active participant of Euromaidan, was in Simferopol and

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS

they could do everything to him. They brought new prisoners to the recruitment office all the time. I was afraid to hear my son's voice behind the wall.

One of the prisoners was Maksym from Odesa region. They tortured him three times a day demanding to confess in fictional accusations. Then I figured out that he had been exchanged and had come back to continental Ukraine. After that he joined the National Guard of Ukraine, served as a sniper, but he died. That boy was very reckless and brave. I always tell about him when I recall that captivity.

Hennadi Afanasiiev: They Exposed us with Electric Current through Wires Attached to Our Genitals

A former political prisoner, a participant of “the case of Oleh Sentsov”, a Crimean activist of the movement of resistance against the Russian annexation of Crimea, a volunteer. In May 2014 he was detained in Simferopol by officers of Russian FSB accused of plotting of terroristic attacks. He endured tortures of FSB. The Russian court sentenced him to 7 years of a strict regime colony. He served his sentence in the Komi Republic. In June 2016 he was exchanged for 2 citizens of Russia accused in separatism in Ukraine.



Photo from the archive of Afanasiev family

The thing I’m talking about must be said. People have to know what is happening in that country (Russia) and in other places controlled by this state. I’m not the only one, a lot of people like me are still there.

On May 9, 2014 I went to the parade dedicated to the Victory Day with a photo of my great-grandfather. I wanted to honor his memory. I was in the center of the city. Suddenly, unknown people attacked me, took me down to the ground, put my hands behind me and handcuffed, holding me like that for 767 days. They put a bag over my head and threw me into a car, like a bag, sat down on me and drove me somewhere.

Then they made me sit between two men. They didn’t take off the bag. These guys kept repeating that I “was all in their hands now and I couldn’t escape, since they never made any mistakes”. These people beat me in head and stomach, called me a terrorist and asked where my associates were. They asked about people I didn’t know and even couldn’t repeat their surnames. However, Oleh Sentsov was among them.

On the way by the car they promised to get me into the forest where I would dig a grave for myself and would lie there if I refused to reply on their questions. At that moment in Crimea a lot of pro-Ukrainian activists and Crimean Tatars often disappeared this way.

I didn't have any relation to terroristic activity, so I couldn't answer anything. And they beat me for this since they needed answers.

They brought me to some place and pressed me down to the floor. I understood that it was my apartment, since I had a small dog that came to me and started licking my hand, jumping around, it was happy that I came back home. However, I wasn't happy at that moment.

FSB officers carried out a search of my apartment. They searched for something but didn't find anything. Later, my mother told me that they had stolen all cameras, gadgets and valuable things from our apartment.

After that they brought me to an FSB building in Simferopol. And the interrogation started. The interrogation was carried out by the investigator Bunin with his team – guys from Caucasian region, special agents, strong and rigorous men. They “worked ” with me for ten days. They beat me constantly. They had fun; they said that no one would ever know that I was beaten since they knew how to do that. They used to wear helmets and gloves they found in the room. There were also suitcases, bags, other stuff. They hit me on my head and in my stomach with them. They put a bag over my head and choked me. They constantly asked me where the terrorists were. I had to confess that I was a terrorist. And when they understood that they couldn't get anything from me they started torturing me for hiding my associates.

FSB has a lot of methods to torture. I will tell you some of them. They didn't always question me, since they tortured me “for prevention”. They put on a gas mask and shut off access to air. I couldn't breath and when they saw that I was losing the consciousness, they opened the pipe. When I made a breath they splashed a spray or

liquid into the pipe and lifted the pipe. This liquid caused vomiting which couldn't get off the pipe and I started choking with my own vomit. When they saw that I couldn't handle this anymore, they put off a gas mask and revived me: splashed water on me and gave some ammoniac to smell.

During all ten days at night they got me to a detention unit where I didn't have any opportunity to sleep since every 10 minutes I had to come to the window and say my surname, my name, and the articles I was detained under. They didn't give me any mattress, any toilet paper, nothing. When they brought into the cell someone else, they told him: "Your neighbor is a Banderivets. Don't give him anything, because we will take everything from you". I met nice people though; they shared everything with me and were not afraid. However, I mentioned this to show how the torturers treated a person who hadn't been sentenced yet. They treated me like an enemy.

In FSB they demanded me to sign an admission of guilt and did everything for this. They stripped me naked, put me onto the floor, took a police truncheon, touched my genitals with it and threatened: "We are going to rape you now!" Later I learnt that they hid their perversions by stating that Oleh Setsov had bruises all over his body because he used to beat himself playing some sexual games. An adequate person couldn't do what they did.

Later, they brought a soldering iron and, excuse me for the direct speech, but I will just quote the words of my tormentor: "Now we are going to stick it into you cold, and then we will switch it on, it will heat up. You will erect and have consequences into your underwear. And then everything will get burnt there. You won't be able to sit; there will be nothing you will be able to do. In prison you won't prove anybody that you are a straight guy. All the following years in jail you will continue to be raped".

But that's not all. They removed my clothes again, and affected me with electricity through wires attached to my genitals. They span a so-called "coil", which looked like a field telephone, and I felt electric

current going through my parts. It was hard and painful. They threatened to do the same to my mother. "Nobody will save you. No one wants you. Who will be worried about you? You will disappear from world radars and they will all forget you," that's what they said.

Surely, I felt the utmost pain during these periods of torture. It was hard since people who had to defend your health and life did it to me. Who could you complain to if it was the order of their authority? Your destiny and life were completely in their hands. These people made me confess that I was guilty, I was a terrorist. They made me testify against Oleh Sentsov and Oleksandr Kolchenko.

