

REGIONALISM AND THE CRIMEAN TATAR POLITICAL FACTOR IN 2004 UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

Towards the end of 2004, the majority of the media in the Western World focused on the rigged presidential elections in the Ukraine that led to the Orange Revolution. These elections became a turning point in the awakening of the Ukrainian civil society and solidified the shifting political dynamics in post-Soviet Ukraine. Yet, one very important aspect closely linked to security and stability in the southern flanks of post-Soviet Eurasia remained unnoticed: the Crimean Tatar political factor in Crimea.

This paper, which reviews the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections, is divided into three parts. The first part revisits the shifting dynamics in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election processes. The second focuses on the regional factors affecting Ukrainian politics, comparing and contrasting two Eastern regions, Donetsk and Luhansk, with the Crimean Autonomous Republic of the South. To capture the complexity of the Crimean politics further, the third part examines the Crimean Tatar political factor incorporating the key findings from multi-method field research conducted.¹ The conclusion entails certain policy recommendations in regard to future conflict prevention efforts in Crimea.

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¹ A survey of 62 questions was distributed among 700 Crimean Tatar return migrants in thirteen cities, nineteen micro-districts, and seven villages during 2003. In addition, 62 interviews were conducted (solely by the researcher) in seven cities, five micro-districts, and two villages using snowball sampling. At the end of the field administration, a total of 484 completed questionnaires were gathered. In an effort to triangulate the data, library/archival research methods were also employed.

Key Words: *Ukrainian Presidential Elections, Crimea, Crimean Tatar Politics, Orange Revolution, Victor Yanukovych, Victor Yushchenko*

INTRODUCTION

Ukraine became an independent post-Soviet republic in 1991,² when 90.3% of its citizens voted for independence. As expected, the political cadres [old-guards] that were in charge during the Soviet era did not disappear overnight and remained strong in the political arena. The first president of the independent Ukraine was Leonid Kravchuk, a former member of the Ukrainian Communist Party (UCP). After the demise of the Soviet Union, Kravchuk, a Communist turned nationalist, strongly advocated Ukrainian independence from Russia. Although he promoted market-centered economic reform during his tenure, the Communist Party of Ukraine was re-established in 1993.

When the next presidential elections of Ukraine took place in June 1994, Kravchuk failed to win a second presidential term and Leonid Kuchma, who maintained close ties with Russia, became the president of Ukraine with 52% of the vote. After five years in office, Kuchma was re-elected in 1999 for a second term with 56% of the vote and remained in power until the 2004 elections.

Three Rounds of Ukrainian Elections

Under Kuchma, there were several prime ministers two of whom (Victor Yanukovych, and Victor Yushchenko) later became the 2004 presidential candidates.³ Victor Yanukovych was serving as Kuchma's Prime Minister since 2002. He had strong support from certain Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine. Moreover, based on his assurances to Kremlin, he was backed by Moscow. Among Yanukovych's promises to Kremlin were, granting the right for double citizenship for Russians living in Ukraine including in Crimea, acknowledgement of Russian as the second state language, increase in Russian-language publications, increase in Russian business investments including in the area of tourism, and strong cooperation between Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine towards a single "unified" economic space.

Nevertheless, the political dynamics in Ukraine were shifting rapidly. Peaceful transfers of political power in post-Soviet regions, such as the Rose Revolution in Georgia, were impacting the political psyches of the Ukrainians and presenting

² The independence of Ukraine was declared on August 24, 1991, and confirmed in a referendum on December 1, 1991.

³ Yushchenko, was Kuchma's prime minister for 15 months during 2000-2001.

them a possibility of a green light at the end of a de-Kuchmasized political tunnel. The majority of the people who were tired of corruption and poverty were opting for a positive change and more democratic governance. Accordingly, these hopeful citizens were supporting the more liberal opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko who seemed to be pro-NATO and pro-EU and more open to European cooperation. While his Western stance was creating great support among the majority of the Ukrainians, it was also making Yushchenko an obvious threat to Russian ambitions in Ukraine.⁴

Against the background of these political dynamics, the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections took place on October 30, 2004. According to the exit polls, the two opposing political candidates – Viktor Yanukovich and Viktor Yushchenko were running too close to call. Soon after, however, the election results were declared null and void. Election violations included electoral fraud through *dead souls*,⁵ central control of state media, harassment, intimidation and scare tactics – including a life threatening attempt to poison the opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko.

The second round of elections took place on November 21, 2004. At the end of this run-off vote between the two leading candidates Yanukovich was declared the winner.⁶ Vladimir Putin, the president of the Russian Federation, and his ally Lukashenko,⁷ the president of Belarus, were among the first to congratulate Yanukovich. Nevertheless, shortly after the declaration of a winner, the international observers affirmed that this election was also flawed. These political events and post-election crisis created a groundswell of public opinion, leading to a peoples' movement, formed to voice disapproval over the election results. Approximately 800 thousand people gathered at the Independence Square "*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*," in Kiev, and for weeks they waved their color-coded flags and banners to show support for their particular candidate. Blue was the chosen campaign color for Victor Yanukovich, the Kremlin-backed candidate, and orange was the color of the popular opposition candidate Victor Yushchenko.

⁴ The Russian Federation views Ukraine's integration with NATO or EU as an obstruction, for it could end the hopes of Russia to re-emerge as a global superpower.

