



IRYNA VYRTOSU

# CRIMEAN ALBUM:

STORIES OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

IRYNA VYRTOSU

**CRIMEAN  
ALBUM:**  
STORIES OF HUMAN  
RIGHTS DEFENDERS

УДК 342.72/.73(477.75-074)(092)

K82

Author of text: *Iryna Vyrtosu*.

Editor and author of idea: *Tetiana Pechonchyk*.

Production photographer: *Valeriya Mezentseva*.

Photographers: *Mykola Myrnyi, Iryna Kriklya, Olexiy Plisko*, as well as photos from the personal archives of the heroes.

Transcription of the interviews: *Yana Khmelyuk*.

Translator: *Olga Lobastova*.

Proofreader: *Arthur Rogers*.

Design composition and layout: *Pavlo Reznikov*.

## **I. Vyrtosu**

K82 Crimean Album: Stories of Human Rights Defenders / I. Vyrtosu; edit. T. Pechonchyk; Human Rights Information Centre. – Kyiv: KBC, 2019. – 232 p.

ISBN 978-966-2403-16-9

This book contains evidence and memories of Crimean human rights defenders including their work experience before and after the occupation. There are twenty personal stories about the past, present and future of people, who continue to fight for the protection of human rights in Crimea even after losing their home, as well as those, who oppose reprisals living under the occupation. These are stories of Olga Anoshkina, Eskender Bariyev, Mykhailo Batrak, Oleksandra Dvoretzka, Abdureshyt Dzhepparov, Lilia Hemedzhy, Sergiy Zayets, Synaver Kadyrov, Emil Kurbedinov, Alyona Luniova, Roman Martynovsky, Ruslan Nechyporuk, Valentyna Potapova, Anna Rassamakhina, Daria Svyrydova, Olga Skrypnyk and Vissarion Aseyev, Iryna Sedova and Oleksandr Sedov, Tamila Tasheva, Maria Sulialina, Volodymyr Chekryhin. The book is intended for a wide audience.

УДК 342.72/.73(477.75-074)(092)

ISBN 978-966-2403-16-9

© Iryna Vyrtosu, 2019

© Human Rights Information Centre, 2019



Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs

The book was published with the support of the Human Rights House Foundation (Oslo, Norway) within the framework of the joint project of the Human Rights Information Centre (member of the Human Rights House Crimea) and the Human Rights House Zagreb (Croatia) “Human Rights Defenders: Standards, Memoirs, Evidence”, which is implemented thanks to financial support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The views and opinions expressed in this book are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Government of Norway.

# Content

Foreword.....	5
My gallery. <i>Iryna Vyrtosu</i> .....	7
Drinking Tea on Autumn Beach. <i>Alyona Luniova</i> .....	9
Nautical Rope. <i>Olga Skrypnyk and Vissarion Aseyev</i> .....	22
Father. <i>Abdureshyt Dzhepparov</i> .....	36
Sharp Cobblestone. <i>Mykhailo Batrak</i> .....	50
Prometheus. <i>Emil Kurbedinov</i> .....	60
Dawn. <i>Lilia Hemedzhy</i> .....	69
Erytheia. <i>Oleksandra Dvoretska</i> .....	81
Followers of Don Quixote. <i>Iryna Sedova and     Oleksandr Sedov</i> .....	92
Man of Steel. <i>Eskender Bariyev</i> .....	102
Dissident. <i>Maria Sulialina</i> .....	114
Tutoress. <i>Valentyna Potapova</i> .....	125
Thorn. <i>Ruslan Nechyporuk</i> .....	136
Not a Man in the Shadows. <i>Sergiy Zayets</i> .....	147
Script Writer. <i>Daria Svyrydova</i> .....	158
Uncle Roman. <i>Roman Martynovsky</i> .....	170
Cobweb. <i>Olga Anoshkina</i> .....	183
Equilibrist. <i>Anna Rassamakhina</i> .....	192
Crimean Banksy. <i>Volodymyr Chekryhin</i> .....	200
Patriot. <i>Synaver Kadyrov</i> .....	212
Voice. <i>Tamila Tasheva</i> .....	221

# Foreword

---

This book tells the stories of Crimean human rights defenders who were forced to leave their homes after the Crimean peninsula had been seized by the armed forces of the Russian Federation. For many of them, a break that they had planned for no longer than three days or a week has now lasted five years. However, despite being outside of Crimea, they help protect the rights of people, who stayed on the peninsula and provide assistance to the internally displaced persons.

This book also tells the stories of people who had not been active members of civil society prior to the occupation but could not remain indifferent to the arrival of armored infantry vehicles and “little green men” [masked soldiers in unmarked green army uniforms and carrying modern Russian military weapons and equipment that appeared in Crimea in early 2014 – *Translator’s Note*] in their native Crimea. This led a former sales representative, a PR consultant and a diving company employee to become human rights defenders and get involved in collecting and documenting human rights violations, informing the authorities and international organizations of those violations so that the crimes of the occupying authorities do not go unpunished.

The book also tells the stories of people who have stayed in Crimea and, despite the threats and pressure, are still engaged in human rights activities. Their struggle for human rights, or rather, for people whom the occupation authorities are persecuting for their views or religion, is an example of courage that inspires a lot of people to join the human rights movement.

*“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms,”* says the UN Declaration on Human Rights

Defenders<sup>1</sup>. In pursuit of this principle, many protagonists of the book have lost their homes, an opportunity to see their relatives and friends, or daily risk their freedom and safety while staying in Crimea.

The stories of 22 human rights defenders are based on their evidence, recollections of the past, conversations about the present and thoughts about the future. However, it is only a part of the mosaic of resistance to the occupation and the struggle for the protection of human rights in Crimea. The stories of other people, who continue their human rights activities under the occupation or have relatives living in Crimea, cannot yet be made public because of the risks of persecution. We hope the time will come when they will be revealed as well.

We are also waiting for the release of human rights defenders, who have been imprisoned on trumped-up charges of “terrorism”, who took part in the activities of the Crimean Contact Group on Human Rights and the Crimean Solidarity initiative, namely Emir-Usein Kuku, Server Mustafayev, Seyran Saliyev, and citizen journalist Nariman Memedeminov, as well as other Ukrainians, who have been jailed in the Russian Federation and occupied Crimea on politically motivated charges.

Meanwhile, the 21st-century world is failing to resist new armed aggression and the attempt to change borders by force. It is also failing to protect people living under the occupation, each of protagonists in the book leaves no stone unturned in seeking to make the broken mechanisms work and find new answers to new challenges.

Despite the fact that the civil society in Crimea was suppressed, and in many cases expelled from the peninsula after the occupation, dozens of new initiatives, which appear in Crimea despite the pressure, and unanimous efforts of human rights defenders in mainland Ukraine and abroad will help obtain justice and resist the occupation. So that the dream of many protagonists of this book comes true and they to return to their native Crimea and work there without fear of reprisals against them and their relatives and friends.

*Team of the Human Rights Information Centre*

---

<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. It was adopted by the General Assembly resolution 53/144 of 9 December 1998.

# My gallery

Iryna Vyrtošu

My 8-year-old nephew came to see me one day. He's a smart guy but, like many kids nowadays, prefers a tablet to books. He saw me writing a book and, whilst he tried not to disturb me, he couldn't help putting his tablet aside time and again and asking me a thousand questions.

- *Aunty Iryna, what's your book about?*
- *It's about Crimea, about Ukraine. I wish you read it someday.*
- *But it will be about politics, it's difficult stuff. I wouldn't understand it, I guess.*
- *No, it's not about politics. It's about people.*

Indeed, when I was preparing for the first interview with Crimean activists and did not have a full picture of the book-to-be, I knew for sure that I would write about people. About real people, people of worth, who despite sometimes being tired and disappointed were undoubtedly strong and capable of performing remarkable deeds. I am sure that these are the people who will return Crimea.

This book is based on these interviews – memoirs of 22 Crimean human rights defenders, the experience of their struggle before and after the illegal annexation of Crimea. Many of them were forced to leave Crimea when it was occupied by the Russian Federation and have not been able to return to their native land for five years.

Of course, every interview is a reminder of the pain inflicted by the occupation. However, despite the difficult five years of struggle, this time is not only painted in dark shades. I tried to write down joyful, fond memories and even hints of bright laughter and also to draw a verbal portrait of

these beautiful people. To my own surprise, I discovered that I had gathered a unique gallery of Crimean portraits. And the book itself reminded me of a puffy album where something very intimate is kept: memories, photos, postcards from Crimea, pebbles from the embankment, shells, dried flowers, which soaked up the sun and salty wind...

This book is largely supplemented with photographs of Valeriya Mezentseva. She said it was an interesting and sad process to take photos of Crimeans: *“When I work, I focus on light, on emotions, on the outer shell of people and what they look like in a picture, my hearing is almost turned off. However, when working during those interviews, I often put my camera down and just listened to the protagonists – ordinary people who did what they thought was right. Our shootings took place in completely different places, but I wanted to convey the atmosphere of tête-à-tête communication, when you are sitting in the kitchen at night, warm light streams from under the lampshade, shadows fall on your face and hands holding a cup of already lukewarm tea.”*

Each of us has an impact on something. Our actions or inactions can lead to global consequences. Neither a photo nor our life is simply black or white, rather there are many tones in the interplay between light and shade. The same is often true of the events in Crimea and people who are linked with the peninsula.

Every story of my heroes and heroines is special. I tried to keep their frankness and emotions in the text. I hope that you can also feel the power of these people while reading the book.

*Iryna Vyrtosu*

# Drinking Tea on Autumn Beach

**Alyona Luniova**

Simferopol



## **PROFILE**

**Alyona Luniova**

**BEFORE:** Lawyer at the Simferopol city office of the Legal Aid Network of Crimea

**AFTER:** Expert of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (Kharkiv), Lawyer at the Charity Foundation “East-SOS”, Advocacy expert at the Human Rights Information Centre.

Left Crimea in March 2014.

**DREAMS** of driving along Yalta highway to her beach.

“

*How much I felt that a clear understanding was missing in the public space then: Crimea is Ukraine! It's still missing. As if Crimea had been annexed a long time ago. Now, by the way, the same is happening with Donbas, when they say that the war is ongoing somewhere in the east ... For many years, only the recent events<sup>2</sup>, which triggered the introduction of the martial law for the first time updated the issue that the war is not in Donetsk or Luhansk. The war is everywhere.”*

*Alyona Luniova*

<sup>2</sup> Author's note: The capture of Ukrainian sailors in the Kerch Strait (at the time the interview was done, December 2018).



August 2012. Duty-free at the Boryspil International Airport.

*“Mint chocolate, there must be mint chocolate,”* Alyona kept saying, inspecting the shelves of sweets. A short young girl wearing glasses, confident and persistent – she reminded me more of a teenage friend from night parties than a “serious human rights defender.”

During our first meeting, Alyona said that she adored mint chocolate and marzipan. For me, both were a sort of hoity-toity whims.

We were about to fly to Kazakhstan for ten days to monitor the Zhanaozen<sup>3</sup> trials... Who could have thought that after this trip we will jokingly call each other “Kazakhstan vets”, travel across half of Crimea, visit Solovki<sup>4</sup>, help each other recover from deep depressions after the massacre during the Revolution of Dignity in Kyiv, and weep in the first seconds after the birth of my daughter?

<sup>3</sup> Zhanaozen is a town of regional significance in Mangystau region in western Kazakhstan, where oil and gas are produced. On December 16, 2011, a seven-month oil strike ended with riots on the main square of Zhanaozen involving internal troops. The security officers used weapons, killing at least 15 protesters. The riots were followed by mass arrests and subsequent trials.

<sup>4</sup> The Solovki Special Camp was the largest concentration camp in the USSR set up on the territory of the Solovetsky Islands, which operated in 1920–1930s. Ukrainians were the largest group of the camp’s prisoners. The communist authorities sent the leaders of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, insurgents, clergy, intellectuals, party activists and statespeople there.

This funny girl (such was my first impression) showed me the real Crimea, which had nothing in common with the stories in a whisper about the “terrible Crimean Tatars” who came to “take the land away from Russians”, the terrible dirty minibuses, or the lack of free access to the sea because of expensive hotels...

Alyona showed me her amazing Crimea: warm after the rain, sweet like figs fallen from the sky, fearless like the wind at Ai-Petri<sup>5</sup>, and cozy like driving home along the Yalta highway after bathing in the sea. She was one of the first people who managed to show me easily and naturally the real Crimea, making a full picture out of the fragments-judgments: look, it is a kaleidoscope, not broken glasses! This is how her Crimea became mine too.

When the Russian Federation began the operation to seize Crimea (but we still had no idea about this), I visited Alyona in Simferopol. We attended various actions, absorbed the emotions of Crimeans in minibuses and trolleybuses... And then, coming to her cozy home where we finally felt safe, we ate fried potatoes and laughed at the whims of her three-year-old son.

Five years ago, Alyona Luniova worked in the Simferopol office of the Legal Aid Network of Crimea<sup>6</sup>. She gave legal advice on holding peaceful assemblies and accessing fair trials, raised the issue of domestic violence and boldly confronted police officers who violated laws. She also had a family, parents, traineeship, the sea, a lot of figs and Turkish delights. That time seemed to be frozen in sugar syrup.

She could not even imagine that she would have to leave. It was so “unwise”!

*“If everyone moves away, there will be nobody here,” Alyona said in a firm voice, looking into my eyes. “Many decisions related to the violation of human rights are made by the local authorities. Therefore, it is so important to influence the decisions at the local level, to help those, whose rights have been violated, to defend our territory of freedom...”*

<sup>5</sup> Ai-Petri is a mountain in the Crimean mountains as part of the Ai-Petrianska plateau massif. The height of the mountain is 1234 m.

<sup>6</sup> Legal Aid Network of Crimea provided free legal aid in Simferopol, Kerch, Alushta, Yalta, and Dzhankoy.

Alyona defended the territory of freedom until her last day in Crimea. Moreover, leaving after the so-called “referendum”<sup>7</sup>, she sincerely believed she would return in three months at the latest.

*“During one of the rallies (it seems to me it was on March 19), my point of no return happened. I remember us hanging the photos on the fence around the building of the central office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Some activists<sup>8</sup> had been already abducted and we didn’t know where they were. There was a small group of us. Many of those who supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine already left. People were afraid... I came to my dad’s home after the rally and he told me: ‘Alyona, it’s time for you to leave’...”* as if he was saying goodbye, as if everything had already been decided.

He helped his daughter to take this step. Alyona bought a ticket and left. She managed to return only once. She has not been at home for five years now. Alyona’s son stayed in Simferopol for some time with her husband and mother while she was looking for a job and trying to settle in a new place.

*“You know, then I really didn’t even think about what had really happened in Crimea. We were all quite traumatized by what happened during the Euromaidan – the shooting of hundreds of people ... We did not expect another blow. But I remember very clearly what I felt at the time when I arrived in Kyiv. I feel overwhelmed by emotions: people here live a peaceful life and seem not to notice the war in the air! The media trumpeting: “they*

<sup>7</sup> The illegal referendum on the status of the peninsula, which was held in Crimea on March 16, 2014 under the control of the Russian military, and the further annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation were not recognized by the international community. On March 27, 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution No. 68/262 on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, which reaffirmed the UN commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. The European regional organizations also stated they did not recognize the referendum and the attempt of the annexation of Crimea. On March 21, 2014, the Venice Commission adopted its conclusion, declaring the “referendum” in Crimea illegitimate. In April 2014, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) decided to suspend the voting rights of the delegation of the Russian Federation.

<sup>8</sup> The active phase of the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation was accompanied by a wave of enforced disappearances of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars. According to the NGO Crimea-SOS, in the spring of 2014, 23 people, including 19 pro-Ukrainian civil society activists, were abducted on the territory of Crimea. 17 out of 19 cases of abductions took place from March 3 to March 16, 2014. Five people abducted during this period have not been found yet. One kidnapped person, Reshat Ametov, became the victim of extrajudicial execution: his body with traces of torture was found near the village of Zemlianychnye in Crimea on March 15, 2014. According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, as of March 2019, the fate of the 15 victims of enforced disappearances is still unknown.



*attacked Crimea”, “war in Crimea”, “clashes in Crimea ...” drove me mad. Not Crimea, but the whole of Ukraine was attacked, the war is ongoing in Ukraine!” Alyona Luniova recalls.*

My friend looks into my eyes and says silently: “*We had never lived amid the war, we did not know what occupation was or how we should act.*”

Alyona Luniova became a member of the Kharkiv team of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine<sup>9</sup>. She wanted to work specifically in the eastern regions: it seemed to her that working with Donetsk and Luhansk she would be able to warn, explain, shake up people and their thoughts so that the Crimean scenario was not repeated.

Kharkiv became her second home for a couple of years working at the Mission. She arrived there on the eve of the attempt to seize the Kharkiv

<sup>9</sup> The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission (HRMMU) was deployed in Ukraine on March 14, 2014 to monitor compliance with human rights in Ukraine, prepare reports and provide recommendations to the Government of Ukraine and other subjects to address human rights issues. Despite numerous attempts, during the five years of the occupation of the Crimea, the MUPSU was not able to obtain access from the Russian Federation to work on the peninsula.



Rally in Crimea after the crackdown on students' protest in the Independence Square in Kyiv on November 30. *Simferopol, 2013*



Crimea. Start of occupation. *March 2014*

Regional State Administration on April 6, 2014<sup>10</sup>. Luniova and her colleagues monitored the peaceful assemblies and understood, *“they are not peaceful at all, the participants in these peaceful actions are not from Ukraine”*. She saw people coming in large buses from Belgorod [the Russian city 40km from the Ukrainian border – *Translator’s Note*].

Branka Sesto – her chief, mentor and friend – helped understand many things. Branka is Croatian, she worked at the UN after the outbreak of the war in the Balkans. She knew a lot about what happened during the war. It was Branka Sesto, who disillusioned Alyona and other colleagues, “predicting” what further events should be expected.

*“She often repeated that our conflict was not unique. There is a geopolitical context. But who of us studied the Balkan experience or the experience of Georgia then? Who knew what a hybrid war was?”*

*We did not know it is possible to bring special forces from Russia to Crimea and at the same time declare that the locals simply “bought a uniform in an army surplus store” ... Or make money on the war, trading humanitarian aid... We did not know those things then but Branka knew.*

*She also knew that our war will last for 10-15 years. Me and my colleague Denys Kobzin shuddered, hearing these words, we wanted to object. But later we understood: Branka was right. After all, five years have already passed! It is even longer than the German-Soviet war of 1941-1945, and we have known it as the longest and the most terrible was since we were children,”* Alyona says very quietly.

It is no coincidence that the human rights defender began to deal with the issues of Donbas – she could still remain more detached, which was impossible in case of Crimea...

Remembering Crimea once again, Alyona Luniova, whom I know as a strong, confident woman, burst into tears. That was the second time when I saw her crying because of Crimea.

---

<sup>10</sup> On April 6-7, 2014, an unsuccessful attempt was made to seize the building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration and to proclaim the so-called “Kharkiv People’s Republic”. From the mid-summer of 2014, during the armed conflict in Donbas, a series of terrorist acts and sabotage attacks were committed in the territory of the neighbouring Kharkiv region mainly against the military facilities and the activists supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

As though Alyona is building a dam inside herself, soothing the pain and fear for her son, for her closest friends and relatives. As soon as she feels safe, a sincere conversation about Crimea disturbs the balance of her mind... The tears break the dam.

*“At first and later on it was difficult without the support of the family... When I left Crimea, my younger sister was in the 8th month of pregnancy. I ... I did not see how Yasia was born...” Alyona fell silent ...”It became easier when my relatives started visiting me – my mother, my sister... I can still only communicate with my dad only via Skype.*

*I see a lot of people who live in Simferopol, on my Facebook feed, I don't unfollow them. It is important not to lose touch with your native city but, when I see how it changes, my heart aches. It's ... like when strangers refurbish your house. Some days ago I saw my friend's house, it is near the bridge over Salgir<sup>11</sup>. There was a small part of a neat pedestrian underpass with trees and flower beds – now everything is rolled up in the asphalt.*

*What surprises me most is that sensible people, who studied with me at the Philosophy Faculty, my peers feel a longing for the Soviet Union, Russia, although they have never lived there. After the so-called “referendum” had been held, they published photos in social networks, writing “Spring has finally come, Russia has come.” Where does this love for the Russian Federation come from?*

*Only recently we have started to find out the information about the sums of money Russia had spent on propaganda in Crimea, how it paved the way for many years, kept a link between Crimea and the Russian Federation, unlike mainland Ukraine.*

*I felt the greatest resentment, perhaps, in 2014. We had our own Euro-Maidan in Crimea, though it was not so large it was alive, it was Ukrainian. Then those ‘green men’ and ‘Cossacks’ [Russian patriotic military formations – Translator's Note] appeared, while some people wrote to me from Kyiv: ‘Why didn't you defend Crimea?’ In response, I invited them to come, promised to treat them to fried potatoes...” Alyona stopped talking*

<sup>11</sup> The Salgir is the longest river in Crimea. The length of its bed is 232 km. It originates in the Chatyr-Dag mountains from the confluence of the Angara River and the Kizilkobinka River and flows into the Syvash bay. The Salgir forms a reservoir near Simferopol city.

and then continued strugglingly: *“The Maidan in Kyiv was defended... not by residents of Kyiv. It is important to say. Maidan was defended by the whole of Ukraine! It is necessary to understand that there were no troops of a foreign state in the capital, but they were sent to Crimea. Therefore, it is ruthless and unfair to accuse Crimeans of a failure to protect their land. However, such accusations are still presented.”*

... Her coffee was already cold when she began to talk about her work at the civil society initiative East-SOS<sup>12</sup>. Coming to the other side of the occupation, Alyona Luniova for about three years worked on the hotline, first at the legal aid office moved from Simferopol, and then at the East-SOS initiative. The girl was in touch with her companions in misfortune. There were many questions. The most obvious ones, to which the state was supposed to give simple and quick answers to support its citizens in difficult times, related to the documents. How to affix a photo to a passport, what should be done with Ukrainian citizenship if the occupying country forces one to abandon it<sup>13</sup>, how to deal with the relatives who passed away, or with documents for newborns...

The onset of the military hostilities in eastern Ukraine gave rise to completely different challenges: where to find a shelter, where to go, what to do if a house is destroyed?

Giving legal advice by phone, Alyona kept up with her profession and, what was more important to her, was able to help people. That gave her the strength to carry on.

*“But when you give the 150<sup>th</sup> recommendation in a row to an old lady living in the conflict zone to appeal to a court if she is not paid a pension, understanding she will not do this, you have to find the nerve to admit a need for strategic changes.”*

<sup>12</sup> The civil society initiative “East-SOS” was established on May 5, 2014 as part of the Human Rights Center “Postup”, which had previously functioned in the city of Luhansk. The initiative was joined by the NGO “Crimean Human Rights Center “Action”, whose members also were forced to leave the territory of the occupied Crimea. Finding themselves in the high-risk zone, the activists had to move to Kyiv, where, with the assistance of several organizations and individuals, they opened a coordination center to help the residents of eastern Ukraine.

<sup>13</sup> During the occupation and subsequent illegal annexation of Crimean peninsula, the Russian Federation proclaimed all Ukrainian citizens living in Crimea to be their nationals. Crimeans could try to submit an application “about the desire to retain the citizenship of Ukraine” to one of the four relevant offices in Crimea for a short period of time (18 days). Having filed such an application, they became foreigners at their native land and their rights were seriously restricted.

*It seemed to me that by living in Kyiv I would have more opportunity to influence the situation in the country. It is important to attend the meetings, it is important to be able to give a legal assessment of a certain situation in time, reach the media – and then payment of pension will not be a minor issue among other problems, but will become a key priority Ukraine is obliged to pay attention to,”* she explains her choice to move to the capital and get to grips with the legal direction in the “East-SOS”. The human rights defender was convinced that she would be more helpful and was therefore meant to join this initiative. Having said “thank you, Branka” in her mind, Alyona took her UN badge off.

... I know Alyona as a person who loves laughing loudly. You cannot help but surrender to the power of her laughter and emit this energy of freedom with her. After the occupation, Alyona has not forgotten how to laugh, but I hear her laughter much less often now. However, she is not a person to cry over the phone. Her task is to search for the right solutions, to encourage a person to act.

Alyona is convinced: her responsibility is to try again and again to change the state system as the system does not want to change on its own.

*“Millions of people have suffered from the war. Just think of it: millions. This number is beyond belief. Most often we mention one million five hundred thousand internally displaced persons; but what about the seven million people who are left in the occupied territories or the many people who have moved to Russia or other countries? Sometimes, when I see how the state wants to save money on those who have nobody to stick up for them, I feel utterly discouraged...”* she says.

Now that it was four years since Alyona left Crimea and was giving dozens of pieces of advice a day on a hotline, it was difficult for her to admit that she had already given everything she could. She needed to recover.

So she went to the Human Rights Information Centre and started to deal with the reform of the residence registration system. Alyona believed that, having hurled herself into new work, she would be able to reshape in order to understand what is more important for her and her family at the moment... She managed to persuade herself to do this ... for a month or two until again she was plunged into a succession of painful issues di-



rectly related to the war. This time though, she already had a spacesuit that protected her: her family, home, cozy evenings at home when she could read a book in silence. Although it was still not enough time for even the most mundane things.

*“During the break, I got free time and inspiration... I am no longer engaged in direct assistance, but I can give expert advice to those organizations that provide such assistance. My colleagues inspire me. Together we can influence changes to the situation, and therefore, make the world a bit better,”* Alyona says with a confident smile: she is doing everything right.