I think that I should have stood. People say that everything is okay. But it isn't. I shouldn't have given up.

It took some time to calm down after the torture. I was in a detention facility in Moscow. When I was alone, only me and my thoughts within concrete walls, I reflected how to move forward with this, whether my releasing was really worth lives of the two men who would suffer more than me. And that was when I decided – no, it wasn't worth it.

I couldn't tell anybody about what was going on, at that moment I didn't have a lawyer who could defend me. I had no journalists, no relatives, no consular office, nobody next to me. Those investigators who had tortured me were together with me every day in Moscow. They told me that my state (Ukraine) didn't need me and that I disappeared from all radars as they had told me.

However, I decided that I had to go to the Court and speak the truth. Before I had kept my opinion a secret from the investigators, otherwise they would have done everything not to let me even appear there, or not to list me as a witness. And I was waiting for the Court. Before the Court I had written to my friends that I apologized for all my sins and went to the court. I said what I said. Since only truth could make a man free.

After I told the judge that I had made my statements under pressure and torture, they brought me to the detention unit and tried to

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS

force me to say that Sentsov`s lawyers had made me lie, they tried to convince me to participate in a press-conference and tell the judge about this pressure in the Court.

I refused. For doing this they beat me and moved from Moscow.

I can describe a lot more details, how this torturers treat us, Ukrainian people, how they press. Indeed, I could tell endlessly about it. However, I am free now and I am grateful to you, Ukrainian nation! I am thankful to every journalist, every person who worked and did something for this holyday I feel every day now to come true. Thanks God, thank you, I am at home.

*From the press-conference of Hennadii Afanasiev in the
press-center of News Agency "Ukrinform"
June 23, 2016*

Olha Afanasieva: FSB Called Me and Said: “Calm Down Your Son. Otherwise, Harsh and Cruel Measures Will Be Taken”



*Photo from the archive
of Afanasiev family*

The Mother of the former political prisoner Hennadii Afanasiev. She lived in the Crimea since 1985. She is a teacher of music, an economist. She used to have her own tourist business in the Crimea. The native language is Russian.

At the beginning of 2014 in Crimea nobody understood what was going on. I remember how I came to a fitness studio after the so-called “referendum”. Girls asked me whether I had voted, but I hadn’t participated in that “referendum” and as it turned out, they hadn’t either. But who did go then?

After that notorious “referendum” the life of everybody changed, it became harder. A new currency and new legislation appeared, but the most important thing was the rejection of everything going on.

I had always been a completely apolitical person, even more, I am the same now, but I remember that my pro-Ukrainian choice was unconscious. Once I was driving back home by car, when I noticed three cars with tricolors ahead of me. I was so disgusted. At that moment I thought that it was wrong. It was inhuman.

On the road from Simferopol to Sevastopol unknown people set up checkpoints. I felt fear and dispartate since I didn’t know how to behave. Any minute they could stop you. I was alone in the car

and I didn't know what to do in such situations. It looked like gang activities.

On February 26, 2014 I didn't attend the rally outside the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea, but my son attended all the rallies. I felt an overwhelming anxiety. Even then I understood subconsciously that these events could lead to tragedy.

Nobody could believe that one day we would wake up in the Russian Federation. On March 18 I was overcome by shock, because there were people among my friends who got a Russian passport on March 21. How could they get these passports and issue them for citizens in 3 days?!

When Hena started to attend rallies actively, filmed in a video of reciting poem of Vasyl Symonenko³⁰, FSB started calling me warning: "Calm down your son, otherwise, harsh and cruel measures will be taken". It lasted in February, March, and April of 2014. I told my son everything. I supported my son. We prepared porridge together, put it in three-liter bottles, wrapped them into a towel and old newspapers, and then brought it to blocked Ukrainian military bases. Surely, it was terrifying, but I prepared that food as for my son.

On the streets we could meet soldiers in unmarked uniforms, military equipment, convoys with Russian flags; you could hear strange calls from loudspeakers. Helicopters flew over the houses very low. I stopped going to my office by car. It seemed that something is going to blow up. The sense of insecurity and amount of adrenalin increased, and the soul was full of aversion and rejection of the situation.

You can never have too many friends. Those who didn't support Hena's position continued to contact me but didn't ask about him. I have one friend. His family split up as a result of the occupation: the mother and the son are pro-Russian, and he is pro-Ukrainian, he brought cigarettes for my son during all time when Hena was in the Russian prison.

30 "Where are you now, the executors of my nation?" is a poem of Ukrainian poet Vasyl Symonenko which was recited by Hennadii Afanasiev on Youtube video in March 2014.

In May 2014 my life changed dramatically: my son was detained and spent in the Russian prison two and a half years. Hena was the fist of the Crimean four who were brought to Russian “Lefortovo”³¹. To see my son I acted in a rebellious way: I came to the detention unit where it was hard for lawyers and relatives to get into.

“Lefortovo” is a large prison where 190 persons are imprisoned. It is a huge area where FSB and investigation department are located. It is surrounded by kindergartens, schools and parks. It is hard to find it. I used to come there and say that I was from Crimea. The Prison staff met me with their well-known “Crimea is ours!” I had to write three applications addressed to the Chief in case they refused to issue a visiting permit and permit on transfer of a package, I asked also for face-to-face meeting. It helped me and they showed me my son, I could bring something to him.

I couldn’t have meetings with Hena every time, but I at least could bring him food and other stuff . I didn’t have any support as opposed to Oleh Sentsov and Oleksandr Kolchenko. I was alone. I had to go to Russia very often. It was hard financially. However, now I can provide relatives of other prisoners with expert advice how to behave and what to say in “Lefortovo”, what they can bring and what is prohibited.