⁵ The inclusion of the votes from people who have died or changed their place of residence.

⁶ At the end of the second round, Yanukovich received 49.46 percent of the votes against Yushchenko's 46.61 percent.

⁷ On October 17, 2004, Belarus held national elections that resulted in the abolishment of constitutional two-term limit on presidency, and provided its head of state with the right to stay in power virtually for life.

Even in freezing temperatures, the Blue and the Orange protesters remained in their tent cities 24 hours a day, and waited patiently for a result that would satisfy their demands. This non-violent collective mobilization was dubbed the “Chestnut Revolution,”⁸ but as word spread to the world through the media, the movement came to be known as the Orange Revolution. These events – so reminiscent of the November 2003 overthrow of Georgian ex-President Eduard Shevardnadze by Western-leaning Mikhail Saakashvili – marked a historical turning point for Ukraine. It showed the awakening of the civil society, and the desire for democratic processes that could shift the gears from old-guard corruptocracy toward a more free and open democratic Ukraine. Ukrainian people were not ready for the alternative of “back to the USSR,” the ill-fated symbiotic relationship between Russia and Ukraine, a concept that Putin, a KGB alumnus, has been promoting ever since he came to power in Moscow.

Moscow’s meddling in the political affairs of Ukraine was evident throughout the Ukrainian presidential elections. Even before the elections there were multiple meetings between Putin, Kuchma, and Yanukovich. In fact, to show his strong support for the Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, the president of the Russian Federation, visited Ukraine twice during the elections and openly endorsed Yanukovich for the presidency. Yanukovich received campaign contributions from Russian businesses and received a preferential treatment from the state controlled Russian media. During the [second] post-election protests Moscow’s mayor, Yuriy Luzhkov, visited Kiev and branded the Yushchenko campaign as “an orange sponsored orgy.”⁹ Yet, despite Moscow’s interference, the Ukrainian peoples protest continued in Kiev.

The political dynamics in Kiev were changing day by day. On November 27, 2004, a symbolic parliamentary vote in Kiev declared the second run-off election results invalid. The next day, on November 28, 2004, frustrated residents of the Eastern Ukrainian province Donetsk, Yanukovich’s home province, called a referendum declaring their autonomy from Ukraine if their candidate did not win the election. Thereafter, more Yanukovich supporters arrived in Kiev from the Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine, the strongholds of Yanukovich, to show him public support. Regardless, they were by far outnumbered by the Orange protesters.

Clearly, the regional gap was widening in Ukraine and the overall situation was getting critical. On November 29, 2004, outgoing president Kuchma urged the protesters to end their protests. He proposed further talks between the candidates as a

⁸ Because of the numerous chestnut trees of Kiev, this revolution is called Chestnut revolution as a synonym to Rose revolution that took place in Georgia in 2003.



⁹ “Post Election; The Supreme Court – Bogus Justice.” *British Helsinki Human Rights Group*, (<http://www.bhhrg.org/Print.asp?ReportID=&CountryID=22>)

means for compromise, and suggested that a new set of elections should take place to end the controversy. This so-called compromise was in fact, a time-gaining tactic of the Kuchma camp. By offering a brand new election process that would necessitate entirely *new* candidates, and new election campaigns that would last for several months, Kuchma was attempting to keep his status-quo as long as possible. He was also aiming for certain constitutional changes that would lessen the powers of the president to a minimum, while enhancing the Prime Minister's and Parliament's position to a more central one.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Orange opposition did not buy into these tactics, and persistently rooted for a third round of elections between the two existing candidates.

As the protest continued, after five days of deliberations, Supreme Court judges agreed that the November 21st run-off election had been rigged.¹¹ Consequently, on December 1, 2004, under pressures from the Orange supporters as well as the international observers, *Verhovna Rada* (Upper Parliament of Ukraine) expressed "no-confidence" in the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine at the second-round voting. According to the Ukrainian constitution the no-confidence vote mandated the government's resignation, but the parliament had no means to enforce this resignation of Kuchma's government without his or Yanukovich's cooperation. Regardless, the third run-off election between the two [existing] candidates was ordered to take place on December 26, 2004.

This last round of elections seemed legitimate and the international observers also approved its process. As a result, on December 28, 2006, Yushchenko was declared the winner and became the President of Ukraine¹² by receiving 51.99 percent of the electoral votes, compared to 44.20 percent received by Victor Yanukovich, according to official data from the Ukrainian Election Committee (see Table 1).

Table 1 - The Third-round (December 26, 2004) Ukrainian Presidential Election Results¹³

Candidate	Graph	Percentages	# Of votes
Yushchenko V.		51.99	15,115,712
Yanukovich V.		44.20	12,848,528

¹⁰ Similar to Republic of Turkey's current political system.

¹¹ (http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/nm/20041203/ts_nm/ukraine_dc)

¹² Yushchenko was officially inaugurated on January 23, 2005.

¹³ From the Official Website Central Election Committee of Ukraine (in Ukrainian) (<http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2004/wp0011>)

Crimean Tatar Factor in Ukrainian Presidential Elections

During this remarkable election ordeal, a number of journalists and television broadcasters of the Western media pointed out the regionalism in Ukrainian politics, highlighting the differences between the East/South and West/North. Yet, one very important aspect closely linked to security and stability in the southern flanks of post-Soviet Eurasia remained unnoticed: the Crimean Tatar political factor in Crimea.

