



### **How to Keep Crimea in Mainstream of Ukrainian Civic Movement?**

With years passing, the topic of Crimea has been more and more disappearing from the media landscape of Ukraine.

And this fact may become a significant obstacle to keep ties between Crimea and the mainland as well as to protect the rights of people living in the occupation. Joining together the efforts of civil society in this sphere is key to revitalize the issue.

**The Human Rights House CRIMEA** has initiated a discussion on how to keep Crimea to the mainstream of the Ukrainian civic movement. Well-known Ukrainian human rights activists and journalists have tried to answer important questions that will help find new ways to keep the society interested in the topic of Crimea.

The discussion was moderated by **Mr. Andriy Kulykov**, a journalist, a TV and radio anchorman, and a media expert.

The discussion started with searching a brief answer to the question on speakers' own experience on the event subject.

*- Based on your personal experience, what methods and actions would be the most successful to keep Crimea in the mainstream of the Ukrainian civic movement?*

**Ms Valentyna Potapova, Head of ALMENDA Center for Civil Education:**

- My personal opinion is this is enlightenment because it is through enlightenment that Crimea may be kept in the mainstream of the Ukrainian civic movement. First of all, this is the civic enlightenment on the events that occurred in Crimea during the military aggression and the occupation.

**Ms Anastasiya Martynovs'ka, Head of Regional Center for Human Rights:**

- I think that organizations dealing with issues of Crimea and issues of human rights on the occupied territories should proceed as fast as possible/

**Ms. Olha Skrypnyk, Head of Crimean Human Rights Group Board:**

- This is a cooperation of the Crimean and Ukrainian human rights organizations, a joint presentations of the issues related to the Crimea occupation at the international arena.

**Mr. Yevhen Hlibovytsky, Founder of Analytical Center pro.mowa, a member of Nestor Group:**

- First of all, we should constantly maintain the topic of Crimea relevant in the information access, secondly, it is high time to establish institutions that would be able to move to Crimea after its liberation. For instance, the Ukrainian Catholic University was established in Rome when Lviv was still a part of the Soviet Union.

**Ms. Valentyna Potapova** *told about a consistent elimination of the Ukrainian identity in Crimea by the occupation authorities and mentioned what Ukraine could do additionally to preserve it:*

- Starting from May 2014, when I moved to Kyiv, I have seen a strong movement of Crimeans. People who had even no place to overnight, had already started the battle for Crimea. Then, for me personally, Crimea was a peninsula that was moving away, but there were people who held it tightly on both sides - mainland Ukraine and Crimea. Now I feel that this tie is becoming weaker. So far, those who left Crimea in 2014 have been maintaining the connection with Crimea from the Ukrainian side. But we need new people to hold this tie.

During this last year, it has become very important for us to make people understand why "Crimea is ours." The Russian Federation has done a lot for 7 years to destroy the Ukrainian identity in Crimea. Studying what Ukraine is doing for the sake of preserving the Ukrainian mentality among the Crimeans, I may say that it is not doing enough. It is strange to me why Crimea has disappeared from all-Ukrainian educational competitions, why it disappears from history textbooks, why it does not become a part of all-Ukrainian projects. For example, the program "Youth of Ukraine 2016-2020" was adopted. But it does not include Crimea and the occupied territories, there are no camps, media and cyber-education for children from there. How can children from Crimea join this program? I do not think that the Ministries of Youth, Education and Culture are doing this on purpose. After 2014, Ukraine entered a period of reforms, but there was no place in these reforms to understand the preservation of Crimea in the mental consciousness of Ukrainians. In my opinion, it is non-governmental organizations that should remind the state that this could result into a large-scale emigration. This battle may last for long, but Crimea must eventually return to Ukraine.

I communicate with children who chose Ukraine after they finish school in Crimea, and we should do our best to make them also a part of the Ukrainian civic movement.



