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The Cracking of Crimea: two sides to every annexation

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Abstract

In this paper, the variation of support of the Russian annexation of Crimea through a socio-economic context is explored in both the Crimean Peninsula and mainland Russia. Previous literature demonstrates that many aspects of society, such as political freedom, economic prosperity and cultural protection were promised within the Crimean Peninsula, but not necessarily carried out by the Russian administration. The citizens of Crimea were supportive of the annexation at first due to guarantees of gaining access to the Russian mainland, as well as promises of new infrastructure that would connect the peninsula to the mainland. Through newspaper articles, it became clear that these promises were all political rhetoric by President Vladimir Putin and his administration, as many of these projects were never seen through or started. Over the past six years, the citizens of both Crimea and Russia have seen economic stagnation in both regions met with economic sanctions from the international community. Additionally, there has been a lack of political freedom as the Russian administration wants to ensure that the only following is that of President Putin. This research is put forth in order to demonstrate that the annexation has now proved to be less successful than originally hoped for the Russian administration, and that there should be cause of concern in the international community as tensions are growing within both Russian and Crimean citizens. Unfortunately, with President Putin creating a new constitutional amendment that would allow him to stay in power for another fifteen years, there is a question of how far the Russian government will go to ensure that the citizens of Crimea and Russia publicly support him and will be punished otherwise.

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Introduction

The year 2014 was a turning point for several bi-lateral and multi-lateral relationships across the globe, specifically for Ukraine and Russia. Mid-year of 2014 is when Russian troops invaded the Crimea region of Ukraine and occupying the region. Their rationale of invasion was historical ties, and President Vladimir Putin stated that it was only the proper action to take to improve the lives of the people within the Crimea region. Many international entities, such as the United Nations, the European Union Commission, and the United States of America do not recognize the annexation of Crimea as it was completed by force and coercion. This paper discusses the historical ties of both Ukraine and Russia to Crimea, as well as view previous literature's take on the annexation, and how the Crimean population's socio-economic outcomes were before and after the annexation. This paper attempts to answer the following question, *What explains the variation in support for the Russian annexation of Crimea in conjunction with economic and social conditions experienced by the individuals living in Crimea*, then argue that the Russian population in Crimea, despite originally supporting the annexation of Crimea, have now changed their support to opposition as the annexation reaches its sixth year of external occupation by the Russians. Additionally, the change in the support of Russia will be examined, and how this affects (or lacks affect) the current Russian administration under President Vladimir Putin.

Historical Background

Ukraine and Russia have had historical, political and economic ties for many centuries' due geographical proximity, similar cultures and populations [many Russians currently live in Ukraine and the Crimea region] and of course, Ukraine is a previous satellite country of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics [USSR]. A visual timeline can be viewed in Appendix one.

Crimea was a part of the Russian state from 1783, when the Tsarist Empire annexed it a decade after defeating Ottoman forces in the Battle of Kozludzha, until 1954, when the Soviet government transferred Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic [UkrSSR] (Kramer 2020) for "managerial purposes". During this time period, the Soviet government kept the transfer of Crimea very quiet from the general public of Russia and the rest of the world. This was done to ensure the privacy of the Russian government in light of the Cold War, especially as many

international actors were polarized to supporting either the United States of America or the Soviet Union.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, a 1997 treaty with Ukraine permitted Russia to retain its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, under a “lease” that has a tentative end date of 2042 (Popovici 2018). This ultimately gave Russia the access needed to make a future overthrow of Crimea. The relationship between Ukraine and Russia during the time period of the 1997 treaty and the 2014 annexation has not been without its faults, but there seemed to be a mutual understanding that if the two countries wanted to avoid war and conflict, they would need to make compromises in areas such as economics, trade, politics and border control for their citizens. This all changed in 2014. Violent protests broke out in Kiev against President Victor Yanukovich’s government. These protests seemed to be fueled off the cancellation of an economic agreement with the European Union in favor of closer ties to Russia (Khrushcheva 2019). When Yanukovich fled to Russia, the Kremlin managed a forceful, paramilitary takeover of the Crimean Peninsula. This region had been part of the Russian Empire for centuries as aforementioned — Russians consider it to be known as “Kievan Russia”, a proto-state of Russia and Ukraine. When President Putin returned it to the Russian control, his then-waning popularity skyrocketed from 60 to nearly 90 percent (Khrushcheva 2019).

