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By Petro Poroshenko

## Crimea Is Still Ukraine

The Russian annexation has robbed Ukrainian citizens on the peninsula of the right to live in their own state.

### *Крим ще Україна*

*Російський анексія вкрала у громадян України на півострові право жити у власній державі.*

*"Рік тому український Крим була незаконно анексований нашим сусідом і тодішнім партнером Російською Федерацією. Рік тому, коли російські сили спеціального призначення розпустили регіональний парламент і змусили замовкнути незгодних, був проведений фарсовий референдум, щоб приховати територіальне захоплення за фасадом легітимності", - пише Президент України Петро Порошенко. Порошенко вказує, що*

*"Крим - це не тільки українське питання, оскільки, ймовірно, вперше з часів Другої світової війни одна країна в односторонньому порядку привласнила територію іншої країни, створивши небезпечний прецедент в міжнародних відносинах". "Рік потому Крим - це все ще Україна, - стверджує Порошенко, - і наша спільна відповідальність з рештою світу - усунути несправедливість де-факто і де-юре - змусити агресора піти. Рано чи пізно Крим повернеться тому, кому він належить, і наш спільний обов'язок - зробити так, щоб це відбулося скоріше - в ім'я поваги прав наших громадян, міжнародного закону і в ім'я забезпечення глобальної безпеки".*

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/petro-poroshenko-crimea-is-still-ukraine-1426797603>



*TAKEN: The Russian annexation has robbed Ukrainian citizens on the peninsula of the right to live in their own state. Photo: Reuters*

#### 9 COMMENTS

One year ago, the Ukrainian territory of Crimea was illegally annexed by our neighbor and partner at the time, the Russian Federation. One year ago, as Russian special forces sacked the regional parliament and silenced dissenting voices, a farce referendum was held to position Moscow's land grab behind a facade of legitimacy.

I myself witnessed the illegal and shameful occupation, and never will I forget or excuse it. When I visited the Crimean capital of Simferopol to help negotiate a settlement one year ago, I saw many "little green men," who were in fact heavily armed professional soldiers. Although they were masked and disguised, with their uniforms and markings altered, it was clear that every command for the occupation had come from one source: the Kremlin.

Much has happened in our country since then. More of our territory has come under attack from the east. An insurgency led by Russia and supported by Russian troops and advisors has devastated the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, a previously peaceful and hardworking industrial area. Now it is in ruins. More than 6,000 people have died. More than a million have been displaced. Russians who have died are buried in secret, their families denied explanations. Despite a renewed cease-fire that I signed in Minsk last month, periodic violence continues.

Ukraine and its people have made tremendous advances in the past year. The country has successfully held two free and fair elections. We are pushing forward with anticorruption measures, deregulation, the overhaul of the justice system, decentralization and other necessary reforms to eventually bring Ukraine up to European standards. However, we cannot for a moment ignore the brutal violence currently being inflicted in eastern Ukraine, nor can we forget Crimea's annexation.

Crimea is not merely a Ukrainian issue. For arguably the first time since World War II, one country has unilaterally appropriated the territory of another, setting a dangerous precedent in the conduct of international relations.

Perhaps most alarming is the lesson that Crimea teaches those states pondering the acquisition of nuclear weapons. When Russia invaded Crimea, it tore up the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, the agreement that Ukraine reached in 1994 with its Russian, American and British partners. In return for guarantees of territorial integrity, Ukraine gave up its nuclear stockpile. With assurances and respect for Ukrainian sovereignty so cynically broken by the Russian Federation, other nations may now determine it is better to acquire the bomb than risk foreign guarantees.

The annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula was not only an assault on international law, it also robbed Ukrainian citizens the right to live in their own state. Moscow quickly exported its strong-arm rule, cracking down on dissent, the media and access to information. Those who refuse to accept Russian citizenship are considered foreigners, given no protections against deportation and denied access to basic services.

No group has suffered under the occupation more than the Crimean Tatars, the indigenous population of Crimea that had previously suffered from ethnic cleansing and mass deportation under Stalin. Despite the risks, Tatars turned out in large numbers to protest the annexation. Intimidation and vigilantism against the Tatars and other minority groups have escalated.

Several Tatars and pro-Ukrainian activists have been murdered or simply disappeared. Other Tatar leaders, such as Mustafa Dzhemilev, have been silenced, deported or prevented from returning to their homeland. Russian authorities have moved to shut down the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, the organization that represents Tatar interests.

The police and vigilantes have vandalized cultural monuments, raided Mejlis offices and seized religious books. Mr. Dzhemilev has stated that repression in Crimea is now worse than it was during the Soviet Union. This is a powerful indictment from a man who was imprisoned by the Soviets and went on the longest hunger strike in the history of civil rights. During Soviet times, it was at least clear who was making the arrests, and why. Today, the violence is often impersonal, random and brutal.

Many others have also come under attack. Media outlets, journalists and independent civil organizations have been silenced. Voicing support for Crimea's status as a territory of Ukraine is now an offense that carries up to five years of prison time. Oleg Sentsov, a Crimean filmmaker who opposed the occupation, has been arrested and is being held in Russia on bogus terrorism charges. On the pretext of protecting Russian culture, other cultures on the peninsula are being obliterated. Every Ukrainian-language school in Crimea has been switched to Russian. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate in Crimea is being threatened.

On March 27, 2014, 100 United Nations member states voted in favor of a resolution affirming support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine and recognition of Crimea as a part of Ukraine. We remember and appreciate this display of international solidarity in a time of need. And we believe that the Crimean people will regain their native land.

One year later, Crimea still is Ukraine, and it is our joint responsibility with the rest of the world to undo the injustice *de facto* and *de jure*—to make the aggressor go. Sooner or later Crimea will return to where it belongs, and our joint duty is to make it sooner—out of respect of the rights of our citizens, to international law and for the sake of safeguarding global security.

Mr. Poroshenko is president of Ukraine.