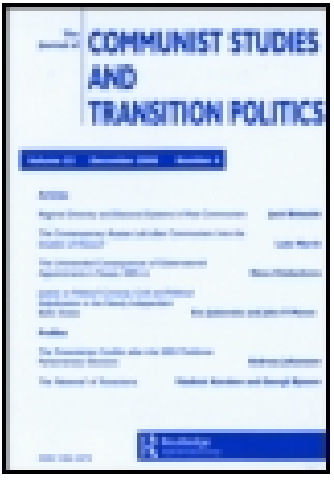

Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fjcs20

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Gwendolyn Sasse [a]

[a] Doctoral student at the London School of Economics and Political Science ,

Published online: 12 Nov 2007.

To cite this article: Gwendolyn Sasse (1996) The Crimean issue, Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, 12:1, 83-100, DOI: 10.1080/13523279608415302

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13523279608415302

The Crimean Issue

GWENDOLYN SASSE

Crimea has been characterized as a flashpoint for future European security and is both part of Ukraine's state-building process and a specific case in itself. Ownership of the Black Sea Fleet is but one issue: inter-ethnic relations (including the sensitive question of the position of the Crimean Tatars), economic and social factors (such as the peninsula's heavy dependence on Ukraine for goods and materials and Ukraine's dependence on Russian energy), political organization (notably the constitutional position within Ukraine and the powers of the Crimean president and parliament), and international and strategic aspects (in particular the relative claims of Russian and Ukrainian nationalism in the region) all play their part in rendering this a complex issue. Various scenarios place the issue of Crimea at the heart of Ukrainian state-building, and the prognosis for a peaceful resolution of the matter is not particularly encouraging.

Russians call it 'the jewel in the crown'; for Ukrainians it is 'the badge on the breast of the land': these are but two depictions of Crimea out of a range of lavish classifications. They contrast with recent comparisons of a different kind: 'the next Bosnia', 'a new Nagorny Karabakh', 'Kashmir' or even 'the trigger for the Third World War'. Granted the fact that media exaggeration conjures up such juicy comparisons, Crimea unarguably presents a complex regional issue. This is due to its ethnic composition (it is the only Ukrainian region with an ethnic Russian majority), its geopolitical position and its turbulent history which subjugated it to different rulers who once again make contrasting claims to the peninsula.[1]

Increasingly, Crimea has also been characterized as a flashpoint for future European security. Even without this military connotation the outcome of Ukraine's attempt to build a viable nation-state is bound to have consequences for the balance of power in the eastern part of Europe. In 1994, when the question of whether or not Ukraine could survive as an independent state was at the top of the agenda, Crimea represented a spark that could have torn Ukraine apart. Crimea is both part of Ukraine's state-building process and a specific case in itself.

Often, particularly in Western media reports, the Crimean issue is reduced to the struggle between Russia and Ukraine over the Black Sea Fleet (BSF). Undoubtedly, the question of the fleet is a related topic, but it

Gwendolyn Sasse is a doctoral student at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, Vol.12, No.1, March 1996, pp.83–100
PUBLISHED BY FRANK CASS, LONDON

clearly represents only one part of the Crimean question. Likewise, the broader context of the problematic relations between Russia and Ukraine is often mentioned. It is worthwhile, however, to concentrate for a change on the developments in Crimea itself in order to evaluate the potential for conflict. This article will therefore analyse the different facets of the Crimean issue, which fall into four categories: inter-ethnic relations; economic and social factors; political organization; and international and strategic aspects. The first two can be seen as a basis for the third category, whereas the fourth category establishes the broader framework. In reality, the 'Crimean knot' cannot be untied so neatly as all these areas overlap and have to be tackled in conjunction with one another. The interaction of these areas sheds light on typical post-Soviet features and problems, such as the relation between centripetal and centrifugal forces and the link between domestic and foreign policy and also that between socio-economic and political developments.

Inter-ethnic Relations

In general, Kiev has pursued a liberal policy towards ethnic minorities which was laid down in the 1991 'Declaration of the Rights of Nationalities in Ukraine'. The 1993 State Department Annual Human Rights Country Report reads accordingly: '... Ukraine has been remarkably free of interethnic antagonism and conflict'.[2] From the government's side this was a political move to increase support for Ukrainian independence even in regions with a substantial non-Ukrainian population.

Crimea has aptly been described as an 'ethnographic museum'[3] and is sometimes referred to as the 'microcosm of the FSU' as it comprises about 100 different nationalities – almost as many as were to be found in the entire USSR. In 1989 the population of Crimea totalled 2,430,495; two-thirds were Russian and one-quarter Ukrainian; 90.5 per cent of the population have Russian-language fluency, and 47 per cent of the Ukrainians consider Russian to be their native language,[4] which leaves Crimea with an extremely low inclination to Ukrainian ethnic nationalism based on language. However, Crimea is ethnically divided within itself: the Ukrainian minority is concentrated in the north, which is more closely integrated into the Ukrainian heartland, whereas the Russian population dominates in the south. If Crimea were to secede from Ukraine, it might split along this north–south divide. Moreover, the potential for inter-ethnic conflict can be seen in the presence of nationals outside their state next to representatives of a nation without a state.[5] These two groups – parts of the Russian population and the Crimean Tatars – are politically the most motivated.