What these Russian people did not realize is when Russia illegally seized Crimea from Ukraine [this event violated the territorial integrity of the former USSR], and sparked a war that has displaced nearly 2 million people and destroyed the country’s infrastructure (Popovici 2018). A few days after the Crimean invasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin held a referendum, where the citizens of Crimea voted in favor of joining Russia. Putin justifies the aggression by asserting that the population of Crimea is comprised mostly of ethnic Russians. This population, Putin cites in many interviews and rhetoric, must be given the same opportunities as those individuals and families within Russia’s borders and that despite the 1954 overturning of Crimea to Ukraine, Crimea is the right of Russia to possess. Interestingly, the actions of the referendum proved turbulent and any credible international observers for elections were absent. Local authorities reported a turnout of 83 percent, with 96.7 percent voting in favor to join Russia. The numbers seemed unlikely and highly inflated, given that ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars accounted for almost 40 percent of the peninsula’s

population. [Two months later, a leaked report from the Russian president's Human Rights Council put turnout at only 30 percent] (Pifer 2020). This should come as no surprise as Russia is notorious for inflating numbers to better suit their greed for international recognition and power.

In 2020, powerful actors such as the European Union and the United States are continuing to place economic sanctions on the Crimea region in order to gain the Russian's attention when it comes to illegal acts. Additionally, these entities do not recognize Moscow's holdings on Crimea and many still consider the Crimea peninsula to be a part of Ukraine (Morello 2020). But Russia is not budging when it comes to releasing the Crimea region and signing it back over to Ukraine. The current Russian administration has continued making large investments within Crimea, citing that the citizens on both the Crimea peninsula and within Russia support these new projects of railroads, paved roads, importation and exportation of goods and services.

Literature Review

Previous literature has demonstrated that Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 has played a large role in both the domestic politics of Russia and the international politics of the modern world. Authors have explored the political, economic and social ramifications of the Crimea annexation and how this may create tensions in the realm of international partnerships with Russia.

Author Znamenshchikov discussed in his article, *Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol: First Results of Implementation of State Programs in Economic and Social Spheres*, the economic programs that Russia has implemented since the beginning of the annexation and how this situation is unique to the region. In a relatively short period of time, Crimea had to transform their current infrastructure, not only to reflect the Russia administration but also establish economic allegiances with the Russian Federation. To begin long-term integration of the Crimean region, large projects aimed at revamping Crimea's economy and integration to better suit the Russian interests, including The Federal Target Program for Social and Economic Development of Crimea (developed in 2015 and is considered valid until 2022). This program includes the construction of electric grid facilities, including power bridge to Crimea and cable crossing through the Strait of Kerchen, construction of transport crossing through the Strait of Kerchen (Crimean Bridge) and the Federal Route Tavrida, facilities of medicine and health care, water supply, development of

industrial complex, improvements on access to tourism, etc. (Znamenshchikov 2019). These implementations appear positive to the international sector, but the main problem lies in how the administration in both Russia and Crimea are implementing this program and measuring its successes.

