




CURBING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OPINION AND EXPRESSION IN CRIMEA: FACTS AND TRENDS



PURGE OF THE TELEVISION AND RADIO LANDSCAPES





RUSSIAN LEGISLATION ON EXTREMISM IS APPLIED TO CRIMEA

-  Oral statements accusing journalists of extremism, as well as demands from the Federal Security Service (FSB) and prosecutors to remove “extremist statements” from websites. For instance, the prosecution of Crimea twice notified the leadership of the ATR Crimean Tatar television channel regarding “inadmissibility of extremism”.
-  Summer 2014 – Editor-in-chief of the Crimean Tatar newspaper “Avdet”, Shevket Kaibullaev, was twice summoned for questioning to the prosecution and FSB of Simferopol.
-  June – August 2016 – 5 criminal cases started in Crimea with allegations of extremism on social networks.
-  On 18 July 2016 – a citizen of Yalta, Larisa Kitayskaya, was detained and her residence searched for alleged extremist publications in social networks.



CRIMINAL LIABILITY FOR “CALLS TO SEPARATISM”

-  In 2014 – new amendment to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation entered into force: imprisonment for up to 5 years for “calls to separatism” (for instance, for stating that Crimea is part of Ukraine).
-  3 criminal cases launched against Crimean journalists under article 280.1; the latest case on 19 April 2016 against Nikolay Semena, Radio Liberty journalist. Law enforcement bodies forbade him to leave Crimea despite his need to get medical attention.





ILLEGAL DETENTIONS OF JOURNALISTS



In 2014 the majority of illegal detentions were perpetrated by the “Crimean Self-Defence” paramilitary group. From 15 to 19 May 2014 only (throughout preparations and commemoration of the Memorial Day for Victims of Crimean Tatar Deportation) there were 9 cases when “Crimean Self-Defence” violated journalist rights. None of these cases have yet been investigated.



On 15 January 2016 – officers of the Extremism Combating Centre attempted kidnapping an independent journalist Zair Akadyrov who had been reporting on a court case. Perpetrations by the law enforcement agencies have been left unprosecuted.



On 10 May 2016 Ukrainian journalist, Igor Burdyga, was groundlessly detained by FSB and questioned for over 6 hours.



All in all, between September 2014 and September 2016, 12 cases of unlawful detention of journalists by law enforcers took place.



REFUSALS TO REGISTER OR RE-REGISTER CRIMEAN MEDIA



From 1 April 2015 Roskomnadzor (Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media) stopped recognizing Crimean media outlets that had been registered in Ukraine. As a result of this decision, the number of media outlets registered in Crimea dropped by 88%.



Only 2 media outlets reporting in Crimean Tatar language have been able to complete re-registration in accordance with Russian legislation requirements. All in all, the Crimean Tatar language media-landscape in 2015-2016 shrunk by 5 times (from 20 to 4 media outlets).



SEARCHES AND CONFISCATION OF PROPERTY



The last two years witnessed 19 searches on property of Crimean journalists, in most cases resulting in confiscation of all digital devices that could be found.



On 19 April 2016 law enforcers launched simultaneous searches with 7 Crimean citizens linked to “Krym.Realii” website.



MAKING THE PROCESS OF MEDIA ACCREDITATION MORE CUMBERSOME



There is a chance of losing accreditation for “opinionated coverage” of the State Council of the Republic of Crimea by a media outlet.



The majority of Crimean courts through internal regulations prohibit photography or video-recording of the lobby, corridors and other premises, which is justified by “measures linked to anti-terrorist security”.



Unaccredited journalists may not enter the city council premises of Kerch, Alushta, Saki, and other cities.



BLOCKING OF THE WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS



In October 2015 Roskomnadzor limited online access to websites of information agencies “Crimean Centre for Investigative Journalism”, “News from Crimea” and “BleackSeaNews” from the territory of Russia and Crimea.



Odnoklassniki social network blocked and then deleted a one of the largest groups that united Crimean Tatars, called “Crimea and Crimean Tatars”. The group had over 14,5 thousand members and was originally started in May 2008.



In August 2016 six websites of pro-Ukrainian media were blocked at once on the peninsula (including, for instance, the Radio Liberty “Krym.Realii” project). At the same time, the Sevastopol-based internet newspaper “Meridian Sevastopol” noted that its website was not blacklisted on the Unified Register of Domain Names that Allow to Identify Internet Websites Containing Information Prohibited for Distribution in the Russian Federation.