The 1989 USSR census identified 271,715 Crimean Tatars,[6] but this

number can hardly be considered correct. Before 1989 the Crimean Tatars had always been subsumed under 'Tatars' in general and remained absent from standard publications like the *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*.[7] More realistic estimates assume a total number of about 300,000 to 500,000 Crimean Tatars; of these about 250,000 have returned to Crimea so far: at the beginning of May 1993 their pre-war number was reached.[8] Among the other nationalities the 'deported peoples' (Armenians, Bulgarians, Germans and Greeks) take the biggest share. The populations of the indigenous Krymchaks (Tatar-speaking Jews) and Karaims number only 1,500 and 600 persons, respectively.[9]

Direct confrontations between them and today's Russian or Ukrainian settlers have to date been limited. In September 1989 and October 1992, however, Crimean Tatars, occupying territory (*samozakhvat*), clashed with local special forces and at the end of June 1995 riots occurred after two Crimean Tatars had been killed by local racketeers.[10] Those incidents indicate the possibility that Crimean Tatars could alienate themselves further from official politics or that criminality and gang warfare might provoke extremism which would then exacerbate inter-ethnic tensions.

On the one hand, Crimean elections in 1994 led to a clear victory of the Russian nationalist Yurii Meshkov and his bloc *Rossiya* (Russia), but on the other hand an official Crimean Tatar faction entered parliament for the first time and became the biggest oppostion force. Thereby a new and institutionalized, but also more polarized, framework was established. The Crimean Tatars view the Ukrainian government as a guarantor of their cultural and political rights and have vociferously opposed Crimean separatism or re-integration into Russia. In an interview in April 1994, the Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Cemiloglu spoke about the possibility of co-operation with the Ukrainian national movement *Rukh*, but dismissed any alliance with the russified and under-mobilized Ukrainians in Crimea with the phrase that Crimean Tatars 'are more Ukrainian than Ukrainians in the Crimea'.[11] Kiev has likewise recognized the Crimean Tatars as allies against Crimean separatists.

Although the Crimean Tatar issue is the most glaring ethnic problem in Crimea, it cannot be separated from the other aspects of the Crimean issue as it would need other factors to trigger off an open conflict. Moreover, only emphasis on a multinational Crimea can lay the foundation for a civic national identity in the peninsula. At first glance there is evidence that Russians and Ukrainians identify themselves first and foremost as Crimeans, which would strengthen separatist moves. The *Russkoe Natsional'noe Dvizhenie Kryma* (Russian National Movement of Crimea – RNMC) briefly and unsuccessfully tried to promote the Crimeans as a separate nationality.[12] But when polled on specific political issues such as

Ukrainian citizenship or loyalty to the Ukrainian government, Crimean Ukrainians have been more supportive than the Russians and less supportive when it came to such issues as CIS integration. These two facts point to a distinct self-identification underlying the often-cited Crimean identity.[13]

The fact that Russian-language newspapers, radio and TV broadcasting still dominate in Crimea has led to reports biased in favour of pro-Russian forces.[14] Attempts to reduce the air time granted to the Russian TV channel Ostankino have evoked protests among the Crimean population. Usually, language policies spark ethnic tensions since they hit the core element of identity, but the Ukrainian Language Law of 1989, which envisaged the Ukrainization of the country within ten years, has not been pushed in Crimea.[15]

Summing up what has been said so far, inter-ethnic tensions and clashes do not seem to be motivated by genuine hatred. Rather, they have been fuelled by, for example, the threat of 'Ukrainization' in terms of language policies or were induced by political groupings, but they must have been generated by other factors, such as economic and social problems, to which we now turn.

Economic and Social Factors

Obviously, the Crimean economy is affected by the general economic crisis in Ukraine which stems from being an integral part of the former Soviet economy, a lack of energy resources, diversified but inefficient and wasteful industrial and agricultural production, a lack of hard currency and the postponement of economic reforms. Ukraine's energy bill to Russia quickly grew to astronomical figures, and this brought Ukraine's import capacities down, contributed to a huge trade deficit and gave rise to general dissatisfaction among the population, especially in the eastern and southern provinces where the population tends to make direct comparisons with the rather better state of the Russian economy.

Crimea receives 75 per cent of its industrial goods, 80 per cent of its water and 85 per cent of its energy from Ukraine. Production in Crimea itself is very limited and includes TV sets, food and textiles.[16] Crimea represents the final link of a chain of dependency and finds itself exposed to Kiev's 'stick-and-carrot' methods which resemble those applied by Moscow in relation to Kiev. Threats to withhold oil and gas aim to counter the drive for autonomy and force the dependent side into line. Kiev's economic policies have caused additional damage: traditional markets in Russia were lost because of a ban on the export of agricultural products to the CIS, the wine-making industry suffered under the high excise taxes on

Crimean wines, and a leasing system was postponed. Whether the recently discovered potential oil and gas deposits in Crimea and possible hydrocarbon reserves off the Crimean coastline will change the relations between Moscow and Kiev, or between Kiev and Simferopol, remains to be seen.[17]

As Crimea, with its remarkable share of retired party officials and KGB and military officers, remained a communist stronghold, the level of protest against economic liberalization proved to be extremely high. Furthermore, this inadequate economic policy has also fuelled corruption and the build-up of Mafia-like structures which are directly linked to the increasing crime rate. Even the local press has declared Crimea one of the most dangerous regions in Ukraine.[18]

Leonid Kravchuk's speech on the Crimean issue in June 1994 showed that Kiev is not against any autonomous regional economic activity. However, the assistance provided by Russians – thereby gaining indirect influence through the back door – evoked serious concern.[19] In January 1995 the Crimean parliament took the economic decision with the most far-reaching consequences to date: it declared all state property in Crimea to belong to the republic (rather than to Ukraine) and delegated the privatization in the region to the Crimean State Property Fund.[20] This was reversed by Kiev's clamp-down in March which – apart from allocating additional budget funds to appease regional economic demands[21] – gave Ukrainian law priority over Crimean property and set up a unified system of privatization agencies. Despite its privatization plans, Crimea has so far lagged behind the other regions. The issue of privatization illustrates how the different facets of the Crimean issue interlock: so far privatization programmes have not taken into account the interests of the deported peoples which have not even fully returned to their homeland and have to settle down before obtaining any property.