*“I think that it’s important for people, who stayed in Crimea and who left, that the state forms public opinion regarding the integrity of Ukraine. You should admit that it is hypocritical to, one the one hand, say that Ukraine is united and we are fighting for our people in the occupied territories, while on the other hand, depriving people of pensions, checking IDPs at home, restricting movement by allowing people to cross delimitation line once a day carrying hand luggage only, restrict rights to education and rights to receive documents...”*

*When the imposition of martial law<sup>14</sup> was announced, which frightened most people, it became a shake-up: the war is going on in our country, not in just one area. This became a strong reminder that Ukraine is integral: if it is cut in one part, it hurts everywhere.*

*The state must support people who come to mainland Ukraine. Moreover, it must finally say what we should expect when the territory is de-occupied.*

*Against the background of the upcoming elections, you can hear a lot of populism about the need to punish those, who have stayed under the occupation, as they all are “collaborators” ... it may be difficult for some to understand but for me, everything is very simple. I have a family on the other side of the administrative border and now there is a high risk that my sister’s husband could be drafted into the army<sup>15</sup>. I do not know what will happen to him if this occurs. Will Ukraine regard him as a traitor, will he be considered a criminal, will he be able to enter the territory of mainland Ukraine and not be jailed? I don’t know and people in the occupied territories know even less than me.*

*The state isn’t making enough effort. Without answering these questions, the authorities are fueling the fear, which grows from ignorance. This fear is great. Even if Russia leaves Donbas, will this territory be ours if the*

<sup>14</sup> In Ukraine, martial law is defined as a special legal regime that is introduced when a threat to national security arises. The imposition of martial law is proposed by the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, agreed on by the President and approved by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. The decision to impose the martial law in ten regions of Ukraine (Vinnytsia, Luhansk, Donetsk, Mykolayiv, Odesa, Sumy, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Chernihiv, Kherson) was approved on November 26, 2018 for a period of 30 days after the act of Russian aggression in the Kerch Strait. Although this regime was not imposed in Crimea, the martial law was introduced in the southern regions of Ukraine, which directly border with Crimea. The martial law in Ukraine ended on December 26, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> According to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, in 2015–2018, Russia drafted about 12,000 men living in the annexed Crimea into its armed forces. Calling up the residents of the occupied territories for performing military service in the occupying state, as well as the propaganda for serving in the Russian Armed Forces ongoing in the territory of Crimea is a war crime in accordance with international law. It is a violation of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and of the Art. 51 of the Convention for the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (the Fourth Geneva Convention), while the transfer of Ukrainian citizens from the occupied territory to the territory of the Russian Federation violates Art. 49 of this Convention. Furthermore, the occupation authorities persecute the Crimeans, who evade military service in the Russian Federation. According to the Crimean Human Rights Group, the information about the initiation of at least 35 criminal cases against Crimeans over evading military service in the Russian army (under Article 328 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation) has appeared on the websites of the Crimean “courts” since the beginning of the occupation. The main part of the sentences was a fine of RUR 7,000 – 80,000. However, the payment of a fine does not relieve a person from the obligation to serve in the armed forces. In at least one case, a defendant was sentenced to an 8-month suspended sentence.

*people living there think that we will jail them or punish because they lived under the occupation?” Alyona asks.*

She is convinced that one of the challenges for human rights defenders is the elaboration of a reconciliation concept: how the world may look like after the war ends, what rules will work in it. These are her tasks for the near future.

“

*What does Crimea mean for me? It is a Yalta highway and a round trolleybus moving along it. It is autumn sea and tea on the beach. Probably, these are the warmest memories.*

*Moreover, Crimea is an opportunity. You just know you can dive into the warm water any moment, though you may not go to the beach for the whole summer. But this feeling – that you can and nothing limits you – nourishes from within.*

*It's like human rights: no matter how often you use them, it is important that you have them and you can use them: to vote, to get an education, to get a job without discrimination. It's like the feeling that I can – at any moment, when I want, without any obstacles – go to my sea...”*

# Nautical Rope

## Olga Skrypnyk and Vissarion Aseyev

Yalta



### PROFILE

#### Olga Skrypnyk

**BEFORE.** Professor of the Crimean University for the Humanities, Head of the Centre of Civil Education “Almenda”, Co-organizer of “EuroMaidan – Yalta”.

**AFTER.** Head of Board of the Crimean Human Rights Group.

Left Crimea in March 2014.

**DREAMS** that her daughter will never have war in her life.



#### Vissarion Aseyev

**BEFORE.** Ossetian civil society activist, human rights defender, “Euromaidan – Yalta” activist, founder of the Yalta Group of Resistance to Occupation.

**AFTER.** Co-organizer and expert of the Crimean Human Rights Group. Left Crimea in March 2014.

**DREAMS** that the Caucasus and Crimea will be liberated from Russia and that his daughter will be able to easily visit her grandmothers in Crimea and the Caucasus.

“

*The southern coast of Crimea is my source of strength, inspiration, calmness, energy. It is my home. It is my sea. I was deprived of that. Over the past five years, I have been on all the Ukrainian seacoasts: on the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, in Odesa and Kherson regions. They are all beautiful in their own way, but it is not my home. Nothing can make up for Crimea ... I miss it very much.*”

*Olga Skrypnyk*

February 25, 2014. Yalta, the Crimean University for the Humanities. Olga Skrypnyk was teaching a class on World War II to her students during a Slavic Peoples History class. As Olga explained how an offensive had taken place, a bell rang and the girls and boys rushed off for a break. She went out into the yard and saw the Russian servicemen...

Of course, a young teacher had seen soldiers in her city before, but that happened under other circumstances. There was a car with Russian number plate, full-to-bursting with Russian soldiers, who had no sign on their uniform but held weapons. That got Olga's attention.

The premises of the Crimean Humanity University were located next to a health resort of the Black Sea Fleet, which belonged to the Ministry of Defense of Russia. The car drove into its territory. Olga followed it and tried to capture on video the car and everything that happened around. Those were the first shots in her long and hard experience of documenting the human rights violations in Crimea under the occupation.

*“It's a strange feeling when you finish a lecture on World War II, and the occupation starts in your city. Many years have passed, we live in the modern world, and suddenly war and occupation become your reality...”* Olga recalls.



... Previously, Olga, being a university professor and head of the Almenda Centre of Civil Education<sup>16</sup>, paid much attention to the youth programs. Olga and her colleague, Valentyna Potapova, organized the Social and Law Movie Club, where burning issues in the society were discussed. They also collaborated with the Docudays Documentary Film Festival<sup>17</sup>. Movies helped to explain the values of human rights to the Yalta youth. And the response from young people was evoked. So it is not surprising that the Yalta EuroMaidan was organized including by the movie club

<sup>16</sup> In 2008, the Initiative Human Rights Group was established in Yalta (Crimea). In 2011, it was registered as a legal entity – the NGO “Centre of Civil Education “Almenda”. The goal of the organization is to defend human rights through legal and awareness-raising actions and the development of civil society institutions. After Crimea had been occupied by the Russian Federation, the organization moved from the peninsula to mainland Ukraine.

<sup>17</sup> Docudays UA (Docudays UA International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival) is the largest international documentary film festival in Ukraine. It takes place annually on the last week of March in Kyiv. Upon completion, the Docudays UA traditionally screens the best movies of the program in the regions of Ukraine as part of the Itinerant festival.

members. Olga Skrypnyk supported those students in every possible way, and when the university administration wanted to exclude about two dozen students for participation in a rally, she began to defend them.

The human rights defender wrote appeals to the local prosecutor's office, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the media, reporting on the pressure exerted on students and professors only just for using their rights. That saved the guys.

Olga's human rights experience suggested it was extremely important to document everything that happened in Crimea. The month of living under the occupation was life to the point of exhaustion. Olga went to military units, interviewed people who had been captured, observed the situation during the rallies and recorded everything in detail.

*"There were not many 'little green men' in the resort city of Yalta. Instead, the 'night wolves' came to us – the representatives of a bike club which is personally funded by Vladimir Putin. Just imagine: a regular rally on Lenin Square, allegedly organized by the residents of Yalta, who want Crimea to become a part of the Russian Federation. Bikers drive in, creating noise and portraying a crowd scene... Yet they are quite peculiar, not only do they have their club mascot, a wolf, embroidered on their vests but the city of the club's branch: 'Moscow', 'Krasnodar', 'Saratov.' The residents of different Russian cities then pretended to be the 'local' residents at the pro-Russian rally in Yalta. I didn't even have to ask anything. Just go out, take a video as it is. Everything was so clear, so surreal...*

*Of course, later we were ousted from that rally – they began to threaten us, but we managed to take a video. I still have it, hoping that one day we will be able to show it at the International Criminal Court sessions and during other trials of those who organized the seizure of Crimea,"* Olga says.

Apart from documentation, Olga and her colleagues responded to all requests they received: collecting money, medicines, help with transportation etc. Yalta residents reacted sensitively to the situation and tried to help.

In a Crimean story of Olga, there is a person who always stays beside her. It's her husband, Vissarion Aseyev. Ossetian by birth, he hardened during



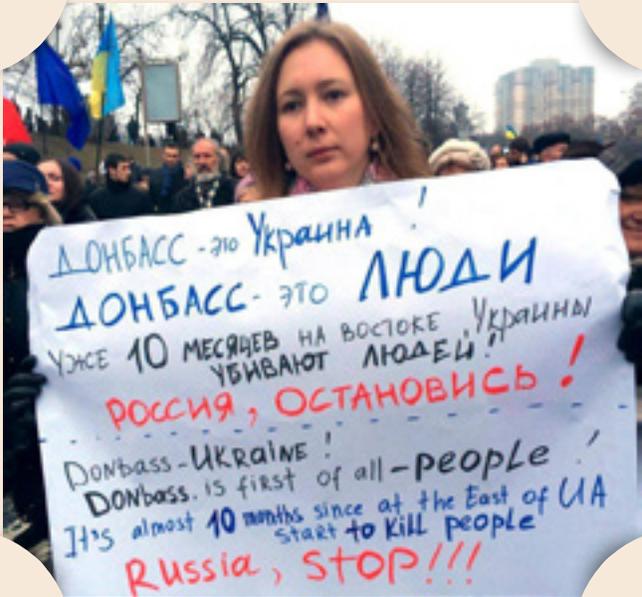
Vissarion Aseyev in the Independence Square in Kyiv. *December 2013*



Rally of terrorist attack survivors organized by Vissarion Aseyev. *Beslan, 2007*



Single-person protest which caused opening of criminal proceedings against Vissarion Aseyev. Vladikavkaz, December 2007



Olha Skrypnyk participates in the rally against armed aggression of the Russian Federation in Donbas

the tragedy in a local school in Beslan<sup>18</sup>. He was in Tskhinvali<sup>19</sup>. All those events were similar to the situation in Crimea in 2014: the Russian military invasion, amending the legislation to legitimize power, seizure of cities, putting pressure on local media and showing an alternative reality on TV. Even the Beslan tragedy was repeated in Kerch<sup>20</sup>.

Vissarion's personal life story resembles an exciting blockbuster. He was a member of a district council in Beslan city when a terrorist attack in a local school No. 1 occurred in 2004. In the first hours of the school's seizure, Vissarion organized a temporary group out of police officers and special purpose police unit officers to search for and annihilate terrorists. He drew the terrorist sniper's fire upon himself and was wounded. Later, he and other school's teachers organized the Victims Assistance Committee.

Teachers trusted him. Vissarion worked a lot with the children, having organized an Internet club and a Sunday school for them. Every Sunday, English and computer literacy classes for children from low-income families took place.

*"The children were nice. But their parents worked a lot and could not pay much attention to them. Children started to get bad marks and teenage behavior complicated the situation... Everything came right when they began to attend our school. Our teachers were the pedagogical university students; they liked this voluntary work. We worked with children of different ages and we showed them that studying was not dreadful stuff. I consider this school to be one of the most successful projects in my life but the Beslan tragedy derailed everything,"* Vissarion says.

<sup>18</sup> On September 1, 2004, during the festivities dedicated to the school year start, the terrorists seized secondary school No. 1 in the city of Beslan (North Ossetia). More than 1,100 people were taken as hostages at school. On the third day of school seizure, the federal forces decided to storm the building. According to official data, 334 people, including 186 children, became victims of the Beslan events.

<sup>19</sup> Tskhinvali is the capital of the self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia. Up to 1990, the city was the administrative center of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region as part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic as part of the USSR. On August 8, 2008, during the Russia-Georgia war, Tskhinvali was shelled by the Georgian army in an attempt to restore the control over South Ossetia. The Russian army responded the next day by redeploying their troops to the city. On August 10, the Georgian troops withdrew from Tskhinvali, which was captured by the Russian army.

<sup>20</sup> October 17, 2018, explosion and shooting occurred at the Kerch Polytechnic College. According to the Investigative Committee of Russia, the explosion was arranged by a fourth-year student, 18-year-old Vladislav Roslyakov, who "committed a suicide." As a result of the tragedy, 21 people died.



The teachers' Victims Assistance Committee was the first among the public initiatives to verify all the lists and make the authorities to admit that more than 1,100 people were held hostage in the school gym, not 354, as officially stated. Of course, the authorities could not forgive this. They tried to discredit the organization, to close it. However, Vissarion's mandate as a district council member meant that he was able to repel these attacks.

*"Then it was still possible not to be a member of the United Russia system and be able to defend the people's interests,"* my interlocutor says.

In December 2007, he ran for the Republican Parliament. To print his election posters, Vissarion went to the printing house and paid for the order. However, the next morning, an alarmed director called him and said: *"Officials from the prosecutor's office and the Federal Security Service came to me and forbade printing posters for you..."*

In an act of protest against Putin, Vissarion Aseyev held a single-person protest in Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia. He took a small campaign table, covered it with banners "Join social movement against Putin" and sat in the center of Vladikavkaz, inviting people to support the movement. He was quickly surrounded by police officers who tried to stop the event but Vissarion rallied for two more hours.

An administrative case was opened against Vissarion. The prosecutor's office put pressure on a judge, saying Vissarion had been conducting an anti-Putin, anti-government rally. However, the judge dismissed the claim, ruling that it was just a single-person protest and relieved Vissarion from liability.

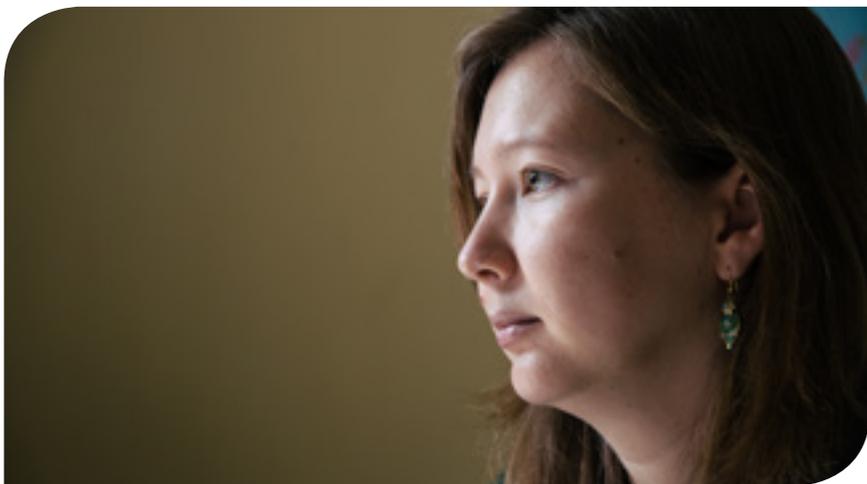
*"It was so unexpected. But then I realized that, in fact, there isn't total support for Putin even among the officials and judges. At least, it was so at that moment. Now, perhaps because of fear, people are unwilling to show their stance like this. The launch of Putin's large-scale campaign started then. For example, the whole newspaper circulation, 3,000 copies, was taken away from the printing house because of my article-manifesto "Ossetia: a free look," the Ossetian activist comments.*

Vissarion Aseyev was in Tskhinvali during the events of August 2008. He saw what the night bombing and the military operation of the Georgian army turned the city into. Almost all private households were damaged by the attacks. The buildings of Tskhinvali University and the Parliament of South Ossetia were destroyed, many schools and kindergartens were damaged, while the buildings of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Security Service remained intact (although they were located across the street from the parliament).

Later, those events reminded Vissarion of the situation in Crimea in 2014.

*"Nobody expected that the war would end so quickly in Tskhinvali. Nobody expected that Russia would intervene in those events. Russian convoys entered, and we hardly managed to push through them and drove into the city. No fighting was ongoing there, except on the outskirts... Despite the fact that all the media, both South Ossetian and Georgian, create a picture that South Ossetia is virtually struggling to become a part of Russia, in fact, the situation is not so one-dimensional. I believe that South Ossetia is currently occupied by the Russian Federation, and the occupation took place in 2012 when they did not allow to inaugurate the newly elected president," Vissarion said.*

After the war, he stayed in Tskhinvali, organized humanitarian aid for the wounded and children, sent them for treatment to Vladikavkaz and Moscow, supplied them with medicines. Vissarion was also engaged in human rights activities: he documented the results of the August events,



interviewed relatives of people who had been detained by the Georgian police and subsequently had gone missing, called on the South Ossetian authorities to investigate into the cases of looting and murders of people of Georgian nationality. He delivered food packages to the Georgians, who were held in the Tskhinvali prison.

... In the summer of 2011, Vissarion met Olga Skrypnyk. Since there was no normal transport link between Ossetia and Crimea, he bought a black Land Rover with South Ossetian number plates to make the journey to Crimea. For about three years, he lived in three cities: Yalta, Vladikavkaz and Tskhinvali.

*“We have a sad joke: wherever I come, Russia comes there. Maybe, I should move to Moscow, and Putin will withdraw from everywhere?”* Aseyev says with a touch of irony.

Being at home in Ossetia, Vissarion watched the published videos of troops entering Crimea. He rushed to Olga, not wanting to let her go. He then became a Ukrainian activist, defending Yalta by going on night patrols that had been organized to support the Ukrainian military.

Olga loves to remember this international story. She even smiles a little bit, when recalling it: *“You know, despite the tragic nature of the situation, a lot of good things happened. For example, we helped our guys from a military unit in Massandra town. They held out to the last. We organized small detachments that were on duty near the military units. During the day,*

*those were mostly girls, who reported on the movement of Russian military equipment. In the evening, we were replaced by men, including my husband Vissarion, my colleagues, and friends. One night, a detachment of three people – an Ossetian, a Russian and a Georgian – was on duty near that military unit. And that threesome defended the Ukrainian military unit.”*

The day of the so-called “referendum” was approaching, Olga and Vissarion had to leave.

*“My car with Ossetian number plate was a rolling stock actually as we came to all Ukrainian military units in it, being caught on all the cameras... We could no longer stay, there were unjustified risks. We did not know where we were going. We decided that, as a last resort, we could go to our colleagues in the Educational Human Rights House Chernihiv [located in Chernihiv city in northern Ukraine – Translator’s Note]. The building of the House was just being built. There was really nothing except for bare walls. However, it was safe there,” Vissarion recalls.*

It’s hard for Olga to recall her departure from Crimea, especially a farewell to her mother. Olga left on the eve of her birthday. Mom came to help pack the bags. They had only a couple of hours:

*“The most difficult thing was to look into her eyes because she knew what was happening and she understood perfectly well that we might not cross the Chonhar checkpoint as a roadblock had already been put there. Later we found out that was Girkin’s roadblock<sup>21</sup>. He organized the so-called “Crimean Army” and captured the people at that roadblock to torture them... They tortured our friends Andriy Shchekun, Anatoly Kovalsky<sup>22</sup> ... We did not know if we could leave Crimea safely and my mother understood that too...”*

Olga admits that she didn’t understand many things when she left Crimea: *“Vissarion was hardened by wars in his homeland. I wasn’t. It could be*

<sup>21</sup> Igor Girkin a.k.a. Strelkov was the head of the Novorossiia movement and active participant in the occupation of Crimea. He played a significant role at the beginning of the armed conflict with Russia in eastern Ukraine. He was involved in the seizure of the Parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, led the Russian sabotage group in Simferopol, and then in the town of Slovyansk, Donetsk region. He led the seizure of Slovyansk. He was one of the organizers of the activities of pro-Russian separatists and the so-called “People’s Militia of Donbas”, held the position of the “defence minister” of the self-proclaimed “Donetsk People’s Republic” from May 16 to August 14, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> On March 9, 2014, at about 09:30, the members of the paramilitary group “Crimean Self-Defense” detained two Crimean activists – Crimean Euromaidan coordinator Andriy Shchekun and ex-chairman of the Republican Forestry Committee Anatoly Kovalsky – at the Simferopol railway station near the Kyiv – Simferopol train No. 12. They spent eleven days in captivity and were subjected to torture.



*seen from the way I packed bags. I took nothing from warm things. I took only summer clothing and footwear, thinking: I'll be back soon...*

*The hardest thing is that you do not just lose your home, you lose touch with your family. You cannot be near them, when they feel good or when they feel bad. You cannot celebrate your wedding with them. You cannot say goodbye to your grandfather in the cemetery..."*

...The interview with Vissarion and Olga was the longest one. At the beginning of our conversation, Vissarion made hot tea to warm up in a cold, wet December. He also served spongy cakes for tea. *"Help yourself, I've bought them especially for you,"* he smiled. We often took breaks, being distracted by other topics...

I watch out of the corner of my eyes how fondly Vissarion looked at his wife and how respectfully Olga appealed to her husband. Their couple reminded me of a nautical rope. It's very solid, resistant to any damage. It is impossible to break it as the fibers are woven into each other. The nautical ropes are usually used to attach a ship to a shore. I am deeply confident that Olga and Vissarion will make it with Crimea.

The occupation deprived them of a lot of things; in fact everything that happened in their past life. But it could not deprive them of meetings with good people. Olga recalls those people with whom she has become real friends:

*“We had met Volodymyr Balukh<sup>23</sup> before he was detained. What was he like? He is a man of freedom! By his nature, he is a real Ukrainian Cossack, whose spirit is unrestrained and beautiful. For me, Volodymyr is a genuine symbol of Ukraine in Crimea, not only because of raising the Ukrainian flag over his house but because of his spirit...*

*There are many such people, we cannot talk about all of them out loud. This is what Putin is trying to conceal. After all, there were human chains, Ukrainian rallies, anti-war demonstrations, there were activists like Reshat Ametov<sup>24</sup> and many others, there were rallies on February 26<sup>25</sup>, March 8<sup>26</sup> and March 9<sup>27</sup> on Shevchenko’s birthday.”*

<sup>23</sup> Volodymyr Balukh is a farmer from the village of Serebrianka of Rozdolne district of Crimea. After Crimea had been occupied by the Russian Federation, Balukh many times publicly expressed disagreement with the accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation and refused Russian citizenship. In March 2014, he hoisted the national flag of Ukraine over his house and soon started to receive threats. Several illegal raids were conducted on his house, during which the national flag of Ukraine was removed from the roof. During one of the raids, the activist was beaten by police and brought to administrative responsibility in the form of a 10-day arrest for “disobeying a police officer’s order.” For the same “violation”, Volodymyr Balukh was later again brought to criminal responsibility, having been sentenced in November 2016 to the penalty of 320 hours of compulsory community service. Nevertheless, he again placed the Ukrainian flag on the roof of his house, and on November 29, 2016, he placed a sign “18, Heroes of Heavenly Hundred Street” on the wall of his house in memory of the civilian protesters killed on the Independence Square in Kyiv in February 2014. After that, in December 2016, the officers of the Russian Federal service conducted another illegal raid on the houses of the activist and his mother, removed the Ukrainian flag and allegedly “found” munitions and dynamite in the house. Since December 2016, Volodymyr Balukh has been in custody. In August 2017, the court sentenced him to three years and seven months in a general regime penal colony and a fine of RUR 10,000. On March 19, 2018, Balukh declared a hunger strike. He was on the hunger strike for more than 200 days.

<sup>24</sup> Reshat Ametov was a Crimean Tatar, who conducted a single-person protest opposite the building of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea on the central square of Simferopol on March 3, 2014. He protested against the seizure of Crimea by the Russian Federation. The representatives of the paramilitary group “Crimean Self-Defense” kidnapped Ametov right from the square. His body with numerous traces of beatings was found near the village of Zemlianychna of Bilohirsk region of Crimea on March 15. His head was tied with a tape, the handcuffs lay nearby.

<sup>25</sup> On February 26, 2014, two rallies were held near the building of the Parliament of Crimea. One was organized by the Russian Unity party, and another one – by the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people. The reason for holding the rallies was the decision to hold an extraordinary Parliament’s session on the status of the Crimean peninsula. The confrontation occurred at the rallies, during which crowding arose. As a result, two people were killed and several more people were injured. In January 2015, the Crimean Department of the Investigative Committee of Russia opened a criminal case over the civil unrest at the rally, the so-called “case of February 26.” The defendants were deputy chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people Akhtem Chygoz, activists Ali Asanov, Mustafa Degermendzhi, Eskender Kantemirov, Talat Yunusov, Eskender Emirvaliev, Arsen Yunusov and Eskender Nebiev.

<sup>26</sup> On March 8, 2014, rally “Women of Crimea against war – women of Crimea for peace!” was held in Crimea. More than 12,000 women of different nationalities took part in it. The participants in the rally stood along the main roads of Crimea and Kherson region, holding the posters “Peace to Crimea”, “I want to live”, “No to war”, “We support united Ukraine”, demanding to thwart military actions in southern Ukraine. They also demanded that Russian troops be withdrawn from the territory of Crimea and called for a boycott of the “referendum” on the status of Crimea scheduled for March 16.

<sup>27</sup> On March 9, 2014, two rallies were held in Simferopol. The pro-Russian rally “Crimean Spring” was held on the Lenin Square, where the then-speaker of the Parliament of Crimea Vladimir Konstantinov and Prime Minister of Crimea Sergey Aksyonov delivered speeches. The pro-Ukrainian rally dedicated to the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko was held near his monument, where Crimeans, wearing blue and yellow ribbons on their clothes, came to declare their unwillingness to see the Russian Federation in Crimea.

The human rights activity makes sense only when people need it, Olga says.

*“During the occupation, we were driven by the desire to convey the truth of what was actually happening on the peninsula: that a huge number of people in Crimea do not want to live in Russia.*

*Now, the team of the Crimean Human Rights Group is also important to me. These people have also lost their home, started the life anew, completely unaware of what they are going to, often leaving for nothing. They know firsthand what the occupation is. But we have the strength to help others. It inspires us as we know that our efforts are not in vain,”* Olga notes.