*Ms. Olha Skrypnyk explained that it was very important to make the issue of Crimea interesting, fundamental and significant for all citizens – both Crimeans and Ukrainians, then we would have a chance not only to return Crimea, but also to have something done right now.*

- In 2013 – 2014 it is citizens of Ukraine who decided what our state would be, and which way we would go, how we would treat people on the occupied territories. 7 years have passed, and it is the citizens who have been still maintaining the course set by them.

One of the great initiatives that made Crimea an issue for all of us was the aid within the 'House of Friends' created by Mr. Maksym Butkevych, a human rights activist and journalist, and his colleagues. In 2014, when the first wave of internally displaced persons began, this idea united all residents of Ukraine and those who were looking for at least temporary housing. Residents of Kyiv and other cities hosted complete strangers, in different parts of Ukraine they talked about our pain, about our problems. Then what was really happening in the Crimea became known to others.

What is important is not similar but joint activity of residents of the occupied and non-occupied territories.

One of the first human rights organizations that reflected to the issues of human rights activities from Crimea was ZMINA Information Center of Ms. Tetiana Pechonchyk. We have been still cooperating, documenting and protecting together human rights in Crimea.

To get an institutional dimension emerged, the society should demand new institutions. And it is citizens who can create new models without waiting for the state. For example, when we were setting up the Crimean Human Rights Group, we understood that we worked, protected people and communicated with people there, because we would return to Crimea. And we will continue to protect human rights after the Ukrainian authorities return there. We understand that there will be many problems, because Ukraine currently does not have a clear answer to how it will act after de-occupation.

When we created the Human Rights House "Crimea", it was important for our four organizations to understand that later this House would return to Crimea.

Thus, the society itself can create new models that may later emerge at the state level. But if we, the citizens, do not have such a demand, then, consequently, the state will not have it.

There are many new technologies today. As an option, one can try remotely, through online mechanisms, to arrange the Crimeans to elect a representative body. It can be created as a civic platform. It is fundamental that the Crimeans should have their voice, that they may understand that, even remaining in the occupation, they can create, choose, that they will be heard. Why not grant certain political rights to people who are citizens of Ukraine through online instruments?

The further destiny of all Ukrainians depends on resolving the issue of Crimea and Donbas. And this should be become our joint activity.



**Ms. Anastasiya Martynovs'ka**, in her turn, added that Crimea was paid little attention at the moment. We are not trying to find the ways to increase this attention, instead we are starting to fight inside for this little attention that we have.

- Some bodies may exist in exile now. For example, we do not have a body responsible for orphans in the occupied territories. If a child leaves the occupation, they simply have no one to address. There is no representative office of Crimea and Sevastopol in the Bar. There are no people representing Crimea in the Supreme Council of Bar. These points can be corrected now, and specific bodies that would be responsible for Crimea may be set up.



**Summing up the discussion, the experts added that the demand to return the topic of Crimea in the mainstream of Ukrainian civic movement did exist, but it was necessary to look for new connecting points, to support in all ways possible connections between Crimeans and mainland Ukraine.**

**Ms. Olha Skrypnyk:**

For recent years we have done a lot to shift the focus internationally from Crimea territory to Crimea people. For Ukrainians this is the point. This year the public opinion pool on COVID issues was held – whether the people from the occupied territory should be allowed to enter the controlled ones? Over 50% of Ukrainian supported offering such possibility for the people. This confirms that links between the people are still in place.

**Mr. Yevhen Hlibovytsky**

Many Ukrainian institutions in Crimea were Soviet as such. And the occupation became possible because this system got rotten, and allowed the Russian aggression, having failed even to identify it. A lot of people in Crimea, observing the events that occurred in February – March 2014, did not understand what would be the final result for them.

**Ms. Sevhił' Mustafayeva, Editor-in-Chief of UKRAYINSKA PRAVDA online media:**

***It is necessary to develop empathy in society so that the topic of Crimea is in the hearts of people. This is a issue for mass culture, creative industry. What hurts us, what is important to us, should be felt by other people, both in Ukraine and abroad.***