

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 9 June 2020 from the Permanent Representative of
the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the
President of the Security Council**

I have the honour to transmit herewith the Chair's summary of the open Arria-formula meeting of the Security Council that was held on 21 May 2020 as a follow-up to the Arria-formula discussion of 6 March 2020 on the situation in Crimea (see annex).

I would appreciate your kind assistance in having the present letter and its annex issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Vassily **Nebenzia**



Annex to the letter dated 9 June 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Summary of the open Arria-formula meeting of the Security Council held on 21 May 2020 as a follow-up to the Arria-formula discussion of 6 March 2020 on the situation in Crimea

Introduction

On 21 May, the Russian Federation organized an Arria-formula meeting for the purpose of giving an opportunity for the panellists residing in Crimea to present their views to the members of the Council and all interested United Nations Member States and to provide them with first-hand information about the situation on the peninsula. It was due to the refusal of the organizers of the previous Arria-formula discussion in March to give the floor to the residents of Crimea. Instead, they had invited only those speakers who had chosen to leave the peninsula years before and who had presented inaccurate and biased information and views on the situation in Crimea.

The meeting was held by videoconference and live-streamed online through YouTube. It was chaired by Vassily Nebenzia, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, and attended by the representatives of 24 other delegations to the United Nations, including 12 Security Council members and the observer mission of a regional organization. The guest panellists represented various national groups of Crimea across the spectrum of non-State actors: religious groups, community leaders and the media. The participants were briefed by the Vice-Mufti of Crimea and Sevastopol, Asadullah Bairov, the Head of the Ukrainian community of Crimea, Anastasia Gridchina, the Deputy Director General of the Crimean-Tatar television channel Millet/People, Ervin Musaev, and a presenter at the television channel Krym/Crimea, Alexander Makar. Representatives of all the United Nations Member States were invited to attend and to make statements and engage in a dialogue.

A concept note providing the background was released prior to the discussion. It recalled that, after the coup d'état in February 2014 in Kiev, inhabitants of several regions of the country expressed their rejection of that unlawful act. Among them were residents of Crimea, who demanded that the authorities of the peninsula hold a plebiscite in line with the right of peoples to self-determination, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Out of the 82 per cent of Crimeans who attended that referendum, more than 96 per cent pronounced in favour of reunification with Russia, which led to the inclusion of two new territorial units in the Russian Federation on 18 March 2014 – the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

Statements by the panellists

In the first intervention, Mr. Bairov, as the Vice-Mufti of Crimea since 2013, shared his first-hand perspective on the religious dimension of life on the peninsula and addressed the myths existing abroad. In particular, he emphasized the revival of religious life and infrastructure in Crimea during the past six years, as compared with previous times. According to him, new mosques are being built at an unprecedented pace, including the Central Mosque, for 6,000 people, and 300 mosques are already operating freely. The decreased cost (by half) of pilgrimage allowed a significant increase in the number of Muslims in recent years who are able to exercise their religious needs. He also mentioned the important support and cooperation from the 25-million-strong Russian umma, which warmly welcomed the Muslims of Crimea.

In contrast with the Ukrainian period, when the Crimean Tatars as a minority could not get a single legislative act approved to restore their rights as a people, Russian Decree No. 268 on the measures for the rehabilitation of Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Crimean-Tatar and German peoples and State support for their revival and development of 21 April 2014 became a long-awaited solution to the problem.

Mr. Bairov added that, on 18 May 2020, the Crimean Tatars commemorated the seventy-sixth anniversary of the deportation with a traditional prayer, which this year was webcast owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The fact that Christians and Jews also supported the commemoration with prayers signified the true inter-ethnic harmony on the peninsula.

The Vice-Mufti stressed that Muslims of Crimea have full freedom of religion, with the holidays of Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha being official days off and azan heard five times a day and during the night-time, noting that not all Muslim countries enjoy this.