“

*In January 2014, when Vissarion was going to leave for Maidan, a landmark situation happened. The tragic events on Hrushevsky Street have already begun. My grandfather did not support the Maidan protests. He, a Soviet serviceman, was zombified in many ways by Russian television, which dominated in Crimea. We had disputes about Maidan at home.*

*Vissarion was packing his bag, when the grandfather, who knew they had categorically different views, came up to him and gave a helmet – usual safety helmet for construction – and said: “I know that we look at some things differently, but the main thing is that you return safe and sound, because you are my family.” Therefore, it is so hard to realize that I had not said goodbye to my grandfather as he had died after the occupation. I have a feeling that we did not finish speaking..*

*It seems to me that it is symbolic for the whole of Ukraine. We may have different views, we may have made some mistakes, someone believed the propaganda, but this does not mean that we should sever relations. Each of us must find this “helmet” and give it to each other.”*

# Father

## Abdureshyt Dzhepparov

Bilohirsk – Simferopol



### PROFILE

#### Abdureshyt Dzhepparov

**BEFORE.** Activist of the Crimean Tatar National Movement. Member of the Crimean Tatar National Movement Organization since 1989; member of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People since 1991. President of the Foundation for Naturalisation and Human Rights “Assistance” in 1998 – 2015.

**AFTER.** Coordinator of the Crimean Contact Group on Human Rights. Lives in Crimea.

**DREAMS** that his son Isliam Dzhepparov and nephew Dzhevdet Isliamov, who were kidnapped by Russian special services, will return home. He also dreams of being an out-of-work human rights activist so that human rights are not violated in Crimea.

“

*My son was good at brewing coffee, I trusted him to brew it for my guests ... Isliam was about 1.80 meters tall. Pouring coffee, he seemed to be bending down on one knee in front of me and my guest. That flattered me. A beautiful son's gesture. He looked very aristocratic actually...*

*Having stayed a bit with me and my guest, the son asked: "Do you need anything else?" I replied: "No, son, you may go if you have plans." And he left...”*

*Abdureshyt Dzhepparov*

*“Iryna, I am sending you a photo of a protagonist. I took pictures for about ten minutes, and we talked for an hour...” a photographer tells about shooting with Abdureshyt Dzhepparov. “I tried to capture his glance, to convey emotions. He tries to hold tight: if he opens up, it will be very difficult to calm down again...”*

I forced myself to sit down and write this story many times. And each time I was afraid that one wrong word would tear Abdureshyt apart.

When Isliam Dzhepparov was kidnapped, he was 18 years old, and his brother, Dzhevdet Isliamov, was 23 years old. For more than four years – since their disappearance on September 27, 2014 – the black silence has been reigning, though the voice of an exhausted father tries to pierce it.

Abdureshyt, again and again, goes to people and tells about his son, his nephew, the Crimean Tatar people, the violation of human rights in Crimea. He says that nobody waits for Russia here. He has to be strong to be heard in Crimea, in mainland Ukraine, and in the farthest corners of our planet so that the world would shudder from the paternal sadness, wake up at last from wars, murders, torture, abductions, lies and barbarism.

Only among the near and dear ones, Abdureshyt Dzhepparov gives vent to his moaning, makes no disguise of feelings not to choke with grief, to survive, to withstand, to see the free Crimea, to wait until his sons return and hug them.



I know Abdureshyt only by his level voice, his measured breath. I set my heart on getting acquainted with him as a happy father who does not hide his tears of joy from meeting his son.

Abdureshyt's life is amazing but he speaks about himself in simple words, without vanity.

*"I am 59 years old. I was born on November 14, 1959. February 24 marks 50 years since we came to Crimea from Uzbekistan. You can name it differently – come, move, come back... I was nine when I first came to Crimea,"* he says.

The Dzhepparovs were among the first to return to Crimea in the late 1960s [Crimean Tatars were massively deported from Crimea in May 1944, mainly to the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan, several thousand kilo-

meters away – *Translator’s Note*]. In Crimea, they first lived in the Lenino district<sup>28</sup> from where they were again deported in October 1969. Then they moved to Bilohirsk district and were evicted again. On May 18, 1971, the Dzhapparovs were forced to leave Crimea and settle in the village of Taman in Krasnodar Territory, living there until 1987.

*“It’s across the bridge, right after the strait, now everyone knows about this village<sup>29</sup>,”* Abdureshyt says.

His father was an activist of the Crimean Tatar National Movement, then they were called initiators. Upon his return from the army, young Abdureshyt also decided to join the movement. He created his initiative group. Every month about 10 people secretly gathered and discussed the history of their people, the problem of deportation. This was written on leaflets and recited onto cassette tapes, the materials were spread at weddings and other public events.

*“We hid our typewriter, dragging it from attic to attic when we heard that the KGB officers arrived,”* he recalls.

However, one event brought them out of the underground. In 1986, a number of gravestones were damaged in Taman. Abdureshyt Dzhapparov and his friends reacted strongly against that, gathering more than 200 people for a protest rally. The Soviet authorities initiated a case against the man. However, the investigation did not have time to go further as when Gorbachev came to power, democracy and publicity arose – and the case was gradually closed.

January 6, 1987. A cold, snowy day. Abdureshyt heard a dog barking in the courtyard and went outside to look at what had happened. Mustafa Dzhemilev [leader of the Crimean Tatar National Movement and a former Soviet dissident – *Translator’s Note*] and several other men were standing at the gate. Dzhemilev was released on December 15, 1986, and started to make visits to the activists of the Crimean Tatar National Movement immediately after his release. So he came to Taman, to Abdureshyt.

*“There were about 16 of us, we talked for a long time, exchanged good news. Dzhemilev already knew more than us. He said that a new era*

<sup>28</sup> In 2016, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine renamed Lenino district into Yediquy district.

<sup>29</sup> Taman is the nearest Russian populated locality to the recently built Kerch Bridge on the Sea of Azov.

*had begun, that the state had become free from its previous regimes, and now we all need to become more active. That became a new start for me,”* the human rights defender recalled.

Abdureshyt Dzhepparov participated in the rallies of Crimean Tatars at Red Square in Moscow in 1987<sup>30</sup>, was among 21 people, who were invited to a meeting with the then Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Andrei Gromyko.

On October 7 of the same year, he organized the so-called “Taman campaign”. The Crimean Tatars were to leave Taman and walk to Simferopol in 12 days. They had managed to walk only 7 kilometers when the security forces stopped them. The clashes occurred and a new case was initiated against Abdureshyt Dzhepparov under the article “resistance to a representative of the authorities or a representative of the public who is responsible for protecting public order.”

Who knows how this case would turn out if Crimean Tatar human rights defender Ayshe Seitmuratova had not petitioned for him. She lived in New York and worked for Radio Liberty.

An official meeting of US President Ronald Reagan and Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet Mikhail Gorbachev was to take place in December. The activist was invited to an open day for the immigrants from the USSR at the Presidential Administration. Seitmuratova seized an opportunity and said: *“Meanwhile it has been announced that publicity and democratization processes are going on in the USSR, my compatriot Abdureshyt Dzhepparov faces imprisonment.”* The US President promised that he would ask to settle this issue.

Indeed, after Reagan’s meeting with Gorbachev, the case of Dzhepparov was closed on International Human Rights Day. December 10. Was it a coincidence? The activists jokingly began to call Abdureshyt “a godson of Gorbachev.” Abdureshyt returned to Crimea, where he became one of the leading activists of the Crimean Tatar movement.

<sup>30</sup> In the summer of 1987, the Crimean Tatar activists held a number of rallies in Moscow to seek a return to their homeland, Crimea. Although the rallies ended in the mass expulsion of activists from Moscow, they marked the beginning of the return of Crimean Tatar people to Crimea.

Soon he met Viacheslav Chornovil<sup>31</sup>, Stepan Khmara<sup>32</sup> and many activists from the Baltic states at the Conference of National Democratic Countries of the USSR in Riga. Chornovil then addressed the Crimean Tatars: *“We know about your national movement. We respect it very much. But new times have come, and we would recommend that you reformat into an organization with a clear program and charter so that we understand who we are dealing with and what your goals are.”*

Abdureshyt reported those words to his fellow activists, and the three working groups in Krasnodar Territory, Crimea and Tashkent started to elaborate a program and a charter of the future organization. In May 1989, taking part in a conference in Loodi, Estonia, Abdureshyt Dzheparov received a telephoned telegram saying he now represented not the movement, but the Organization of the Crimean Tatar National Movement. The same telegram stated that the participants in the first congress of the organization had elected Abdureshyt as a chairman of the Crimean regional<sup>33</sup> organization, and Mustafa Dzhemilev as a chairman of the Crimean all-union organization.

Two years later, in 1991, the Qurultay<sup>34</sup> meeting was held, on which the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people [the single highest executive-representative body of the Crimean Tatars in the period between sessions of the Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People – *Translator’s Note*] was established. Abdureshyt was elected a member of the Mejlis. Until 2002<sup>35</sup>, he was the Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis, while Mustafa Dzhemilev was the Mejlis Chairman. Abdureshyt was responsible for the humanitarian field: the media, education, culture. Later he stepped down. *“People of*

<sup>31</sup> Viacheslav Chornovil – Ukrainian politician, dissident in the USSR, journalist, columnist and literary critic. He was one of the leaders of the Ukrainian national democratic liberation movement in late 1980s-1990s and one of the founders of the People’s Movement of Ukraine. Chornovil was the initiator of adoption of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine on July 16, 1990 and the Declaration of Independence of Ukraine on August 24, 1991.

<sup>32</sup> Stepan Khmara – Ukrainian politician, Soviet dissident and political prisoner, one of the founders of the Ukrainian Republican Party.

<sup>33</sup> At that time, Crimea was a region.

<sup>34</sup> The Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People is the national congress and the highest representing plenipotentiary body of the Crimean Tatar people. At Qurultay the Crimean Tatar people are represented by delegates elected by Crimean Tatars and members of their family, who permanently reside on the territory of Crimea, and Crimean Tatars and members of their family, who are the citizens of Ukraine regardless of their place of residence. The first meeting of the Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar people took place in 1917. In the book, the first meeting means the first after the Crimean Tatar National Movement was resumed.

<sup>35</sup> Except for a break from 1993 to 1996.



Crimea-SOS activists hold a rally near the Russian embassy in Kyiv, demanding to find the victims of enforced disappearances in Crimea, including Islam Dzhepparov. Kyiv, *September 2016*



Abdureshyt Dzhepparov and Eskender Bariyev at the United Nations Office at Geneva, *2017*



Isliam, kidnapped son of Abdureshyt Dzepparov

*the new formation came to the Mejlis, their views did not quite coincide with mine...”* Abdureshyt explains briefly.

Abdureshyt digressed from his story as if collecting his thoughts to go on.

...2014, February, Russia, endless convoys of armored vehicles, helicopters. Crimea is being filled up with the military.

*“We live 150-200 meters from a highway and saw on that day the vehicles moving, we heard a continuous hum... We were confused,”* Abdureshyt recalls.

Groups of Crimean Tatars were created in Crimea to warn their peers about impending danger: they organized night patrols and reported the news to each other. Abdureshyt’s younger son, Isliam, was a member of one such group.

September 27, 2014. Abdureshyt remembers that day in detail. He and his colleague were in Simferopol in the morning. When he returned, his son Isliam was waiting for him at home. He brewed coffee for his father and his guest and then went to visit his brothers. An hour and a half later, a car drove up to Abdureshyt’s house, honking persistently. A driver jumped out of it: *“Just before my eyes... your son...”*

*“He told me how my son was tied up and pushed into a navy blue Volkswagen Transporter with tinted windows and taken away... I could not make it out, just asked if he was alone. The driver replied: “There were two of them, the second was of the same height and with a beard. “If I guessed correctly, it was the son of my younger sister Zore – Dzhevdet Isliamov,”* Abdureshyt says.

Abdureshyt called his son but he did not answer. Then he called an officer of the Security Service of Ukraine he knew, who suggested calling the police. Abdureshyt also called Remzi Ilyasov<sup>36</sup> and, without bowing and scraping, said: *“Unknown people took my son in an unknown direction. Find out, do something, join the search.”*

<sup>36</sup> Remzi Ilyasov – Deputy Chairman of the State Council of the occupying power of the “Republic of Crimea” from May 2, 2014 to July 23, 2018. Before that he was a deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in the 5th and 6th convocations (2005-2014). Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People (2001-2013), Secretary of the Kurultay Rukh faction.

He made the next call to his friend and lawyer Mammed Mambetov who reported on the abduction of two Crimean Tatars through social networks.

Abdureshyt Dzhapparov went to the police to write a report. But what it should be about? There, he and the witnesses were offered to go to the Investigative Committee department where a certain investigator, Lieutenant Colonel Babylsky, took on their case.

*“They started to talk to us like to criminals, people guilty of something, not like to victims. They were shouting at us. They ordered the witness to go upstairs... We heard a noise and a shout coming from above. He returned completely pale, he was shaking. I asked: “What has happened, Asam?” But he was silent, shaking and could not say anything...”* the father of missing Isliam recalls.

The men stayed in the Investigative Committee department until one o'clock in the morning, then asked to be released to pray, but got a rude answer: *“Your Allah will need to wait.”*

Soon, a large group of law enforcement officers came to Abdureshyt's home and carried out a search, seized the Isliam's personal belongings.

Abdureshyt did not lose hope that a kind of misunderstanding had happened with his son, that he would return in two or three days... The limitation period under the Criminal Code already passed and nothing has been heard about Isliam or Dzhvedet.

Then the daily interrogations began. During one such interrogation, Babylsky let the words slip: *“We believe it may be linked to your activity.”* Perplexed, Abdureshyt replied: *“Listen, if you flatter me, then I don't need it. I am not in the first echelon, so do not say it is linked to my activity.”*

*“No, we saw how many people you gathered...”* the investigator smiled wryly.

When his sons were kidnapped, about a hundred people came to Abdureshyt's courtyard the next day and there were already more than 400 of them on the third day. The people kept arriving.

On September 28, Abdureshyt Dzhapparov managed to agree on a meeting with self-proclaimed “Prime Minister” of Crimea Sergey Aksyonov, taking



advantage of acquaintance with Remzi Ilyasov. The next day, a meeting was held with the participation of the then representative of the President of Russia in Crimea Oleg Belaventsev, adviser Eskender Bilialov and officers of the special services.

*“The officers were sitting at a distance from the table, they rather regulated the dialogue by facial gestures and body language than conducted it by themselves,”* notes Abdureshyt and continues: *“Aksyonov was very talkative, he said: ‘We will be searching everywhere, day and night. Report this to the people... I replied: ‘I also came to talk about something... More than 400 people have already gathered near my house, and they are concerned for my children. They are also concerned about their own situation because now no one is sure that he or she will leave home and return. There are also endless raids on mosques, schools... It cannot go on like this for a long time.’”*

Aksyonov assured everyone that it would stop, saying it was just a “transitional period.” And each time he added: *“Report this to the people.”*

*“I came to talk, but I’m not a postman. Therefore, come to us and tell yourself the things you want me to report,”* Abdureshyt snapped. When

Aksyonov started to murmuring something about his busy schedule, he added: *“Maybe we should come? If you do not have time, then we have plenty of it. But there will be more than one thousand people, I promise...”*

There came a pause... Aksyonov instructed his assistant to review the schedule and promised to be near Abdureshyt’s house at 14:00 on October 1.

On the appointed day, several thousand people gathered near Abdureshyt’s house. The territory from his house to the highway was filled with people and cars, the Crimean Tatars kept coming from all the corners of Crimea.

The intelligence banned Aksyonov from approaching the house. Therefore, at the last minute, the meeting was moved to the premises of the district administration in two and a half kilometers away.

*Abdureshyt did not want to agree on a new meeting place, but his friends persuaded him. A group was formed to meet with Aksyonov, which included his sister Zore, mother of activist Seyran Zinedinov, who was abducted on May 30, Elvira<sup>37</sup>, chairman of the Qurultay election commission Zair Smedliayev, chairman of the Bilohirsk regional Mejlis Mustafa Asaba and the district’s imam Elvidin Abliamitov.*

Abdureshyt recalls: *“The city was filled with machine-gunners. The jeeps could be seen everywhere. Their doors were half-open. The guys wearing jeans, sports pants and holding machine guns on their knees were sitting in those jeeps... I looked up and saw the snipers on the entire perimeter on the roofs, a lot of snipers. Later we were told that the neighbouring forests were overcrowded with soldiers, military personnel and armored vehicles. It’s good that we went to the meeting in a small group, not a crowd...”*

During a meeting with Aksyonov, they agreed to create a group that would keep in contact with the de-facto “leadership” of Crimea and the security forces and would inform the people about the results of the meetings. Thus, the Crimean Contact Group on Human Rights was created by Abdureshyt Dzhepparov, Elvira Zinedinova, Mammed Mambetov, Nariman Asanov, Emil Kurbedinov and Edem Semedliayev.

<sup>37</sup> December 10, 2017, she died of cancer, which developed after her son had been kidnapped.

After the Contact Group had been created, four more meetings with Aksyonov were held. At one such meeting, the human rights defenders even managed to agree on the release of five detainees who had been jailed over “May 3<sup>38</sup>” case, when Mustafa Dzhemilev came to Crimea.

*“It was a great victory. We received calls and letters with congratulations from everywhere. Moscow human rights defenders said it was an unprecedented case,”* Abdureshyt comments.

However, not all Crimean Tatars understood the role of this organization, many thought that it was created by the “head” of Crimea itself, although it was Abdureshyt’s initiative. He did not need that glory, however, the meetings with the “leadership” soon became unsuccessful also. The “requests” piled up. First, they were asked to exclude Emil Kurbedinov from the group. Then, in April 2015, there was an attempt to kidnap Emir-Usein Kuku, who represented the Contact Group on the southern coast of Crimea, from Alushta to Sevastopol. Abdureshyt was asked to deny the fact that Kuku was a representative of the Contact Group. Those events caused the termination of relations with Aksyonov.

However, the Crimean Contact Group has not been closed and continues to operate. Abdureshyt says that there is enough work, and their main task is to unite active people. It is difficult as people are shocked by the terrible things that happen. Everything changes gradually though, for example, “Crimean Solidarity” was created in April 2016 on the initiative of Abdureshyt Dzheparov and other activists.

*“I am convinced that the stronger the civil society is, the louder the voice of Crimea will be heard. It is we who should speak about our problems from the Crimea. Although my sincere desire is to become an unemployed*

<sup>38</sup> On May 3, 2014, the Russian authorities banned Mustafa Dzhemilev, the leader of the Crimean Tatar people, from entering Crimea. In response, the Crimean Tatars went to the city of Armiansk, where the entry checkpoint to Crimea is located, to support Dzhemilev and express their protest against such a ban. They tried to help Dzhemilev to get to Crimea. However, the way was blocked by the former fighters of the “Berkut” Ukrainian riot police. Crimean Tatars managed to break through the cordon and meet Dzhemilev. Several thousand Crimean Tatars took part in the meeting, after which the “Crimean Prosecutor” Natalia Poklonskaya sent a resolution to the Investigative Committee and the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation on “opening of criminal proceedings against the perpetrators under Art. 212, 318 and 322 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation” (mass riots, use of violence against a representative of the authorities and illegal border crossing). Five people were arrested within the framework of the “case of May 3”, who were accused of violence against the representatives of the Russian authorities. Moreover, about 100 Crimean Tatars were fined.

*human rights defender so that this nightmare ends and we return to the state where we lived before. I dream of the integrity of Ukraine so that it becomes a power that does not leave its territory.*

*Of course, I wish the Crimean Tatar autonomous republic was established, where each person felt safe,” Abdureshyt says and adds firmly: “I think it is not just a wish. It will happen. Our friends, allies, the public, and sanctions have been making efforts for this aim long and hard. Another thing: how long will it take?*

*But the sooner this happens, the sooner my children will return... As it happened in 1953, when Stalin died, and almost all the prisoners, who were alive, returned home. I think the same will happen with our prisoners, with those who, have disappeared or have been abducted. I really want to believe that my children are alive.”*

“

*As soon as you cross the border and step on the Ukrainian side, it becomes easier to breathe. Because you can talk loudly about anything, with anyone, on any topic. Here in Crimea, we are not free to do it, just in half a tone, with caution, carefully, not calling names on the phone, not mentioning certain things... this lack of freedom cannot be substituted with any budget money or road construction. We have not asked them for that.*

*... People in the Crimea are constantly waiting. When I return from Kyiv, I am often asked: what they say in the capital, will it all end soon?*

*But I know that the start of de-occupation will not diminish the scope of tasks for human rights defenders. One wave will give way to the next one, it is inevitable.”*

# Sharp Cobblestone

**Mykhailo Batrak**

Simferopol



## **PROFILE**

**Mykhailo Batrak.**

**BEFORE.** Sales representative.

**AFTER.** Activist at the Ukrainian Cultural Center, coordinator of the “Crimean Trial” initiative Left Crimea in autumn 2018.

**DREAMS** of a peaceful life for himself, his relatives and friends, everyone living nearby. Peaceful life means safe life when you have a roof over your head...

“

*We should not forget that Crimeans are Ukrainian citizens. Those, who rushed to vote in the so-called “referendum” at a breakneck pace, are not traitors. Even those, who made the wrong choice, are not traitors.”*

*Mykhailo Batrak*

Mykhailo Batrak lived in Crimea for 33 years. He is an ordinary guy. He wears a short haircut and earrings. He graduated from the university but has never had a profession. He was a sales representative in one of the companies that ceased operations after Crimea had been occupied. The

senior management left for Kyiv and Mykhailo stayed at home, in Simferopol. He was not going to leave the peninsula.

In his free time, Mykhailo met with friends, argued about something, laughed at something, but never imagined that his life could change drastically. He could not imagine that the strange armed people would come to his native land and many people would have to adapt to the new rules and keep quiet. Mykhailo could not imagine that he would be engaged in journalism, write reports on Facebook about raids on homes of Crimean activists, about arrests and interrogations. He could not imagine that he would attend politically motivated trials in Crimea, document violations in such cases as the case of Volodymyr Balukh, who hoisted the Ukrainian flag on the roof of his house and was jailed for that, or Ihor Movenko<sup>39</sup>, who became a defendant in a criminal case over wearing Ukrainian symbols, or Crimean Tatar activist Suleiman Kadyrov<sup>40</sup>... He could not imagine he would refuse to acquire Russian citizenship in 2014. He could not imagine that FSB officers would question him repeatedly in his native Crimea or that the prosecutor's office would give him different advance notices.

It is unlikely that Mykhailo asked himself who the human rights defenders are and why he will become one of them soon when chatting with his friends before a football match.

But everything changed.

Immediately after the occupation, Mykhailo and his colleagues established the organization "Ukrainian People's House", which helped the Ukrainian

<sup>39</sup> Ihor Movenko is a resident of Sevastopol, worked as a manager in a local event company. In September 2016, he was beaten because of placing Ukrainian symbols on his bicycle. It turned out later that an attacker was a police officer. Movenko made failed attempts to initiate a criminal case and bring the attacker to criminal responsibility. However, in April 2017, he himself was charged with a criminal offense under Article 280 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation "Public appeals for the performance of extremist activity" for posting comments on social networks. He stayed in a remand prison in Simferopol in the period between a court of the first instance passed the sentence and the appeal was considered. Movenko received a one-year suspended prison sentence with probation.

<sup>40</sup> Suleyman Kadyrov is a member of the regional Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people in Feodosia. Until 2010, he worked in the Feodosia city department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In October 2016, a raid on his home was conducted and a criminal case was initiated against him under Art. 280.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation "Public appeals for the performance of extremist activity aimed at violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation." The reason for the prosecution was sharing a video about the formation of the volunteer battalion "Crimea" on Suleyman Kadyrov's account. A few months later, comment on behalf of Kadyrov appeared under this video reading "I support, Crimea has been and will be Ukraine". He received a two-year suspended prison sentence with the prohibition of public activities.



service members and their families to move to mainland Ukraine. However, it did not last long. Activists, including two of his colleagues Tymur Shaimardanov and Seyran Zinedinov<sup>41</sup>, began to disappear. After this, the initiative completely ceased to work and its participants tried not to even mention its name.

Perhaps, the most “harmless” thing to do amid the Russian aggression was to open the Ukrainian cultural center to preserve the Ukrainian culture, traditions, and language on the territory of the Crimean peninsula. It was naive to assume that new “authorities” would not bother this organization but their fear has already gone, the fear had become a mundane thing and therefore did not prevent clear thinking, it did not paralyze.

*“I began to pay attention to the problems that previously did not touch me at all. Almost for the first time in my life, I pondered what human rights are. It was a poignant question, requiring instant actions, not just answers.*

*Illegal arrests, detentions... People were illegally detained for expressing their views, jailed. I was getting uneasy: what on earth is happening in my Crimea! I began to attend court hearings, to document some facts, cooperate with some media, write about it on my own social media account so that more and more people would learn how we actually live.*

*I have never taken care of my safety, but it became the top-priority issue after the events of 2014...”*

Mykhailo was confident that his participation – even as an observer, as a person who conveys the facts to Ukraine and the world – could yield good results for his native Crimea.

*“At first, I was very scared,” Mykhailo admits. “But then the fear disappeared. Well, it did not disappear, it became a habitual thing. It became mundane.”*

Mykhailo could be seen during the court hearings in the trials of Crimean political prisoners Volodymyr Balukh, Suleyman Kadyrov, Ihor Movenko,

---

<sup>41</sup> Timur Shaimardanov, a Crimean Tatar, an activist of the public initiative “Ukrainian People’s House”, in March 2014 helped to deliver humanitarian aid to the Ukrainian military in the Crimea. He was abducted on May 26, 2014, and a few days later, on May 30, his colleague Seyran Zinedinov, who was searching for Shaimardanov, disappeared. Nothing is known about their fate.