Crimean Autonomous Republic (CAR) - an administrative sub-division of the Ukrainian state - is strategically located in the Crimean peninsula (southern Ukraine), and its current population is approximately 2.5 million. Crimea, where the Communist Party remains the strongest of all the regions in Ukraine, is “the only major territorial-administrative unit of Ukraine where the ethnic Russians are the majority.”¹⁴ According to recent figures on the population, 64 percent are ethnic Russian, 23 percent are Ukrainian, and only about 12 percent are Crimean Tatars. Various other ethnic groups¹⁵ constitute the remaining 1 percent.¹⁶

The ethno-political hostilities and negative peace¹⁷ in post-Soviet Crimea is complex due to the trilateral dynamics between the three central actors: the Crimean-Russians, the returning [Islamic] Crimean Tatars, and the Crimean-Ukrainians. While the latter is still searching for their [independent] national identity in post-Soviet Ukraine, the majority of the Crimea’s *Russophobes* still do not recognize Crimea’s transfer to Ukraine by Khrushchev on February 19, 1954¹⁸ and continue to root for unification with Russia. The unification issue is brought up by certain segments of the Crimean parliament often. On February 2002, Crimean

¹⁴ Maria Drohobycky (Ed.), *Crimea: Dynamics, Challenges, and Prospects*, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1995), p.5

¹⁵ These include Karaims, Kyrymchaks, Bulgarians, Germans, Koreans, Jews, and Armenians.

¹⁶ *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, (Crimea: Simferopol, 19 January 2003), p.13

¹⁷ Lund defines *negative* or *unstable* peace as a “situation in which tensions and suspicions among parties run high but violence is either absent or sporadic.” Michael S. Lund, *Preventing Deadly Conflict*, (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), p.39

¹⁸ Khrushchev named this transfer as a “special gift” to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the [January] 1654 Treaty of *Pereiaslav*, an affirmation of East Slavic reunion between the fraternal peoples of Russia and the Ukraine. Historically, this treaty took place when Hetman Bogdan Khmelnytsky and the Ukrainian Cossack Council recognized the suzerainty of the Muscovite tsar. Kohut Zenon E., *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate 1760s-1830s*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp.3-4

speaker Leonid Grach suggested that a referendum should be held in Crimean Parliament on acceding Crimea to the Russian Federation.¹⁹

Although as much as 90 percent of the ethnic Russian population settled in Crimea after the Second World War (following the Crimean Tatar deportation in 1944), they consider Crimea to be a part of the historical Russian *Rodina* (homeland) despite its official inclusion in the newly independent Ukraine. They acknowledge Sevastopol, where the famous former-Soviet/Russian Black Sea Fleet²⁰ is based, as the *glorious Russian city*. For them, “Sevastopol is a holy city twice over – sacred not only to Russian military sacrifice, but also to Russian Orthodoxy.”²¹ On the outskirts of the city, the remains of the Chersonesk (Chersoneses) “where the Byzantine missionaries Cyril and Methodius first landed in *Rus*, bringing the Gospel and the Cyrillic alphabet with them,”²² generates a persistence reminder of Sevastopol’s historical importance for the Slavic soul. At the city entrance, multiple signs and hand-made posters can be seen, suggesting that the only spoken language in Sevastopol is Russian. In fact, most other cities in Crimea are filled with Lenin statues or busts, in addition to other Soviet symbols and monuments. Central city square in Simferopol is named Lenin Square, and many other streets have Russian names like Dimitri Ulyanova,²³ and Kirova.²⁴

On the other hand, Crimean Tatars consider themselves as the *indigenous* people of Crimea, and perceive their peninsular homeland as an indivisible part of their [national-territorial] identity. They were deported by Stalin from Crimea en masse on May 18, 1944. They remained in exile until the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then, they have been returning to Crimea in waves, only to face dire socio-economic conditions, lack of political representation, and ethnic discrimination, making most feel like second-class citizens in their own historical homeland. Among the socio-economic problems, land deficiencies, ethnically based high unemployment rates, housing crisis,²⁵ social services, proper health care and

¹⁹ *RFE/RL Newswire* Report, 28 February 2002, (<http://www.rferl.org/nca/features>)

²⁰ Under the 1997 bilateral agreements between Russia and the Ukraine, the stationing of Russian Black Sea Fleet forces in Crimea will run through 2017. At present, no Ukrainian official calls for the revision of the agreement or abridging the duration. *Jamestown Foundation*, (http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2369489)

²¹ Anna Reid, *Borderland – A Journey Through the History of Ukraine*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p. 170

²² *Ibid*, p.171

²³ Dimitri Ulyanov was Lenin’s brother.

²⁴ Sergei Kirov was an elected a member of the Communist Party’s Central Committee in Moscow. He was murdered in 1934.

²⁵ Most of their houses lack drinking water, electricity, plumbing/sewage system, and telephone lines.

educational opportunities in their native language are the main sources for collective grievance.

Currently, there are only two Crimean Tatar deputies in Ukrainian Upper Parliament (*Verhovna Rada*) that has a total of 450 deputies (national level). On the local level, Crimean Tatar *de-facto* self-governance, *Mejlis*,²⁶ is still not recognized in Crimea. Crimean Tatars have a long history of non-violence. Since the beginning of the Crimean Khanate in 15th century until the present-including the collective mobilization years in exile under the umbrella of Crimean Tatar National Movement—they have consistently abstained from violence. In fact, during the Soviet era, they were the first ethnic group to stage a sit-in in Moscow's Red Square, demanding justice and repatriation.²⁷ Since their return to Crimea, their leaders have continued to advocate peaceful means²⁸ to improve their situation in their peninsular homeland.