Addressing the myth that Crimean Tatars were being prosecuted for their nationality or religious beliefs, he drew attention to the fact that the cases cited in this regard were nothing but the criminal prosecution of individuals related to Hizb ut-Tahrir, a group banned in the majority of Muslim countries for using religion for political purposes and antagonizing Muslims to other religions.

The intervention by Ms. Gridchina focused on the contrast between the restrictions on the use of the Russian language in Ukraine and the position of the Ukrainian language in the Russian Crimea. She referred to the study by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, confirmed by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe in September 2019, that 28.1 per cent of Ukrainians speak Russian and expressed regret that the language factor is used by the authorities in Ukraine to suppress inter-ethnic communication in order to achieve their political aims. On the contrary, she pointed to the inter-ethnic peace and harmony on the peninsula, which allowed ethnic Ukrainians to comfortably integrate and become full members of the cultural and socioeconomic space of Russia. She expressed hope that the same spirit of inter-ethnic cooperation will prevail in the neighbouring Ukraine.

Mr. Musaev addressed the alleged violations of human rights in Crimea. He denied this, specifying that there were only attempts to undermine the rights of Crimeans by Ukraine. In particular, he drew attention to the energy and water blockade of the peninsula by Kiev, which for six years deprived 2.5 million inhabitants of these essential humanitarian necessities. He expressed hope that such an important violation of rights could be addressed and resolved in the United Nations.

Touching upon inter-ethnic coexistence on the peninsula, the panellist stressed that the 175 various nationalities inhabiting Crimea have a tradition of celebrating each other's religious and national holidays together. More than 400 media outlets operate in Crimea, broadcasting in Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, German, Greek, Russian and other languages.

Russian, Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian, all being state languages in Crimea, are taught across the peninsula, allowing inhabitants to learn and to obtain education in their native language. In this connection he mentioned that Crimean Tatars receive complaints from their fellow countrymen residing in Ukraine about restrictions they face after the entry into force in July 2019 of the law on ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian as the State language, as they fear being unable to preserve their native language under Ukrainian legislation.

Mr. Makar, concluding the list of panellists, used the opportunity to address the international community with a set of questions. Indicating from the outset that Crimeans treat the citizens of Ukraine as a fraternal people, he criticized the authorities of the neighbouring country, as well as of some Western States, for their hypocritical

policies towards Crimeans. In particular, he expressed frustration with those international players that have been declaring advocacy for the civil rights of peoples, but appeared to be the ones that actually introduced or supported sanctions against Crimeans. He specifically mentioned the restriction of movement through discriminatory visa policies, support for the food, water and energy blockade of the peninsula, as well as obstruction of the participation of the inhabitants of the Russian peninsula in international discussion platforms. Mr. Makar drew attention to the fact that when a dispute is being discussed in the United Nations or elsewhere, the opportunity to present its views is given to each side, which was not the case with residents of Crimea.

Commenting on the statement of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, issued at the day of the Arria discussion, Mr. Makar justified the ban of the Mejlis on the peninsula, as that organization was known to Crimeans as the one engaged in political blackmailing and the creation of armed units rather than defending the rights of Crimean Tatars. He also rejected accusations of forced conscription of Crimeans into the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, whereas military service is a duty of every Russian citizen.

He summarized his intervention with the appeal to the participants and the rest of the international community not to rely on sources of false information and to visit Crimea personally in order to have a frank and direct conversation with Crimeans, who are always open for a dialogue.

Statements by delegations to the United Nations

European participants in the meeting, which hosted the previous discussion of 6 March, joined by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic, Miroslav Klima, aligned themselves with the statement delivered by the Head of the Political Section of the Delegation of the European Union, Guillaume Dabouis. Indicating from the outset that their participation did not mean endorsement of either the concept note or the statements by the panellists, they shared a common position of non-recognition of the reunification of Crimea with Russia in 2014, which they referred to as “illegal annexation and occupation”. The commitment was expressed to continue to implement such an approach “including through sanctions”. They also repeated their claims of violations of human rights on the peninsula, including those of the Crimean Tatars, who, according to them, were “systematically restricted of fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and freedom of religious belief”. The panellists, in their replies, repeated that such claims are unsubstantiated and far from reality.