I remember how I went to Komi Republic. There is something like modern GULAG with an old building described in bestsellers. A forest, snow... Hena asked me to bring simple things: a pen, a notebook, but the prison wardens said: “Prohibited”. It was the end of workday. I burst into tears and they agreed to transfer a notebook. I asked to give the other things they hadn’t allowed to bring to Hena to other prisoners.

Indeed, the system of punishment in Russia is a separate corruption scheme in which almost everyone from guards of detention unit to the state itself profits from it. For example, there is a site

31 “Lefortovo” is a detention facility in Moscow.

“Rodnaya svyaz” on which various “services” could be bought: a Skype conversation, an opportunity to transfer something and thus replenish the state funds. Klykh’s mother³² said that he didn’t write any letters since they didn’t give him a pen all this time. I had been trying to transfer a nail clippers for 2 years.

I remember the closed hearing of Moscow City Court. There were three judges, a lawyer, a prosecutor, Hena and me. My son was in a bar cell surrounded by guard and dogs as if he was a serial killer. Hena told me that when he was being brought to the court and was going upstairs to the courtroom, the guards abused him and beat him on his calves with truncheons.

In the courtroom I couldn’t even come to him and touch the glass. When I was leaving the courtroom I lifted my hand to wave goodbye. The guards jumped on me since emotions were prohibited there. I know that Hena hasn’t forgiven Russia the prison and the torture.

I left Crimea in 2016 due to persecutions of my family and me by FSB for political views. We didn’t have any options where to live in continental Ukraine. It was a period of collapse and a complete change of emphasis. First of all, at that time my son was still in prison and tortured mercilessly. Secondly, we lost all possessions.

Hena was released on June 14, 2016. After his return from Russian prison, we went to “Amnesty International”³³ where they gave us 2 cups: a black one and a yellow one. I had never been so happy receiving a present. I always thought that a cup was a bad present, but that time I was really glad. Now we had what to drink tea from in the morning. It was awful. Nobody could understand how

32 Stanislav Klykh is Ukrainian political prisoner who was sentenced to 20 years of prison by the Supreme Court of Chechen Republic on May 26, 2016. According to Russian investigation, Klykh was a member of UNA-UNSO (Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian People’s Self-Defense) and fought with military forces of the self-declared Republic of Ichkeria in Chechen Republic. Klykh doesn’t admit his fault.

33 «Amnesty International» is a non-governmental organization founded in Great Britain in 1961 and focused on responding to human rights abuses and assistance to those whose were violated. It is headquartered in London.

hard it is to be a forced migrant when you have to buy everything from a flour sifter to a coat. It is terrible and harsh emotionally. To start a new life wasn't just hard, but it was extremely hard. I couldn't resume my business. Russia took my native land, my house, my business, brought grief to my family. "Thanks" to Russia my relatives are in a big danger. My mother is still in Crimea. I hope that they won't hurt her, we didn't mention her in our interviews. Moreover, she is 70 years old.

When somebody asks me whether I miss Crimea, the answer is no. Sincerely, I got so much fed up with FSB that I am afraid of police cars even here in Kyiv. As a patriot of Crimea, I am supposed to say that I will come back to Crimea when the occupation ends. However, frankly speaking, I don't know what I will do. I have a lot of terrible memories of those 3 years of the occupation and a clear understanding that it will be hard for Ukraine to restore biased conscience of its people.

When in 2014 first persecutions and detentions of Ukrainian citizens by Russia security agencies happened in Crimea, I was sure that it was "an exemplary punishment" of dissidents. Now I understand that it was a systematic abuse of human rights by Russia in Crimea.

I am afraid that the occupying authority will leave only scorched earth after itself. We have already been informed that in Feodosiia the Museum of Ivan Aivazovsky was robbed. I think the Russian occupying authority will act similarly to the occupants in the World War II. However, we have to stop them since the repressive machine is working there. Legislation, people don't matter to them, only enriching themselves matters.

Personally, I hope that Crimea will be returned under the control of the Ukrainian authority. I think that it will become a problematic region, but for our country this is an affair of honor.

Now I provide families of political prisoners of Kremlin immediate assistance.

Yevhen Panov: Electric Current Made the Entire Body Tremble and there was Smell of Skin Burning

A driver of Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, a participant of ATO. Since 2016 he has been persecuted by Russian special agencies for accusations in sabotage on the instructions of Ukrainian Intelligence service. He was detained by FSB officers at the age of 39. He underwent tortures of FSB.



Photo from the archive of Panov family

I, Panov Yevhen Oleksandrovych, announce that from August 7 to August 12, 2016 FSB officers were torturing me physically and psychologically. During my detention on August 7, 2016 I got a hit and cut the forehead above my right eyebrow. You could see this in the video made by FBS officers in which I answered the questions according to the plan compiled beforehand.

I was detained at around 3:30 at the passport control of the Armiensk border checkpoint on entering Crimea. After the detention from August 7 to August 12, 2016 they were torturing me. All that time my wrists were placed in handcuffs with tight fixations, so I felt a severe pain.

Then they handcuffed me with my hands under my knees, lifted me using a stick, beat me on my legs and feet using a metal stick, so I felt a severe physical pain. All that time I had a bag over my head and I couldn't see anything. I lost a spatial orientation, I didn't know what time it was, I felt fear. This torture lasted for 10 hours.

All that time they didn't feed me, only gave me some water periodically.

The above mentioned torture was used on August 7 in a building in the Northern Crimea. I don't know who tortured me; I couldn't see them since I had a bag over my head.