Against the background of these historical and present dynamics between the Crimean-Russians and the Crimean Tatars, during the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections, the political dynamics in Crimea was more reminiscent of Moscow than Kiev. With the exception of Crimean Tatars, Crimean cities were filled with dedicated Yanukovich supporters, including the Cossacks, who took to the streets waving their Russian flags, Putin and Yanukovich posters, and hand-made Russian symbols. In Simferopol, gigantic Yanukovich posters were visible everywhere, from the airport area to the main streets of the city.

At the time, the only persistent [Crimean] group of supporters of Yushchenko was the Crimean Tatars. Regardless of top-down Yanukovich propaganda, they held their political position. They walked in the streets carrying orange flags, and wearing orange scarves, hats, and tee shirts. Numerous Crimean Tatars who could afford to travel to Kiev took their place next to their Ukrainian compatriots in Independence Square. In fact, on November 30, 2004 (after the second round of

²⁶ The full name of the *Mejlis* is *Milli Mejlis* and it actually means "People's Parliament." Although it is not recognized as an official parliament, since 1991, *Mejlis* is the *de facto* representative body of Crimean Tatars in Crimea. Brian Glyn Williams, *The Crimean Tatars-The Diaspora Experience and the Forging of a Nation*, (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p.xvii





²⁷ Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, (Toronto, Ontario: Viking, 1993), p.100

²⁸ There were ethnic clashes between the [Zaporizhzhnyan] Cossack mercenaries and Crimean Tatars (March 5-7, 2004), and then on March 24, 2004 there were clashes with the skinheads after a stabbing incident in Simferopol. Consequent to these events, on March 30, 2004, *Mejlis* has suspended all protest actions [by the Crimean Tatars] to prevent further provocations from "others."

elections), Mustafa Cemilev,²⁹ the leader of the Crimean Tatar National Movement in exile and the chairperson of the Crimean Tatar *Mejlis*, gave a speech to the crowd in Kiev's Square, urging all Ukrainian citizens to vote for Yushchenko.

Crimean Tatars knew that their total number of votes could not significantly impact the overall results of the elections, since they constituted only 0.5 percent of the Ukrainian population.³⁰ Even so, in their fourth *Qurultai*³¹ meeting (September 10, 2004), the *Mejlis* leaders urged repatriates to vote for Yushchenko collectively, because they believed that unlike his counterpart, he was the more democratic candidate, with no attachments to the Russian Federation. Their efforts proved to be of no avail, when the third-round election results were pronounced. It quickly became clear that in Crimea, only 15.41 percent of the votes went to Yushchenko, while Yanukovych won the Crimean elections by a landslide,³² receiving 81.26 percent of the votes (see Table 2).

Table 2 - Yushchenko versus Yanukovych – Ukraine versus CAR³³

% ³⁴	Yu-shchenko	Graph		Graph	Yanukovych	%
51.99%	15,115,712		Overall Ukraine		12,848,528	44.20%
15.41%	178,755		Crimean Autonomous Republic		942,210	81.26%

A review of all three rounds of elections in every region of Ukraine reveals that these electoral patterns were consistent throughout the entire election process (see Table 3).

²⁹ In October 1998, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded Cemilev (in Tatar Cemiloglu) the Nansen Peace Medal for his commitment and extraordinary efforts for Crimean Tatar return to their homeland.

³⁰ "Mustafa Cemilev's speech from the Fourth *Qurultai* Meeting", *Kirim Bulteni (Crimean Bulletin)*, Vol:12, No:54, July-September 2004, p.14 (in Crimean Tatar).

³¹ There are 250 delegates in the *Qurultai*, which means one delegate representing approximately a thousand Crimean Tatars currently living in Crimea. Ayder Emirov, "Underwater Rocks of the Crimean Tatar Democracy." The *Poluostrov* newspaper, 24 – 30 March 2005; available at (<http://aspects.crimeastar.net/english/news.php?action=020405>)

³² Similar to Eastern Ukrainian provinces: Donetsk and Luhansk.

³³ (<http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2004/wp0011>)

Table 3 - Three-Rounds of Elections in Overall Ukraine³⁴

Regions	Three-phases	Yushchenko	Yanukovych
Ukraine	October 31, 2004	39.90 %	39.26 %
	November 21, 2004	46.61 %	49.46 %
	December 26, 2004	51.99 %	44.20 %

Yet in certain regions of Ukraine, these electoral results were totally opposite. Crimea was one of these regions, and its electoral results were analogous to the results in the two Eastern regions – Donetsk and Luhansk, strongholds of Yanukovych. In other words, similar to these two regions, Yanukovych was the winner by a landslide in all three rounds in Crimea (See Table 4 and Table 5).