Yevhen Panov<sup>42</sup>, Mykola Semena<sup>43</sup>, Ilmi Umerov<sup>44</sup>, Akhtem Chyigoz, “the case of February 26.” He also attended the hearings, at which the pre-trial restrictions were chosen for Ukrainian sailors<sup>45</sup> captured in the Kerch Strait area.

Of course, work with lawyers, analysis, and public speeches drew attention to Mykhailo. Lately, every crossing of the administrative border ended with detentions, interrogations and threats: “*When are you going*

<sup>42</sup> Yevhen Panov is a citizen of Ukraine, lived in Enerhodar town, Zaporizhzhia region. He worked as a driver at the Zaporizhzhia NPP, took part in the anti-terrorist operation in eastern Ukraine. He was detained by FSB officers in Crimea in August 2016. Then the Russian special services announced they had prevented terrorist attacks against the infrastructure of Crimea. According to investigators, the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine planned to organize the attacks. Panov was called a member of a sabotage group of seven, who penetrated into the territory of Crimea. On August 11, 2016, a video appeared showing Yevhen Panov, who admits that he was engaged in subversive activity on the territory of Crimea and collaborated with Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate. Subsequently, he denied the testimony through lawyers, saying they had been given as a result of prolonged torture. July 13, 2018, Yevhen Panov was sentenced to eight years in a penal colony.

<sup>43</sup> Mykola Semena is a Ukrainian journalist, a political columnist well known in Crimea, working as a correspondent of the Den (Day) newspaper and other Ukrainian media outlets before the occupation. In the spring of 2016, a raid on Semena’s home was conducted and a criminal case was initiated against him over public appeals for violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation (Article 280.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation “Public appeals for the performance of extremist activity aimed at violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation”). The reason for the prosecution was his article “Blockade as the first step to de-occupation of Crimea.” The security officers have long been spying on journalist’s correspondence; they knew that Semena was famous for his articles criticizing the Russian authorities and the occupation of Crimea. Semena received suspended prison sentence of 2 years and 6 months with the prohibition of public activities.

<sup>44</sup> Ilmi Umerov is the Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People. In 1994-1997, he served as the Deputy Prime Minister in the Government of Crimea. In 2002-2005, served as the Vice Speaker of the Crimean Parliament. In 2005-2014, Umerov was the Chairman of the Bakhchsarai district administration. In the sign of disagreement with the fact of occupation, he left the position of the Chairman of the Bakhchisarai district administration, repeatedly condemned the reprisals against the Crimean Tatars carried out by the de-facto authorities of Crimea. In May 2016, a criminal case was initiated against Umerov on charges of public appeals for violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation (Article 280.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). The reason for the prosecution was his speech in the Crimean Tatar language on the air of the ATR television channel, where, according to the investigators, he called for toughening sanctions so that Russia would return to the borders of early 2014. Umerov gave a written pledge not to leave the city. For almost a month, he underwent a compulsory forensic psychiatric examination in Simferopol. He was sentenced to 2 years in a penal colony-settlement and banned from public activities for two years. After the sentence had been pronounced, he was secretly taken to Ankara and released pursuant to the agreement between the presidents of Turkey and the Russian Federation.

<sup>45</sup> On November 25, 2018, the border ships of the Russian Federation prevented three ships of the Ukrainian Navy from moving from the port of Odessa to the port of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. In particular, a border ship of the Russian Federation in the area of the Kerch Bridge rammed through a Ukrainian harbour tug. As a result, all three ships and 24 sailors aboard were captured by Russia, six sailors were wounded. On November 27-28, the “courts” in Simferopol and Kerch in the occupied Crimea arrested 24 Ukrainian sailors until January 25, 2019. On November 30, they were transferred from the occupied Crimea to the Lefortovo and the Matrosskaya Tishina remand prisons in Moscow. All Ukrainian sailors declared themselves the prisoners of war.



*to leave?”, “Do you know that your activity is not very desirable here and, on the whole, you are not a citizen of the Russian Federation!”*

A raid on the home of his colleague from the Ukrainian Cultural Center, Olga Pavlenko<sup>46</sup>, became a warning shot.

*“I’d gone to the house as it was being raided and an investigator (whether truthfully, or just to intimidate me) said that the search warrants had not only been issued for her. After that, several more people packed their things and left,” Mykhailo says.*

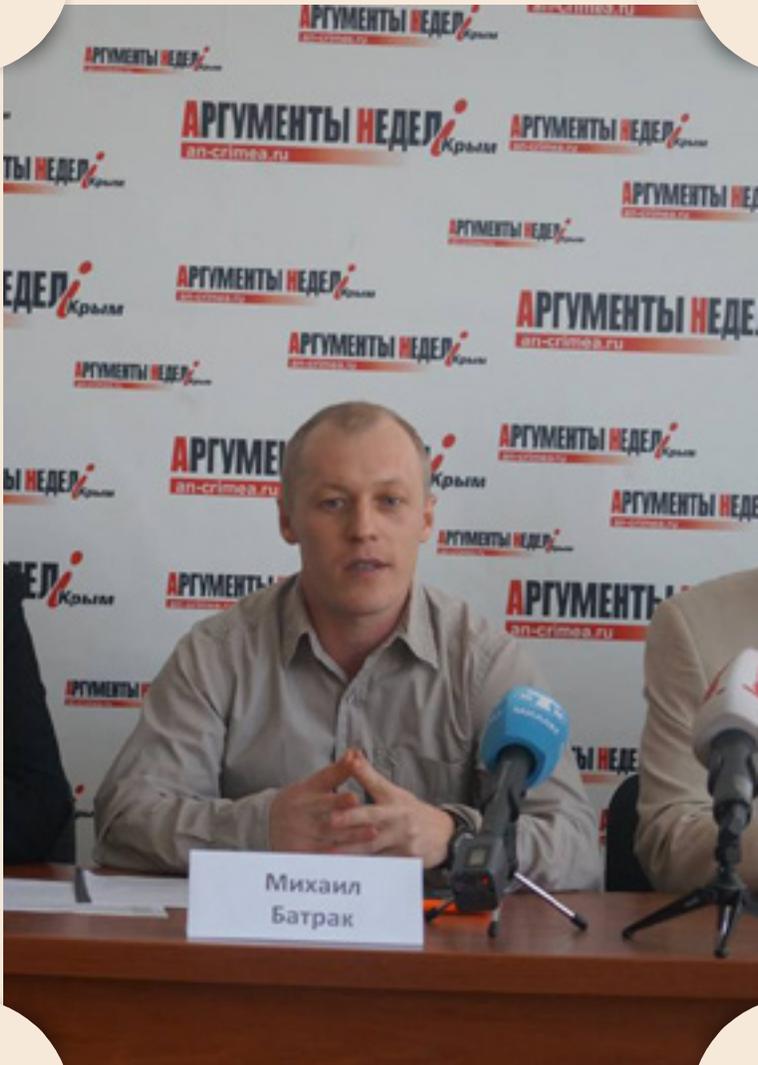
<sup>46</sup> Olga Pavlenko was an activist of the Ukrainian Cultural Center (UCC) initiative in Simferopol. The Center was established in 2015 and organized cultural actions, Ukrainian language courses, embroidery courses, etc. The activists were detained several times during mass actions timed to the significant Ukrainian holidays. At the beginning of 2018, the Simferopol city prosecutor’s office initiated inspection against the Ukrainian Cultural Center. On August 29, 2018, a raid on the home of UCC activist Olga Pavlenko was carried out, and later she was summoned for interrogation. After that, she left the Crimean peninsula.



Action dedicated to 200th anniversary of birth of Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko. Simferopol, March 2014



After court hearing in the case of Ilmi Umerov. Alyona Popova, Valeriy Balayan, Olha Pavlenko, Mykhailo Batrak. Simferopol, September 2017



Presentation of the Ukrainian Cultural Center in Crimea.  
*Simferopol, March 2016*

According to him, a policy of intimidation and expulsion of dissidents is being pursued on the peninsula. He realized that his freedom and safety was a matter of time. Anyway, Mykhailo had managed to stay in Crimea for too long, being engaged in public human rights activity.

*“After Olga Pavlenko had been interrogated at the Investigative Committee department, I packed my belongings in four hours and left before the dawn. I didn’t warn anyone, I told nobody about my decision by phone. When crossing the border, the FSB officers detained me again. However, it was the shortest interrogation, it lasted three minutes actually. They told me that I had made the right decision to leave the territory,”* Mykhailo Batrak says.

Kherson is the first administrative center where Crimeans go. Mykhailo stayed there for some time to settle the matters related to Olga Pavlenko. He did not want to leave her alone: Olga and Mykhailo himself needed support. However, during the time he stayed in Kherson, he liked the city.

*“There are very kind responsive people here. It is a good city, though there are terrible roads and transport here,”* the guy smiles.

Having a sunny smile, Mykhailo does not resemble the sharp cobblestone that was so uncomfortable for the Crimean “authorities.”

Crimea remains the homeland, the conscious homeland for Mykhailo. Probably, you understand how important it is only when you lose it. The sea, the sky, Ukrainian songs, an embroidered national shirt with an ornament like a blood circulatory system. Being detained as a criminal just for wearing an embroidered shirt is beyond good and evil.

“

*Later, my friends and I tried not to touch on the topic of politics – neither in Crimea nor in mainland Ukraine. In 2014, it was a sensitive issue, we argued a lot, we got angry... Until at some point, we realized that we had many other things that unite us. Despite the fact that many people have different views on what is happening in Crimea, we continue to communicate.*

*I don't want to discuss with my friends just politics, problems in the field of human rights, work. You cannot devote 100% of your time to this. Otherwise, you will burn out. There is too much injustice and not everything can be endured.*

*We must know how to rejoice... It is not carelessness or obduracy, it is a response to the evil around, our response: life goes on, which means we are ready to fight. Otherwise, what sense would it make?”*

# Prometheus

**Emil Kurbedinov**

Simferopol



## **PROFILE**

**Emil Kurbedinov**

**BEFORE.** Civil barrister.

**AFTER.** Barrister, lawyer of the “Crimean Solidarity” human rights association in Crimea. Lives in Crimea.

**DREAMS** of the future, when the head of states will not be tyrants when the people will not be afraid of reprimanding the authorities, where the people in power are the servants of people, not vice versa.

“

*I am already sure that those who are now managing the processes inside Russia are very short-sighted politicians. They live here and now and it is the root of the misfortune. They use the old methods, predominantly that of force.*

*Perhaps, for now, these politicians are seeking something, for example, the instigation of a huge number of criminal cases and prosecutions. But they don't understand they are planting a timebomb for the future of Russia...”*

*Emil Kurbedinov*

*“I cannot single out the main case from the bulk of our litigated cases ...”* Crimean lawyer Emil Kurbedinov says with a shadow of annoyance. Blowing a short breath, he continued to speak in a warmer and sadder manner: *“The cases, in which the Crimean Tatars are accused of terrorism, or cases of kidnapping, the cases of Ukrainian prisoners of war, the cases over murder and torture – how is it possible to choose? All of them have an impact on activists, those who practice religion or want to practice it, they have an impact even on politics. Each of these cases has its own pain points but they reveal the policy of Russia and its true goals...”*

...I could not meet with Emil Kurbedinov personally. I asked my colleague to put my questions to him. While listening to the recording of their conversation, I imagined Emil clearly: a swarthy, good-natured man with a warm smile.

Probably, all Crimean Tatars and all Ukrainian activists on the Crimean peninsula know who Emil Kurbedinov is. His name is also very well known to the de-facto authorities of Crimea, the FSB officers, the courts and the prosecutor’s offices. While his name sounds like hope and power for the first group, it’s like a red flag for the latter.

Emil Kurbedinov was born in the Krasnodar Territory in Russia. Already at school, he dreamed of being engaged in the legal profession. It seemed to be so interesting: to analyze the cases, to solve people’s problems! In pursuit of his dream, he graduated from a specialized “police department” in his school. He received a law degree at the Kuban State University.

In 2007, he moved to Crimea, to the historic homeland of his ancestors. Here he met with the colleagues, who were willing to defend human rights. In 2011, they rented a small office in Simferopol. Two years later, Emil received the status of a barrister. He and his colleagues were dealing with civil cases and could not even imagine that their life would change so dramatically so soon. In just one month.

March 2014. Emil Kurbedinov found out that the FSB officers had kidnapped Ivan Selentsov on the street just because he had been handing out the Koran in Russian.

*“The young guy disappeared. He was held in an isolation ward, tortured. Then they just took him to the Crimean border, threw him out of the car and said: “If you return to Crimea, you will regret it,”* the lawyer recalls.



That became his first case. He and fellow human rights defenders began to search for Ivan: they came to all police departments, prosecutor's offices, wrote inquiries. Only on the fourth day of the searches were they informed that Selentsov was being held in an isolation ward.

*"In order to justify themselves, give some reason for the disappearance of the man and somehow fit this story into the legal field, the special services had to initiate an administrative case against him and arrest Ivan for 15 days post factum. We were then told that Ivan had been held in the isolation ward absolutely legally as there was a court ruling. They claimed it was an ordinary administrative case, saying Ivan had sworn in front of the FSB building, bothering the passersby..."* the lawyer explained the factual background and continues:

*"Then we for the first time saw that the FSB and the courts act in concert. So it is very doubtful that the courts will be impartial. The special services*

*apply rather tough methods if they need to achieve a certain goal. We saw how our lives had changed and what they were capable of... The story with that guy was like a litmus test so that everyone understood clearly and immediately where we were."*

The lawyer, who grew up in Russia, has a good knowledge of the Russian legislation and knows firsthand the methods of activity of the security forces, was shocked by the events that occurred in Crimea.

Emil calls the first three months of Russian control over Crimea "life in a legal and social vacuum" as the courts did not work and neither the police nor other law enforcement agencies knew which legislation they should comply with.

*"The first court rulings we received had the wording "on behalf of the Russian Federation" but were sealed with the Trident [the national coat of arms of Ukraine – Translator's Note]. That was an endless feeling of surrealism..."* Emil says.

Indeed, the courts in the Ukrainian Crimea could make unlawful judgments, the law enforcement agencies could abuse their authority, and the prosecutor's officers could turn a blind eye to the violations. However, Crimeans had never faced enforced disappearances, persecutions on grounds of religion or political views before.

*"When Crimea was controlled by the Government of Ukraine, we could peacefully organize some kind of rally to express our disagreement. In 2012, I personally gathered about 30 people in front of the building of the Main Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs [in Crimea]. Nobody made us go away. Moreover, the department's chief received us and we talked... Will anybody dare to organize such a rally now? You will be jailed for at least 15 days... The contrast is dramatic,"* Emil observes.

After Reshat Ametov, a Crimean Tatar who held a single-person protest against the occupation had been kidnapped and murdered, the criminal cases started to be opened massively.

*"A terrible repressive machine, about which we had heard from our grandparents, started to work. We were brought up on the stories about the KGB, about how the soldiers transferred our loved ones in stinky cattle cars simply because they were Crimean Tatars... My grandmother died when she*

*was 87 years old, and even at that age, she could not tell about the events of 1944 without tears in her eyes. She was 13-14 years old then... And we absorbed her pain, felt it through generations. That was the genocide of my people. And now our children have to experience the same pain,"* Emil says.

As soon as the lawyer began to visit his compatriots, who had experienced raids on their homes, were detained or arrested, when he started to defend Ilmi Umerov, Mykola Semena, the defendants in the case of Hizb ut-Tahrir organization<sup>47</sup>, he was "warned" almost immediately. He was hinted that he should cease his activity or not to make it public.

Over the past five years, Emil has gathered the collection of methods, which were used to intimidate him. In 2017, he was arrested for 10 days<sup>48</sup>, there was an attempt to initiate a criminal case against him over alleged disclosing secrets of the investigation. Then the prosecutor's office issued a notice which stated that he, his colleague Lilia Hemedzhy and other lawyers organized mass rallies.

*"In fact, there were single-person protests only. However, that was enough for the prosecutor's office to warn us against conducting extremist activities,"* Emil says.

The second arrest of the lawyer, in December 2018, set a precedent on the peninsula: he was twice prosecuted for the same shared publication on social networks under an administrative article over the propaganda of the symbols banned in the Russian Federation, in particular, the symbols of the Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir. Moreover, the publication had been shared before Russia established its control over Crimea. Emil was jailed for five days.

After Emil had been detained, an unknown person broke into the office of the Crimean Solidarity, broke the windows: *"It's something new... Previously, such*

<sup>47</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir is the international Islamic political organization whose mission is to unite all Muslim countries in the Islamic caliphate. It rejects the violent methods to achieve its goal. The organization operates in more than 40 countries around the world. In Russia, the Hizb ut-Tahrir was recognized as a terrorist organization after the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation had banned it in 2003. After Russia had occupied Crimea, the criminal cases against the members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir branch in Crimea were opened.

<sup>48</sup> On January 26, 2017, the raid was conducted on home and office of Emil Kurbedinov, and he himself was arrested for 10 days for "spreading extremist materials." In 2013, before Crimea was occupied by the Russian Federation, Emil shared on Facebook an announcement about holding a rally of the Hizb ut-Tahrir in Simferopol, and later a court in the occupied Crimea interpreted it as the spread of extremist materials. The lawyer was detained when he was in a hurry to help Bakhchisarai activist Seyran Saliyev, to whom the riot police came to search his house.



Rally in support of Emil Kurbedinov in Kyiv, January 2017



Emil Kurbedinov receives 2017 Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk

*tough methods or threats were not used, they just resorted to arrests, pressure, warnings,” the lawyer says. “We have cameras everywhere, but this person acted so professionally that no camera caught him. You see it is a man, you see his face a bit, but it is very difficult to identify him.”*

The Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation issued an order to expel Emil from the Crimean Central Bar Association. However, the Justice Ministry worked clumsily: it stated in a letter to the Bar Association, relying on the recent arrest of Emil, that he was an extremist and must therefore be excluded. Otherwise, the Ministry of Justice would liquidate the entire Bar Association.

*“Expelling me from the Bar Association is the first step towards depriving me of a barrister status. They try to reach this goal gradually. Of course, we will appeal against this instruction. After all, I am not being accused under a terrorist article. There are also legal moments indicating that the Ministry of Justice violated the law. I am sure there will be a huge response from the Russian barristers. The Federal Chamber of Lawyers of the Russian Federation has already issued a statement about the illegal actions of the Ministry of Justice. Considering all this, the court will have to reject the appeal of the Ministry of Justice. Therefore, I hope that their instruction will only remain on paper<sup>49</sup>,”* Emil says and, in a moment, firmly adds:

*“Even if I am deprived of a barrister status, I’ll be a human rights defender still. Probably, I will not be able to participate in criminal cases. Even in the worst-case scenario, my colleagues and I will have enough work. I hope that I will be able to continue to defend people as I have defended them with my barrister ID card.”*

*“Before it was the USSR trying to annihilate us and now Russia but our peaceful struggle goes on”* the lawyer explains his life choice. But did he have a choice?

The worst horrors of the occupation, when abductions and killings of people were commonplace, ended after two years. However, Emil believes that it only happened due to publicity: barristers and human rights defenders dealt with every tragic case, they demanded that the state conduct effective investigation, they filed complaints to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). As more journalists started to cover those events, the world learned about them.

<sup>49</sup> On February 22, 2019, the Bar Association made a decision not to expel Emil Kurbedinov.



*“From the very beginning, my colleagues and I decided that we would act as openly as possible, we would work as transparently as possible and would report on what is happening in the courts, in the government bodies, in society. These are our principles – publicity and non-violent struggle.*

*The great support of the people also saves us. I remember one day a man and a woman followed me for a while. I went to a store and they followed by. I started to think that was a shadowing. I went out into the street, and they caught up and said: “Sorry, we know what you are doing. We strongly support you! You are not alone!”*

*...and when I left jail after a 5-day arrest, about 300 people came to meet me. Most of them were people that I was seeing for the first time in my life. I was really struck,”* Emil says.

The lawyer adds that since the first days of the annexation of Crimea, the Ukrainian human rights defenders have provided huge support, the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine have not missed any court hearings in Rostov, where Crimeans are usually tried, and the Crimean Prosecutor’s Office working in the mainland Ukraine has been responding to all the crimes committed on the peninsula. In addition, there is a sanction list of Russian politicians, international pressure, and the attention of journalists. All these measures facilitate the return of Crimea and protection of the political prisoners.

*“Although arrests, psychological pressure, sentences of 17 years and more in prison are still our reality, we do not give up,” Emil Kurbedinov is convinced. “Just take a look at how our political prisoners behave. They hold on, all of them! No matter how much the system wants it, nobody betrays others, nobody makes concessions, nobody signs confessions to meet absurd accusations. A unique association of the Crimean Tatars has formed! Previously, we could not talk to each other, but today one for all and all for one. And although not all Crimeans are willing to help in public, to a greater extent they donate money, buy products for political prisoners or carry some things, this support is important.”*

...The recording is over. And even though it was already well past midnight and I don't like transcribing interviews from audio to text, I felt sad: that's all...

Emil's words and deeds resemble the fire of Prometheus: they cheer up, give hope and throw light on the dark times. I cannot help but be astonished by his strength to do his “work”, relying on the law decisively, angrily, publicly. I even catch myself thinking that I sigh with relief when I find out that Emil Kurbedinov defends a detainee.

I am sure I will definitely have an opportunity to thank him personally for his great work, his humaneness and endless faith in people.

“

*Do you remember an old cartoon about Prometheus? An eagle pecks his liver every day, and Prometheus says: “I just want to help people. It's so easy, don't you really understand that?”*

*“No, you want some kind of profit, what do you want?” the eagle raged.*

*“I just want to help people!”*

*... We do not want to see the future of our children in a country that resembles present-day Crimea. We do not want our children and grandchildren to live in a country, where you only need to read what you are allowed to, and where you will be jailed or killed for expressing your views which differ from those of the official authorities. We do not want to live in such a reality. We believe that truth and justice stand with us.”*

# Dawn

## Lilia Hemedzhy

Alushta – Simferopol



### PROFILE

#### Lilia Hemedzhy

**BEFORE.** A lawyer who helped Crimean Tatars, returning home after deportation, to draw up their documents.

**AFTER.** Barrister, lawyer of the Crimean Solidarity human rights association in Crimea. Lives in Crimea.

**DREAMS** of living on her land and practising her religion peacefully.

“

*I have never had a desire to leave for mainland Ukraine. When you come to Kyiv, you like the city, you like the attitude of people... But you feel you are just visiting Kyiv, and your home is Crimea.*

*Therefore, even after we received obvious hints that we “talk too much” and “interfere in the cases we must not to” I know for sure: I will stay at home. Most of our people live in Crimea, our roots are here, and this helps.*

*When one of my friends, who had left two years ago, asked: “How difficult is it for you to live in Crimea?” I replied: “It’s not difficult for us to live in Crimea, it’s more difficult for you to live far from Crimea.”*

Lilia Hemedzhy

Early in the morning, when the first rays of the sun awaken the Crimean land, a prayer is heard, which signifies the power of the entire Crimean Tatar people. This power lies in love for freedom, non-acceptance of violence, good-neighbourly attitude.

*“Living in Crimea for many years, I am sure that Crimeans are absolutely peaceful people who will never use any armed methods of struggle, that only peaceful confrontation is possible,”* Lilia Hemedzhy says.

She talks about her people with such love and devotion as if the dawn hugging the earth with its warm light. Lilia herself seems to be woven from the morning dawn: she is calm, strong, peaceful.

*“My parents and I moved to a village in Crimea in 1989. We were treated as second-class people. Our school was located 5 kilometers from our house and we travelled to school on a bus on which we were not allowed to sit down, we had to stand all the way. Allegedly, no seats for Crimean Tatars had been foreseen. Eventually, we resorted to physically fighting for a right to sit down.*

*Afterwards, when I started to wear a headscarf, I had to prove that I was still a normal person who deserved to be treated according to my actions and the content of my character. While a headscarf might mean that I practise a certain religion, it has no link with my mental capabilities.*

*The way you speak during a trial, prepare the case files, treat a case, can, on the whole, tell people something about your mental and moral qualities, not your headscarf,”* Lilia says.

Having obtained a law degree and having recently obtained barrister status, Lilia started her career in an organization that helped Crimean Tatars. People who were returning to Crimea from Uzbekistan, the Russian Federation and other republics of the former USSR to register for Ukrainian citizenship.

After working for this organization, Lilia became a mother and spent time away from work raising her son and daughter.

Her husband, Rustem Kiamilev, also a lawyer, was one of the organizers of the Crimean Human Rights Movement. Then the organization dealt



with such issues as Crimean Tatar burials or obtaining permits to affix a photos of women wearing a headscarf to a passport.

After Crimea had been occupied, the organization moved to mainland Ukraine but Rustem and his family stayed in the homeland of their ancestors. Lilia gave birth to her third child and gradually began to return to her profession. She took a human rights course at a workshop organized by the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union where Emil Kurbedinov and Edem Semedliayev invited her to work at Crimean Solidarity together. When her youngest daughter was born in 2015, Lilia did not go on maternity leave but took the baby with her: the daughter was playing and falling asleep while her mother was working.

At first, Lilia gave legal advice in Alushta and Simferopol one or two days a week, but the scope of work was growing day after day. Now, Lilia receives calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, giving advice on the move, at home, cooking a dinner... She says she has already got it into the habit: she uses headphones or presses the phone against her shoulder.

Crimean Solidarity has a hotline and lawyers also reply to messages on social networks. Since they are unable to deal with all inquiries, they are more focused on the cases under which people may be further prosecuted. Such cases imply searches, summons for interrogation, preventive conversations on points of law enforcement officers... The first thing the lawyers took up was the “May 3 case” when Crimean Tatars met Mustafa Dzhemilev at the administrative border of Crimea.

Soon cases started to grow like a snowball... Lilia and her colleagues could not believe for a long time that the seizure of Crimea, the so-called “referendum” and the disappearance of Crimean Tatars was possible. Her friend, who snapped out: *“Look around!”* brought her back to reality.