Most recently, in July 1995, a special economic zone was created in northern Crimea for a period of five years. In December Kuchma approved the plan to grant tax, excise and other exemptions. These measures are meant to decrease production costs, raise wages and obtain resources necessary for the renovation of enterprises and housing construction in the area.[22] This pilot project could be the first careful step in the direction of a long-planned Crimean free economic zone without immediately provoking economic separatism.

As for socio-demographic factors, identifiable economic schisms between Russians and Ukrainians which might be a major factor fuelling ethnic tension are not present.[23] The overall feeling is that the economic situation and the social status of the majority have deteriorated and that these issues are not bound up with ethnicity. However, a clear schism exists

between Russians and Ukrainians on the one hand and Crimean Tatars on the other. The unemployment rate among the latter, according to their own figures, amounts to 70 per cent and financial assistance is worse than limited. Paradoxically, other parts of the Crimean population sometimes voice complaints that Crimean Tatars enjoy preferential treatment when it comes to housing and payments.

In general, education is lower in Crimea than in other regions in Ukraine, a fact that reflects the considerable regional differences in the concentration of scientific, academic and industrial institutions. Moreover, education in Crimea is highly russified. For Crimean students, however, access to universities in the Russian Federation has become more difficult and less affordable. At the same time the announcement of general 'Ukrainization' and Ukrainian-language entry exams at Ukrainian universities stirred anxiety among Crimean Russians; but so far Kiev has not imposed these policies, which would severely hinder the formation of a civic nation-state.

In conclusion, socio-economic problems can be considered the single most important factor complicating the situation in Crimea. Plummeting living standards, above all, have boosted the drive for independence or for closer ties with Russia, have made Crimean Russians increasingly aware of their ethnic origin and have been translated into political action.

Political Organization

Political organization in the Crimean context comprises two aspects: first, the development and objectives of a movement striving for Crimean independence or reunification with Russia, and, secondly, the establishment of a political system itself with defined competences, parties and a civil society. Both involve a struggle over assets of power and prestige.

Even prior to Ukrainian independence the Crimean population voted for the restoration of Crimean statehood in the form of the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), a status that was lost in 1946 but re-established in February 1991. The driving force behind increasing separatist moves has been the RNMC, formed directly after Ukraine's declaration of independence and led by the local Russian communist deputy, Yurii Meshkov. With the backing of local business elites, the RNMC gathered enough signatures to demand a referendum on Crimean independence.

For a long time there were hardly any other organized political forces in Crimea apart from nationalist or communist parties. Moreover, most political organizations in Crimea are regionally based. With the declaration of Ukrainian independence in August 1991, the communist party was officially banned, but in Crimea the reconstruction of a similar party began

almost immediately in conjunction with separatist and pro-Russian tendencies. Since the disintegration of the USSR Crimea has appeared as an enclave, but as the exact opposite of Aksenov's literary vision of a capitalist and independent *Ostrov Krym* (Island of Crimea). Instead, it could rather be described as 'a bastion of Soviet-style communism'.[24]

The local power struggle is reflected in the fact that Mykola Bahrov, former communist and chairman of the Crimean Supreme Soviet, used the RNMC to put nationalist pressure on Kiev before shifting to moderate, pro-Ukrainian forces once he had obtained concessions on autonomy and saw his own position endangered by the popular Meshkov himself. On 5 May 1992 the Crimean parliament passed a law on the 'sovereign state – the Republic of the Crimea'[25] which was made subject to confirmation by referendum. This move was bound to inflame the relations between Kiev and Simferopol, although it was not clear what this self-proclaimed independence entailed.

In this case a compromise was found: the Ukrainian government forestalled the referendum by announcing a programme of economic stabilization in the region and granting Crimea unprecedented autonomy, to be manifested in a separate constitution (the revised version was enacted on 25 September 1992), financial and social policies and a say in Ukrainian foreign policy. The September constitution makes it abundantly clear, however, that the Republic of Crimea is 'a lawful, democratic and secular state within Ukraine'.[26]

Only in 1994 were the first free presidential and parliamentary elections held in Crimea. The clear victory of Meshkov and his electoral bloc *Rossiya*[27] came as a surprise to the Ukrainian government, which had seemed sure about Bahrov's success and Crimea's eventual loyalty to Ukraine.[28] Kiev clearly underestimated the threat of separatism. Bahrov had been the only pro-Ukrainian candidate, the other contenders being pro-Soviet/CIS communists or pro-Russian separatists. Before the parliamentary elections the electoral law effectively excluded all-Ukrainian parties from the campaign.[29] Meshkov scheduled a new referendum for 27 March, but owing to Ukrainian intervention it had to be downgraded to an opinion poll. The three questions – which were all answered positively – dealt with the restoration of the Crimean constitution, the right of Crimeans to dual citizenship and rule by presidential decree. Subsequently, however, Meshkov acted more cautiously than during his election campaign following diplomatic pressure from the leadership of Russia and the new Ukrainian president Kuchma.

Although there were internal divisions in the Crimean Tatar camp concerning their willingness to co-operate with the official institutions, the radical branch represented by *Mejlis* has gained more influence than the older, less formal *Natsional'noe dvizhenie krymskikh Tatar* (National Movement of the Crimean Tatars), which has always retained closer contacts with government institutions. *Mejlis* finally dropped its election

boycott in order to opt against Meshkov, by which action it turned into a supporter of Ukrainian statehood.[30] The old Supreme Soviet had agreed upon national quotas: the Crimean Tatars were granted 14 out of a total of 96 seats in parliament, while the other deported nationalities (Armenians, Bulgarians, Germans and Greeks) obtained one seat each. All 14 seats were taken by the more radical and vociferous branch of the Crimean Tatar movement after the Crimean Tatar congress *Kurultai* had finally decided to stand in parliamentary elections and obtain an official status.