Later, they brought me to Simferopol, in that building they taped my arms, legs and all the body to the chair, attached wires to naked parts of my body and I felt the effect of electric current: trembling of the entire body and a smell of skin burning. I started screaming and asking to stop the torture, I shouted: "You are Gestapo!" However, they just laughed. It lasted for several days. The purpose of the torturing was to make me confess that I was a Ukrainian saboteur who came here to blow up houses, to kill people, to poison water, etc. It was a lie. After that torturing I had to incriminate myself and to sign protocols.

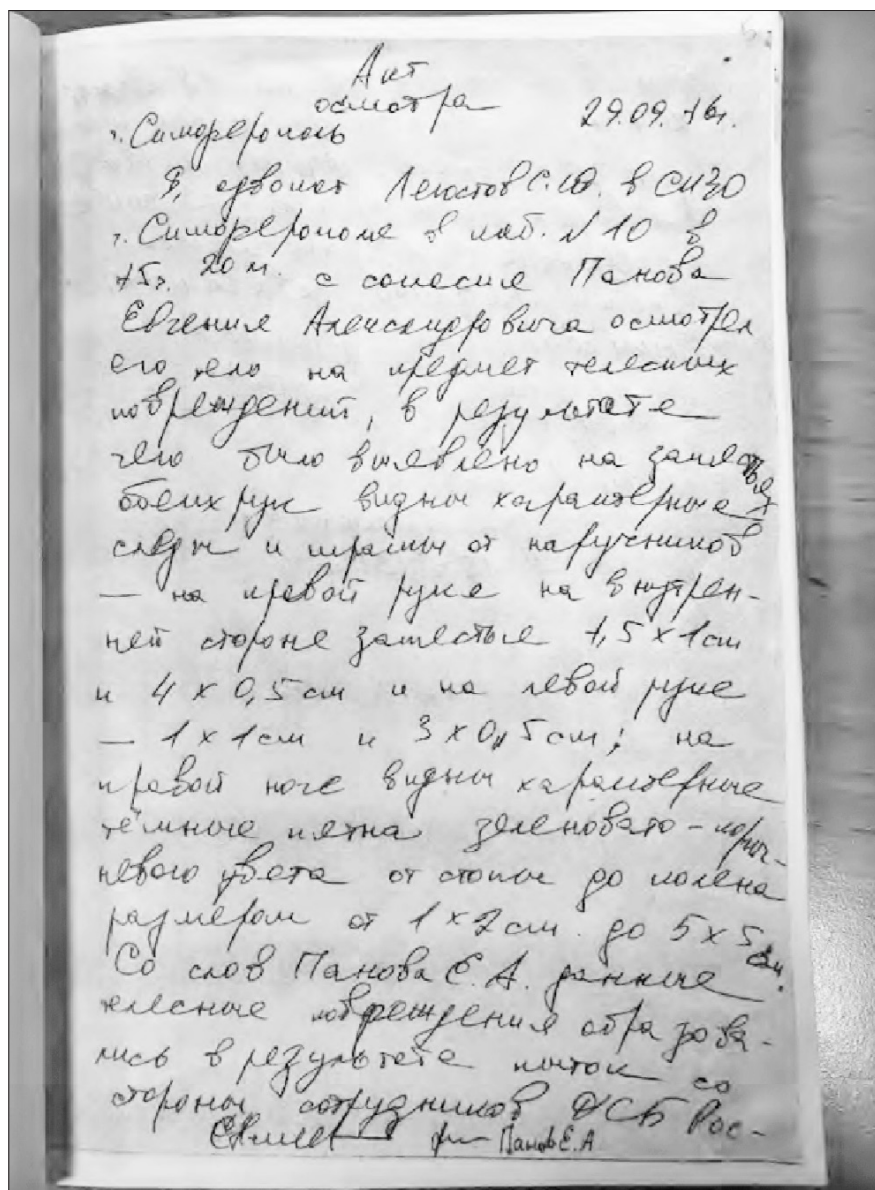
The lawyer had to notice the signs of torture on my body, I told her that I had been beaten, but I don't know whether she issued a complaint. I didn't trust this lawyer, since it was provided by FSB officers. As far as I know, lawyer Olha Pomozova didn't appeal the court decision concerning my arrest and the extension of my detention.

FSB officers, whose names I don't know, made me write a waiver of representation by lawyers Taras Omelchenko and Edem Semedliaev who, according to FSB officers, "wouldn't defend me and would use this case only for own P.R". I was forced to sign this document under the psychological threats, even though I understood that my relatives had hired them.

Moreover, after the detention and the torturing, they put a plastic collar on my sexual organ, and then tightened it, it turned blue and I felt a severe pain. It was on August 7, 2016 in the region of the detention. They also tried to put a wooden stick with a condom on it into the anus, to attach electrodes to my penis, however, I resisted and they couldn't do that.

I didn't count the other kicks and punches I got from August 7 to August 12.

*From the statement of Yevhen Panov written
in the detention facility in Simferopol*



The presence of numerous signs of violence is documented in the Act of examination of Evhen Panov by the lawyer Serhii Lehostov in the detention facility of Simferopol on September 29, 2016.

Акт
осмотра

29.09.16г.

1. Сидорова

Э, с/полит Лешков С.В. & СИЗО

2. Сидорова в каб. № 10 в
15, 20 м. с согласия Панова

Евгения Александровича осмотра
его тела на предмет телесных
повреждений, в результате
чего было выявлено на правой
боковой руке видны карманные
следы и шрамы от наруганий
— на правой руке на внутрен-
ней стороне запястья 1,5 x 1 см
и 4 x 0,5 см и на левой руке
— 1 x 1 см и 3 x 0,5 см; на
левой ноге видны карманные
темные пятна зеленовато-корич-
невого цвета от стопы до колена
размером от 1 x 2 см до 5 x 5 см.