Table 4- Three-Rounds of Elections in Crimean AR³⁵

Regions	Three-phases	Yushchenko	Yanukovych
Crimean AR	October 31, 2004	12.79 %	69.17 %
	November 21, 2004	14.59 %	81.99 %
	December 26, 2004	15.41 %	81.26 %

Table 5 - Yanukovych support in Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk³⁶

Region	Winning candidate	% of votes	# votes per region
Crimean ACR (South)	Yanukovych	81.26	1,159,437
Donetsk (East)	Yanukovych	93.54	3,143,730

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

Luhansk (East)	Yanukovych	91.24	1,638,104
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This regional divide in Ukraine was reminiscent of the one in the United States' 2004 elections, where the differences between the Blue and the Red states emphasized the difference in preference between the two candidates for presidency, by location.

Underlying Reasons For Yanukovych Support in Crimea

In this paper, I argue that there were two major reasons for strong Yanukovych support within the Crimean population. One reason is that the majority of the Crimean population consists of ethnic Russians and Russified Ukrainians who viewed Yushchenko's Western stance as a threat for Russian-Ukrainian rapprochement. The other reason is [their] concerns about the question of returning Crimean Tatars. The two previously mentioned groups have a fear that the Crimean Tatars, at an opportune time, will declare their national-territorial autonomy. To make matters worse, when vice-speaker Vasili Kiselev falsely announced that Yushchenko was going to create Tatar autonomy in Crimea³⁷ just before the presidential elections, existing fears were solidified. In actuality, there were no such campaign promises,³⁸ and the only reason for Crimean Tatars support for Yushchenko was his pro-Western stance that could eventually bring positive changes and democracy to Ukraine as well as to Crimea.

Although it is difficult to detect what nationality voted for which candidate through the electoral results (the ballots do not indicate the ethnic background of the voters), close examination of the correlation coefficients from the Bahçesaray district of Crimea,³⁹ where Crimean Tatars live in compound settlements, reveals interesting results. Reports show that in this particular district, there is a strong correlation ($r \approx 1$) between the number of Crimean Tatar residents in the region and the number of votes Yushchenko received (0.97; 0.96; 0.97 respectively for each round). The correlation coefficients for Yanukovych, on the other hand, are negligible (see Table 6).

³⁷ (<http://aspects.crimeastar.net/english/news.php?action=041204>). From *the Poluostrov Newspaper*, #49.

³⁸ Before and during the elections, it was merely two deputies from Crimean Tatar Mejlis, including its chairperson, Mustafa Cemilev, from Yushchenko's "Our Ukraine" block that raised the issue of creating Crimean Tatar autonomy in Crimea, although Yushchenko himself has never supported the idea.

³⁹ This electoral data was obtained by the author from the Crimean Tatar *Mejlis*,

Table 6 - Crimean Tatar voters in Bahçesaray District: Yushchenko vs. Yanukovych

Crimean Tatars for Yushchenko		Crimean Tatars for Yanukovych	
First round:	0.97	First round:	0.8
Second round:	0.96	Second round:	0.6
Third round:	0.97	Third round:	0.5

On the other hand, the investigation of the correlation coefficients for the number of Crimean-Russian residents in the region reveals a totally opposite result. In this case, there is almost a perfect correlation with the number of residents and the Yanukovych votes in round one, two and three; 0.95, 0.99, and 0.99 respectively (see Table 7).

Table 7 - Crimean Russian voters in Bahçesaray District: Yushchenko vs. Yanukovych

Crimean-Russians for Yuschenko		Crimean-Russians for Yanukovich	
First round:	0.22	First round:	0.95
Second round:	0.28	Second round:	0.99
Third round:	0.26	Third round:	0.99

So, why did Crimean Tatar returnees fervently support Yushchenko although there were no specific campaign promises made to the returnees? To answer this question, several underlying reasons for this support need to be examined. First of all, the Crimean Tatars are vehement about not supporting *any* presidential candidate with close ties to the Russian Federation. It is true that during the 1999 elections Crimean Tatars had supported Kuchma, who, at the time, was running against Simonenko, leader of the Communist Party. Put another way, in 1999 Crimean Tatars voted for Kuchma as a result of their *opposition* to Simonenko. By parallel reasoning, during the 2004 presidential elections, motivation to support Yuschenko partially originated simply from their opposition to Yanukovych.

Although it might seem to be a remote idea for some, the biggest fear for the Crimean Tatars is the possibility of a future Crimean annexation to the Russian

Federation. The returnees support Ukrainian territorial integrity, and although they would eventually like to have Crimean Tatar national-territorial autonomy, they persistently state that they would want to have this autonomy *within the framework of the Ukrainian state*.⁴⁰ This envisioned Crimean Tatar autonomy would by no means be a secessionist movement, rather it would be a system of ethnic sovereignty, a power-sharing solution analogous to the Tatarstan model introduced by Tatarstan president Mintimer Shaimiev in early 1990s.⁴¹ Crimean Tatars believe that through this autonomy, they can ensure cultural independence and balance between all ethnic groups and religious communities in Crimea, where Russian, Crimean Tatar, and Ukrainian would be the official languages.

Another reason for Crimean Tatar support for Yushchenko was their rapidly declining trust in Kuchma, especially within the last few years. One example of this diminishing confidence in Kuchma's leadership is related to a vetoed law that could have facilitated resolution of the land question for the returnees. This was the "law on restoration of the rights of persons deported on [their] ethnic backgrounds" that was adopted on June 24, 2003 by the Ukrainian *Verhovna Rada*. As its name indicates, this law was going to recognize the status of deportees; and it was going to establish state guarantees on restoration of their rights, including the compensation of material losses they suffered during the deportation.⁴² Through this law, the Crimean and Ukrainian governments were going to be able to allocate land plots and include a separate funding line in the budget, for resettlement and restoration (rehabilitation).⁴³ While the adoption of this law aroused heightened optimism for the returnees, these expectations turned somber when Kuchma vetoed this proposed law on July 19, 2004, based on the alleged objections of his Ukrainian Presidential Administration.