Romeo-Victor Ionescu and Pierre Chabal discuss the various aspects of society (religion, economics, social opportunities, politics, etc.) and how these factors have been altered due to the ongoing Russian occupation in Crimea and intertwining these concepts with political science theories in their article, *The Impact on Continental and Economic Issues of Russia's Military Stance on Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*. The first theory that these two authors address is the “vital-space” theory. Foundationally, all States are in a struggle for space and seek to increase their territory in order to access more resources. This classic idea that States, as a rule, extend into their neighbors, has a countervailing significance: any State having lost territory will be driven to reacquire it, as if expansion was an unstoppable trend (Ionescu and Chabal 2015). Once Russia lost the area of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, their goal has been to regain this territory for not only political gain, but also economic opportunity and resource exploitation.

A second theory that Ionescu and Chabal discuss that is imperative to understanding the current annexation situation between Russia and Crimea is “geo-economics” theory. This theory is characterized by the following actions: actors are viewed no longer in terms of the “rapport” to the territory as a power-base but of the impact of economic stability or cyclical downturns on their status vis-à-vis other actors (Ionescu and Chabal 2015). In other words, once Russia had gained the Crimean region through military force and mitigated uprising against the Russian government and military, they shifted their focus on economics and social aspects of Crimea. A concept that the Russian administration understands is that in order to gain economic prosperity in this region, they must implement programs that will not only benefit the citizens of Crimea, but also Russia (to ensure the most support by the general public to mitigate ill-sentiments towards the administration). The programs that Russia has implemented are mentioned below in the “argument and analysis section.” A caveat to this concept is the notion of paper versus implementation. These programs created by the Russian government appear to be intact on paper, but implementation of these programs have the potential to be more harmful than helpful.

Author Irina Mikheeva makes several interesting points in her article, *Accession of the Crimea Territory to Russia: the Crimea's Inestimable Value*. Mikheeva discusses the following points: First, the assumption is made that the occurrence of the Crimea in the economic and legal space of the Russian Federation has included significant investment. Secondly, this integration was a critical turning point in world politics that significantly altered the scope of international relations and the agreed-to “norms”. Finally, the annexation of Crimea into the Russian Federation has allowed the ruling “elite” of Russia to optimize the use of opportunities for their own legitimization (Mikheeva 2011). First, the accession of Crimea has given Russia the opportunity to make economic investments in an area that still holds a large Russian population, thus giving them the opportunity to “improve” the area and not receiving much backlash from the citizens. Secondly, by Russia annexing Crimea and the only major retaliation by the international world was sanctions and dropping of some (but not all) trade agreements demonstrates that Russia took the risk of losing trade opportunities for the accession of Crimea and decided that holding the territory under Russia was far more positive than Crimea encountering trade sanctions. This annexation demonstrated on an international scale that full isolation of the country that is committing the fallacy will not occur and that in the future more “buttons” will be pushed to see really how far an accession scheme can go. Thirdly, the annexation of Crimea has allowed the Russian elites to legitimize their own agenda and created a power vacuum in Russia. To the elites, Crimea is a “trial and error” area where they can experiment with investments, new policies and even social structures to see what will benefit the motherland the most, and catapult Russia into becoming a large international superpower for years to come.

This previous literature has demonstrated that the annexation of Crimea may have been successful in theory, but in reality, has caused more harm than good. Not only is Russia attempting to make a lasting impact on the political climate of the Crimea region, they are also pursuing to mold the social and economics environments to reflect more pro-Russian sentiments and actions. Russia has demonstrated to the international world that they will make drastic choices in order to maintain their global influence. By reflecting on these previous theories and observations, it is apparent that the divide between Crimea and Russia is much more than surface level. This annexation not only caused tensions economically, but culturally and politically. All social classes between the elite administration to the working classes of industry and agriculture within Crimea feel the increased Russian influence on all aspects of their life: the success of the economy go back

into Russia to inflate their own economy with the outside revenue, the Russian military is stationed along border zone and large waterways to ensure individuals and families are not attempting to flee Crimea and sneak back to Ukraine, and most importantly, politics have drastically been saturated with Russian influence. Crimean officials now have to answer the heads of government back in Moscow and ensure that their actions are not “stepping on the toes” of the motherland.