Со слов Панова С.А. ранние
телесные повреждения отража-
лись в результате пыток со
стороны сотрудников ФСБ Рос-
сии от Панова С.А.

Vira Kotelianets: They Promised My Son to Send Him to “Warm Prison” for Cooperation

The mother of Evhen Panov accused by Russian special agencies in sabotage on the peninsula on the instructions of Ukrainian Intelligence service. A pensioner.



Photo from the archive of Vira Kotelianets

When Dzenia was detained we were shocked. I can't even put it into words. We spent two months in frustration. I spent a month in hospital; I lied unconscious for two weeks. Relatives wanted to bury me but I survived.

I remember as I was seriously going to die in 2010 when I had a cancer. However, Dzenia helped me to survive, took me to doctors and hospital and I combated the illness. He is the main pillar of our family, he is my support and my hope.

I thought that we had gone through the most terrible time for our family when Dzenia was in ATO. However, as it turned out, the worst things were waiting for us.

I could see him only several months after his detention in Crimea. In February 2017 he was brought from “Lefotovo” by plane, he was unable to walk. When I visited him in March it was hard for him to walk, he hobbled. Then I noticed that his right hand had been twisted, his arm and a leg were numb, and he had problems with his spine. I can talk to my son only through the glass in the detention facility of Simferopol. A guard monitoring everything is always nearby.

Once they allowed me to see him, but they turned off the telephone apparatus. I shouted through the glass as loudly as I could. I drew something on the glass, sometimes my shouting reached him. However, I managed to tell him that we were worrying about him, fighting for him and we were telling the world about him.

Zhenia doesn't cooperate with the investigation, even though they tried to persuade him using different methods. They offered him Russian citizenship, promised to send to a "warm prison" and to release him conditionally. The investigation had an order to make Zhenia slander Ukraine.

My son doesn't want to cooperate anyway. He doesn't understand how he will be able to go on with that, how to look into the eye of his countrymen.

Since my son was detained I have been to Crimea several times. I have an awful impression of those trips. When I went there for the first time, I was really scared. Local statesmen have antipathy to Ukrainian passports. On the administrative border of Crimea at Russian checkpoints they humiliate you and say offensive words. If you try to fight back, they throw all belonging out from the bag on the floor and inspect them with dirty hands. When I tried to stop that they said: "Shut up! You will be a commander at home, in your Hohland!"

Once I took two pieces of meat (350 g of each) across the administrative border of Crimea. At the checkpoint "Armiansk" border guards demanded to throw away that meat. They ordered to do it on the Ukrainian territory: "Take your pork, go to the Ukrainian territory and then come back". I have problems with my legs and it is hard for me to go anywhere. I sat down and said that I was not going anywhere. I was sitting among strangers for 40 minutes until a Russian border guard told me: "All right, go away from here".

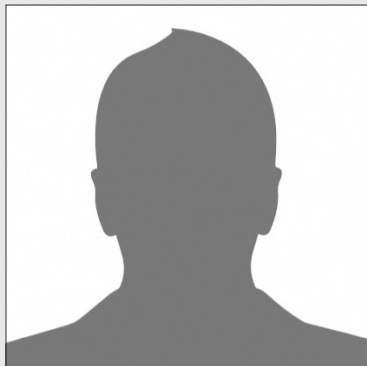
All those things were humiliating and offensive, but I braced myself together, since I knew I had to go to my son whatever it took.

They took away my pork. At first, they gave it to a man passing by, but then they took it away from him too.

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS

I visit FSB and the court in Crimea. They behave there like they are lords of the universe and we are second-class people. I talked to the prosecutor, the investigator. When the investigator gave me a permission to visit my son, I told him that my son wasn't guilty. The reply was: "I know that your son isn't guilty, but I cannot do anything about it".

Renat Paralamov: They Said: “We Are Going to Rape You”



A Crimean IT specialist, a businessman. He was born in Uzbekistan where his family was deported in 1944. After returning to the Crimea he lived in Nyzhnohirsk village of Nyzhnohirsk region.

In September 2017 FSB officers performed a search in his house. Then several unknown men in civilian clothes took Renat Paralamov into their van and drove in an unknown direction. Next day relatives and lawyers tried to find him, but without results. Soon he contacted them, he was found in a complicated psychological and physical condition at the Simferopol bus station. Renat Paralamov said that he had been severely tortured in FSB, they demanded his confession about participation in an Islamic organization “Hizb ut-Tahrir” prohibited in Russia. After that he had to leave Crimea together with his family. They moved to Kyiv.

It happened in the morning on September 13, 2017. That was the time for the morning prayer. At that moment I lived in the house of my wife’s family. My mother-in-law woke me and said that somebody was walking in the yard. I dressed up and went out. Unknown people were in the yard. They were in civilian clothes. Nobody was in a uniform. They knocked the door threatening to break it out if I didn’t open.

I went out and we sat down onto a bench in the yard. These people showed me a court order to perform an investigative action in our house.

I read through that document and drew their attention to the fact that the document allowed an inspection, but not a search. One of them started cursing and said that I was “too clever”. I demanded from him identifying himself and explaining why he was rude to me. He refused. His face was covered with a balaclava.

Actually, only one of them identified himself. Then I understood that he was an investigator. He showed me his ID where I saw the emblem of FSB. When I took my pen to put down his personal data, he hid it. I asked to show his ID one more time to write down who he was, but he replied: “There’ll be plenty of time to do it”.

They offered me to sign a protocol, but I refused saying that they brought the official witnesses from Simferopol I would sign only if they took somebody other. I said: “If you take anybody else as official witnesses, I will sign it!”