Crimean Tatars faced another disappointment when a shift in the 1961 Criminal Code of Ukraine took place towards the end of 2003. This shift had immediate consequences for the returnees. The old version of this Code did not include strong

⁴⁰ Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Cemilev describes this autonomy as similar to the ones in *Tatarstan, Bashkiriya* or *Komi* Autonomous regions within the Russian Federation, where different ethno-religious groups, including Russians, coexist peacefully. "Crimean Tatar leader believes Crimean autonomy should be based on ethnic lines within Ukraine." *Newspaper 2000*, 16 July 2004, (in Russian).

⁴¹ A 1994 bilateral treaty On Delimitation of Jurisdictional Subjects negotiated between the Republic of Tatarstan and the Russian Federation provided Tatarstan unprecedented autonomy, where the presidents of both states became republic's official guarantors. Ravil Bukharaev, *The Model of Tatarstan Under President Mintimer Shaimiev*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp.2-5

⁴² (<http://www.crimea.vlasti.net/>) Crimean Aspects Website: (<http://aspects.crimeastar.net/english/>)

⁴³ Ibid.

penalties against self-seizing squatters. But in November 2003, the Head of the Crimean Parliament Boris Deych, appealed to the President to implement a new version of the Criminal Code of Ukraine that was to have become effective beginning in September of 2001. The new version imposes two years of forced work, imprisonment, and fines for squatting on land in Crimea. Moreover, special amendments were added to the Ukrainian Law regarding militia. In these amendments, troops were given permission to use dogs, chemical elements, and special arms as needed, for “preventing” or “liquidating” mass squatting.⁴⁴ Since no other ethnic groups in Ukraine except the Crimean Tatars use squatting tactics as non-violent means for political protests, it was clear that these changes were specifically targeting Crimean Tatars.

A self-seizing movement (*sama-zaxvat*) was initiated by Crimean Tatar returnees during and after their return to Crimea. Due to the unresolved citizenship issues,⁴⁵ overt discriminations in regards to land and housing allocations, and state privatization rules,⁴⁶ the returnees were not given land plots upon their return in either rural or urban areas. As a result, pockets of repatriates started the self-seizing movement at the outskirts of cities by squatting on lands and by building temporary houses (or tents depending on finances available).⁴⁷ Most of these areas do not have sewage systems, clean running water, electricity, or even roads. And some are located on muddy hills that can be washed away in the event of mudslide. Regardless, the returnees continued to squat, as this was the only available means for a returning Crimean Tatar to have a place to dwell.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Crimean Tatars who returned to Crimea after the declaration of independence of Ukraine (December 1, 1991) were only allowed to apply for citizenship *after* five years of residency in Ukraine. Moreover, since dual citizenship was not in the constitution, first they needed to renounce their [exile] citizenship, which was a lengthy and costly process. As a result, until the adoption of new Ukrainian citizenship law of Ukraine in 2001, the majority of the returnees remained as non-citizens, and were ineligible for employment, social services, and Ukrainian internal passports (*propiska*).

⁴⁶ In 1999 a series of presidential decrees were able to break up the collective agricultural farm system (*kolhozes*) and bring in the privatization law, which allowed land from the farms to be distributed among all former collective farm (*kolhoz*) members. Since the deported Crimean Tatars did not live in Crimea before the demise of the Soviet Union, they were not able to receive land under the new law and could not participate in the state property privatization on equal terms with the rest of the Crimean population. *RFE/RL Report*, 27 April 2000; available at (<http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2000/04/f.ru.000427132641.html>)

⁴⁷ Between 1990-1995, in the southern regions of Crimea, the returnees squatted on 1000 land plots, but the local authorities allowed only 270 of them (from the reserve) to be allocated to the returnees.

Currently, the shortage of land is still a major problem for returnees. In 2000 alone, the representative of the President of Ukraine in Crimea received 46,603 appeals from the returnees requesting more land share.⁴⁸ The majority of these appeals were rejected. Currently at the outskirts of the cities, an average plot of reserved land Crimean Tatars may supposedly receive is around 0.04 hectares⁴⁹ (0.09 acres). According to Mustafa Cemilev, Chairman of the Crimean Tatar National Parliament, these reserved lands allocated to Crimean Tatars are in most cases inferior [barren] land that cannot be used for planting crops and/or feeding animals. The situation is even grimmer around the Southern coast of Crimea. Crimean Tatars are not allowed to apply for land titles for housing constructions, reside on, buy, or self-seize land⁵⁰ within the coastal area. In sharp contrast, Russian and Ukrainian business people, foreign enterprises, and other like entities may freely buy/own land, and build hotels, casinos and other types of structures.

According to the Crimean Republican Committee on Nationalities' 2002 report that was published in Simferopol, more than 128 thousand returnees have no permanent housing in Crimea. More than 15 thousand families are on the waiting list for state-sponsored housing projects. About 25 thousand Crimean Tatars live in rented apartments with relatives, or dormitories. These dormitories resemble the Soviet communal apartment, in which the residents of the particular floor share one bathroom and are not allowed to cook. Thus, although minimal – and certainly not approved by the *Mejlis* – the self-seizing movement still continues in Crimea today, creating internal fragmentation among the Crimean Tatar returnees. All these issues in combination create major grievances for the returnees, who believed that a change from Kuchma to a Western-oriented new leader would provide them reasonable solutions for these unsettled issues.