Argument & Analysis

Social media [Facebook, twitter] and news platforms play a large role in how information is spread across the world. Statistics can be inflated; quotes can be misspoken, and false information can lead to conflict. This warping of information, whether it is intentional or not, had led to the questioning of the Crimea Annexation by Russia as it is almost six years to the date of the Russian invasion of the peninsula.

In Russia’s eyes, the annexation of Crimea was not to gain spheres of influence over factors of society, such as economy and politics. Russia’s leaders truly believed that the Crimea territory was legally an area of Russia and that the notion of Ukraine categorizing it as theirs was illegal and wrong. The caveat is that President Vladimir Putin is well aware of the international rules and regulations when it comes to accessing and/or acquiring an outside territory. In international law, Conquest is the acquisition of territory through force, An effective conquest takes place when physical appropriation of territory [annexation] is followed by “subjugation” [i.e., the legal process of transferring title] (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica 2007). The doctrine of conquest and its derived rules is contrary to international law, a view that is expressed in the following critical internationally recognized documents: the covenant of the League of Nations, the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, the judgments of the international military tribunals created at the end of World War II, and the Charter of the United Nations. The statements regarding aggressive conquest and how these actions break international law were placed in the *Stimson Doctrine (1932)*, published in January 1932 and subsequently agreed upon by the assembly of the League of Nations. Additionally, *The Draft Declaration on Rights and Duties of States (1949)*, was created by the International Law Commission of the United Nations. This document contained [in Article 11] the rule that states are obligated not to recognize territorial acquisitions achieved by aggressive war (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica 2007). Thus, Putin was aware that his annexation of Crimea

was considered illegal by international actors around the world, including the United States of America, the European Union, and the United Nations.

Barclay Ballard of World Finance published an article in October of 2019 updating the world on how the Crimean region is “holding up” since the Russian invasion, and how the implications of territorial and economic conquest have larger influences than many people think. Ballard made the following statement, the peninsula’s success, however, is a little misleading. Since 2014, Moscow has provided huge sums of money for the Crimean economy, funding a number of large infrastructure projects of high value. This expenditure has not only created the pretense of prosperity – “it has also proved a monumental drain on Russia’s finances at a time when international sanctions are beginning to bite” (Ballard 2019). In other words, Crimea’s success is demonstrated on paper with statistics that may have been altered [as that has been a characteristic in the past of the Russian administration] and in reality, there has been promised projects not completed and growing sentiments on both sides of the Black Sea that citizens are unhappy with Russia’s annexation. Industries such as tourism, fishing, manufacturing and banking have been affected negatively since the annexation took place, as many international entities such as the United States of America, Ukraine and even the European Union have ceased trading relationships with Crimea due to the Russia annexation.

The administration in Moscow has built a new airport in Simferopol and as aforementioned, connected Crimea to the Russian mainland with a 1.4-mile suspension bridge over the Kerch Strait. Crimea’s economy experienced extremely fast growth in 2019—at least according to data collated by the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (a think tank with close ties to the Kremlin). By 2022, on the institute’s projections, Moscow will have plowed \$13 billion into the territory (Smith 2019). If you look between the lines, this new-found wealth for the peninsula is not evenly spread. While Crimea’s construction and manufacturing sectors have expanded by twenty percent since 2018, sectors such as agriculture, retail, and tourism have grown far less, with statistics being recorded at most an improvement by three percent. Outside the often-corrupt elite, private enterprise has collapsed, and ninety percent of small businesses have closed and filed for bankruptcy since 2014 (Smith 2019). Despite there being trade embargos on the Crimean Peninsula, economic hardships for small business owners, and even Russian citizens living in Crimea are encountering difficulties crossing the borders into Russia [when ease of access was promised], there are many people in Crimea who support the annexation of Crimea by the

Russians. But, as the new year has begun, this massive support that was once displayed in the earlier side of this decade has now fizzled out.