In May 1994 Crimea's parliament, in reaction to a decree from Kiev that subordinated the Crimean justice, security and interior ministries to the central authorities, re-adopted the controversial constitution of May 1992. This amounted to a declaration of independence as it envisaged dual Russian and Ukrainian citizenship, the establishment of a separate militia, local conscripts serving military duty in Crimea, renegotiation with Ukraine on an equal footing, and Crimean jurisdiction over all Crimean property.[31] The Ukrainian parliament immediately rejected the constitution as illegal and once again a compromise bill was developed.

Eventually, political splits within the pro-Russian bloc isolated Meshkov and his 'Moscow government' and advanced the power of Crimean Russians around the parliamentary speaker Sergei Tsekov.[32] This fact suggests a more cautious approach to the pro-Russian vote in Crimea as the 'import' of Russian ministers from Moscow was viewed increasingly sceptically and turned against Meshkov. Apart from switching the clocks to Moscow time Meshkov had not kept his promises; his profile on economic issues remained low and in September 1994 the Moscow tug-of-war seemed to repeat itself. After a clash with parliament and a staged coup, however, Meshkov found himself in a nominal position, stripped of virtually all powers. He unsuccessfully tried to implement his own government, supported by groups of Don Cossacks with whom he had earlier signed a friendship agreement.[33] At the time President Kuchma refused to take sides and sent an envoy to mediate between the two powers.[34]

In January 1995 the Crimean parliament voted unanimously for the restoration of the USSR and started sending out public appeals to Russia, Ukraine and Belarus to promote reintegration.[35] Thus, Crimea pursued a policy diametrically opposed to Kiev's standpoint, which opposed integration of the CIS. At the same time this move was a step beyond demands for reincorporation into Russia as it left Crimea with the opportunity to play a more independent role. On 17 March, in response to renewed Crimean threats to hold a region-wide referendum on independence, the Ukrainian government suspended the Crimean constitution, annulled the president's post, initiated legal proceedings against Meshkov, imposed temporary presidential rule and considered suspending the Crimean parliament, which

was given an ultimatum to write up a new constitution in line with Ukrainian law.[36]

The subsequent dismissal of Crimean Prime Minister Anatolii Franchuk by the Crimean Supreme Council was declared illegal. The split among the politcal forces in Crimea became obvious when 45 out of 96 parliamentarians – among them the pro-Ukrainian Crimean Tatar faction – appealed to the Supreme Council of Ukraine to dismiss the Supreme Council of Crimea. The Crimean parliamentary speaker, in return, urged the Russian Duma to protect Russian rights in Crimea, a step which clearly shows the attempt of regional leaders to appeal to nationalist feelings to the benefit of their personal position. With hindsight it looks as if the Ukrainian government waited for a suitable moment to clamp down on Crimean separatism. Pro-Russian and pro-independence forces in Crimea were no longer united, the Crimean population was weary of the whole situation and the Crimean Tatars, along with Crimea's old *nomenklatura*, were on Kiev's side. The OSCE likewise showed no support for Crimean self-determination. Moreover, Moscow could hardly intervene since it had to grapple with the Chechen conflict which it had likewise defined as an internal matter and which exposed its military weakness. The disaster in Chechnya may have been the last proof for Kiev that political solutions are to be preferred to military ones. At the same time this last stand-off revealed the potentially dangerous link among different regionalist tendencies as Donbas organizations linked their demand for autonomy to the right to Crimean autonomy.[37] In early July the Crimean parliament finally sacked its pro-Russian chairman Tsekov; he was replaced by Yevhen Suprunyuk who labelled Crimea 'an integration bridge'.[38]

The draft of the new Crimean constitution clearly envisages the 'Republic of Crimea' as a constituent part of Ukraine. Its powers will be designed in accordance with the Ukrainian constitution and the Ukrainian laws concerning Crimea from 1992 and April 1995.[39] Accordingly, Crimea is not subject to international law and cannot enter into international relations with other states. At first national quotas were left out of the draft, but they were retained after massive Crimean Tatar protests and a corresponding OSCE recommendation in November 1995.

A last factor to be addressed under this heading is the perception of the Crimean public. The referendum in 1991 and opinion polls in spring 1992 provided no clear-cut mandate for independence. The turnout in general elections has been extremely low and even the events of March 1995 evoked very modest protest, if any at all. This points to widespread political apathy affecting both Russians and Ukrainians.[40] Alongside support for Kuchma, polls showed a majority of Crimeans in favour of a union with Russia and a return to the communist system,[41] both of which are not among Kuchma's objectives. Such contradictory results add to the impression of

political confusion among the population which augurs unpredictability but, for the time being, also makes extremist outbursts in the region less likely.

To sum up, three factors are particularly important: the Russian separatist movement has passed its zenith, a stable political system in general has not yet evolved – a fact that could again ignite Crimean separatism – and the population has increasingly turned its back on political organizations. These features increase Kiev's current influence over the region. The fact that political forces in Crimea obtain direct or indirect support from Kiev, or that Moscow places the Crimean issue into the broader context of Russian–Ukrainian relations, are the fourth and last element to be analysed.

International and Strategic Aspects

Nationalism cannot be used only in centre–periphery struggles where the regional leadership or influential societal groups take advantage of its appeal, but also in centre–centre debates. Thereby the focus shifts to power struggles at the national level. Regional stability will largely depend on the interplay between Russian and Ukrainian nationalism.