Policy Recommendations to the New Government on Conflict Prevention in Crimea

Within the first six months of Yushchenko's presidency, the new government had to deal with the complete chaos left by the previous leaders, including unsolved murders, illegal arms sales, immense corruption in illegal privatization of land, major fraud, and internal fragmentation within the administration. Although Crimean Tatars realized that the new government faced daunting tasks, and not enough time had passed for major reforms, frustrations continued to grow among the returnees, regarding lack of communication between themselves and the new leadership.

⁴⁸ ([http://www.cidct.org.ua/en/studii/4\(2000\)/6.html](http://www.cidct.org.ua/en/studii/4(2000)/6.html))

⁴⁹ One hectare equals to 2.471 acres.

⁵⁰ Before the 1944 deportation, Crimean Tatars constituted 80-90% of the population of the Southern coast.

One of the most pressing issues in Crimea is still the land conflict, and the Crimean Tatar returnees were hoping to engage in immediate communication with the leadership toward resolution of this issue. When no communication was forthcoming by the end of February 2005, based on growing concerns about the pressing issue of land distribution in Crimea, *Mejlis* proposed that Crimean Tatars should be permitted to settle on the Crimea's south coast and receive land plots. During the *Mejlis* session, leaders suggested that if the new government did not address this issue soon, they would lift their ban on land squatting⁵¹ and help the returnees occupy land plots without permission, which had been illegally sold to Russian and Ukrainian officials, and foreign entities.⁵²

Another major issue needing immediate attention is the high unemployment rate among returnees. According to a Gallup poll conducted in 2000, among the Crimean Tatars in Crimea, only 29.5 percent of the respondents were employed, and 70.5 percent were unemployed.⁵³ My own field research (2003) indicated that among 484 survey respondents 63.3 percent were unemployed, and those with jobs were underemployed, doing work that did not fit in with their educational backgrounds. As a point of fact, in Crimea the percentage of Crimean Tatars working in government offices is three times lower than what it should be, in comparison to the ratio of their population to the population at large. There is not a single Crimean Tatar who is employed in customs offices or in the Security Services of Ukraine (SBU).⁵⁴ Within the Republican Committee for Nationalities and Deported Citizens of Autonomous Republic of Crimea,⁵⁵ the employed Crimean Tatars constitute only 1.5 percent of the total work force; and among the staff of the

⁵¹ In the beginning of 2004, the land distribution problems in the coastal Crimea (*Yalta, Simeiz, Partenit, and Alushta*) had created major grievances among the returnees, especially when the uniformed mercenary Cossacks attacked their shantytowns in *Simeiz*. The attacks when Berkut (Black Hawk) militia watched the whole event unresponsively from the far. After these conflictual events, *Mejlis* leadership banned all land squatting activities in Crimea to prevent provocations and further conflict in the peninsula.

⁵² "Land Conflict Looms in Ukraine's Crimea", (http://www.unpo.org/news_detail.php?arg=20&par=2031) and *Action Ukraine Report*, Vol:5, No:435, Article 12 (24 February 2005)

⁵³ Irina Prybitkova, "Resettlement, Adaptation, and Integration of Formerly Deported Crimean Tatars" *Krimskii Studii*, (Kiev, Informational Bulletin), Vol:13-14, No:1-2, 2002, p.31

⁵⁴ Remzi Ilyasov, "Krimskie Tatari: Kratkii Obzor Proshlogo i Analiz Sotsialnogo-Ekonomicheskogo Polojenia Nastoyashego", *Informatsionnii Byulleten Altin Besik*, Vipusk 5, (Crimea: Simferopol, 1999), p.35

⁵⁵ Respublikanskoi Komitet po Delam Natsionalnostei i Deportirovannih Grajdan Avtonomnoi Respubliki Krim

Ministry of Internal Affairs, Crimean Tatars constitute only 1.3 percent of the total employees.⁵⁶

In addition to land share and unemployment, considerable asymmetry in terms of power sharing is another major area of concern for the Crimean Tatar leadership. In February 2005, during an interview with the *Ukraina Moloda* newspaper, Cemilev clearly expressed his concerns regarding certain assignments to governing positions of executive bodies of Crimea, particularly in regions with large Crimean Tatar populations. Cemilev suggested that ignoring the opinions of the Crimean Tatars in issues directly related to them was causing waves of resentment among the collective.⁵⁷ He went on to state that:

“We, Crimean Tatars, are surprised that in Crimea there are designations already under way after elections, and somehow nobody is consulting with us.”⁵⁸

Recent interviews (via focus groups) with returnees from different walks of life display a general post-election disappointment among the returnees. Although they are still hopeful of the new government, they also realize that all the post-independence [Ukrainian] leadership both officially and unofficially, have shared pro-Russian sentiments, regardless of the political orientation of their leadership.⁵⁹

To prevent these concerns from causing further conflict, and begin rebuilding the confidence of the people, one positive step that the new Ukrainian government could take at this point would be the inclusion of the Crimean Tatar National Assembly *Mejlis*, within the framework of the Ukrainian state as a consultative body, so that they could consult on a limited range of policy issues of direct relevance to the Crimean Tatars.⁶⁰ Currently, neither the Crimean Parliament nor the Ukrainian government officially recognizes the Crimean Tatar National *Mejlis*,⁶¹ claiming that [Crimean Tatars] are unconstitutionally attempting to create “parallel structures of power” within Crimea and Ukraine. If this misinterpretation could be resolved, and

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ The *Poluostrov* (Peninsula) newspaper, No:7, 18-24 February 2005

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ These statements were compiled through 20 post-election focus-group interviews with Crimean Tatar repatriates in Crimea.