The reality of the matter is that Russia does not acknowledge the sectors that have become stagnant or has produced negative growth. In the eyes of the Putin's administration, the holding of Crimea for the past six years has demonstrated to the world that Russia can withstand international sanctions and also maintains a strong military presence in the eastern bloc of the European region. Over the past six years, the aggressive nationalistic tendencies of Russian citizens, especially over the Crimean annexation, have faded away as concerns of economic prosperity keep them up at night and lack of production has led them to worry about where their next meal is coming from (Khrushcheva 2019).

For Crimea, the annexation has proved to be disappointing over the past six years. The initial support for Russia's invasion and administration was based off the promised ideas and projects to positively boost the economy and political spheres of the Crimean region to the point that they would no longer need Ukraine or the European Union for support. Now, six years later, the support has disappeared as the result of this promises are mostly a ruse.

Crimea has undergone significant changes over the past six years. A large number of ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars — close to 140,000 — have left the peninsula since 2014 (Pifer 2020). Crimean Tatars state that intimidation and oppression as one of the main reasons for moving out of the region. During the same period, around 250,000 individuals have moved from Russia to Crimea (Pifer 2020); The inflow has included troops and sailors, as the Kremlin has bolstered the Russian military presence on the peninsula, deploying new submarines, surface combatants and combat aircraft among other things. This is an important concept to understand as this influx of troops and sailors from Russia means that Russia can keep an eye on the borders and waterways between these two occupations. Unfortunately, this influx of persons has caused Crimean persons to lose their jobs in both the military and fishing industries.

The economic situation currently in Crimea leaves a sour taste in the mouths of Russians and Cremins alike. Trying to create a success story, Moscow has poured in more than \$10 billion in direct subsidies as well as funding major construction and infrastructure projects as those aforementioned. On the other hand, small business has suffered, particularly with the decline in

tourism, which once accounted for about one quarter of Crimea's economy (Pifer 2020). Tourism was previously seen as a very profitable sector of the economy as many cruises and tour companies would place stops on the Crimea territory. Crimea also remains subject to a variety of Western economic sanctions, including those from the European Union and the United States of America. Though these countries do not want Crimea to drown from isolation and economic downturn, they are also trying to make a political statement to Russia, demonstrating that illegal actions such as the annexation will not be tolerated.

Over the past six years, the support for President Vladimir Putin has declined in both Crimea and on mainland Russia. This is due to both regions experience economic stagnation and lack of political freedom. Despite this lack of support, President Putin, and with the Kremlin-controlled Duma, passed a constitutional amendment this year that would allow Putin to remain in power until 2036 (Staglin 2020). Thus, the original regulations of two-term presidential limit have been thrown out. This political move by President Putin did not sit well with many of Russia's citizens, and there have been calls for protests and resistance. In April 2020, Russia will be holding a vote for the public on this new constitutional amendment. But, viewing the previous inflation of numbers and statistics by the Russian government, I do not think it would be a surprise if the numbers were reported to favor Putin and this new constitutional amendment. Additionally, there could be little opportunity to review these statistics as President Putin has control on many organizations and institutions related to the Russian government and political sphere.

Future implications of this annexation

As more time passes from the original invasion by the Kremlin, more sentiments of ill-will and resistance will start to grow on both sides of the Black Sea. The lack of stable employment for many sectors within Crimea is one of the biggest concerns of citizens living on the peninsula. This is due to the notion that generations have "made their living" off certain industries, such as fishing and tourism. Now with these industries largely sector to Russian-born citizens from the motherland, or they are completely diminished due to international sanctions, the frustration and weariness is growing. Furthermore, international sanctions placed on the region has stagnated growth as well (Ayres 2019). With no income, many individuals and families are struggling to pay for groceries, house mortgages, or electricity bills. The danger of having a growing rates of

individuals and families that cannot sustain themselves economically is then that region's economy will eventually collapse. Especially for Crimea's situation, they will then become fully reliant on Russia, first economically, and then following politically and socially. The international community may view this skewed situation as colonialism [though may be different as many persons living on the peninsula are of Russia descendent] and the international world order has frowned upon colonialism since the Europeans gave up their colonial ties in Africa between the 1960s and late 1980s. But, the international community, including entities such as the United States, the European Union, and even singular member states as Ukraine, have restrained from intervening because there is potential of this situation becoming a catalyst for yet another World War.