Nationalist Russian politicians such as former Vice-President Rutskoi, and even the liberal mayors of Moscow and St. Petersburg, increasingly argued that the transfer of Crimea from Russian to Ukrainian jurisdiction in 1954 was unconstitutional[42] – a peculiar point to make, given the arbitrariness that ruled every paragraph of the constitution. This fuelled suspicions that Russia might try to retrieve the territory.[43] The issue was carried further when Crimean communist hardliners allied with Russian nationalists. In 1992 the Russian Supreme Soviet questioned the constitutionality of the 1954 transfer and forwarded the issue to its commissions, asking Ukraine to do the same. In July 1993 the Russian parliament almost unanimously declared Sevastopol a Russian city, arguing that it was originally not included in Khrushchev's gift as it had obtained a special status in 1948.

According to opinion polls, this view was widely supported in Russia despite the general anti-parliament attitude at the time.[44] On that issue Ukraine addressed the UN Security Council, which ruled the declaration 'null and void' and confirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity.[45] A year later, Sevastopol declared Russian status for itself, a move that was condemned by Yeltsin and Crimea's separatist politicians alike since it separated the city port from the rest of the peninsula. However, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev on several occasions argued for a strong foothold in Sevastopol. Given the fact that the Russian military and the foreign ministry – rather than Yeltsin himself – increasingly formulated policies towards the 'near abroad', this had to cause disturbance. So did Russian arguments supporting

Crimea's right to determine its own future as they might have approached Crimean independence as a temporary phenomenon enabling Russia to regain influence.[46]

Shortly after the declaration of independence, a Ukrainian national army was created on the basis of Soviet assets on Ukrainian territory. Kravchuk demanded a pledge of allegiance from all units on Ukrainian territory, including the BSF. The BSF became the focus of the Russian–Ukrainian dispute which turned into a matter of principle rather than a rational argument. Yeltsin repeatedly acknowledged Ukraine's territorial control over Crimea, but he likewise stressed that the BSF was genuinely Russian. Russian nationalists linked the terriorial question to the continuing fleet dispute. In the context of defining new security interests, the BSF plays an important role. The majority of naval servicemen at the conscript and lower officer level are Ukrainians who supported Ukrainian independence, whereas the higher officer corps is mainly Russian, highly conservative and in favour of Russian control. At a time of redefining national identity, the BSF with its naval base in Sevastopol also constitutes an important symbol of national prestige and historical memory – it is the 'holy of holies of Russian imperial history'.[47] An often neglected fact is the brief interlude 1918–19 when the BSF flew the Ukrainian national colours of the Ukrainian People's Republic.[48]

External threats to Ukrainian state- and nation-building and to regional stability are, above all, expected to come from Russia. This threat is perceived as being twofold and comprises 'Russian expansionism and Russia's military machine' plus 'externally stimulated conflicts and the territorial break-up of the Ukraine'.[49] Crimea represents both of these components and can be used as a direct Russian lever of influence.

For Ukraine, the Crimean issue unavoidably became a test case in terms of asserting its sovereignty against Russia; in this respect territorial integrity is absolutely vital. Potentially, the Crimean and BSF disputes have been highly precarious, given Ukraine's substantial military units stationed in the region and Russia's large stake in Sevastopol. In financial terms Ukraine is even less capable of financing its own naval forces than is Russia. The Russian and Ukrainian sides have accused each other of not fulfilling the joint financial obligations.[50] The immense fall in the value of the Ukrainian *karbovanets* against the Russian rouble reduced Ukraine's proportion of the fleet's costs and resulted in salary discrepancies between Russian and Ukrainian sailors; this in turn generated protest among the Ukrainians, who hoisted the St. Andrew flag in 1993.

Negotiations about the division and bases of the ageing fleet have dragged on for almost four years. Despite their demands, the Crimeans were granted no stake in the BSF negotiations nor were their calls for a united

BSF under CIS command taken into account. Naval commanders have predicted that by the turn of the century the fleet will no longer be functional and a cynical Ukrainian anecdote goes as follows: 'All the BSF vessels should be sent out into the Black Sea where they have to take one shot each. Only the ones finding themselves afterwards still on the surface are obviously worth the struggle between Russia and Ukraine. A procedure like that would quickly resolve the whole issue.'[51]

In April 1994 the agreement was reached that the BSF would be split in half, with Russia buying most of the Ukrainian share and thereby relieving Ukraine's energy debts. In early June 1995 Kuchma and Yeltsin signed an agreement in Sochi – the seventh of its kind – on the division of the BSF, which laid down that 680 out of a total of 833 ships were assigned to Russia, the Russian fleet would have its base in Sevastopol and would be based separately from the Ukrainian navy, and the fleet officers would have the right to choose which navy they would join.[52]

Yet the vaguely worded treaty could be interpreted differently according to the needs of either side in order to appease parliaments and nationalists at home. The accord, above all, confirmed the status quo since it maintained the possibility that the port of Sevastopol, where 80 per cent of the fleet's infrastructure is located, would be shared by both sides – the main bone of contention over a long period of time.[53] It was decided that Russia's main base would be Sevastopol, but the issue of where the Ukrainian ships were going to be based was left open, as were other issues – the deployment of ground troops, the price Russia was to pay for Ukraine's share and for the lease of Sevastopol, and also the actual division of the ships. Therefore the Sochi treaty cannot be considered a major breakthrough for the struggle over the BSF. Its significance lies elsewhere: it determined that Crimea is part of Ukraine and it represented a 'political face-saver'[54] for both sides as – on paper – it removed the obstacles to the long-postponed friendship treaty and further economic co-operation, both of which became tied to the BSF issue.[55]