By then Lilia and her family lived in the suburbs and tried not to go out in the city center often. Besides a lot of armed people, vehicles on the streets of the city, Lilia’s headscarf attracted particular attention.

After the words of her friend, the woman had to face the truth: this monstrous reality has come and you need to learn to live amid new conditions. Some people started to collaborate with the occupation authorities, some ceased to be active and some, on the contrary, adopted an active civic attitude and began to defend the interests of the Crimean Tatar people.

*“It is important for me that my people are not treated as second-class in Crimea, that their rights are observed, that criminal prosecution and pressure stop.*

*... In 1944, all Crimean Tatars were accused of being traitors without any grounds. Now they are accused of being extremists and terrorists, and only one way to deal with it is to dispel the myths about us. If you call the Crimean Tatars terrorists, if you call Muslims terrorists, please give the evidence, show at least one explosion or terrorist attack that happened in Crimea,”* Lilia says and adds:

*“I’ve recently attended an OSCE meeting in Rome dedicated to the discrimination on religious grounds. There were a lot of participants from different countries, and a participant from Italy showed statistics he had taken from the Interpol website. Muslims committed only 0.86%,*

*not even 1%, of terrorist attacks among all the attacks that had occurred lately. But if we look at the media and the hate speech they use, if we rely only on media materials, it seems as though all of the attacks are committed by Muslims.”*

She feels certain that this phenomenon can be countered by providing true statistics, showing the lives of Muslims and particularly Crimean Tatars in their usual environment, showing their actions and their deeds. It is necessary to tell people about what is actually happening in Crimea, not how it is shown by the security forces and Russian TV channels.

*“Aksyonov has said recently that the Ukrainian nationalists and the members of the Noman Çelebicihan<sup>50</sup> battalion pose the main terrorist threats now in Crimea. Apparently, there will be detentions of Ukrainian activists, Muslims, Crimean Tatars living in Crimea as a direction for the FSB officers has already been set and a signal has been sent out. The propaganda machine – the media in Crimea and in Russia as a whole – will create an image of the enemy. And the enemy has been determined already: it is our people,”* my interlocutor says quietly.

No fear is seen in her eyes. She knows that firmness and publicity are needed now for her, her family, her Crimea. At the moment these are the only tools with which she can hope to somehow influence these politically manufactured events.

*“If you analyze the latest work of Palagin<sup>51</sup>, the FSB chief, and the new FSB chief Mikhailiuk<sup>52</sup>, you can see that Mikhailiuk’s accession to office was marked by the powerful propaganda machine. This machine speaks not only about terrorists, or to be more precise the people who have been labelled as terrorists and extremists, but it also starts to form a negative image of all those who do not support the de-facto authorities in Crimea,”* the human rights defender comments.

<sup>50</sup> The Noman Çelebicihan battalion is a Crimean Tatar volunteer armed formation, which was formed in early 2016 during the blockade on the administrative border with the occupied Crimea. The battalion was named after Noman Çelebicihan, a Crimean Tatar politician and public figure, organizer of the first Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar people, the first Mufti of the Muslims of Lithuania, Poland, Belarus.

<sup>51</sup> Viktor Palagin held the office of the Chief of the Department for the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol of the Federal Security Service of Russia in April 2014 – November 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Leonid Mikhailiuk has been the Chief of the Department for the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol of the Federal Security Service of Russia since November 9, 2018.

Lilia Hemedzhy quotes the book “Punitive Psychiatry” by Russian human rights defender Alexander Podrabinek. There are two reasons for the use of punitive psychiatry towards political opponents and dissenters. The first one is the camouflage of public life, while the second reason is the iron curtain.

In other words, all the attempts of the Russian authorities and security agencies are aimed at showing how things are bad outside of Russia and preventing their citizens from following human rights defenders, brave people who talk about lawlessness and the real situation inside the country.

*The second reason refers to the creation of a nice picture for the international community to show how good and wonderful everything is. In particular, this was practised in Crimea when the Millet TV channel was created after the expulsion of the Crimean Tatar television channel ATR.<sup>53</sup>*

*“Millet” shows the construction of a mosque but it keeps silent about the arrest of dozens of our compatriots, our co-religionists. It shows some kind of road construction, but at the same time forgets to show how the children of political prisoners, of whom there are already more than 110, feel. These are incomparable facts.*

*One of the Sharia provisions says that the death of one person is worse for the Most High than the destruction of a Kaaba, an Islamic shrine. Is the construction of a mosque a valuable deed if dozens of your fellow believers are held in the prisons and their young children live without father’s care and support? These are huge psychological traumas, broken destinies, this is a rewritten history of our people,” the human rights defender says resentfully.*

The FSB works in concert with propaganda. A complaint in the case of activist Marlen Asanov<sup>54</sup> has been filed recently. The raid on his home

<sup>53</sup> ATR is a Ukrainian TV channel, previously one of the three Crimean TV channels along with the First Crimean and children’s TV channel Lâle. Their programs were broadcasted in the Crimean Tatar language. During the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the ATR TV channel supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine and conducted a live stream of the events in Crimea. On April 1, 2015, the ATR disappeared from the Crimean TV viewing grid after the Federal Supervision Agency for Information Technologies and Communications of the Russian Federation had refused to re-register it pursuant to the Russian legislation.

<sup>54</sup> Marlen Asanov is a Crimean Tatar activist, defendant in the Hizb ut-Tahrir case initiated by the FSB, who helped the families of political prisoners for a long time.



was captured on video. However, the litigation documents claim that the technical means of communication, which would record the process of the police raid, were not used.

*“At the same time, Crimea-Inform news website used FSB video footage and made a report in which the person was called a terrorist, violating and ignoring the principle of presumption of innocence, and to present him in a poor light, some explosions were shown,”* Lilia Hemedzhy says.

The human rights defender recalls the first arrest of Emil Kurbedinov and the search of his house. There was a search warrant under a relevant article of the Criminal Code but the international public outcry caused by the arrest of Kurbedinov and the searches conducted in his home and office, most likely, prevented the security forces from taking any further criminal measures.

Lilia considers that the administrative arrests are the “wake-up calls.” On October 27, 2018, she and her colleagues were also warned against the extremist actions.



Russian Special Police Task Force and police officers came to the Crimean Solidarity meeting in Sudak on January 27, 2017. All persons detained, including Lilia Hemedzhy, were freed after giving explanations



Lilia Hemedzhy takes part in an event in Brussels organized by German politician Rebecca Harms



Lilia Hemedzhy and her colleague Edem Semedliayev (far right) at OSCE meeting on religious discrimination. Rome, January 2019



Appeal hearing in the case of Fera Abdullayeva, wife of political prisoner Uzeyir Abdullayev, 2018

*“When I asked the prosecutor who gave me this warning and what was it that I had done that I should avoid in future, he did not answer me. We sent an inquiry to the prosecutor’s office, asking to provide the case files pursuant to which the warning was issued. Our inquiry was rejected, referring to some secrecy,”* the human rights defender notes.

Lilia says that they in Crimea feel support, including from Ukraine. In particular, it is the voice of human rights defenders and concrete steps of the state recent resolution, by which the state allocated funds to support political prisoners and pay costs of lawyers.

However, there are still a number of problems to which Ukraine could pay more serious attention. First of all, an effective information campaign should be conducted.

*“If we look at the figures, the statistics of 2017 shows that only 2% of the broadcast time on Ukrainian TV channels are devoted to the topic of Crimea. It is a very small percentage given such a serious situation. It is also important to convey the information to the international community as the propaganda machine of the Russian Federation works very well and many foreigners just do not understand what is actually happening in Crimea.*

*Ukraine could also provide social or medical assistance to the residents of Crimea, in particular, the psychological rehabilitation to the children of political prisoners. However, there is an important point: any assistance should be provided in an understandable and accessible manner. Otherwise, getting it requires incredible efforts which makes such assistance less effective,”*

Lilia Hemedzhy is convinced that one can be a lawyer, yet be incapable of being a human rights defender. Conversely, you can be a real human rights defender without a law degree. For Lilia, her friend and colleague Server Mustafayev<sup>55</sup> served as such an example. Without a

<sup>55</sup> Server Mustafayev is the coordinator of the Crimean Solidarity initiative, the association of relatives of political prisoners, lawyers and activists. On May 21, 2018, the Russian security officers conducted searches in house of Server Mustafayev in Bakhchysarai and in the house of Edem Smailov in the village of Dolyne in Bakhchysarai district. The activists were detained on suspicion of the alleged involvement in the Hizb ut-Tahrir organization, which is banned in the Russian Federation. On May 22, the Kyiv District Court of Simferopol arrested the Crimean Tatar activists Server Mustafayev and Edem Smailov.

law degree he has helped people, defended their rights, and was prosecuted for that.

Despite the fact, he is in a remand prison now, or to be more precise is undergoing a compulsory forensic psychiatric examination in a psychiatric hospital, Server continues to be a human rights defender, assisting his cellmates and actively defending his rights in court.

*“In one of the latest statements, which Server handed over through his lawyer, he says that the forensic psychiatric examination he undergoes is just a way to break him,”* the lawyer continues:

*“Our people have never remained indifferent to other people’s misfortunes and have always helped and defended the rights of people subjected to unjust pressure. Server Mustafayev continues to defend these rights through his statements, through appeals to MEPs, human rights defenders and the people. He continues to be active even staying in remand prison.*

*Until recently, Server was among us and we treated him as an equal, as a colleague, as a person with whom you can always chat. Now all those, who earlier did not see any point in this struggle, should look up to him.*

*It is unbearable to watch how people, with whom you were acquainted, with whom you worked, with whom you communicated, are taken away... It is impossible to remain uninvolved in their pain. We often correspond with the wife of human rights defender Emir-Usein Kuku. She is a delicate woman but she continues to bravely defend the position of her husband and prove his innocence.*

I recall one of the letters of our political prisoner Muslim Aliyev, where he writes that “the downpour starts with a drop” and “may the effort of each of us be the drop that will form the downpour.”

Lilia calmly withstands the pressure that is exerted on her because of her human rights activity. What’s really hard for her is the lack of time for communication with children, for joint leisure with the family. But Lilia, like genuine Crimean dawn, has enough light for everyone.

“

*I am often asked what the Crimean Solidarity is. I explain it is a platform that unites lawyers, barristers, relatives of political prisoners and just concerned citizens. But I often hear the next question: “Is it a platform only for Muslims and Crimean Tatars?” My answer is always the same: “No, people of other nationalities, including Ukrainians, stand with us.” The Ukrainian Cultural Center often took part in the meetings of Crimean Solidarity until the latest events, the searches and ousting the activists from Crimea.”*

*... Sharia law tells about good-neighbourliness: your neighbour, regardless of religion, is a significant person whom you should treat the same way as you treat yourself. Such relations should be built between all the people.”*

# Erytheia

Oleksandra Dvoretzka

Simferopol



## PROFILE

### Oleksandra Dvoretzka

**BEFORE.** Member of student union “Direct Action”, member of the Crimean human rights center “Action”

**AFTER.** Coordinator of “Crimea SOS” initiative, Coordinator and executive director of “East SOS”

Left Crimea in 2014.

**DREAMS** of seeing home again and feeling safe.

“

*... I was afraid of coming home to take my things and documents. My mom brought them to me. If she had known that I was leaving without the right to return... Although, everything could have been far more tragic then. So I left my native Crimea from someone else's apartment, in someone else's jacket...”*

Oleksandra Dvoretzka



Oleksandra is capable of asking the right and uncomfortable questions to everybody: teachers, officials, fellow human rights activities. It is often unpleasant. However, these skills help Oleksandra to peel off a dry crust, allows the pus to be discharged so that the wound would finally heal. It is a very valuable skill, especially amid the war in Ukraine, when criticism of the state is perceived as a “Kremlin’s trace”, when up to 10 million Ukrainians are subjected to discrimination only because they are unlucky enough to live in the occupied territory or become internally displaced.

*“I like publicity, I like to communicate with people, I even sometimes like to come into conflict. I mean those conflicts when it is necessary to prove to officials that they are wrong. I even think that I am very effective in this,” Oleksandra says ironically. “It’s crucial for me to be able to say the words, which many are afraid to say or consider it better to remain silent. It is my small contribution to improving the situation in our country.”*

... I met Oleksandra Dvoretzka in the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights in Warsaw about seven years ago. Cool-headed, impudent, still

quite a teenager wearing a short skirt and a tight-fitting T-shirt. She could not tear herself away from her computer, she was constantly in touch with someone. But when she spoke, I don't even remember what it was about, I was struck at how intelligently and fearlessly she spoke about fighting with the state in order to protect a person. At that time, Oleksandra Dvoretzka was already a Crimean human rights defender making her mark in Simferopol, she would later be active in cities such as Luhansk, Donetsk and Kyiv.

*"There wasn't a moment when I woke up and realized that I wanted to be a human rights defender. But if you see injustice, you need to react to it. That's all,"* Oleksandra replies simply.

In 2012, she graduated from the Taurida National University with a degree in political science. Even as she was doing her studies, Oleksandra was already concerned about various issues related to the protection of rights, especially the rights of the students. She and her friends organized the independent student union "Direct Action". They demanded round-the-clock access to student dormitories, combated bribery, and organized an anti-fascist film festival. When the then education minister Dmytro Tabachnyk introduced fees for some of the university services, they arranged protests.

At that time, the local council of Simferopol approved the restrictions on holding peaceful assemblies, identifying only ten places where the assemblies could be held. Since they were actively using that right, it became clear that being just a student union was not enough. So the Crimean Human Rights Center "Action" was founded.

The final year of Oleksandra's studies at the university was not easy as most of her time, while her group mates were writing her theses, she was in Shakhtarsk, a small town in Donetsk region. Tetiana Kochenkova, a student of the Shakhtarsk Teacher's College, made a stand against the actions of the administration, who forced the students to work both after classes and instead of them. Permanent humiliation of students, corruption, a ban on coming to student dorm after 6:00 pm, and often violence was the norm of the teacher's college. Oleksandra was shocked by what she saw. No wonder the local media dubbed the situation in Shakhtarsk "the Donetsk Middle Ages".

*“I came home for the weekends, wrote my thesis, and then went to Donetsk region again as they needed the constant presence and exterior help. Therefore, the fact that today I deal with Donbas is not new for me and is not linked only with the armed conflict. I know perfectly well what these small mining towns looked like before the war. It has never been good to live there. When you know about it firsthand, it is easier to understand the people living there. There were some local elites constantly subjecting people to exploitation, there was a feudal attitude towards people,”* the human rights defender says.

Two years later, Oleksandra returned to Donetsk to tell students and journalists that a recurrence of the “Crimean Spring” must be prevented. She and her colleague Alyona Luniova sincerely hoped they could convey that message before it would be too late.

*“I remember that big avenue as we were going by a trolleybus to the Lenin Square. Several tents with the Russian flag and St. George ribbons [primarily related to WWII, this symbol has recently become widely associated with Russian nationalist and separatist sentiment – Translator’s Note] waving have already been placed near the monument to Lenin... It was deja vu! They did not understand how dangerous it was! At that time, some people had already gone missing, some had been killed and some had been cruelly tortured...*

*Being on the square among the protesters, one of my phrases triggered a conflict. Protesters gave us a piece of paper, saying: “Here, sign the petition. We will also join, like Crimea.” I said: “You shouldn’t join like Crimea.” And so it began... A man standing nearby tore off a yellow-blue ribbon [symbolizing the national flag of Ukraine – Translator’s Note] from my backpack. That ribbon had been with me during the Maidan protests, the beginning of the occupation, I went to Crimea with it... He tore that ribbon off with a slider and somehow it twitched my shoulder strongly. It was painful and insulting.*

*I remember that we called the police, trying to write a report. The police came and greeted us, shaking hands with us.*

*The next day, I and Olena went to a police station to file the report. We came and saw the police officers nibbling sunflower seeds, joking about us, giggling... I even wrote a publication on Facebook that Donetsk would*



Oleksandra Dvoretska and Serhiy Zayets at the press conference on recognition of Crimeans as non-residents by the National Bank of Ukraine. *Kyiv, December 2014*



Oleksandra Dvoretska participates in a rally demanding to give internally displaced persons the right to vote in local elections. *Kyiv, September 2015*

*share the fate of Crimea. Many started to tell me: “No, no! God, you are talking nonsense! “ Yes, indeed... Donetsk faced a much more tragic situation.*

*At that time, it was believed that the territory could not be occupied, and the regional elites such as Akhmetov and associates would retain their influence in the worst-case scenario. Nobody expected the start of the military hostilities in the region. And even after five years, the prospects for settling the conflict are not clear,” Oleksandra Dvoretska says.*

She believes that in order to change something quickly in Crimea, one had to make more efforts. In Kyiv, it's enough to organize a protest action near the Parliament and you will be on the air of the central TV channels. In Crimea, the local mass media became interested in Oleksandra for the first time only after she, a student, won a court case against the city authorities over restrictions on the freedom of peaceful assembly. Although, before that, she had already had experience in defending the rights in court when she had dealt with a case to cancel a curfew.

During the EuroMaidan protests, Oleksandra and her colleagues conducted their first investigation into the embezzlement of budget funds.

*“Now it may seem ridiculous: some UAH 500,000. But then we resented the fact that the officials allocated half a million for the development of civil society and spent that sum on what they needed. It was a paradox. It was the Republican Committee on Information, which spent the money, for screening the videos in trolleybuses where it was reported that I was a traitor to Crimea. I became their personal enemy because of my activity. They spend resources to get rid of me, and instead, more than a dozen people, who sincerely support me, start to follow me on Facebook every day. So, I'm doing important work...*

*Sometimes I feel nostalgia for that time. We were absolutely positive heroes during the Maidan, at least in those media outlets that did not broadcast Russian propaganda.*

*Things are much more complicated now. We are sometimes called “not patriotic enough” when we speak about the violations committed by the Ukrainian military personnel or about the need to pay pensions to people living in the occupied territory. In the morning, we and Deputy Parliament*

*Speaker Oksana Syroyid may defend the rights of the activists speaking from one rostrum and in the evening she already argues against us and our ideas when the Donbas blockade is being discussed.”*

Oleksandra continues her story in a cozy Crimean Tatar cafe near Khreshchatyk Street in Kyiv city centre. She says it is one of her favorite places in Kyiv and recalls how the Crimean activists gathered in the *Shchastia* cafe in Simferopol during the occupation.

*“The cafe was near the Kuibyshevsky market. Oleksandr Kolchenko, Oleg Sentsov, other our friends – those who left and those who stay in Crimea now – gathered there. We coordinated our positions there, reporting what places we had visited that day, what cars we needed for the next day, who would help the journalists to arrive... I remember that I was already very scared. I was peering at every café’s visitor with anxiety. I was surprised that there were people around me, who did not feel afraid,”* the human rights defender says.

I am struck by her revelations. I know a different Oleksandra: she always works, she has no time left for fear. Working at the Crimea-SOS organization, Oleksandra coordinated the provision of assistance to Crimeans who decided to leave the peninsula after the occupation. She created a platform where people could exchange the information: who needed housing in mainland Ukraine and who could provide the housing. She organized people who wanted to help the service members and their families. She was also a key figure for the visiting journalists, providing them with operational information, as well as for the “fixers”, the people who helped the visiting journalists, looking for temporary housing, solving technical problems or making contact with local residents.

It was Oleksandra who, in one of the interviews about Crimea, told me with ease and even with a kind of hope: *“Crimea is not Maidan. Here the distances are over 100 km: Kerch, Feodosia, Yevpatoria, Simferopol... There is no single base (like Ukrainian House), where sympathetic Crimeans can bring food, medicines, warm clothes, money. There is no single coordinating center, which would have clear instructions for community activists and volunteers: where to take food, who should be given a car...”* Then Oleksandra did not so much urge me to come to the restless peninsula to experience five minutes of courage, rather she sincerely

invited me to visit Crimea and even joked it was much warmer there; as if a real spring had come.

... March 6, 2014. A protest near a military unit in Simferopol, not far from the railway station. Several dozen activists stood on the sidewalk near the road holding their posters. The action did not last long as the so-called “Crimean self-defense”, a local paramilitary group, started to tear their posters and push the activists into the roadway. The police stood nearby and did nothing.

Oleksandra Dvoretska approached them and asked them to write a report. She was denied doing that with the words: “*We are not the Ukrainian police.*”

*“And what kind of police are you?”* the activist did not subside.

*“Crimean,”* the law enforcement officers answered.

*“I asked what laws they adhered to. But they hesitated to answer as there are no Crimean laws. And here they are: wearing the uniform with the insignia “Police. Ukraine”, but they are not ours. Because of things like this, you start to feel that nothing works in this city anymore. Even during the Maidan, they pretended that everything was fine: the courts worked, the police guarded, the schools taught...*

*Two days later, when we participated in a rally near the same military unit, no one attacked us. Later we learned that much more serious events had occurred in Sevastopol on that day and everyone had been taken there. In fact, the number of invaders was not great, but all of them were mobilized and had a monopoly on violence...”*Oleksandra goes quiet as if experiencing the pain of those days again.

On that day, March 8, 2014, she congratulated the servicewomen, giving them flowers and yellow-blue balloons over the fence. The next morning, Oleksandra left the peninsula.

*“You know what hurts the most? When they say that Crimeans did not resist or that only Crimean Tatars offered a resistance. But there were a lot of efforts! These were the efforts of small cafés, where many people, risking their lives, were discussing how many meters of wire the military personnel needed. Those were people like Oleg [Sentsov]*



*or Oleksandr [Kolchenko] who are held in Russian prisons now,” Oleksandra says.*

Oleksandra went to her friends, the human rights defenders in Luhansk. The situation in eastern Ukraine was already very disturbing. The journalists, activists, and those to whom it was not safe to stay in Donetsk and Luhansk regions also needed help. So, the “East-SOS” initiative appeared, which was among the first to respond to the requests of displaced persons.

In its first year after creation, the “East-SOS” worked in an emergency mode. The volunteers thought that everything would end soon, as if it was some sort of bad dream and each of them would return to their previous activities: whether that be the “Postup” organization in Lugansk or the “Action” initiative in Crimea. Meanwhile, Oleksandra coordinated the legal direction of “East-SOS” trying, as always, to maintain the link with people.

She urges the Ukrainian authorities to do the same now: to simplify the system of people’s movement, to create a good business environment

for them, to ease a system of admission to Ukrainian universities for the enrollees from the occupied territories, to create online resources where Crimeans could receive the information different from Russian propaganda, to simplify the issuance of Ukrainian passports and certificates.

*“Even if these people hide Ukrainian documents under the pillow, they should know that the return of Ukraine’s jurisdiction will not cause problems, that they are the citizens of Ukraine and that we are happy to see them. We should do our best so that the return does not seem terrible to those people.*

*And Ukraine itself, as a state, should become stronger so that people wish to return here. Frankly speaking, the occupation did not depend on Crimeans and their return does not depend on their desire. But I am sure that the changes in our country have an impact: if we eradicate corruption then our economic potential, the education system, and the army will all be stronger. My Czech friends, who have been dissidents, are joking that “a small Soviet army cannot defeat a large Soviet army.” Therefore, we must stop working in a Soviet style... Moreover, it is important not to turn into Russia fighting against Russia, it is important not to use its tactics: bans on the media, measures against terrorists, collaborators,”* Oleksandra comments.

She feels scared even today. There are a lot of reasons. Recently, she has been put on the so-called “Babchenko list”<sup>56</sup>.

*“Let it be a malicious joke, but you involuntarily start to look around at the subway or peer at the people passing by our house... After Kateryna Handziuk<sup>57</sup> had died, it did not seem funny. I didn’t know her personally,*

<sup>56</sup> On May 29, 2018, the media reported the murder of Russian journalist Arkadiy Babchenko. However, the next day, May 30, Chief of the Security Service of Ukraine Vasyl Hrytsak said that the murder had been staged in order to catch those, who had ordered it. Soon, the Prosecutor General of Ukraine Yuri Lutsenko announced that a list had been found with 47 Ukrainian and Russian journalists, human rights defenders, and writers and that their lives were now at risk. Oleksandra Dvoretzka was on the list. Lutsenko stated that the “Babchenko list” pursued two goals of the Kremlin: to seek revenge on Russian citizens, who now work in Ukraine, for their criticism and to wreak havoc in Ukraine through the murders of Ukrainian journalists and bloggers.

<sup>57</sup> Civil society activist and employee of the executive committee of the Kherson City Council Kateryna Handziuk was attacked with a litre of sulfuric acid on July 31, 2018. She sustained chemical burns to 40% of her body and was delivered to an intensive care unit. For three months, Handziuk underwent 15 surgeries, but the doctors failed to save her life. She died on November 4, 2018. On August 17 and 19, 2018, the National Police in cooperation with the Security Service of Ukraine detained five new suspects in the attack. On February 11, 2019, Chairman of the Kherson Regional Council Vladyslav Manher was served a notice of suspicion of organizing the murder.

*but anyone who fights against some kind of injustice in this country could be her... You know, I'm a pragmatic person: if I'm ineffective because of my fear, I'll quit. I am ready to live and fight, I'm not ready to die,"* Oleksandra says, looking into my eyes.

And I catch myself thinking that I don't believe her. She won't quit. She is the same defiant Oleksandra I met for the first time in Warsaw. Just her facial features have sharpened, and now she looks at you with piercing eyes.

A slight mockery is always felt in a way Oleksandra Dvoretzka speaks. Those who do not know her may view this as arrogance. However, this is actually a protective shell which she has formed over the past five years. She resembles an erytheia, one of the strongest crabs living near the shores of the Crimean peninsula. An erytheia has a heavy and solid shell but when it becomes too tight and prevents further growth, the crab sheds it.

I believe that Oleksandra will not have to live in a permanent "defense" mode and one day she will break free from her shell.