Socially and politically, the Crimean Peninsula has undergone a transformation in the past six years and will continue to change as long as the Russian administration is the head of how cultural aspects of the region are handled. At the beginning of the annexation, citizens of Crimea were offered "perks" of Russia, but no one was told the process of applying for a Russian passport and the subsequent events to be classified as equal to those of their Russian counterparts would be confusing, there would be lack of information and long lines awaiting those that attempted the process. Politically, the structure of government would be a "puppet" government where they need to answer to President Putin's cabinet and orders, as in his eyes Crimea is a part of the mainland Russia, and he still has autonomous power over them.

There is no playbook on how this situation will play out in the future. Questions will continue to arise: *will Russia give up the Crimean Peninsula if the international sanctions continue? Will there be another revolution from the Crimean citizens? How much pressure and control by the Russian administration considered too much?* With the information that is currently available, it is known that the economic health of the Crimean Peninsula is stagnant and in danger of going into a long-term recession. This is due to aforementioned factors, such as the international sanctions placed on large trading partners, such as the European Union and the United States. Additionally, many jobs have been outsourced to Russian-born citizens or have completely vanish due to the annexation. Sectors such as tourism has seen a rapid decline due to many borders and ports being blocked by the Russian military to outside visitors and tourists. Socially, many individuals and families know they will be punished if they speak out against the Russian

government, and many news reports from international sources will leave out identifying information to protect persons that interview for fear of retaliation by the Russian government. In conjunction with social aspects, political freedom has been tightened with this annexation. Everything is run from Moscow, and those on the peninsula know that they must follow those orders to ensure their personal safety and the safety of the community.

As the international entities, such as the European Union, China, the United States of America, and even Russia are attempting to balance soft and hard power, there is potential for the European Union to gain more political influence from these other entities and command enough hard power through mechanisms [as they do not have their own European military but have access to member states' military commands]. This gain of political influence may spark the international community to back the European Union, specifically with Ukraine, to take back the Crimean Peninsula. There is a hope that this action would be done peacefully as to demonstrate that illegal invasion and annexation are frowned upon by global actors. But there is always potential for escalation due to the notion that the annexation occurred under forceful and aggressive measures. Territorial disputes are difficult to resolve in nature, but the question many political scientists and governments alike in regard to the Crimea Peninsula is how long the international world stand by while Russia holds onto Crimea with empty promises and tensions rising.