Instead, they wrote that I refused to have the inspection performed and came into the house, where they started the investigative actions. One of them followed me, said what I had to open: a closet or a drawer. Sometimes he took what he wanted without informing me and inspected.

They scared all my family. Two younger kids cried. They were 1 and 3 years old. I tried to calm them down, but they didn’t allow me to do that. They asked my wife to calm them down, locked them in another room so they didn’t see what was going on.

They confiscated my phone, my wife’s netbook, a tablet and a religious book with prayers to God. They drew a protocol and said that we had to go to the closest police station to make an expert assessment. Nyzhnohirsk ROVD (Regional Department of the Internal Affairs) was not far from my house and I thought that they would bring me there.

They got me into a car and threatened everybody who had already come to my place no be fined if they followed us. I got into their car and we drove. Other cars followed us and a police car was behind us. On the way out of the town I understood that we were going in an opposite direction, since Nyzhnohirsk ROVD was left on the right side. I pointed that, but they said: "Don't worry, everything will be fine". I realized that they had tricked me. At that moment they handcuffed me and put a bag over my head. They were driving for 2 hours, but I didn't know where to.

They pulled me out from the car with the bag over my head and took me somewhere. They took me to the room and placed onto a chair. Then they started questioning me where I lived, where I worked. I said that I wouldn't testify against myself and I wanted my lawyer to be present here. After that an unknown man came into the room and asked: "Who asked for a lawyer?" They pointed at me and he hit me in the chest. After that he said: "I am your lawyer!" Then this man left the room and they continued to question me.

The man questioning me asked again: "Do you need a lawyer?" I replied that I would talk in the lawyer's presence. Then that man came again and hit me in the back of the head. He warned me that they were not going to play with me and I had a poor choice: either I was going to lose my health and do that they told me or I was going to do what they told me remaining healthy. If none, they would move straight to "the next stage".

They understood that I didn't answer clearly to their questions, so they lifted me and removed the handcuffs. Holding me two men taped my arms and legs to knees. Then they put me face-down onto the floor, took off my underwear and attached something to my buttocks. After that they pushed me and I felt electric shocks. They continued to ask questions and when they didn't get the answers, I felt that the pain got worse and worse. When I couldn't take it anymore, I said that I agreed to answer.

They lifted me, put off the tape, handcuffed and placed on the same chair with a bag on my head. However, my answers weren't what they needed. Then they started cursing me. And then they repeated previous procedure, but this time they attached it in a way that it shocked me on the side and the pain was much more severe. The previous electric shocks were lighter in comparison to these. I started shouting. They cursed and told me to shut up.

Then one of them put something into my mouth. It felt like a rolled-up towel, they put the lower part of it between my upper lip and my nose and tightened it. Probably, they wanted to stuff it into my mouth, but they were a little bit out. Then I got a shock again and passed out.

When I regained consciousness, my head was turned to the side and I was choking with water. I was shaking; I couldn't speak and felt terrified. But I heard how they were cursing again and blaming me that I was pretending.

They started to lift me. At that moment I understood that they pulled the tape off my thumb. Further, my lawyers explained me that they had probably taken my fingerprints when I was unconscious.

They placed me in the chair, took the bag off and checked my eyes. I couldn't feel my left leg and arms, and I couldn't close my mouth. I was in such a state until they took off the bag and called somebody. I saw legs of this person. He was in a camouflage. I saw that he was wearing a balaclava. He made me two injections and said that I would feel better.

I was left alone until the injection had its effect. I took some rest, but I still felt pain. They took a swab off my mouth and then an FSB officer hit me in my chest. I bent with pain and started wheezing.

Then a woman came into the room. She measured my blood pressure, injected something into the left part of the oral cavity and started to examine me. This woman put a rag into my mouth and began to fix a dislocated jaw. Two men were holding me at that time. I showed her that I felt pain, but she answered: "Why are you

lying to me? You've got the injection!" Then she stepped back and told the FSB officers that I was lying.

After that they electrocuted me again blaming for the lie. They brought me to my knees and I felt something like a belt on my neck. I couldn't see since they put the bag over my head again. They tightened something on my head and pulled me up. "You see, you can close your mouth if you want", they said.

After that they beat me up brutally. I understood that I was already on the edge and it could be the end. I stopped screaming and started praying.

Soon they lifted me again. They put me face-down on something, took off my underwear and dripped a cold jelly-like substance between the buttocks. They said: "We are going to rape you!" One man said that they would use a pipe and a wire for this. They threatened to do the same with my wife and relatives. I had to agree to talk. They said: "Well! You can speak whenever you want to".

They made me sign two protocols. In one of them I confessed that in 2014 I found TNT and ammunition in the woodland belt in Dvorichchia village and hid them at home in Nyzhnohirsk, and then in Marina Rosha near Simferopol.

In second protocol I confessed that I was a member of the Islamic organization "Hizb ut-Tahrir", I had spread the information about it on the social network "Vkontakte" and I got missions in its clubs. They gave me the list of those who had gathered people. I knew only some of them. So in that way they made me tarnish other people and myself.

The FSB officers told me that I had no other options but to work for them. They explained to me that I would be sentenced to probation based on the first protocol. However, I would have to provide them with all necessary information during this space of time. If I decided to tell somebody what happened here, they would punish me and I would be sentenced to 15-17 years of prison or would be serving life in prison.

Then they forced me to retell the context of the protocols on camera. When I said something wrong they threatened to put me on the floor and continue the torture. I also signed a protocol saying that after a preventive chat I left the building of FSB, I walked around the city, felt terrible and spent all night in Gagarin Park and in the morning I came to them again to confess. Moreover, they forced me to write a statement that I was willingly cooperating with FSB and committed myself not to disclose secrets of the state security of Russia. They told me that otherwise they would give the information about me to mass media and I would be ashamed.