“

*One must not be enthralled by illusions that only extraordinary things inspire human rights defenders. Many activists are driven by resentment and pain. This must be taken into account when dealing with several millions of affected people. We all need support in this difficult time. Even if your relatives or friends have not died in the occupation, have not been killed in shelling, have not gone missing, or do not serve sentences in prison, it does not mean that it is easy for you to experience the Ukrainian events. Anyway, you still dream about walking along the streets of Simferopol after five years. ”*

# Followers of Don Quixote

## Iryna Sedova and Oleksandr Sedov

Kerch



### PROFILE

#### Iryna Sedova

**BEFORE.** Kerch-FM journalist.  
Organizer of EuroMaidan in Kerch.

**AFTER.** Member of Crimean Human Rights Group.

Left Crimea in March 2014.

**DREAMS** about a round the world trip.



#### Oleksandr Sedov

**BEFORE.** Marine agent at the Port of Kerch.  
Participant in the EuroMaidan in Kerch.  
Left Crimea in March 2014.

**AFTER.** Analyst of the Crimean Human Rights Group.

**DREAMS** that human rights are not violated, then personal dreams will surely come true.

“

*Support? We are our own support!*

*After Crimea had been occupied, I lived at my relatives in Kyiv for a while but when Oleksandr came to me, I already had keys and salary.”*

*Iryna Sedova*

It was hard not to notice her. Being in a group of 15 journalists, Iryna was notable for her uncompromising attitude, consistency and taking notes carefully during lectures.

I met Iryna Sedova during an educational course for journalists within the framework of the all-Ukrainian program “Understanding Human Rights” in 2012. She eagerly examined every right from the international documents and looked for practical application in Ukrainian realities or, more precisely, in Crimean realities. Iryna cared about the fate of the small city of Kerch and she was concerned about everything that happened in it.

During her studies, she tirelessly asked media lawyers, human rights defenders, officials, journalists: what to do if... Iryna captured all the answers on video, prepared stories for Kerch-FM, where she worked as an investigative journalist. While my colleagues were bathing in the cold Desna River, Iryna focused on her new knowledge.

Sometimes I wondered: why does she need so much? After all, you can always clarify information on the Internet, or call an expert as a last resort. But Iryna seemed to know that she would face a serious collision with a mayor of Kerch, the organization of EuroMaidan in Kerch, the occupation of Crimea... There will be no time to sit and read books, there will be a need for action.

The journalistic anti-corruption investigations conducted by the Kerch-FM bothered the then mayor of Kerch Oleh Osadchy.

*“He was like Yanukovych on a smaller scale: he must have everything under control. He was a typical representative of the Party of Regions,” Iryna recalls. “He launched an unprecedented campaign of pressure because of our anti-corruption investigations. Criminal cases were opened against journalists. Then, when he didn’t succeed and we began to resist at the all-Ukrainian level, he started to attack from the other side: he damaged the sewage system, poured concrete into the stormwater sewage systems near the editorial office... Therefore, our Maidan kicked off long before the nationwide one, we were already underway in the summer of 2013. We experienced serious stress, waited for searches every day...”*



It is no wonder that EuroMaidan became a natural continuation of the struggle for Iryna and her colleagues. *“We finally have a hope we will oust those gangsters,”* the human rights defender says.

On February 22, 2014, Iryna came to the Kerch EuroMaidan. She was strong-willed, inspired, strong. And only her relatives knew that she had heart problems, that a small child was waiting for her at home and she worried something might happen to her.

She spoke about dignity and human values from a rostrum. Many residents of Kerch came to support her.

Her husband Oleksandr recalls: *“Iryna was speaking from a rostrum and I listened to her in the crowd... Then I met a colleague from work. I did not expect him to have pro-Ukrainian views. He was an elderly man. He understood what was happening, he came to support Iryna, to support Maidan.”*

However, those who did not dare to defend their views vocally also came to the EuroMaidan in Kerch.

*“When the attack began, they got scared and remained standing in the bushes... Those are uncertain people who always think: “Why should I stick my neck out?” Iryna says and her eyes are filled with tears.*

There was another group of people too.

*“I saw how two buses full of people came. Those guys were given engine parts, clubs, eggs, which they threw at activists. It was evident that these people have not come voluntarily, driven by their personal motives. It was a clear that had been issued with these makeshift weapons” Oleksandr continues.*

Hired thugs [mercenary agents who supported the Ukrainian police force during the administration of Viktor Yanukovych, often posing as street hooligans with the express purpose of performing illegal acts – *Translator’s Note*] rushed to Iryna, stroke at the yellow-blue rostrum furiously, threw eggs. The rally turned into a hustle. A guy, who was in charge of the sound equipment, was attacked.

At the last minute, the police pushed Iryna into a car to hide her from the wild wave. However, some other police officers shamelessly paid the hired thugs. Iryna’s colleagues from Kerch-FM followed them to the harbour station and captured on video how the thugs received money from the police officers personally.

The activist then realized for the first time that this violent force was hired for provocations.

Iryna started to receive threats more and more often from everyone: from the hired thugs, from the officers of the Russian Federal Security Service, from the servicemen. On March 18, 2014, immediately after the so-called “referendum”, the journalist left the peninsula.

It was the most reasonable decision, though a very difficult one for the Sedov family.

Before the occupation, Oleksandr Sedov worked as a marine agent, issuing the permits so that vessels could enter the ports of Kerch. Stable seven years of prestigious work with a good salary... though the Oleksandr said the work made him nervous nervous, he liked it.



Rally dedicated to birthday of political prisoners Volodymyr Balukh and Roman Sushchenko. Kyiv, February 2019



Discussion on hate speech in Crimean mass media at the Docudays UA International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival. Kyiv, March 2018



Oleksandr Pavlychenko and Iryna Sedova at a meeting with students of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv



At the rally dedicated to birthday of political prisoners Volodymyr Balukh and Roman Sushchenko. Kyiv, February 2019



However, the man did not hesitate for a second when the Maidan began. He helped the activists to deliver something, go somewhere, constantly accompanied Iryna.

*“Not everyone in Kerch was interested in politics. They were told that drug addicts burnt tires on Maidan in Kyiv, and they believed it. One smart girl, for example, explained in complete earnest that drugs were poured into tea in Kyiv and everyone was protesting for money...”*

*I was not a public figure like Iryna, but I tried to be always with her. I immediately called the “referendum” occupation, it was clear...”* Oleksandr said. *“Most people understood that was an occupation, but they were afraid to say it out loud. I would not even say that everyone was upset: some had the impression that Ukraine had not paid attention to them.*

*There were those, however, who showed their opposition fearlessly. I know one marine agent who went to the commission in April 2014 and greeted them with “Glory to Ukraine!” even though there were only Russians around.”*

The Sedov family had two months of difficult conversations. Iryna tried to explain to her husband that she would not come back as it was dan-

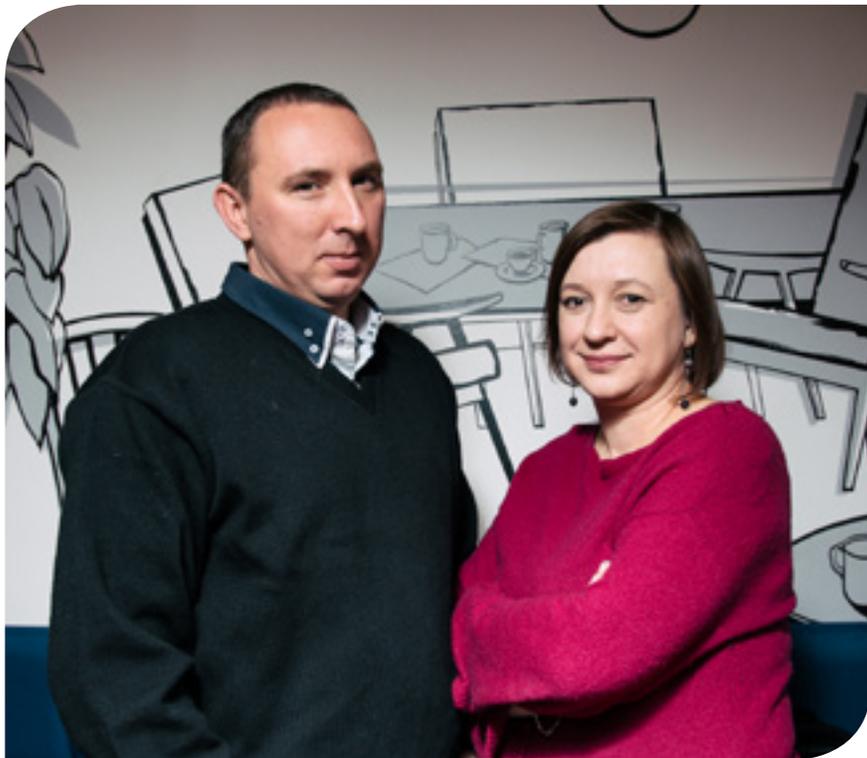


gerous. Oleksandr understood everything, he let her go. However, for him, it was time to decide what to do next. Save the family and follow Iryna – this was not discussed. Where to live, where to look for a new job, think about a school for a child, strictly speaking – how to make a living? These questions haunted the mind of a man who used to indulge himself and his family in every pleasure.

*“At first, I still hoped it was a temporary situation and that Ukrainian authorities would resort to tough actions. But when people started to disappear, when the attacks on journalists began, I was ready to pack my bags.*

*I did not want to stay there because of my daughter. It was obvious that the school curriculum would change dramatically, particularly history and literature. There would be a distortion of educational institutions as a whole and her worldview would simply be spoilt. I did not want her to study there.*

*I closely monitored the opposition movement in Russia. It was not difficult to guess that the suppression of freedom of speech, freedom of opinion would come very quickly to Crimea as an occupied territory. Of course, these changes will affect education,”* Oleksandr says.



He waited until his daughter finished the 4th grade at school, quit his job and went to his wife in Kyiv at the beginning of the summer.

Later, when a border guard he knew (but already wearing a uniform of another country) stopped his car jam-packed with household things on the administrative border and asked where he was going, Oleksandr waved his head towards mainland Ukraine. The border guard replied with sympathy: *“I understand... Go.”*

Iryna found a job at the Hromadske Radio [A Ukrainian non-governmental and nonprofit media organization, which aims to create independent radio broadcasting in Ukraine – *Translator’s Note*]. Iryna prepared a series of programs about Crimea and the upcoming elections. Oleksandr couldn’t find a job as the marine agents were not needed in Kyiv and he couldn’t go to Odesa without his family. In order to do something at least, Oleksandr began to help Iryna in her work. He collected infor-

mation about the events in Crimea, checked and compared the facts, prepared the analyses.

Now Iryna Sedova and Oleksandr Sedov work in the Crimean Human Rights Group. They have not stopped their struggle: they continue to collect and document information about the human rights violations in Crimea, submit it to international courts, negotiate with the authorities, present the researches in the international arena and make every effort that the topic of Crimea remains one of the main issues covered by mass media. Though it may look like Don Quixote's fight against windmills, it will not last forever.

“

*What can I say about Crimea, how has it changed? Over the past five years, independent journalism has been destroyed almost completely in Crimea, political prisoners have appeared, cases of torture and ill-treatment have increased significantly, and now the same lawlessness can be seen in the law enforcement agencies. The plundering of the archaeological heritage of Kerch and the peninsula as a whole is another sore subject for me. Our city, Kerch, is 2,600 years old and when I see how the illegal archaeological excavations are carried out there uncontrollably, under the guise of various construction projects, it hurts me...”*

*Iryna Sedova.*

“

*My residence registration has changed but Kyiv has not become my home yet, though we have been living here for four years already.*

*Many photos from school and university years left at home. They are old ones, made before the digital era, so it's impossible to copy them to a USB flash drive and take with you. Our daughter asks: "Mom, bring me the albums, I want to look at the photos..."*

*Oleksandr Sedov*

# Man of Steel

**Eskender Bariyev**

Simferopol



## **PROFILE**

### **Eskender Bariyev**

**BEFORE.** Chairman of the Crimean Tatar Youth Center, head of the Political Analysis and Forecast Center “Crimea”, member of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people.

**AFTER.** Initiator and coordinator of the Committee for Protection of Rights of Crimean Tatar People, Head of the Crimean Tatar Resource Center, member of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people.

Left Crimea in January 2015.

**DREAMS** of returning home in Crimea and hugging his father.



“

*When the occupation began, the businessmen asked me what they should do. I said that they should recall their history. Eventually, those murzas<sup>58</sup> who agreed to collaborate with Ekaterina II were annihilated. They have no rich descendants now, no companies belong to their descendants, their property is used by others. “Your task”, I told them, “to do business, but to know that we cannot do anything without your support.”*”

*Eskender Bariyev*

*“Stop! I don’t stand up against you. Show me a document which gives you a right to conduct a search in my apartment. I am ready to allow you to conduct a search but I do not guarantee I will contain myself if, God forbid, you scare my children,”* Eskender Bariyev said, meeting the security officers, who broke into his flat at 6:00 a.m.

<sup>58</sup> The aristocratic title of Crimean Tatars and other Turkic peoples.

It was his wife's birthday, September 16, 2014. He, his wife and their two sons – the elder son was four years old, and the youngest was only six months old – slept in one room.

They know when to come. When a person is in the most vulnerable situation. Early in the morning. That night, Eskender returned late from his parents – his father had high blood pressure and they could not normalize it for a long time.

Eskender slept only for a couple of hours. Then the officers broke into his house with dirty shoes on their feet, balaclavas covering their faces, with machine guns in their hands... They came by several buses, 16 armed soldiers and civilians. The porch was cordoned off. Four armed men and two men wearing civilian clothes entered his flat.

They threw the documents at him. Eskender replied: *“You are acting within the framework of your legislation, so if you have a warrant, I will not resist you but let those with arms go.”*

All of the men wearing balaclavas and carrying machine guns left the house, only one remained to stand at the entrance. The field investigators began to work. They turned the whole apartment upside down. When the eldest son woke up, he could not understand what was going on. Later, the son will realize it was how 1944 began when his ancestors were deported.

Eskender was born into a family of the activists of Crimean Tatar national movement. Since his very childhood, the times of the Soviet Union, he had witnessed the struggle for the rights of his people. They have always used the non-violent methods: to inform Soviet intellectuals, the members of the Supreme Council of the USSR about the situation of the Crimean Tatar people. To explain as much as possible about how they are deprived of the right to return to their native land. It has been a huge struggle to restore political, cultural and linguistic rights.

The young man made his first independent steps in the national movement in the 1990s when the Bariyev family returned from deportation from Uzbekistan to their native peninsula. He was one of the initiators of the First Congress of the Crimean Tatar youth, where the “Crimean Tatar Youth Center” was established. Eskender was elected as its chairman.

The issues related to the unification of the Crimean Tatar youth: cultural revival, language preservation and the formation of the Crimean Tatar youth policy were all discussed.

Those became the responsibility of the Ukrainian state when it gained independence. This was a chance to restore the rights of the Crimean Tatars. Thus, in 1996, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar organizations, including representatives of the “Adalet” Organization of the Crimean Tatar National Movement and the Crimean Tatar Youth Center, held a forum in support of the adoption of the Constitution of Ukraine.

Soon, Eskender Bariyev was elected as a Qurultay delegate and, a little later, as a member of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People.

In 2001, Eskender initiated the development of a UN analytical document “The Millennium Development Goals. The Autonomous Republic of Crimea”, headed the public council in support of this document and, as an expert, worked on three goals: “Reducing child mortality”, “Improving maternal health” and “Reducing spread of HIV / AIDS and tuberculosis in Crimea.” He made a contribution to the analytical document, which complemented the Strategy of Socio-Economic Development of Crimea for 2011-2020 in the humanitarian area.

Working with young people has always been a part of Eskender’s activity. Perhaps it was the reason why he reacted so strongly to the beating of students at Independence Square in Kyiv. He and his colleagues Andriy Shchekun, Sergiy Kovalsky, Anatoliy Kovalsky and other activists decided to launch the EuroMaidan-Crimea campaign.

*“During the Maidan, my wife was heavily pregnant. We were very happy that our child would be born in an independent, democratic, European Ukraine. We lived with those hopes,”* the ice in the words of Eskender melted when he talked about his wife and children. Eskender cooperated with the EuroMaidan-Crimea on behalf of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People. They held evening meetings every day, informed the Crimean population about what was happening in Kyiv.

*“We said that it was not some kind of ‘Bandera followers’ or ‘fascists’ gathered on Maidan in Kyiv, but the same people, citizens of Ukraine, who want to oppose the fact that money is being stolen from their pockets*



At the rally "Stop Crimean Tatars Genocide" near the Russian embassy.  
*Kyiv, December 2015*



On the Day of Resistance of Crimean Tatars.  
*Kyiv, February 2017*



Day of Remembrance of Victims of Crimean Tatars Genocide.  
*Kyiv, May 2017*



At the conference of delegates of the Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People  
of 6<sup>th</sup> convocation. *Kyiv, November 2018*

*and that our corrupt officials do not want to live according to the European values,” he recalls.*

With the beginning of the occupation, everything changed at once. The days resembled each other: Eskender together with human rights defenders, journalists, and volunteers, ensured access to military units. Since service personnel were being blockaded, the activists gave them food and supplies.

When the tanks started to appear, his wife was already in a maternity clinic. Their second son was born on March 5, 2014. No matter how exhausting the day was, he knew that his family would always support him.

*“It’s not true that I was brave and did not worry about anything. I came to a perinatal center to visit my spouse, stayed in her ward and told what happened during the day. It was very important for me to stay with her...” he smiled.*

Of course, the Mejlis saw that illegal actions were taking place. When the “referendum” was planned for May, the Crimean Tatars called on the Ukrainian political establishment to adopt a law on indigenous peoples. However, Ukraine was not ready.

As a result, the Mejlis made an open appeal to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the entire Ukrainian people. On the basis of this appeal, on March 20, 2014, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a resolution in support of the Crimean Tatar people and other citizens living in Crimea.

Eskender Bariyev was also among those who organized a meeting with the leader of the Crimean Tatar people Mustafa Dzhemilev on the administrative border on May 3. In April, Dzhemilev was given a document banning him from visiting Crimea.

Such vigorous activity did not go unnoticed: Eskender began to receive the first warnings from the occupying authorities. He faced a physical threat for the first time on July 23 when he was returning from Switzerland, where he had informed the international community about the situation in Crimea. Eskender asked his friends to meet him – by that time Mustafa Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov<sup>59</sup>, the Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, had been already banned from entering Crimea...

<sup>59</sup> Refat Chubarov is a Crimean Tatar political and public figure. Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 1995-1998, MP in Ukraine in 1998-2007 and from 2015. President of the World Congress of Crimean Tatars since 2009. Since November 2013, the chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people.

Eight riflemen surrounded them at the “border.” One of them was especially insolent. He was rude during the search, ordering him not to speak the Crimean Tatar language.

Then Eskender asked bluntly: *“What are the grounds for our detention? Why do you prohibit us from speaking our native language? Where is this written in the regulations? You’re not talking to a criminal! If I am unarmed, and you have a gun, are you a hero, or what?”*

The border guard did not expect such resistance. He relented and finally explained the reason for detention.

Eskender Bariyev is fast, very active and persistent. Then, in Crimea, he did not know how much time he had, so wanted to maximise his time and do as much as he could to defend the Crimean Tatars.

He also understood how important it was to adopt a law on indigenous peoples and to hold elections of members of the Parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in Kherson region before September 14, 2014 as the elections of members of the “State Council of the Republic of Crimea” had been appointed in Crimea on that day.

*“This meant that there would be a formal legitimization of power in the occupied Crimea. So it was important to work in proactive mode. Granting the Crimean Tatar people the status of the indigenous people of Crimea would call into question any authority elected on the peninsula,”* the human rights defender explained. *“But, unfortunately, the Parliament of Ukraine did not hear us.”*

Immediately after the “elections”, on the morning of September 16, the security officers came to his apartment to conduct a search... Other members of the Mejlis were also subjected to humiliating searches. The measures against Crimean Tatars started to be tightened.

Eskender and his colleagues initiated the Committee for the Protection of the Crimean Tatar People. Once a week, they held a press conference in cooperation with the ATR TV channel and other media, urging people to call a hotline to report on any situation. The activists had started to disappear, including Eskender’s friends. The fear only deepened. Even those who had lost their family members, or whose relatives were found dead later, were afraid to speak. Therefore, the Committee for the Protection

of the Crimean Tatar People made a statement: if a hair falls from a head of their compatriot, the entire international community will know about that. And they have kept their word.

He was spied on, intimidated, splashed with bright green paint, provoked into a fight. Yet when the Crimean Tatars wrote a report on the attacks to the occupation law enforcement agencies, they were told those cases had not been crimes.

The All-Crimean Conference became the peak of pressure on the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Crimean Tatar People. On January 17, 2015, activists started to arrive from across the whole peninsula. They were met by about 40 young people of athletic appearance, many of whom, as it turned out later, did not even understand why they had come there.

*“One of our activists from Feodosia was pushed and we barely managed to prevent him from reacting. Then I said: ‘All the representatives of our conference, raise your hands!’ and I told the reporters: ‘Take video and photos, we are not going to fight with anyone, we are not provoking anyone. They came to us and meddle in our work. Police, do your job and take all those whom we didn’t invite out of here.’ The uninvited guests got confused as there were cameras everywhere. So the police had to take the hired thugs out and we were able to hold our conference...”* Eskender says.

Then they prepared appeals to the UN Secretary-General, the President of Ukraine, the President of Turkey on the situation of the Crimean Tatar people on the peninsula. Two weeks later, on January 28, Eskender Bariyev found out that five cases had been opened against him and his colleagues.

Representatives of the pro-Russian media often called Eskender and asked if he was afraid of criminal cases. *“No, I’m not afraid,”* he replied. *“I do not deal with political issues. I protect human rights and in any democratic country, the protection of human rights cannot be a reason for opening criminal proceedings, arrest, trial...”*

The Russians tried to convert Eskender Bariyev three times. Back in March 2014, the occupiers offered him 3 million rubles for the development of the Crimean Tatar Youth Center. No paperwork needed, they told him. He refused.



Afterwards, the representatives of non-governmental organizations from St. Petersburg came to him and offered to unite efforts for “patriotic education.” He replied: *“We have different paths to follow.”*

For the third time, Alexander Formanchuk, a well-known political scientist in Crimea, tried to influence Eskender. He stated in no uncertain terms: *“Why do the Crimean Tatars resist? It is better to take it as it comes, it is better to accept the Russian authorities, because you may receive prospects then.”*

*“You will face the fact that the invaders will constantly feel resistance and this resistance will be non-violent. We have a great experience in this,”* Eskender answered.

After this conversation, Formanchuk wrote on a social network: *“...Eskender should be expelled from Crimea on the heels of Dzhemilev and Chubarov..”* That was done. When, at the end of January 2015, Eskender was in Kyiv to send the appeals from the All-Crimean Conference of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Crimean Tatar People, his friends told him that there was no point in returning.



*“It was extremely difficult to make such a decision but I remembered the words of human rights defender Oleksandra Matviychuk: ‘You will return, you will be arrested. You will create a problem for your family and yourself. People will talk about you for a week, and then what? Who will work?’ I had to follow her advice,”* he says in a shattered voice.

In Kyiv, he started to make new efforts for the return of Crimea. Eskender initiated the creation of the Crimean Tatar Resource Center. He deliberately chose a different name for a new non-governmental organization, because the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Crimean Tatar People had to remain on the peninsula.

...Eskender Bariyev talked a lot about his human rights activities. He even seemed taller, larger than he really was. A man of steel, who could not be crushed by thunder or lightning, nor the occupying authorities of Russia.

But Eskender could not hold back his tears, recalling his mother. He – the son who visited his parents’ house every day, hugged and kissed them, thanked them for their love – could not go to his mom’s funeral.

Eskender was very close to the Crimean border, in the Henichesk district of Kherson, when he found out she had died. He was bursting to go to Crimea, despite the risk. He wanted for the last time to kiss the hands of his mother, whom he would never see again. But his friends said: “*Eskender, don’t you dare! It is not known whether you will manage to get to the funeral.*” About a thousand people came to the funeral to support Eskender Bariyev just as he was supporting them all that time.

Eskender’s father has stayed in Crimea. He has a disability and cannot speak. But the son reads in his eyes that he is waiting for him. Every day, Eskender does his best to fulfil his promise: to come to a free Crimea and hug his father again.

“

*Many told me: “Eskender, are you glad about your deeds now?” They meant I should calm down and everything will be fine then. No, it won’t be fine. Today, they have come to me, and tomorrow they will come to each of you! Nowadays in Crimea, the searches are conducted in the houses of people not even engaged in civil society activity, for example, in the houses of businessmen.*

*If we do not support each other, then a wedge will be artificially driven between the people living in Crimea and those, who have gone beyond its borders. We will be told that only cowards and collaborators live in Crimea and we will be called traitors and fugitives. Therefore, we must maintain contacts, find points of interaction and create all the conditions for the protection of the rights of our citizens.”*

# Dissident

**Maria Sulialina**

Yalta



## **PROFILE**

### **Maria Sulialina**

**BEFORE.** Student at the Crimean University for the Humanities, member of the Centre of Civil Education “Almenda”, organizer of “EuroMaidan – Yalta”

**AFTER.** Graduate of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, documentalist of the Documentation Center of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU),

coordinator of the Docudays UA international human rights documentary film festival in Berdiansk, member of the Centre of Civil Education “Almenda”.

Left Crimea in April 2014.

**DREAMS** of taking a backpack and getting lost in New Zealand or India for two months without a phone and messengers.



“

*One day, when my friends and I were returning home from Кривий Ріг by train, my friend Anton hung his Ukrainian flag, reading 'Вільні'<sup>60</sup> on the window of our compartment. Moreover, we had ribbons in the colors of the Ukrainian flag on our backpacks, one backpack was yellow-blue and a heart in the form of a Molotov cocktail was depicted on two other bags. So-called “Crimean self-defense” could not help but notice them at the checkpoint.*

*They told us to show the passports, asked where we were going. My friend put a bold face on and replied: “Do you have any powers to ask these questions?” They showed us their IDs, printed on some ordinary paper... Anton did not subside: “I can print the same too...”*”

*Maria Sulialina*

<sup>60</sup> Free (Ukrainian)

*“Mom, I want to have a gap year so much,”* said 11th grader Maria Sulialina. However, her mother, Valentyna Potapova, a teacher by education and vocation, was adamant.