Another highly contested issue between the two countries is the right to dual citizenship, a means by which Russia intends to 'protect' its nationals in the 'near abroad". In March 1995, a consular group from the Embassy of the Russian Federation to Ukraine began its work in Simferopol with the support of the Crimean parliament, granting Russian citizenship to Crimean residents after a draft law providing for dual citizenship had been issued by the Crimean parliament.[56] Although the Russian side maintained that it had no intention of interfering with the recent Ukrainian clampdown, this step could not but be perceived as a provocation.[57] The new Crimean constitution will not provide for dual citizenship and, indeed, the wish to obtain Russian citizenship would make matters even more complicated in terms of dual

entitlements and obligations.[58]

Russian–Ukrainian tension hampers general stabilization in Eastern Europe. Mistrust in Russia led Ukraine to change its original decision to give up the nuclear weapons on its territory. They were used as a bargaining chip instead and forced the West into a more active role. With the US-brokered trilateral agreement on nuclear weapons at the end of 1994 a major obstacle to better relations was removed. Once again, the Crimean issue played a significant role in the bigger picture of state-building in Russia and Ukraine: Crimean separatism reinforced Kiev's commitment to the trilateral agreement on nuclear disarmament as it also contains a clause on Ukraine's territorial integrity.[59]

The struggle over Crimea has often been verbal rambling. Obviously, Russia cannot afford to get involved in a 'Crimean adventure'.[60] It would endanger the – sometimes already strained – relations with the West, aid would no longer be guaranteed, and Western concessions concerning NATO expansion would be out of the question, not to mention the fact that Russia would not be financially capable of satisfying Crimea. At the same time, Ukraine deliberately avoided military intervention, which shows that both sides have no interest in a large-scale conflict. Nevertheless, a successful striving for Crimean independence would have prompted Russia to assist its nationals in a region that lacks the conditions to be independent. Today the theoretical possibility remains that rising nationalism at home could drag Russia into a more assertive role.

Problematic Russian–Ukrainian relations and Russia's more assertive policy towards the 'near abroad' form the broader framework of the Crimean issue. After verbal attacks and endless negotiations as well as Kuchma's victory in the presidential elections, Russia and Ukraine now seem to have realized the necessity of good-neighbourly relations. They have made the first steps in that direction, so that Ukrainian territorial integrity seems to be ensured for the time to come.

Conclusions

At first, centrifugal forces at the republican level, demanding sovereignty from a weakened centre in Moscow, brought about the collapse of the USSR. Now a similar process has occurred at the lower level and large successor states such as the Russian Federation, Ukraine or Kazakhstan could themselves face disintegration.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between Crimea and Tatarstan, the first republic within the Russian Federation to obtain greater autonomy rights through a separate treaty with Moscow (February 1994).[61] After a protracted struggle this precedent set the stage for further individual

arrangements of this kind. Crimea can be seen as 'Ukraine's Tatarstan'. Interestingly, the Crimean Republic and the Republic of Tatarstan have established bilateral contacts over the past two or three years. The president of the Tatarstan Republic, Mintimer Schaymiyev, and Crimea's president Yurii Meshkov, in particular, built up close relations, signed several economic agreements[62] and stressed the 'traditional ties of friendship' between the two republics. The Crimean leader consulted his counterpart with regard to Tatarstan's treaty with Russia as soon as he assumed office.[63]

Three patterns generate conflict in Crimea as well as in the FSU in general: (1) the complicated struggle over a new political and economic order; (2) the attempts to rectify ethnic injustices of the Soviet past; and (3) the manipulation of these contentious issues for purposes of personal power struggles.

To come full circle, the scenarios from the beginning can be raised again. The analysis of the multi-faceted Crimean issue has revealed them as platitudes driven by sensationalism. There is undoubtedly theoretical potential for a serious conflict, but this is unlikely to explode in the near future. Despite the risk attached to predictions in the post-Soviet context, I would, in conclusion, suggest the following future scenarios: one optimistic one to counter three more pessimistic ones.

At the moment an optimistic scene prevails. It is inextricably linked to President Kuchma who has so far managed to keep Ukraine unified and has remained fairly popular throughout Ukraine. The relations between Kiev and Crimea have been less hostile under Kuchma than under Kravchuk. Crimean separatism has also been mitigated by the following factors: the tug-of-war between Crimean president and parliament, the appointment of Kuchma's daughter's father-in-law as Crimean prime minister, the presence of pro-Ukrainian Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians, and Russian President Yeltsin's cautious stance.

After the stand-off against Kiev's communist-dominated Rada (parliament) in June 1995, Kuchma was granted extra powers. A strong presidency pushing for economic and political reforms seems to be the best option for Ukraine at the moment, and Kuchma appears competent and committed to fulfilling this role. He also obtained the right to appoint the members of local and regional executive councils, responsible for implementing his policies. This could increase the centre's effectiveness in determining the process of state-building, although Kuchma has increasingly appointed (or re-appointed) members of the old *nomenklatura.* The fact that Kiev, in contrast to Russia's handling of the Chechnya issue, has so far managed to prevent the escalation of the Crimean problem – by granting fundamental rights of autonomy while at the same time stressing the territorial integrity of Ukraine – hints at a possible eventual federaliza-

tion of the country, which could turn Crimea into a model for other centre–periphery relations in Ukraine.[64] The promotion of regional frameworks – within Ukraine as well as among different states, including Ukraine – is likely to keep Ukraine unified and diverse at the same time, to channel its potential and meet its security needs.

There are, however, factors of risk including the possibility of instability in the medium- or long-term future. The most obvious event of significance is the forthcoming Russian presidential election (scheduled for June 1996). The victory of a nationalist or communist candidate would certainly change the political atmosphere. Russian nationalism and imperialism, which have so far mostly remained verbal as Yeltsin has refrained from playing the 'Crimean card', might develop into more assertive actions. Crimea would present a welcome point of reference, notwithstanding any Russian–Ukrainian friendship agreement.