Conclusion

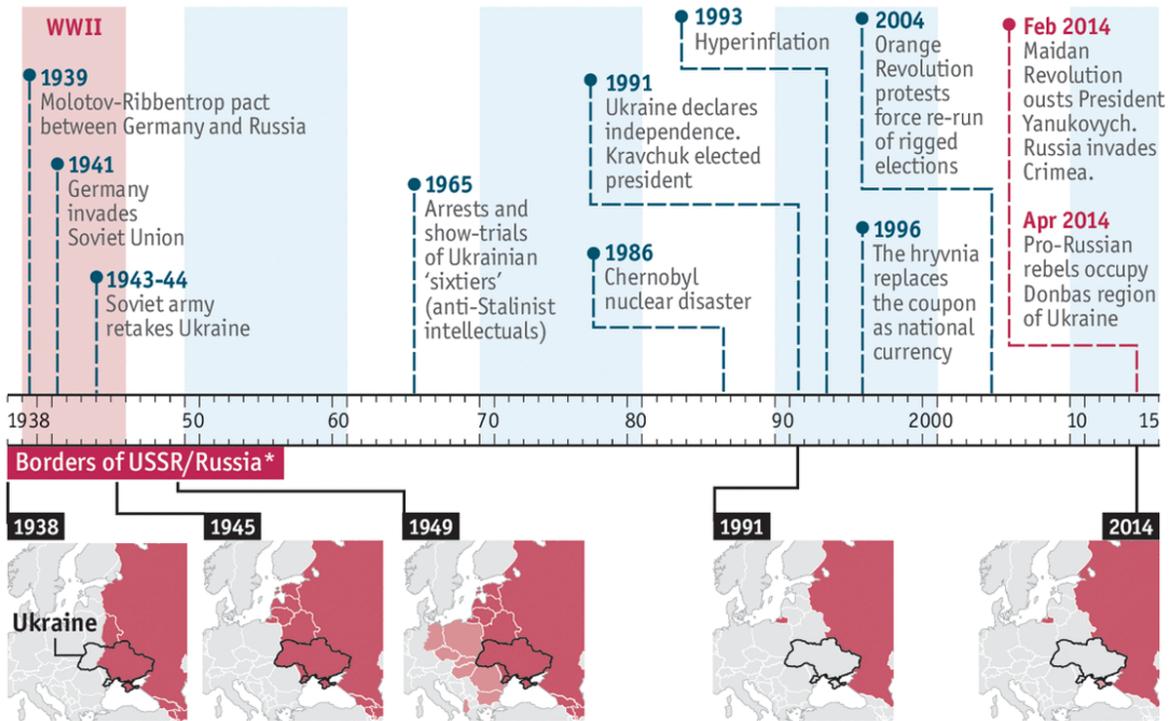
It is difficult as an outsider to fully comprehend what an individual or family endures while living on the Crimean Peninsula. To have the Russian government invade and take everything from your world and turn it upside-down is unimaginable, especially because Russia is aggressive in many things outside of their military. I can only imagine how frustration and heart-breaking it must be to these people that after six years of illegal occupation, the Russian government and military have not accomplished many of the infrastructure, resources and funding that they stated was going to occur after the initial annexation.

To the international world, the illegal annexation of Crimea is a disgrace to the reputation of post-Cold War Russia. Despite the numerous treaties and agreements that the Russian state signed into effect and even maintained after the formal destruction of the USSR, President Vladimir Putin still made the conscious decision to illegally invade the Crimean Peninsula in

March of 2014. Russian citizens were favorable of this invasion as President Putin declared that the territory was rightful property of the motherland, and that there was going to be economic opportunities for many Russian citizens on the Peninsula. Similarly, many Crimean citizens were favorable of a Pro-Russian state as the then current Ukrainian President had fled the country. Additionally, the Russian administration had made many promises to the citizens of Crimea, among them including opportunities for employment, economic prosperity and Russian citizenship. Being six years out from the illegal annexation, it is clear to state on both sides that the support for territorial claims in Crimea has diminished. Many of the projects, funding and resources that were promised on both sides [to Russian citizens and Crimea citizens] were either poorly constructed or never carried out in the first place. Russia started becoming more focused on outside relationships, such as with China and the United States of America. Russian and Crimean citizens alike were questioning when they would experience the employment opportunities, economic prosperity or political freedom that Vladimir Putin so vehemently preached across various social media platforms as well in the streets of Moscow and Sevastopol. Unless the Russian administration starts to “practice what they preach,” the future of the Crimean Peninsula will be shaky, and this will lead to violence based in cultural retaliation and resistance.

Appendix 1

Ukraine's path 1938-2015



*And Eastern bloc, on modern borders

Economist.com

Note on Appendix 1: In this timeline, you can see important dates that constitutes the relationship between Russia and Ukraine, specifically the Crimean Peninsula. Additionally, it can be seen how and when the borders changed between Russia and the rest of the European region.

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