Therefore, the girl enrolled in several universities at once. She did not go Kharkiv to enroll in the law department as she changed her mind about becoming a lawyer at the last minute. She was eager to become a journalist or a public relations manager but failed to submit the needed document to a university in Dnipropetrovsk in time because she had joined her parents and their friends at the archaeological excavations in Chersonese.

So she stayed in Yalta and became a student in the history department of the Crimean University for the Humanities. It was a small tragedy for Maria – the straight-A pupil, a winner of all the school competitions. Once she joked with her classmates that *“you can enroll in that department even without a school certificate – everyone is admitted there...”*

She then failed to start her studies on time. At first, she got sick, so she did not attend classes, then she left for Germany for two weeks to participate in an educational project, then she worked in “Almenda” Centre. She got to the university just in time for the end-of-semester exams, which she passed with flying colors and won the right to an increased scholarship. Her group mates wondered who she was and why she knew all the upper-year students.

The secret was simple: Maria was a frequent participant in the Yalta Discussion Film Club, where bold ideas were born, activism and leadership were cultivated, where the understanding of human rights was instilled. Many university students visited the film club as it was a way of escaping for thoughtful youth. *English Strawberry, The Great Dictator, Forrest Gump, Easy Virtue, Midnight in Paris, Fight Club, The Iron Lady, Laura, Billy Eliot, Instinct...*

It is no wonder that when the revolution was in full swing in Kyiv, young people decided to organize their EuroMaidan in Yalta.

*“Why don’t we do anything?”* Maria asked. She did not understand why they should go to Kyiv, if they could defend freedom here, at home. It was no less important.



A lively girl quickly organized people and wrote an official rally notification but the trouble was that she was a minor. So, her elder friend Ruslan Nechyporuk submitted the documents at the city council instead of her.

*“The city council staff did not understand what was happening. However, the notification was accepted, signed and... a copy of a document confirming that the EuroMaidan will be held in Yalta was given...”* Maria says.

However, it was not the wind of change, but a draught of perplexity. Very soon, the city council staff became more active and the events came thick and fast: Ruslan Nechyporuk, who left his personal data on the notification, started to receive calls from the police, the rector’s office.

*“At our first rally, there were few activists and the crowd of police. They guarded us. And we were joking: ‘Mmm... they are afraid of us.’ God, we were standing with some posters, we were not frightful at all!”* Maria recalls.

The reaction was flash-like. A university rector told professor Olga Skrypyuk, who came to the rally with the students to make sure they



were fine, she was dismissed during the rally. The participants in the rally – about 20 people – were called traitors. They were severely reprimanded as soon as they came to the university after the rally.

Maria, who studied in the first shift, was given a good telling-off. She stood in front of all the first-year students and was listening to the accusations: she had let everybody down, everybody will be expelled because of her, they would not be able to study anywhere else...

*“Who allowed you to organize a rally?” four prorectors asked the 17-year-old student. [In the independent countries of the former Soviet Union, a prorector is a deputy to the rector and a member of the management body of a university. – Translator’s Note]*

*“It is my civic stance,”* Maria answered bluntly.

Stunned prorectors shouted in response: *“From 8:00 to 17:00, you are not the citizens of Ukraine, you are... university students!”*

Citizenship according to schedule? Citizenship is set by a university – the sanctuary of sciences? Is it so surprising that the aggressor state

changed the citizenship of population of the whole peninsula in a couple of months?

The worst thing was that fellow students kept silent.

The moral punishment took a heavy toll on Maria. She fell ill. A couple of days later, the prorector for research summoned her mother, Valentyna Potapova, who worked as a professor at that university.

*“I respect you a lot, you are a good professor... but do you know that your daughter was there?”* the prorector asked about the Yalta EuroMaidan.

*“Of course, I do,”* Valentyna was surprised at the question.

*“We have gathered some information about her...”*

And suddenly she was shown a sheaf of papers with printed out correspondence of Maria on VKontakte social network... Valentyna Potapova caught her breath for interference with her daughter’s privacy. Then the prorector recalled her daughter’s trip to Berlin and said she had visited the Gay Museum in Berlin.

*“So what?”* Valentyna was still perplexed.

*“Isn’t it quite abnormal?”*

*“Listen, even if my daughter has an orientation that is not very well perceived in our society, it is her own business. You, as the prorector for research, have nothing to do with that,”* Maria’s mother answered, keeping her indignation in check.

*“Do you understand that it will be difficult for her to study...”*

Valentyna Potapova had already stopped listening, she left the office.

The students who participated in the EuroMaidan were not expelled from the university but only because their professors stood up for them.

*“They are dissidents,”* the university administration and students of other faculties labelled the activists with contempt.

*“But it is cool to be a dissident!”* Maria smiles. *“Then I realized for the first time how important freedom of speech is. They wanted to expel us only because we participated in the rally.”*

In the end, Maria decided to leave the university in April 2014 after Crimea had been occupied.

*“They gave me my documents in one day, they even gave me the marks for those subjects that I had not had time to pass. They wanted me to leave as soon as possible,”* the girl says.

Before the so-called “referendum”, Maria almost ceased to appear in the university. However, there was one meeting which she decided to attend. *“Moscow professors came to tell how cool it was to live in Russia. We decided to go there, put on national embroidered shirts... But they didn’t let us in, saying: “There are no vacant seats there,”* Maria recalls.

The last action in which Maria participated was dispersed. People were beaten up, their cameras were broken... Feeling the helplessness and absurdity of the situation, Maria was on the edge.

Her mom exclaimed, looking at her: *“What are you lamenting? Do something!”*

*“What can I do? I don’t know of which university we will be students on Monday...”*

*“Write a letter to the minister!”*

*“Yeah, I have a great mind to write it!”*

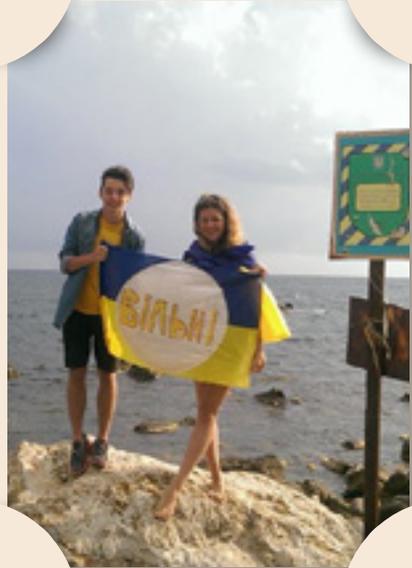
Maria wrote that she and her friends were Ukrainian students and they had enrolled in Ukrainian universities, but the result of the “referendum” was already clear to everyone, and they wanted to continue their studies in Ukrainian universities.

*“We ask to simplify the system of transfer and provide us with a possibility to live in the dormitories as we have nowhere to live in mainland Ukraine,”* the girl wrote.

This letter was sent on Friday to the Education and Science Minister of Ukraine Sergiy Kvit, head of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Science and Education Lilia Hrynevych and the rectors of all the leading universities of Ukraine. By Saturday morning, Maria received a response from minister Kvit, in which he assured: *“Yes, you are the students of Ukraine, and you will have a simplified system of transfer.”*



Leaflets pasted up by students who participated in EuroMaidan in Yalta.  
*December 2013*



Celebrating Ukrainian Flag Day near Sarych headland. *Crimea 2014*



Celebrating Ukraine's Independence Day. *Yalta, August 2014*

Maria recalls how much support there was for Crimean students and invitations from different universities. Meanwhile, in Crimea, kidnappings of activists began. It was already unsafe to be engaged in vigorous activities, and simply lean out. Maria hardly wanted to stay in Yalta.

Mom convinced her to leave for Kyiv for a week to represent the “Almenda” Centre. As a Crimean student, Maria told the media what was happening on the peninsula. After that, she was inalterably labelled as a traitor in the Yalta groups on social networks.

*“You know, I had no fear at all. That is, I felt fear in the beginning when the first servicemen had appeared but then I started to feel ashamed for the fear. Why should we be afraid? We must protect what we still have!”* she says.

On Ukrainian Independence Day, students hung yellow-blue national flags on one of the Yalta beaches. Some passersby threatened them, saying they would come and beat them up.

*“That was the last year when there were so many Ukrainian symbols around in Crimea!”* Maria recalls. *It was a wonderful time in its own way: a surge of emotions, civic stance, and activism. Six months later, when she returned after the first exam session at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, she no longer recognized her friends who had stayed to live in Crimea.*

*‘Everything is not so simple... Perhaps, Crimea has always been Russian,’ I heard. Today, many do not talk to me, they have become hardcore patriots of Russia. Those, who did not succumb to propaganda, left the peninsula, and many people went abroad,’* Maria says.

The first year without Yalta was emotionally difficult. Just yesterday she was a carefree schoolgirl sitting under a cozy parental wing. Today, she is completely lost, without a hometown, with a certificate of a displaced person.

*“I do not consider myself to be a displaced person. I have not left my country... At first, I didn’t understand what was going on, and everyone around asked me: ‘What is happening in Crimea? Are you from there?’ And, while replying to them, I experienced those events again and again. A year later, I simply stopped answering questions because I could no*



*longer scroll through this absurd movie. The most painful thing was to hear: “Anyway, you wanted to join Russia...”*

*An interesting point: after I had moved to the mainland, it became very important to me to say that I am from Yalta, from Crimea, from Ukraine. It is about my identity. For me, it is about a responsibility to make every effort so that we have an opportunity to return to Crimea. I’m not sure that I want to go back and live there after the de-occupation but I don’t want this opportunity to be taken away from me.*

*I wish there were no boundaries, no uncertainty – whether I will be allowed to cross the border or not, whether they let me go or not, what will happen to me there, on the other side. I have a grandmother in Crimea and I am the only one in our family who can visit her.”*

Today Maria still holds discussion meetings at film clubs, but with different students, with different emotions. It is strange, she says, because she remembers those cozy Yalta discussions very well.

In summer, she works as a coach at a children’s camp, where she talks a lot with children about respect, tolerance, human rights values, and re-

sponsibility. She speaks with them honestly, openly, so that the dried Crimean wounds again begin to open slightly. Maria is convinced that is must be like this, so that future adults know the real price of freedom.

She also works for the Documentation Center of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union. Maria deliberately chose the Crimean direction, occupation. It hurts a lot, but the collection of the facts of human rights violations in the native peninsula gives her strength. If she helps to gather evidence of Russia's aggression for the International Criminal Court<sup>61</sup> and the criminals are punished for the war crimes they have committed, then it is not for nothing.

“

*When I occasionally come to Crimea, I also change. I put on my T-shirt with a print depicting Kolchenko and Sentsov. For me, it is important to wear this T-shirt there or wear the symbol of Ukraine around my neck. I was presented with the coat of arms of Ukraine back in 2015, and I take it off very rarely. It often stays with me even when crossing the border with Crimea. It is dangerous but, for me, it is very important not to be afraid and not to take it off.”*

<sup>61</sup> On September 8, 2015, the Government of Ukraine filed a declaration in accordance with Article 12 (3) of the Rome Statute, which recognizes the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in respect of the alleged crimes committed in Ukraine (including Crimea) after February 20, 2014. As part of the preliminary investigation, the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC collects information on several types of alleged crimes committed in Crimea, including disappearances and murders, ill-treatment, forced conscription of Crimean citizens to serve in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, resettlement of part of civilian population of the Russian Federation to Crimea and part of the population of Crimea outside its territory, seizure of property, harassment of Crimean Tatars.

# Tutoress

Valentyna Potapova

Yalta



## PROFILE

### Valentyna Potapova

**BEFORE.** Professor of the Crimean University for the Humanities, member of the Centre of Civil Education “Almenda”, organizer of discussion club.

**AFTER.** Head of the Centre of Civil Education “Almenda”, works on simplification of the mechanism of admission of enrollees from the occupied territories to the Ukrainian universities.

Left Crimea in October 2014.

**DREAMS** of drinking coffee at Yalta quay and telling her grandson or granddaughter what being a Yalta resident is.

“

*My recollections are not dreadful. These recollections just stay always with me. You immerse yourself in them again and again, they appear in your dreams... and I really want to convey to everyone that all the most terrible things happen in a very mundane and ordinary way.”*

Valentyna Potapova

...People in a small provincial Czech town found out that Soviet troops had entered Prague. Tanks. Panic. People do not understand how to behave: someone goes to buy salt and bread, someone starts typing leaflets on old typewriters.

The Soviet soldiers themselves do not know where they were brought. One of them thinks he is in Germany. He runs, he dreams of becoming a cook in France. He is about to cross the border and become a little closer to his dream. But suddenly he realizes that he is in the Czech Republic. Another guy leaves for England to pick strawberries, says goodbye to his girlfriend. However, he finds himself in the epicenter of events.

These are moments from the Ukrainian-Czech movie *English Strawberry* about the events in the Czech Republic in 1968<sup>62</sup>. The film is very incomprehensible: tedious and ingenious...

This is how Valentyna Potapova, a professor of the History and Law Department of the Crimean University for the Humanities, began her Crimean history.

Professors of that department had unusual relationships with students, who could easily rush into their office and spring whole pile of their problems on them. Nobody took revenge for the fact that they did not agree with the rating system or defended their rights. Daria Svrydova and Olga Skrypyuk were among those professors.

In fact, it was “a state within a state” as Yalta University itself remained the embodiment of the Soviet Union...

It is not surprising that an idea of creating a discussion club was born at the department. A member of its team, Maryna Budzar (a terrific professor, a person of encyclopedic knowledge, who also left Crimea after the occupation, offered to watch the *English Strawberry* movie.

When the movie ended, the students sat in silence, not even revealing their emotions. The professor asked then: “*Imagine for a moment when Russian troops invade Crimea. Strictly speaking, it is not something un-*

<sup>62</sup> The Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, also known as Operation Danube, was a joint invasion of Czechoslovakia by five Warsaw Pact countries – the Soviet Union, Poland, Bulgaria, East Germany and Hungary – on the night of 20–21 August 1968. It put an end to the reforms of the Prague Spring. The largest contingent of troops was deployed from the USSR. The Soviet military presence in Czechoslovakia lasted until 1991.



*imaginable as they only need to leave the place of their deployment. What will you do?"* This meeting took place before the Maidan events, in early 2013.

That question triggered discussion. Someone said *"we will become guerillas, we will go into the woods, we will defend ourselves"*, someone said they would do nothing, someone said they would go to buy salt...

*"And suddenly the English Strawberry finally began to be decoded. When the 'Crimean Spring'<sup>63</sup> kicked off, we remembered that movie more than once. All the members of the movie club did exactly what they were talking about then: someone, perhaps, bought salt, and someone started to protest,"* Valentyna recalls.

Valentyna Potapova says very little about herself. Rather, she can be "read", through her relationship with her students.. She remembers them and her eyes start to shine with pride:

<sup>63</sup> "Crimean Spring" is a metaphorical name for the occupation of Crimea in Russian propaganda.

*“It is amazing: one situation was unfolding at our department, while another one was observed in the university on the whole. The rector was an outright despot with a terrible administrative-command system, although he was a good manager. He went on a lot of business trips, talked a lot about his love for Ukraine, very quickly got the title “Honored Teacher of Ukraine”, yet he easily betrayed Ukraine, holding that title... I remember very well how the students organized the EuroMaidan in Yalta. It was an explosion for the university and its system of servility.”*

The students were not expelled, only because professor Olga Skrypnyk had written a report to the prosecutor’s office and the Office of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights. They were also supported by the Crimean media, which covered the pressure being exerted on students. After that, the rector had to declare publicly that there would be no reprisals against the students. Although, subsequently the students experienced internal university “spanking” and humiliation.

Valentyna Potapova recalls the events of 2014 like the film frames.

Here is an attempt to hold a Forum of Civil Society Organizations in Simferopol, the purpose of which was to understand how to act if the so-called “draconian laws”<sup>64</sup>, which were adopted on January 16, 2014, during the revolution in Kyiv, enter into force. That package of laws significantly restricted civil liberties. Civil society activists were preparing for dialogue but they were simply not allowed to enter the building. They had to hold the event under the building of the office of the representative of the President of Ukraine in Crimea.

*“If I’m not mistaken, Oleksandra Dvoretzka moderated the meeting. Activist Kovalsky was also present... and all those who would later be denounced as “traitors to Crimea” by the FSB”* Valentyna Potapova says.

The forum had not opened yet, when the “Russian Bloc” [former political party in Ukraine banned in May 2014 – *Translator’s Note*] began to bring people to the venue. In only half an hour, two rallies unfolded

<sup>64</sup> “Laws on dictatorship” also known as the “laws of January 16”, “dictatorial laws” are the package of laws, which the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted on January 16, 2014 during the EuroMaidan to suppress the protests. Those legislative acts restricted the rights of citizens, provided the state authorities with wider discretion for punishing protesters, and were aimed at criminalizing the opposition and civil society.

on the tiny site in Simferopol: one rally protested against the decision of the Ukrainian parliament, the other one protested against the first rally.

*“We suddenly realized that everyone shouted the same phrase: “Fascism won’t fly!” It was so stupid. It turned out that we all had with the same slogans. We wanted the same things: freedom, democracy, justice, equality. We did not want fascism, dictatorship. But why were we standing on different sides of the barricades, why were we against each other? I came up to a woman, who stood on the other side. Apparently, they were the teachers, and they also recognized me as a teacher.*

*“What are you doing here?” I asked them.*

*And they reflected my question: “And you?”*

*“We do not agree with what is happening,” I answered and heard in response:*

*“Neither do we ... Everything becomes so incomprehensible, so confusing...”*

*This strange conversation often comes to my mind. When you think about it, we, in Crimea and later in Donbas, were divided artificially. After all, we all wanted the same things – justice, freedom, equality we did not want to be treated like cattle, we wanted to be subjects of political activity in the country.*

*Just we defend that differently: some people in a democratic way, while others allow being taken to rallies. Some have liberal values, while others probably need a leader, who will tell them how to live. That rally in Crimea was completely absurd,” the human rights defender says.*

Valentyna could not recover for a long time after what she had seen, she even stopped going to rallies, because she heard “her own” slogans from the other side.

On February 26, 2014, Crimean Tatar students did not let her go to a rally near the building of the Supreme Council of Crimea: *“Valentyna, do not go there. It will be scary, only men go there. We ask women to stay at home. Do not go...”*

*“This rally shows very well what really happened on the peninsula. There was no unanimous voice: ‘We all want to be Russia!’ Not only we, but also those who coordinated the seizure of Crimea, understand that. It is no wonder that the Supreme Council of Crimea was captured precisely at the night from February 26 to February 27, so we had no time to come round... And already on February 27 that dreadful movie began,” Valentyna says.*

She still cannot accept those events as a reality. As if a motion picture operator shows *English Strawberry* again and again:

*“You understand that a historical event occurs now. And what should you, a simple person, do? All the scariest things kick off lightly. You cannot believe that you have been captured, you see the armored vehicles in the street where your university is located, you see the strangers in military uniform, and when you turn the TV on, you see the same thing there. Is it a movie being shot?”*

*Once my husband and I were going to a market by car, and driving near the Hill of Glory<sup>65</sup>, we noticed a huge number of buses nearby. I counted 45 of them. Is a forum being held in Yalta? And my husband responded: “Most likely, these are the “political tourists” brought to Yalta...”*

*... Do you know what Yalta in March is? It is when you walk along the embankment and greet every second person because it is not tourist season and only the local ones remain in the town. If you have worked all your life in the education system, first as a nursery teacher, then as a school teacher, then as a university professor, all the local residents are either your students or their parents, grandparents, or your colleagues. There are no other people. This is Yalta.*

*Then suddenly the embankment is crowded with strangers wearing track-suits, leather jackets, whom you only saw on TV in a “bike show of Putin’s friends” and you understand there are a lot of strangers in your hometown. Finally, you realize: this is an occupation...”*

To get away from glum thoughts for a bit, Valentyna’s husband invited her to the movies. They just wanted to leave home, break away from the TV. The showtime was late in the evening. Ten spectators at most were sitting in the cinema hall with 400 seats.

<sup>65</sup> The World War II Memorial.



*“We were waiting for the movie to start and suddenly heard the tramp of hundreds of legs. On both sides of the screen, a crowd of young people in identical tracksuits begin to flow. They fill the entire hall. For some reason, only one thing came to my mind: these are orcs from *The Lord of the Rings*, just wearing tracksuits and sneakers...*

*The crowd filled every vacant seat: they were sitting next to us, in front of us, behind us... And we, the eight Yalta residents, who came to the cinema this evening, understand, feeling a nagging pain, that we are sitting among the invaders. There is no escape from this occupation, it suffocates you. You are a loner among these invaders. These are young people, and you look at them, at their heads, their ears and you cannot understand why they are here? Why have they come here? To seize my land? What do they have in their heads?”* Valentyna Potapova asked herself.

It was not easier to breathe outside. Almost for the first time, Valentyna and her husband saw commanders with chevrons controlling the crowd in Yalta. For her, this creepy stroll to the cinema on March 9 became the day of occupation.

A special film frame in Valentyna’s personal history was the last film screening at the Yalta discussion club. The club leaders could not decide whether they should hold that meeting. It was in a university room where

you need to go up spiral stairs, there was no emergency exit. It was a huge risk. The “Cossacks” could break in suddenly as there were already many of them in the city. The police were practically absent, as was the government. Anarchy roamed the city in the worst sense of the word.

But many young people came. According to the movie schedule, the Great Dictator starring Charlie Chaplin was screened. The film club coordinators usually tried to stand neuter during the discussions, but on that day Valentyna Potapova broke down:

*“I cried and said that the dictatorship had come and that now it would be difficult for all of us, but we need to withstand and remain human somehow. I said we should recollect everything we had discussed that at our film club meetings because otherwise, we would not survive, because dictatorship was scary. I lived in the Soviet Union. Terrible things were happening behind a very beautiful signboard. Likewise, terrible things will be happening right now behind this beautiful logo “Great Russia.”*

Valentyna Potapova understood that it was time to make a decision – either to leave or to stay. She decided to stay. Students held her here. After all, they were scared and confused even more than she was. What should we do? What diploma will we get? Will Ukraine accept us? She had to stay to answer these questions.

*“If all of us quit, who will administer the exams, who will issue diplomas? We are professors and we could not simply abandon our students .. of course, we do not follow the example of Janusz Korczak<sup>66</sup>, we do not go to a gas chamber – there is another degree of danger. But our students trusted us, and we made the decision to stay. It was, probably, the most difficult decision at that time,”* Valentyna says.

Valentyna lived in two cities – Simferopol and Kyiv – she met with a huge number of people from the Ministry of Education, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies so that the process of transferring Crimean students to other Ukrainian universities was less

<sup>66</sup> Janusz Korczak – Polish doctor, teacher, writer, publicist, public figure of Jewish origin. In 1940, he was taken to the Warsaw ghetto with his pupils from the orphanage. When in August 1942 an order came to deport the orphanage, Korczak and his assistant and friend Stefania Wilczynska, other teachers and about 200 children walked to the station, from where they were sent to the Treblinka extermination camp in freight cars. He refused the offered freedom and chose to stay with the children, meeting their death in a gas chamber.



Valentyna Potapova and her colleagues at the office of Educational Human Rights House Chernihiv



Valentyna Potapova participates in the action of solidarity with Crimeans who have not put up with occupation. Kyiv, March 2019

painful. It was important to support the Crimean students and Ukraine supported them.

It was a trial by fire in human rights activity for Valentyna Potapova. She is among those who are fighting for the right to education for children from the occupied territories, though she does not consider herself a human rights defender. *"I just do my job,"* Valentyna says.

In August 2014, she was fired from the university. She expected that. After a while, it became clear that Valentyna would not get a job in the education system because she was on the "stop list."

She choked. The air needed for breathing was too thick because of the lack of freedom. Nervous breakdowns... She knew exactly where the gas-line was, and maybe that would be her last protest action...

Her mother helped to get away from dark thoughts, saying: *"We must live! And here you die."* In October 2014, Valentyna Potapova and her family went to mainland Ukraine.

Once, at one of the last meetings with her students, who stayed in Crimea, she heard: *"You left us."* People said that not everyone could leave yet, at the same time, they did not know what they should do. How they should continue, they were left to face a new reality in Crimea.

*"Let's be honest, those who stayed and decided to fight there are in a worse situation than we are,"* Valentyna says. Guilt pushes her to work harder to create the best conditions for admission to Ukrainian universities for applicants from the uncontrolled territories:

*"When the Education Ministry officials did not hear us, when everyone around, even some human rights defenders, said that education was the responsibility of the aggressor country, when we could not reach anyone, I came home and burst out crying... I remembered our Yalta meeting and heard those guys: "You left us."*

Five years later, it became clear that Valentyna Potapova and her colleagues won the issue of the education tactically, but not strategically. At that time, to simplify the system of transfer or admission for children from the occupied territories was a success. However, no more than 300 people enrolled in Ukrainian universities:

*“When I meet students from Donetsk and Luhansk who enrol at one of the universities on the ‘preferential list’, they ask the right question: ‘Why does this segregation exist? Why there are only a limited number of universities? It is discrimination.’”*

*I once asked my friends what they dreamed of when they planned to enroll in a university. Some wanted to become a great archaeologist, some a great botanist, some wanted to study at the coolest university, some wanted to save the humanity by enrolling in a medical institute, someone wanted to solve Fermat’s theorem... 17-year-old children are very ambitious, they dream of the great things!*

*And what do we offer them? Ten universities... We humiliate these children.*

*Now my main task is to find people with whom we will create an attractive system of Ukrainian education for the children from the occupied territories.*

*Yes, I cannot protect those people whose houses are searched, or who are arrested, but I will do everything that depends on me. Then I will be able to retire in good conscience.”*

“

*I dream of strolling along the Yalta embankment with a small child, they will be either my granddaughter or grandson. I will teach this little person what is to be a Yalta resident: to love this city, to breathe this air... I really want to give this little person my Yalta. I want to sit with my friends and their grandchildren, who will be running around carelessly, in a cafe (Yalta is a truly European city with the coffee culture!) and drink the most delicious coffee in the world.”*

# Thorn

Ruslan Nechyporuk

Yalta



## PROFILE

### Ruslan Nechyporuk

**BEFORE.** Student of the Crimean University for the Humanities, member of the Centre of Civil Education “Almenda”, organizer of EuroMaidan in Yalta

**AFTER.** Graduate of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, history teacher at the Kyiv school No.130, resource specialist in children’s camp “Origins of Tolerance.”