⁶⁰ Refat Chubarov, “The Summary of Refat Chubarov’s Speech on Crimean Politics”, *Crimean Daily News*, 12 May 2003, p.2

⁶¹ In June 1991, the second Crimean Tatar *Qurultai* convened for the first time in Simferopol and elected 33-member *Mejlis* as a sole legitimate representative body of the Crimean Tatar people. Consequently, *Qurultai* declared “non-violence” as the fundamental principle of the Crimean Tatar movement. Refat Chubarov, “Different Nationalisms: The Case of Crimea,” *Uncaptive Minds*, Vol:33-34, No:3-4, Summer-Fall 1997, p.45

if *Mejlis*⁶² is given a legitimate status, it could play a facilitative role for the security issues in the peninsula in the long term, and stem the flow of growing frustrations among the returnees. If the Crimean Tatars feel ownership of the socio-political processes in regard to their own future in the peninsula, it could create a stable “peace zone” in the midst of the Eurasian territory that is overflowing with escalating or full-blown conflicts.

One other major concern for the returnees is the loss of Western support. Since pro-Western Yushchenko became the new president of Ukraine, the country is being viewed by Western governments – including the U.S. – as a democratizing post-Soviet state. Under these circumstances, Western powers will most likely support the Ukrainian government and might even view Crimean Tatar mobilization as a radical aberration.

The previous Ukrainian government had gone so far as to label Muslim Crimean Tatars as the Ukrainian linkage to political Islam and terrorism, which led to Kuchma’s investigation of the situation. Although this investigation did not find any truth to the claim, former speaker of the Crimean Parliament, Leonid Grach, used the opportunity to exaggerate the numbers of *Wahhabis* and other Islamic religious organizations in Crimea, and reported that Tatars were Chechen-friendly.⁶³ According to *Mejlis*, there are approximately 300 *Wahhabis* in Crimea, which is by comparison, less than the number of Christian missionaries on the peninsula. Moreover, *Mejlis* is vehemently opposes to such religious organizations. Regardless, these false accusations, concocted by anti-Tatar spin-doctors, are considered dangerous because they can impact the post-September 11 attitude of the U.S. which is experiencing a certain thaw⁶⁴ in it’s relations with Yushchenko’s Ukraine, as well as other Western countries that are not aware of the dynamics of

⁶² Although there is some discontent with the *Mejlis*, Crimean Tatars still look up to their leadership as a collective. The analysis of 2004 presidential elections clearly testifies that a predominant majority of voters gave their votes for Yushchenko, who was recommended by the *Mejlis*.

⁶³ The nationalistic pro-Russian media in Crimea (*Krymskaya Pravda* newspaper, or Russian national television channel ORT) often portrays Crimean Tatars as troublemakers and Chechen sympathizers. In 2003, Grach, a Communist and former speaker of the Crimean Parliament insisted that the Chechen fighters were hiding in Crimea under Tatar protection, and that Tatar organizations were linked to Al-Qaeda. Consequently, when the Ukrainian State Security Service (SBU) has investigated these claims, they affirmed that there was no evidence of these accusations. Roman Zakaluzny, “Communist Deputy’s Comments Spark Outcry.” *Kyiv Post*, 23 October 2003), (<http://www.geocities.com/rwzakalu/post/tatars.html>)

⁶⁴ In fact, during the NATO summit in 2002, the seating arrangements had to be changed so that president Bush would not have to sit next to Kuchma, who attended the summit as a guest. The conflict was such that organizers changed the alphabetical seating order from English to French so that “Etats-Unis” - the United States – so that they create a physical distance between the two leaders. Alexander Vasovic, “Yushchenko Visit Shows Thaw With U.S.” *Associated Press*, 3 April 2005.

Crimean Tatar deportation and return. Based on all of these events, another positive step would be keeping awareness of the true status of the Crimean Tatars in the Western world high, in order to prevent manipulation of support through false propaganda.

Conclusion

Obviously, very little time has passed since the inception of Yushchenko's presidency. Nevertheless, these lingering problems feed into Crimean Tatar grievances. At this juncture, Crimean Tatars should be visualized as a smaller system within an overarching Ukrainian state, a sort of box-within-a-box, reminiscent of a Ukrainian *Matroshka* doll. Thus, the resolution of Crimean Tatar concerns should be a crucial part of Yushchenko's conflict-prevention plan. Positive incentives such as the recognition of Crimean Tatar people as the indigenous population of Crimea; return of the historical place names (toponyms); fair land distribution; inclusion of the Crimean Tatar language as the third official language in Crimea; and political power-sharing opportunities, together or individually, all need to be considered as facilitative tools by the Yushchenko government, as a part of its conflict-prevention plan in regard to Ukraine's southern flanks.