The Permanent Representative of Germany, Christoph Heusgen, focused on questions to the briefers, while the Permanent Representative of France, Nicolas de Rivière, called the meeting helpful and took note of the personal opinions of the panellists. He reiterated his country’s non-recognition approach and, among other things, condemned the conscription of Crimeans into the Russian Armed Forces. He called for unhindered humanitarian and human rights monitoring access to the peninsula “in line with General Assembly resolution 68/262”,¹ meaning that access was to be provided as if Crimea were still a Ukrainian territory.

The Permanent Representative of Belgium, Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, recognized that the conclusions of the 6 March discussion were in stark contrast with presentations delivered on 21 May. Mr. Nebenzia shared this view and argued that the idea of the meeting was to provide the true picture of the situation on the ground, rather than listen to propaganda of those who left Crimea long ago or never visited the Russian Crimea.

¹ Adopted on 27 March 2014, with almost 50 per cent, or 93 out of 193 delegations, not supporting it.

None of the European participants explained the basis for the introduction of the visa and travel restrictions for ordinary Crimeans even if, according to them, “the territory was illegally annexed”.

The Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia, Muhsin Syihab, took note with interest of the presentations by the panellists, which helped to better understand the situation on the ground, and repeated his country’s stance in respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and against the illegal attainment of territories. He spoke in favour of the peaceful settlement of disputes in line with Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations and expressed support for all constructive efforts in that regard.

The Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of China, Yao Shaojun, welcomed the opportunity to learn first-hand information from those who live on the peninsula, as, too often, stories fabricated from the outside are spread more widely. He reiterated China’s impartial position on the matter, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States, and, calling the Crimea issue a unique one, emphasized the primacy of dialogue and diplomacy.

Interactive discussion

Following the four introductory interventions and national statements, the participants held an interactive discussion on various aspects of the situation in and around Crimea. The panellists had an opportunity to answer questions, correct the inaccurate claims by some delegates and present their views on issues that were not covered in their initial interventions.

In particular, addressing the allegation that the referendum in Crimea was arranged contrary to the provisions of the Ukrainian Constitution, Ms. Gridchina recalled that the unlawful coup d’état in February 2014 and consequent actions and threats by Ukrainian nationalists towards the Russian-speaking population had ignited breakaway trends in a number of Ukrainian regions and explained that, in such circumstances, the provisions of international law and the Charter of the United Nations envisaging the right of peoples to self-determination prevailed.

Mr. Musaev added that article 138 of the Constitution of Ukraine actually provided for a referendum in Crimea, making the plebiscite possible within the constitutional framework of the country. He also expressed surprise at the allegations that only 20 per cent of Crimean Tatars stayed in Crimea after 2014. He corrected the participant who made that claim, stating that there were more than 200,000 Crimean Tatars living on the peninsula before 2014 and that roughly the same number remained after that date.

Recommendations and conclusions

The interventions of the guest speakers, as well as those of the Security Council members, led to the conclusion that, despite the diverse views expressed during the discussion, the dialogue was useful and revealed the following:

- (a) The majority of the allegations about life in Crimea after its reunification with Russia are either questionable or totally false;
- (b) In order to better understand the true state of affairs, it is useful to consider wider participation in the discussions of all relevant stakeholders, first and foremost the residents of Crimea;
- (c) This particularly applies to the discussion on human rights and the humanitarian situation, which should rely on direct communication with the actual

inhabitants of the region in focus; such deliberations should not exclude external factors such as sanctions, the restriction of movement and other forms of coercive measures.

The meeting proved the value of direct interaction between the United Nations Member States and the actual inhabitants of Crimea. The fact that the Arria discussion was ignored by some delegations that display interest in Crimea-related issues unveiled a lack of willingness on their part to learn first-hand information on the real state of affairs on the peninsula. Inviting residents of Crimea to any possible further Crimea-related discussion is indispensable. They are prepared to engage in a frank and open dialogue, including with those who claim that they represent the popular opinion of the peninsula.
