

# Meeting with representatives of Crimean ethnic groups' public associations

While on a working trip to Crimea, Vladimir Putin had an informal meeting with representatives of Crimean ethnic groups' public associations.

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Excerpts from transcript of meeting with representatives from Crimean ethnic groups' public associations

**President of Russia Vladimir Putin:** Good afternoon, friends.

Let me start by saying a few words, and then we will have a free discussion on the subject that has brought us together.

One can't help but experience special feelings and emotions here in Crimea, not just because this is such a beautiful place with unique nature, but also because you feel so fully and closely here the link with all of Russia's history and with the unique cultural and spiritual heritage that different peoples shaped over the centuries here in this land.

As you know, a census was conducted in Crimea last October, and more than 96 percent of the people indicated their ethnic identity. This is objective data, reliable and obtained through professional work. There are people from 175 different ethnic groups living in Crimea today. Russians make up the biggest ethnic group (68 percent), followed by Ukrainians (16 percent), and Crimean Tatars (more than 10 percent). The census also gave us information on people's native languages. Eighty-four percent of Crimean residents said they consider Russian their native language, nearly 8 percent said Crimean Tatar is their native language, 3.7 percent Tatar, and 3.3 percent

I think all this is humiliating to the Ukrainian people. This will certainly be assessed by the Ukrainian people and Ukraine will get on its feet and develop positively, building its future together with Russia.

**Oleg Kravchenko:** You know, this has proven to be true even during this tourist season, because many Ukrainian residents came to Crimea and saw the calm and peaceful sky above their heads – no tanks, no planes, nothing like that.

**Vladimir Putin:** It's a tragedy. I am not going to make any comments on this now, but I want to express my hope that it will be as you stated. I am confident of it.

As for Ukrainians in Russia, you know, if we speak officially, in the language of statistics, it is the third largest ethnic group in Russia after ethnic Russians and Tatars. We have five million Tatars residing in Russia and three million ethnic Ukrainians, without counting those who are here temporarily and are Ukrainian citizens – we have another 3 million people who fit that description, and the majority of them are men of conscription age, for reasons that are obvious. Many are working, finding jobs in Russia, in order to support their families in Ukraine. Not only do we not interfere, but I am sure you know that we also make decisions that liberalise stays by Ukrainian citizens on Russian territory.

**Chairman of the Taurida Regional Ethnic and Cultural Community of Greeks in the Republic of Crimea Ivan Shonus:** Mr President, colleagues,

Greeks have historically inhabited the Crimean Peninsula; this is an undeniable fact. Our historical monuments speak to this, as do places of worship and history itself. Greeks actively participated in many historical events, preserving the culture of ancient Taurida and present-day Crimea.

Greeks' modern history is inextricably linked to the life of Crimea, alongside other peoples. This was demonstrated in the referendum held last year. Greeks understand that they are an inherent part of the Russian world and express gratitude to the nation's leadership for preserving peace in the Republic of Crimea. We are also grateful to all the citizens of the Russian Federation for supporting Crimea's reunification with Russia.

Thanks to your Executive Order on measures to rehabilitate the Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Crimean Tatar and German minorities and state support for their revival and development, after many years, we have finally gained the opportunity to identify the problems faced by Greeks and other deported peoples, and to begin finding concrete solutions. On April 21 of this year, the Head of the Republic of Crimea declared this day to be the Day of Justice and Unity for the People of Crimea, and the new Artemis Greek dance ensemble demonstrated its mastery during this celebration.

I want to say that a great deal of work is underway by the Greek ethnic and cultural community, which was officially registered in 2014 in accordance with Russian legislation, although even before that, we had not stopped our work on addressing our compatriots' problems in Crimea for a single moment.

We have given a great deal of attention to the patriotic education of young people. Greeks participated in many events that were held at the Crimean and Russian national level. In that time, we became members of the federal Greek ethnic and cultural community, headed by Ivan Savvidi, and we are receiving maximum financial and moral support from him. This includes, for example, the restoration of a church in the village of Laki, which was burned in 1942 by the Nazis. It is almost completely restored today and we have the opportunity to go pray there.

I want to say that we feel sympathy from the Republic of Crimea's leadership, since we are working for the good of the republic and our people. We are doing a great deal of work to lower the level of tension from the political sanctions that have been declared with respect to Crimea and Russia. We are saying from different platforms that the sanctions being applied are illegal. Why? Because today, we have peace in Crimea.

Here in the Republic of Crimea we manifest ourselves and share our history, culture and traditions with the media. The main TV channel in Crimea has a Greek programme, similar to programmes for Armenians, Bulgarians, Greeks and Germans. But today, this is not enough. We know that the immigrants who come here should receive legal assistance in dealing with their resettlement, they should receive social guarantees. And I think that each ethnic and cultural autonomous group can really help in this.

Just as Sergei Tsekov said, Crimea should become a destination for Orthodox tourism. Greeks treat their monuments with great care and respect, for example Mount Mangup

and the Principality of Theodoro. This is a principality from the late Byzantine period and is part of ancient Pontus. And since we are Pontian Greeks, we also want to see the temples there restored. Today, this is a place of pilgrimage and tourism, like Panticapaeum in Kerch.

Thank you very much for including the Chersonesus Archeological Museum in the federal register. We have also read that all our cultural monuments will be included in this register, including Mangup, Panticapaeum and others. Why? Because the Greeks in our group constantly asked me to appeal to you with this request. But today, this has already become a reality.

Mr President, friends,

The Greeks have always lived in peace and harmony with all the peoples of Crimea, always next to them in joy and in sorrow. One example is our yearly participation in mourning events marking the deportation of Crimean peoples and the joint celebration of religious holidays, Christian Easter, Muslim Eid ul-Fitr, Armenian Vardavar and many others. I want to say that we are ready to engage in active work and want to use all the instruments and resources we have as much as possible, both our own and those that are provided to ethnic and cultural communities by Russian and Crimean legislation.

**Vladimir Putin:** Mr Shonus, I think there is no doubt about the indigenous status of Greeks in Crimea, this is obvious. It is patently clear, and not just in Crimea, incidentally, but throughout the entire northern shore of the Black Sea.

As for your suggestions, we will also document all this and try to respond. This concerns various areas of tourism as well. What you suggested is certainly very interesting, just like the Muslim monuments, including architectural monuments, which are of great interest, and many people come here to look at all this with their own eyes. So by taking advantage of Crimea's cultural diversity, I am sure we can develop this territory the way that people living here want, and the way the entire Russian nation wants.

Unfortunately, I now need to go to my next event.

**Yury Gempel:** Mr President, I've been instructed by everyone to say a couple of words.