The second negative scenario involves the failure of Kuchma's reforms. For some time, he was really popular throughout Ukraine, but recent opinion polls show his popularity declining in his former strongholds in the east and in Crimea owing to the discrepancy between his pro-Russian election campaign and his more cautious policies afterwards.[65] However, country-wide 'civic' support for his policies is crucial and depends on visible success, above all in the economic realm; otherwise, Russians in Crimea might be mobilized again by separatist movements. Likewise, clear legal structures at the centre represent an important precondition for regional integration. So far Kuchma's powers have not been based on a new constitution, which still has to be passed in order to regulate executive and legislative powers.

The third pessimistic scenario concentrates on future development in Crimea itself. The new Crimean parliamentary speaker might still end up in the same deadlock as his predecessor because of economic difficulties and an unclear division of power between the local executive and legislature. Likewise, Crimean Prime Minister Franchuk was once again ousted in early December 1995 following his failure to improve the economic situation: This illustrates persisting factors of instability.

In addition, two factors feeding into this instability can be singled out: first, the possibility of growing dissatisfaction among the Crimean Tatars concerning the performance of the Ukrainian (and Russian) government; and, last but not least, rapid escalation of crime and gang warfare, which has already exposed ethnically based loyalties, could gain more political impact.

The focus on the multi-faceted Crimean issue has illustrated both the regional diversity in Ukraine and also the so far successful attempt of the Ukrainian government to appease the region. Crimea might have triggered

a domino effect of separatism; now it may mark the beginning of a federal system in Ukraine on the condition that Russian–Ukrainian relations develop peacefully and reforms are irrefutably implemented in Kiev.[66] Although radical economic reforms will have different impacts on the regions and also on ethnic groups in these areas, there is a fair chance that they will reduce dissatisfaction among the Crimean population and foster the rational recognition that the historically and culturally distinct, but economically not self-sufficient, region is better off in some sort of federal union. Once stable centre–periphery institutions have been established, the chances of regional leadership and Russian groupings playing on nationalist appeal will diminish. State-building, in terms of getting economic reforms off the ground and establishing viable centre–periphery relations, can be considered the most important task for the Ukrainian government. Successful state-building will regulate regionalism and consolidate the integrated and civic Ukrainian nation-state. Crimea is bound to play a leading role in this process.

NOTES

1. For – at times peculiar – Ukrainian versions see, for example, George Knysh, 'The Crimean Roots of Ancient Ukrainian Statehood', *The Ukrainian Quarterly,* Vol.XLIX, No.3 (1993), pp.294–317, or Vasil' Arsenovych Chumak, *Ukraina i Krym: spil'nist' istorychnoï doli* (Kyïv, 1993).
2. As cited by Orest Deyachakiwsky, 'National Minorities in Ukraine', *The Ukrainian Quarterly*, Vol.L, No.4 (1994), p.373.
3. *Izvestiya Tavricheskoi Uchenoi Archivnoi Kommissii*, No.52 (Simferopol 1915), p.3.
4. Russian statistics as quoted in David R. Marples and David F. Duke, 'Ukraine, Russia and the Question of Crimea', *Nationalities Papers*, Vol.23, No.2 (1995), p.272.
5. Ian Bremmer, 'Ethnic Issues in Crimea', *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol.2, No.18 (30 April 1993), p.24.
6. *Vestnik statistiki*, 1990, No.10, p.69.
7. *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, Vol.13 (Moscow: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 1973), p.517.
8. *Krymskaya pravda,* 12 May 1995.
9. Andrew Wilson, *The Crimean Tatars: A Situation Report on the Crimean Tatars for International Alert* (London 1994), p.36.
10. *Moskovskie novosti*, 1995, No.34 (14–21 May), p.15.
11. *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 3 April 1994, p.9.
12. Abraham Brumberg, 'Not So Free At Last', *The New York Review of Books*, 22 Oct. 1992, p.63.
13. Ian Bremmer, 'The Politics of Ethnicity: Russians in the New Ukraine', *Europe–Asia Studies,* Vol.46, No.2 (1994), p.267–81; the data stem from 1992, but trends seem to hold true beyond that year.
14. Compare the likewise biased reports at the higher level in national Ukrainian and Russian newspapers analysed by Alexander Tulko, 'Conflicting Reports Fuel Crimean Tension', *Transition*, 28 April 1995, pp.16–18.
15. Religious affiliation as a marker of inter-ethnic difference may gain in importance between Slavs and Crimean Tatars.
16. *Ogonek*, 1995, No.14 (April), p.75.