After that they offered me something to eat. At first, they offered salo (bacon), but I refused. Then they gave me a piece of bread. I choked down some bread with water, since I felt a terrible pain in my jaw. I spent that night on the floor in FSB. Next day they brought me to that place where, according to their legend, I had hidden TNT and ammunition. I had to point at that place on camera. Actually, they played a scene of finding 15 bullets there, as well as a small amount of TNT and wires.

After that they told me that I could go home to rest, but they would contact me soon. They got me into their car and dropped off near the Kubanskyi market in Simferopol. Then I went to the “Svoboda” bus station and contacted my relatives.

My neighbors, close relatives and other people supported me. I am grateful to all of them since thanks to them I am still alive.

*From the press-conference of Renat Paralamov
and his defenders in the press-center “Interfax-Ukraine”
November 4, 2017*

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS



Approximately 300 participants of Crimean actions of solidarity with the Euromaidan are walking along central streets of Simferopol to the Representative of the President of Ukraine with pro-European slogans. February 8, 2014 (photo provided by Andrii Kovalskyi).



Coordinators of Crimean actions of solidarity with the Euromaidan on Lenin Square in Simferopol. Serhii Kovalskyi, Andrii Shchekun, Ismail Ismailov and Serhii Mokreniuk (from left to right) (photo provided by Andrii Kovalskyi).

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS



Many thousands of people on the rally for the support of territory integrity of Ukraine outside Crimean Parliament on February 26, 2014. The start of active resistance of Crimean people against Russian annexation of Crimea (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).



Red and black flag on the rally on February 26, 2014, which Russian propaganda used to claim that it was brought by “the provocateurs from Kyiv”. Actually, according to the participant of that rally, Stanislav Yermakov, this flag was brought by Simferopol residents to support the spirit of the Euromaidan.

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS



Morning of February 27, 2014. The building of Crimean Parliament captured by Russian militaries (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).



Russian tricolor on the building of the Council of Ministers of Crimea. February 2014 (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS



Representatives of "Crimean self-defense" on the streets of Simferopol with shields and icons (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).



Russian soldiers in the airport "Simferopol". February 28, 2014 (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS



*Armed Russian soldier on the street of Simferopol. February 2014
(photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).*



*Russian military equipment on the streets of Simferopol.
March 2014 (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).*

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS



*The representative of “Aksionov army” swears “allegiance to Crimean people”.
February 2014 (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).*



*The action of Crimean women against war in Simferopol. March 2014.
Photo published in group “Crimean women for peace” on Facebook.*

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS



Russia-controlled power forces is surrounding Lenin square in Simferopol on the eve of the Day of deportation of Crimean Tatar people. May 17, 2014 (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).



One of the first detentions in Russian style in Simferopol. May 2014 (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).

IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS



Crimean Tatar people on the event dedicated to the anniversary of Crimean Tatar deportation in Ak-Mechet neighborhood of Simferopol with supervision of Russian aviation. May 18, 2014 (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).



Implementation of Russian practice of dispersing of peaceful demonstrations in Crimea. May 2014 (photo made by Stanislav Yurchenko).

CONTENT

FOREWORD FROM AUTHORS OF THE PROJECT

<i>Anna Andriievska</i> . Two realities of one peninsula	7
<i>Olena Khalimon</i> . Crimea is Ukraine, but we still have a lot of work to do	9

CHAPTER I

FROM CRIMEAN EUROMAIDAN TO “CRIMEAN SPRING”

<i>The Identity of the Witness Is Hidden for Security Reasons:</i> Rumors about the Collapse of Ukraine Have Been Spread in Crimean Establishment	15
<i>Serhii Mokreniuk</i> : a Friend did not hide that He Had Stood near the Crimean Parliament for the money	20
<i>Ismail Ismailov</i> : There Were Leaflets on the Streets That We Are Traitors of Crimea	24
<i>Serhii Kovalskii</i> : I Have Figured Out that I Was “Hunted” and Guards Took Me Out of Crimea	27
<i>The Identity of The Witness Is Hidden for Security Reasons:</i> Crimean Deputies Have Played along with Kremlin Being Convinced that They Made Historical Decisions by Themselves	31
<i>Olena Dolia</i> : My Acquaintances Were Seeing Russian Militaries on APC When they Rode to the Shop to Buy Vodka	36
<i>Halyna Balaban</i> : I Was Told: “You Are Young and Hothead. Attend Mass Actions for All of Us”	40
<i>Serhii Hromenko</i> : Russian Soldiers Scared Me Noticeably Less than Crimean “Titushky”	43
<i>Olena Dubrova</i> : the Announcement in the Elevator Talked to Inform FSB about Pro-Ukrainian Activists	47

<i>Oksana (Surname is Hidden for Security Seasons): “Self-Defense Told Us: “If You Don’t Disappear, We Will Come to Your Home””</i>	51
<i>Viktor Merzhvynskiy: I Am Also Responsible for Anti-Ukrainian Teachers of Crimea</i>	55
<i>Olha (the Surname is Hidden for security reasons): During Occupation of Crimea Ukrainian Was No Longer Used in School</i>	59
<i>Danylo Myhailychenko: Some Teachers of Ukrainian Gymnasium Were Proud of the Fact that They Would Be Working for Russia</i>	61
<i>Elzara (the Surname Is Hidden for Security Reasons): in 2014 Crimean People Was Looking for Guns to Fight for Crimea</i>	66
<i>Oleksandr Siedov: Many Crimean People Have Accepted the Fact of Occupation</i>	70
<i>Stanislav Yermakov: in 2014 Outside the Parliament Somebody Commanded to Start and Two Lines Met</i>	73
<i>Oleksandr Boltian: I Was in Kyiv, but Crimean Mass-Media At The Same Time Had Been “Detaining” Me in Crimea</i>	79
<i>Serhii Vikarchuk: to Leave Crimea I Half a Year Had Been Developing a Plan for Escape</i>	82
<i>Liuba Kalmakova: I Was Afraid of Crimean “Self-Defense” which Were Walking along Simferopol Streets with Bats and Axe Handles</i>	85
<i>Valentyna Eminova: I Continued to Speak Freely and Ridicule “Militiamen”</i>	90
<i>Yevhen Buket: Probably, Crimea Was Given to Russia to Prevent the Attack on Kyiv</i>	94
<i>Yevhen Sukhodolskii: not All Prosecutor Could Take a Decision to Quit</i>	97

CHAPTER II

RUSSIAN REPRESSIONS IN CRIMEA

<i>Oleksandr Popkov: the Most Terrible Prosecutions Have Been Practised in Crimea</i>	105
<i>Oleh Sentsov: I Don't Know What Your Beliefs are Worth if You Aren't Prepared to Die for Them</i>	109
<i>Olexandr Kolchenko: Having Put Us into Prisons This Regime Just Got Closer to Its End</i>	112
<i>Osman Pashaiev: While We Were Being Detained We Heard People Screaming Next-door</i>	115
<i>Serhii Mokrushyn: They Were Beating Vladlen's Head against the Wall with Enough Force to Break Acrylic Glass</i>	122
<i>Stanislav Yurchenko: I Wasn't Afraid to get in Prison, I Was Afraid to be detained in Basement</i>	126
<i>Serhii Dub: I was Glad to Be Taken to the Police for the First Time since They Could Take Me to Forest</i>	131
<i>Olena Lysenko: I Was Afraid that They Would Kill Me and My Child Would Be an Orphan</i>	137
<i>Natalia Kokorina: I Left FSB Devastated, with the Feeling Like I Had Been Raped not Physically, but Morally.</i>	141
<i>Dmytro Andriievskyi: I Was Taken through My Native Village under Heavy Guard Like a Criminal</i>	145
<i>Nataliia Andriievska: FSB Officers Blamed Me for Speaking with Them in Ukrainian</i>	148
<i>Pavlo Veselyk: a Steel 2 Meter-long Crowbar Was Brought on for the Search of my Apartment.</i>	150

<i>Zair Akadyrov</i> : Shambazov locked car's doors: "don't go to the base, straight to the basement"	153
<i>Halyna Dzhykaieva</i> : FSB Officer Asked Me: "You Probably Know We Have Ways of Making People Testify"	161
<i>Zarema Bariieva</i> : They Brought Our Home in Mess, Opened Closets and Threw All Things onto the Floor.	165
<i>Ahtem Chygoz</i> : Not Betrayers Faced the Trial, but Those Who Had Defended the Laws of the State	171
<i>Volodymyr Balukh</i> : Breaking My Vows Was Enough not to Be Imprisoned.	173
<i>Natalia Balukh</i> : This State Takes My Son Away from Me, I am Afraid that I Will Never See Him Again	177
<i>Archbishop Klyment (Pavlo Kushch)</i> : I Thought the Church Would Be Knocked Down, but, as It Turned Out, Terrible Things Happened in Crimea	183
<i>Ihor Movenko</i> : Masked Men Knocked Me Down and Took into the Bus.	189
<i>Valenyina Movenko</i> : I Took Everything Out from the Bag: "Don't Be Afraid, There Are No Bombs, Only a Ball"	193
<i>Ilmi Umerov</i> : Functionaries of Kremlin Tried "to Convince" Every Crimean Deputy to Vote for "Referendum"	197
<i>Oleksii Nazimov</i> : They Promised to Plant Me Drugs if I Don't Stop to Criticize the Authority	203
<i>Natalia Kharchenko</i> : People in FSB Make You Understand that They Possess Limitless Opportunities	206
<i>Mykola Semena</i> : This Is the Revenge for Criticism.	210
<i>Emil Kurbedinov</i> : Staff Members of Detention Facility Treated Me Very Politely	216

CHAPTER III
IN CRIMEAN TORTURE CHAMBERS

<i>Zarina Ametova: Before Killing Reshat, They Got Him Naked and Tortured, and Burnt His Clothes</i>	222
<i>Lierane Haibullaieva: Doctors Had to Collect Parts of the Body of Reshat Ametov as a Construction Kit</i>	224
<i>Andrii Shchekun: The Capturers Promised to Cut out my Liver</i>	228
<i>Anatolii Kovalskyi: in the Captivity I Was Afraid to Hear My Son`s Voive behind the Wall</i>	233
<i>Hennadi Afanasiiev: They Exposed us with Electric Current through Wires Attached to Our Genitals</i>	237
<i>Olha Afanasieva: FSB Called Me and Said: “Calm Down Your Son. Otherwise, Harsh and Cruel Measures Will Be Taken”</i>	242
<i>Yevhen Panov: Electric Current Made the Entire Body Tremble and there was Smell of Skin Burning</i>	247
<i>Vira Kotelianets: They Promised My Son to Send Him to “Warm Prison” for Cooperation</i>	251
<i>Renat Paralamov: They Said: “We Are Going to Rape You”</i>	254

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Автори проекту: Анна Андрієвська, Олена Халімон
Переклад англійською мовою: Ольга Тимчишин
Редактор англійського тексту: Павло Власко
Верстка і оформлення: Катерина Салата

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