17. *Segodnya*, 15 April 1995, p.4.
18. *Krymskie izvestiya*, 10 Aug. 1995.
19. Kravchuk's speech on *Radio Ukraine*, 1 June 1994, reproduced by BBC Monitoring Service, 4 June 1994.
20. Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Ukraine* (London, 1995), p.11.
21. *Post Postup: Tyzhneva Hazeta Ukrainskyj Informatsijnyj Tsentr*, Issue 14 (51) (Amsterdam, 6 April 1995).
22. *Post Postup*, Issue 27 (64), 6 July 1995, and 28 (65), 13 July 1995.
23. See Bremmer's empirical studies in *Europe–Asia Studies*, loc.cit., p.269.
24. *The Economist*, 11 Jan. 1992, p.47.
25. Document reprinted in *Ukrainian Reporter*, Vol.2, No.5 (1992), pp.5–6.
26. *Konstitutsiya Respubliki Krym* (Simferopol, 1992), Art.1 paragraph 1, p.3 (my translation).
27. For its goals see Ukrainskyj Informatsijnyj Tsentr, *Political Parties and Movements in Crimea* (Amsterdam, 1994); for election results see Andrew Wilson, 'The Elections in Crimea', *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol.3, No.25 (24 June 1994), pp.17–18.
28. This miscalculation accounts for the fact that Kiev did not interfere immediately when Crimea introduced its own presidential system.
29. Interview with Crimean lawyer Vadim Kolesnikov, *Rossiiskie vesti* (29 Oct. 1993), p.3.
30. Susan Stewart, 'The Tatar Dimension', *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol.3, No.19 (13 May 1994), pp.22–6.
31. Chrystyna Lapychak, 'Crackdown on Crimean Separatism', *Transition*, 26 May 1995, p.4.
32. Fading support for Meshkov was already discussed earlier on: *Moskovskie novosti* (17–24 April 1994), p.10. More concrete disputes appeared somewhat later: see, for example, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 4 June 1994, p.1.
33. *ITAR–TASS*, Moscow, 15 June 1994, cited by BBC Monitoring Service, 18 June 1994.
34. *The Ukrainian* Weekly, 18 Sept. 1994, p.1.
35. EIU, *Country Report: Ukraine*, p.11.
36. Law 'On the Autonomous Republic of Crimea' of 17 March, published in *Holos Ukraïny*, 18 March 1995.
37. *Krymskaya pravda*, 21 March 1995. However, this link remained the only explicit one; other regions showed little interest or support.
38. *UNIAN Kiev*, 6 July 1995, cited by BBC Monitoring Service, 8 July 1995.
39. Reprinted in E. Michailovskaya (ed.), *Krym: Sbornik materialov* (Moscow: Informatsionno-ekspertnaya gruppa 'Panorama', 1992); and *ITAR–TASS*, 31 May 1995, cited by BBC Monitoring Service, 1–2 June 1995.
40. Bremmer, 'The Politics of Ethnicity', pp.272, 274, 278.
41. EIU, *Country Report: Ukraine*, p.11.
42. For the argumentation and its validity see Vladimir Butkevich, 'Respublika Krym – Zakryt' Ameriku', *Pravda Ukrainy*, 27 May 1992, pp. 1–2.
43. See, for example, Khasbulatov's emotive comment: 'Khrushchev must have suffered either from a hangover or a bad case of sunstroke when he handed Crimea over to Ukraine' (cited in Ustina Markus, 'Black Sea Fleet Dispute Apparently Over', *Transition*, 28 July 1995, p.31).
44. *Ogonek*, 1995, No.23 (June), p.77.
45. Peter von Ham, *Ukraine, Russia and European Security: Implications for Western Policy*, Chaillot Paper 13 (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, WEU, Feb. 1994), pp.26–7.
46. G. Potapenko, 'Konstantin Zatulin: Krym prinadlezhit Krymchanam', *Krymskaya pravda*, 28 March 1995, and Interfaks, citing *Krymskaya pravda*, 29 March 1995.
47. Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, 2nd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p.585.
48. *Ukrainian Reporter*, Vol.2, No.1 (1992), p.8.
49. Roy Allison, *Military Forces in the Soviet Successor States*, Adelphi Paper 280 (Oct. 1993), p.37.
50. For a Russian perspective see *Ogonek*, 1995, No.23 (June), p.77.
51. Ole Diehl, *Kiew und Moskau: Die ukrainisch–russischen Beziehungen als zentrales Problem deutscher und europäischer Sicherheit*, Arbeitspapiere zur Internationalen Politik 84 (Bonn,

April 1994), p.53.
52. *Post Postup*, Issue 24 (61), 15 June 1995; text of agreement in *Pravda*, 10 June 1995, p.2.
53. Sir Russell Johnston, *Ukraine and European Security*, Assembly of WEU, 40th ordinary session (24 May 1995), p.8.
54. Markus, op.cit., p.34.
55. The latest postponement in this respect was due to Yeltsin's voicing concern about Kiev's clamp-down on Crimea, which was seen as an interference with the right of the Crimean population to decide about its own future: see *Izvestiya*, 21 April 1995, p.1.
56. 'Rossiiskoe grazhdanstvo – zhitelyam Kryma', *Krymskaya pravda*, 22 March 1995, and Interfaks, citing *Krymskaya pravda*, 24 March 1995.
57. *Post Postup*, Issue 12 (49), 23 March 1995.
58. This point has been made by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel. However, it is vital that the Crimeans maintain access to education facilities in Russia and obtain the pensions they deserve: see *UNIAN news agency Kiev* (20 June 1995), cited by BBC Monitoring Service, 22 June 1995.
59. *The Economist*, 5 Feb. 1994, p.41.
60. Ibid., 28 May 1994, p.40.
61. For further details see Elizabeth Teague, 'Russia and Tatarstan Sign Power-Sharing Treaty', *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol.3, No.3 (8 April 1994), pp.19–27; the comparison has been made in Russian accounts: see, for example, 'Kommentarii', *Stolitsa*, 1994, No.15 (April), p.7.
62. *Novecon Vek 1993*, cited by Reuters Business Briefing, 27 April 1993, and *UNIAN news agency Kiev*, 4 July 1994, cited by BBC Monitoring Service, 8 July 1994.
63. *Argumenty i fakty*, 29 August 1994, p.5.
64. Even in Ukraine's russified and industrialized regions recent studies have shown the populations's support for federal structures in contrast to Kiev's insistence on a unitary state: see Vicki L. Hesli, 'Public Support for the Devolution of Power in Ukraine: Regional Patterns', *Europe–Asia Studies*, Vol.47, No.1 (1995), p.94.
65. Jaroslaw Martyniuk, 'The Shifting Political Landscape', *Transition*, 28 July 1995, pp.9–11.
66. In his annual report to parliament Kuchma sketched some features of a new regional policy, devoting special attention to guaranteed Crimean autonomy and pointing in the direction of federalization: *Radio Ukraine World Service Kiev*, cited by BBC Monitoring Service, 6 April 1995.