Left Crimea at the end of 2014.

**DREAMS** that Ukraine will make it one day. Then he will organize a picnic at Yalta beach and sing Ukrainian songs among his friends.

“

*When someone tells me: “What can your human rights do? The armed people came to Crimea and they do not give a damn about the rights and about you.” My answer is always the same: “Start with yourself!”*”

*Ruslan Nechyporuk*

... Crimean mountains and roots of mountains cannot be imagined without juniper. It's an amazing plant: evergreen, resistant to heat and frost, strikes roots in salty soil. Its pine odor calms down, and luxurious branches like wide wings hide the grayness of the stones and fill your day with a soft green light.

Do not be deceived by dark thoughts though! If you violate juniper's personal freedom (if you try to uproot it or break its branches), this plant will injure you with its needles and a thorn wound will hurt for a long time, reminding you of your bad deed. Crimean juniper can be replanted in another place, and it will decorate someone else's garden. But on a stellar warm night, when no one sees, it will be quietly pining for its homeland.

Ruslan Nechyporuk is not a juniper but he is quite a thorn. His cute, smiling appearance conceals strong, thorny character. It was he, who threw the city council's staff into panic and shocked the prorectors of the Crimean University for the Humanities by submitting an application for holding a peaceful rally: EuroMaidan in Yalta.

He, Maria Sulialina and other people from the "Almenda" Centre decided to hold a rally in support of the European choice of Ukraine. They were inspired by Maidan in Kyiv – the energy of unity, heat flowing from the tea in plastic cups, and the ease of student youth.

Three friends exchanged glances: *"We can organize our own EuroMaidan in Yalta."* Eighteen more students supported them.

*"We went to the building of the city administration holding posters to state that we support Ukraine's integration into Europe. The most provocative slogan, perhaps, was "Let's give Europe Ukrainian salo and nuts to Russia." For us, that was a joke, a sort of student in-crowd. It was fun to draw posters and demand accession to Europe... And the next day I was summoned to the university administration with shouts: "How could you do that! The rector is already in a hospital with a heart attack..."* Ruslan Nechyporuk recalls.

They scolded him, accused of sending two coaches of Crimean students to Maidan in Kyiv. Ruslan told the pro-rectors, who turned pale with indignation (or fear?): *"I would really like this to be true, but, unfortunately, I don't have such an opportunity!"*



Freedom, which Ruslan emitted, frightened many. So, after an accidentally slipped phrase in a student dorm: “It seems to me that our Lenin is standing for too long, while they have started falling across Ukraine<sup>67</sup>”, a tent with a guard from pensioners appeared near the monument next day. Ruslan shrugs his shoulders: was it a coincidence or had a system of denunciations had been already set in the dorm?

*“By the way, Lenin still stands there,”* Ruslan says.

... Troops were invading Crimea. Students planned to hold another action in support of Ukraine and against the occupation. Then “Almenda” was run by Olga Skrypnyk, she helped to organize the action.

<sup>67</sup> Toppling of monuments to Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin in Ukraine is a wave of dismantlement and damages to the monuments to Vladimir Lenin and other Soviet figures of the 20th century in Ukraine, which began during the EuroMaidan in Kyiv in 2013-2014. The first event, which was widely publicized, had been toppling of the monument to Lenin in Kyiv on December 8, 2013. The active phase of the demolition of monuments to Lenin in Ukraine occurred in the first days after the confrontations of February 18-21, 2014 and the escape of Viktor Yanukovich.

*“Dear residents of Yalta! Those, who want to support us, please come,”* the young people wrote in the invitation and published it in the media and social networks.

They were sure that twenty people at most would come, as usual. It was a genuine surprise when three hundred Yalta residents joined them.

*“It is Yalta, a small town. Such a number of people was simply unthinkable! Everyone held Ukrainian flags, sang the anthem of Ukraine... It was fantastic!”* Ruslan recalls. *“And then the “night wolves”, Putin’s bikers, appeared, clashes started... Many of the participants were beaten, someone broke a camera of a journalist of the Inter TV channel, whom I invited. I could not understand: how could it be? Then I finally realized that was not a joke. Incomprehensible and very scary things were taking place in Crimea.”*

I did not even plan to go to the so-called “referendum.” However, when I woke up on the morning of March 16 and saw an empty student dormitory (did everyone go to vote?), I ventured to go to one of the polling stations. That was a school, where he underwent his teacher’s internship.

*“I addressed the election commission members: “Colleagues, you know me. I have no documents with me. Please give me a ballot, I will vote.” And they gave me a ballot... I went to another station, and the same story happened. I took those two ballots to Kyiv, gave them to Olga Skrypyk... It’s sad to remember, but I saw long lines of people wanting to vote. The armed people were snooping around everywhere,”* Ruslan says.

On the night before the “referendum”, Olga Skrypyk announced that she was leaving Crimea. She promised to be in touch with everyone. She promised to find an opportunity to help anyone who would need help in Kyiv. After all, they had met at the meetings of the film discussion club for many years, learned to defend their civic stance and cultivate responsibility for their actions.

Olga invited Ruslan to go to Kyiv but Ruslan could not make up his mind and leave alone: *“I was a kind of mama’s son: I really had not gone away for a long time for my 18-19 years, I constantly consulted her. Should he leave? Where? What for? I don’t understand what was going on... But after March 16, everything changed in Yalta. Another flag was hoisted on the*

*embankment, people became different, we were even afraid to go alone, we were walking in groups, for the sake of safety.”*

Ruslan did not dare leave his native peninsula, but one day, upon his return from a trip to Kyiv, the self-defense members met him at Simferopol railway station and brought to the nearest police station. They asked him to show his passport. The guy noticed a pile of A4 sheets with long lists of names. His name was on one of those lists.

*“You are not recommended to stay in Crimea,”* the men said to Ruslan.

*“What do you mean? I live here, I have a Crimean registration...”* Ruslan was surprised.

*“We give you a few days. You must leave the territory of Crimea.”*

He was shocked so much that he didn't even ask why he must leave. He answered only: *“Is it a bad joke?”* However, the police and self-defense members were not joking.

Ruslan managed to pass his exams at the university and began to pack his suitcases.

*“I remember I called my mother and said: ‘Mom, I’m going to Kyiv, will be back in three days...’* Ruslan held his breath for a couple of seconds, and then he exhaled heavily and continued:

*“You know, when you leave Crimea there is a segment of narrow rail track with sea on both sides. I went to the viewing carriage when the train was moving through that sea corridor... I had a gut-churning feeling. I really cried because I did not know if I would return... and those three days have lasted for four years now.”*

When Ruslan moved to Kyiv, there was a boom of IDP certificate issuance there. He was sure that he would receive this document without any problems but he was denied as the term of registration ended when he had moved out of student dormitory. He did not lose courage and Olga Skrypnyk helped him to file a lawsuit against the social service.

It was a landmark case. There had already been many situations in Ukraine where people from the occupied territories were denied an IDP



certificate. For Ruslan, it was important not so much to win a lawsuit as to show that one can protect their rights in the court.

Ruslan won, the court even ruled to pay some monetary compensation to him, which he had not received for four years. When Ruslan came to the social service with a court ruling, he heard from its chief: *“So what? Couldn’t you come up and talk to me? Was it necessary to file a lawsuit?”*

*“For me, it is something incredible: to come, discuss, and settle a matter. What is it like? Everyone should perform their duties. I get UAH 400 every month according to this certificate. I cannot buy anything for that money but I appreciate not the money but the fact that*

*the state recognizes me as a person who was forced to leave home because of occupation,”* the activist explains.

For a year and a half, Ruslan’s master’s degree studies at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv completely preoccupied him. He tried to understand himself and was looking for his own way. After graduation, he lived and worked in the “Educational Human Rights House Chernihiv” organization for three summer months. Most of all he wanted to work at school with children. He felt that was his vocation.

*“I am a historian. I went to different schools uninvited and asked: “Hello, do you need history teachers?” And they all politely answered: “No, thank you.” One day, when I was tired and angry, I wrote the same tired and angry letter to the State Secretary of the Education and Science Ministry Pavlo Poliansky, asking “Why can’t I find a job?”* he continues.

After a while, he received a call. Ruslan was just returning by train from the “Origins of Tolerance” children’s camp, where he worked as a coach.

*“Good afternoon. I am the principal of school No. 130. We were asked to employ you,”* he heard on the phone.

God, what a blessing! He received that call on August 30, two days before the start of the school year, and the director insisted that he come that day. Ruslan left his belongings in a luggage room and ran to the school straight from the railway station with greasy hair, wearing shorts and sneakers.

*“I broke into a school. A staff council was held, and the director met me with the words: “Oh, are you that scandalous boy?”* Ruslan recalls.

As it turned out later, the Education Ministry addressed the school administration with an irritated request “employ him somehow.”

*“I was standing in the middle of the assembly hall, and fifty teachers aged 50-60 years old were watching me (wearing shorts and a T-shirt), viewing me as a history teacher in their school,”* Ruslan recalls and adds that the “scandalous boy” label stuck.



EuroMaidan in Yalta, *December 2013*



EuroMaidan in Yalta, *December 2013*

He has been holding the fort for four years already. He is the class teacher of the 8th grade, he teaches history, teaches students how to think. He just gives children his love. If he could, he would cover them with Crimean juniper to protect from all life problems.

Ruslan truly does not understand how is it possible not to love a teacher's job. He does not understand those who always complain about small salary, programs, children...

*"I really like the changes linked with the New Ukrainian School<sup>68</sup>. I like the fact that new subjects appear, such as "Civic Education." I call it "soft Ukrainisation." Indeed, during these classes, we discuss the issues that concern little Ukrainians so much: their identity, civic activism, responsibility. And I see they are interested in these issues,"* Ruslan says.

In one history class, he taught about a Crimean Tatar fortress. A couple of days later, Ruslan met his students on Maidan. They came there with parents to commemorate the victims of the deportation of Crimean Tatars.

*"They came there not because someone told them it was needed, they wanted to come. It is very inspiring!"* Ruslan says.

Ruslan is sure: 20-year teaching experience in school is not bad, but modern children need something completely different:

*"When I first apologized to the children and said that I didn't know the answer, but I would definitely find out – children were shocked. Is it possible that a teacher could not know something? Is it possible that a teacher could apologize? I argue a lot with my colleagues about teaching techniques, and I often hear disparaging remarks from them: "Did you learn that in Crimea?" At first, I even felt aggrieved, and then I began to answer with pride: "Yes, in Crimea, my teacher Valentyna Potapova taught me that. I may introduce you to her,"* Ruslan keeps silent for a while and continues:

<sup>68</sup> "New Ukrainian School" is a secondary school reform of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. It provides for the creation of a school, where children will get knowledge through the activities, and the main focus is placed on the development of competencies, rather than memorizing facts. The goal of the reform is to create a school in which "children will be glad to study," and which also "will grow up responsible, active and enterprising citizens." Since the 2018-2019 school year, all the first grades in Ukraine study according to these standards.



*“When a week of law started in all Ukrainian schools on December 10, I decided to talk with students about human rights. What clever children we have! They may not know the exact dates and facts, some kind of theory, but they know how to think, and it is very valuable! Ukraine has a great future.”*

Ruslan also cooperates with the Congress of National Communities. Each year, the Congress organizes a children’s camp “Origins of Tolerance”, where young representatives from different national communities come. He likes working in the camp as children of more than 100 nationalities from all over Ukraine meet here and resemble Ruslan’s native multinational Crimea.

Last year, twenty children from the occupied peninsula managed to come.

*“Their transfer was a real special operation! Representatives of the Defense Ministry, the Education Ministry, and other ministries were on the administrative border... This bracelet,”* Ruslan shows his hand with a

bracelet reading “I love Ukraine”. “I received from a boy, who was leaving the camp and told me: “*May I give it to you? I can’t come with it to Crimea.*”

“

*I see that Ukrainian children know a lot about Crimea, we openly discuss the annexation and I see that their understanding of the events on the peninsula in 2014 is very distorted. It is not their words when they talk about a large number of people who supported joining Russia. They voice the words of their parents, the opinions from the media and social networks... I hear these hackneyed phrases. My mission is to encourage them to interpret the information critically. In mainland Ukraine, I want to work not with those, who have already formed their world outlook, but with those who are just learning to live, who do not get tired of perceiving the world and making mistakes. Who as not nervous before discovering America?”*

# Not a Man in the Shadows

**Sergiy Zayets**

Sevastopol



## **PROFILE**

### **Sergiy Zayets**

**BEFORE.** Barrister, private law practice.

**AFTER.** Barrister, expert of the Regional Human Rights Center,

Expert of the educational program “Human Rights Standards in Practice of Barristers and Judges”.

Left Crimea in summer 2014.

**DREAMS** of having much more sea in his life.

“

*Initially, probably for more than two years after moving from Sevastopol, it seemed to me that the sea was looming on the horizon. On those days, when I could see the sea every day and many times a day, I didn't even realize how much I love it and that I might miss it so much. Now I try to use any opportunity to travel to the sea. Perhaps, it is the reason why I like Geneva. I was there in 2015. It's a beautiful city with a huge lake resembling the sea and with the embankment resembling Crimean Yalta...”*

Sergiy Zayets



Late in the evening from February 20 to February 21, 2014, lawyer Sergiy Zayets and his colleague Daria Svrydova flew from Kyiv to Simferopol. The arrival in Simferopol was delayed for more than an hour. The plane circled over the airport for a long time.

While waiting, Sergiy was gazing around. It was a huge plane, unusually large both for local airlines and this route. Another unusual thing is that the entire plane was crowded with politicians, members of the Party of Regions [former pro-Russia political party in Ukraine. The best known former party member is ex-president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich, who fled to Russia amidst EuroMaidan – *Translator’s Note*], natives of Crimea, who later betrayed Ukraine.

All those people supported the regime of Viktor Yanukovich. But why are they flying to Crimea now? Sergiy and Daria were joking sadly: are they guaranteed security in Crimea? Apparently, it was indeed so...

Apart from lawmakers, many women with children were aboard. Women wore luxurious clothes, jewelry. Yanukovich’s associates sent their children and wives away from Kyiv.

*“I think we were allowed to land only because of the lawmakers. As it turned out later, that was the last Kyiv- Simferopol flight, the air link was blocked afterwards,”* Sergiy says.

He and Daria ran into the group of lawmakers again at the airport: they were nervous and had a lively discussion. Their appearance triggered conflicting feelings. On the one hand, anxiety from understanding: something happens. On the other hand, the hope that EuroMaidan won, that Ukraine faces a change for the better...

Sergiy and Daria flew from the Second Regional Conference on Provision of Free Legal Aid, which was held in Veliky Novgorod by the program of the network of Human Rights Houses with barristers and human rights defenders from Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus who were among the conference participants.

Protection of human rights was a popular topic then. Sergiy Zayets recalls: *“In September 2012, I participated in a similar conference in Moscow. Compared to other countries like Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine seemed to be very democratic. Perhaps, Moldova was ahead of us. By September 2013, the situation had changed and Ukraine was already in the lead. The events in Maidan begin to unfold at a furious pace...”*

“Draconian laws” were adopted on January 16, 2014. There were mass shootings of people, fighting in Hrushevsky Street and Instytutska Street<sup>69</sup>... That reminded Sergiy of the events in other authoritarian CIS countries: human rights defender Ales Bialiatski<sup>70</sup> was brought to criminal responsibility in Belarus, Intigam Aliyev<sup>71</sup> and other human rights defenders were held liable in Azerbaijan. In Moscow, the participants in the

<sup>69</sup> The streets in Kyiv city center, where clashes between protesters and security forces took place during EuroMaidan.

<sup>70</sup> Ales Bialiatski is a Belarusian human rights defender, chairman of the Human Rights Center “Viasna”, former political prisoner, “prisoner of conscience.” He was brought to justice more than 20 times over active civic and human rights activities. On November 24, 2011, the Pervomaisky District Court of Minsk found him guilty of alleged tax evasion on an especially large scale and was sentenced to 4.5 years in prison and confiscation of property. He was amnestied and released on June 21, 2014, having spent 1,052 days in the prison.

<sup>71</sup> Intigam Aliyev is Azerbaijani lawyer, barrister, public figure, head of the Legal Education Society. He has filed more than 200 complaints to the European Court of Human Rights over falsification of election results, restriction of freedom of speech and violation of the right to a fair trial in Azerbaijan. In April 2015, he was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison. March 28, 2016, the real sentence was replaced with suspended one.

rally on Bolotnaya Square<sup>72</sup> were prosecuted, and any manifestations of freedom in Russia began to be strictly prevented.

*“In 2013, that happened here in Ukraine. It was hard to believe...”* the lawyer says.

Later, in June 2014, Sergiy Zayets participated in a working meeting on human rights with the representatives of the same countries in the Belarusian Human Rights House in Vilnius. By that time it was very difficult to communicate with the participants from the Russian Federation: they clearly steered away from Ukrainians. The most sincere supporters were Belarusians as if they once again lived through the events of their “Maidan”, which ended sadly for many of them. They saw that Ukraine had a chance and they were glad to support it.

Crimea was already shaking. Sergiy Zayets, as an international law expert, understood very well what occupation was. The lawyer did not hesitate. He packed his bags and prepared to leave the peninsula heavy-heartedly.

*“I have not received any direct threats, but it was only a matter of time. They were ousting everyone with pro-Ukrainian views... I did not wait for someone to take me on. I cannot explain, but that was in the air. For example, I received a message on Facebook saying that I and people like me should leave Crimea as quickly as possible. On closed Sevastopol forums, the ideas of violence against people with a pro-Ukrainian stance were seriously discussed,”* Sergiy says.

Sergiy Zayets was not in Sevastopol on the day of the so-called “referendum.” He and his wife were in Strasbourg, the capital of Alsace<sup>73</sup>, the annexation of which in 1940 became a key milestone at the beginning of

<sup>72</sup> On May 6, 2012, the rally called the “People’s March” or “March of Millions” was held on the Bolotnaya Square in Moscow in protest against the inauguration of Vladimir Putin. About 400 demonstrators were detained, the criminal cases were initiated against more than 30 people. The case is known as the largest criminal case against the participants in the protest movement in Russia in 2011-2013. It has been repeatedly criticized for various judicial and legal violations of the laws of the Russian Federation. The European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly ruled to award a number of defendants and convicts the compensation for violations of their rights during the investigation and court proceedings.

<sup>73</sup> After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, a significant part of the territory of Lorraine and almost entire Alsace were given to Germany. Pursuant to the Treaty of Versailles, France regained these lands in 1918. After the occupation of France in 1940, Alsace and Lorraine again came under German control. In 1944, they were occupied by the Allied forces, and after the war they were officially returned to France.



World War II. There they found out about the so-called “accession” of Crimea to the Russian Federation.

The barrister’s family made a principled decision to leave Crimea. While the children were finishing the school year, Sergiy stayed in Sevastopol: got his work done and listened to Crimea. It was such a chaotic polyphony: screams, drunken joy, deep despair, dull pain, heavy moan. Brave voices singing the anthem of Ukraine made their way through these thorny sounds. But at some point, Sergiy Zayets heard... silence. Deep, deafening silence.

*“Crimea fell silent. If there was excitement among Crimeans in spring and summer, all the conversations hushed up abruptly in September,”* Sergiy also fell silent after these words.

In October 2014, he visited Crimea for the last time.

Sergiy is not talkative, even aloof. He does not want to recall the events that happened five years ago. It’s as if he was being asked to wear a



jacket two sizes smaller: it's cramped and uncomfortable. He can't stand this. He loves freedom.

For me, lawyer Sergiy Zayets is someone who makes the justice system work. He uses all the mechanisms to protect a person in court methodically, persistently, carefully. And when it turns out to be not enough, he

applies to the European Court of Human Rights. Many of his cases relate to Crimea.

I met Sergiy in January 2015. Then he and the lawyers of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union filed a lawsuit against the National Bank of Ukraine. They convened a large press conference and stated that the resolution of the National Bank discriminated against the Crimean citizens of Ukraine, recognizing them as non-residents.

After the press conference, we went to the nearest café and continued to discuss that case with colleagues. I kept an eye on Sergiy in a dispute: he was undoubtedly overwhelmed by the situation on the peninsula and by the careless steps of the Ukrainian authorities. However, he was so decisive, active, enthusiastic, he was looking for legal solutions to change everything and to make a personal contribution to that.

Sergiy Zayets together with colleagues Daria Svyrydova and Anastasia Martynovska sent one of the first complaints to the European Court of Human Rights concerning the discrimination against the internally displaced persons and the deprivation them of an opportunity to participate in local elections. The court ruling in this case is fundamental for the plaintiffs.

*“For many Crimeans, who have left for mainland Ukraine, Crimean registration is the only way to maintain at least a symbolic connection with the Crimea and return home,” the lawyer explains. That is why it is important for them to keep “that” stamp in the passport, which becomes a reason for humiliating many Crimeans on the mainland.*

*“We love talking about inclusivity so often... but the involvement of Crimeans in the electoral process is not an inclusive decision. After all, an IDP, who did not have an opportunity to go to a polling station, did not vote. Thus, they had no impact on the situation in a city or a village they live in now. And they will have no impact again in four or five years. So, the candidates do not consider this group as part of their constituency, as voters whose interests must be taken into account. The IDPs needs are overlooked, their interests are not on the agenda either in local councils or at a national level. They simply do not exist,” the lawyer says.*

His personal pain is that Ukraine, after five years of war, still has no clear policy and systemic strategy for Crimea. As a result, the legal acts that apply to the occupied territories often do not take into account the actual circumstances, often even worsen the situation. That was the case with the resolution of the National Bank of Ukraine, which declared all Crimeans “non-residents” of Ukraine. Sergiy Zayets filed a lawsuit over that resolution with the European Court of Human Rights.

*“There is an opinion that the ECHR considers lawsuits for a long time. Believe me, it’s no longer than in the national courts,”* Sergiy Zayets says. He explains the Ukrainian courts rather give the impression that something is happening: appointment of court hearings, adjournment of hearings, filing complaints, etc. In the ECHR, after filing a complaint, nothing may happen for a long time, then the parties exchange written commentaries and, after a while, the court makes its decision. In general though, a case in the ECHR can often be considered faster than in the national courts.

Therefore, the lawyer arms himself with patience and convinces Crimeans, who are tired of endless court sessions and do not see any result, to go the whole way. After all, they have already done much – what do they have to lose? The findings of the European Court of Human Rights may spur the authorities to review their decisions or may be a deterrent. This concerns, first of all, Russia, although in some cases it is necessary to spur Ukraine into action. Unfortunately, our officials also do not leave us without work, the lawyer complains.

Sergiy has in general though, a case in the ECHR can often be considered faster than in the national courts. participating actively in the educational programs on human rights over the past five years.

*“I am convinced that, primarily, we need to create a powerful impetus for values. Yes, many can say without a pause that human rights are universal and inalienable... but these are decorative words that require very practical explanations. Most of our students only start to realize in the middle of the course that violations of human rights are an interaction between a person and the state and that by no means can all crimes can be considered from this perspective,”* Sergiy says.



At the press conference on recognition of Crimeans as non-residents by the National Bank of Ukraine. Roman Martynovsky, Darya Svrydova, Serhiy Zayets. Kyiv, September 2015



Serhiy Zayets, Mustafa Dzhemilev, Nils Muižnieks, Olha Skrypnik and Georgii Logvynskiy at the side-event on Crimea at the Council of Europe. Strasbourg, March 2017

His personal goal is to teach lawyers how to defend human rights, using all the available mechanisms at the national level. And as a result, to make these mechanisms work not only under the pressure of Strasbourg.

In addition, he aims to teach Ukrainian judges to read the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights correctly. According to him, the training of judges in the practice of the European Court of Human Rights very often consists in dictating a kind of “Quotations from Mao Zedong “ to them. In other words, “if there is such a situation, then you take for your decision such a phrase from such a judgment.” It is the way that the national courts are guided in most cases.

However, the usage of quotations, often in a completely inappropriate way that changes from one judgment to another, often distorts the meaning of what the European Court said. However, it is important for the judges to understand why the ECHR solved a particular case in a particular way and to be able to act in accordance with the spirit and the principles of the Convention on Human Rights, rather than with quotations taken out of context.

*“We joke about the fact that many lawyers and barristers come to us to learn to write complaints to the ECHR and we teach them that we need to work at the national level,” Sergiy Zayets says. “In fact, almost every case requires very extensive and thorough work at the local level before filing a complaint to the European Court. Our knowledge does not make the life of those who want to use it easier. On the contrary, work has to be done more and more carefully.”*

The activity of Sergiy Zayets is not public so his surname cannot be found under many changes in the country. He manages to achieve a lot, so one may call him a man in the shadows. That would be wrong though, there is no meanness or underhandedness in his actions. On the contrary, Sergiy, despite his chronic fatigue, emits so much kindness it will suffice for more than one Crimea.

“

*The amount of work that came upon me after moving to Kyiv weaned me away from perfectionism very quickly. As perfection has no limits, gradually I had to learn to apply the principle “better once on time than twice correct.” Of course, it is important to understand what cases require thoroughness and when excessive diligence leads to inappropriate wasting of resources.*

*In most cases, I am guided by the principle of Rikki-Tikki-Tavi: do not unclench your teeth until the viper is dead. This helps to bring many things to a logical end, as a rule to victory, and not to lose optimism. For me, the European Court of Human Rights is like the light at the end of the tunnel. I have seen many rather successful lawyers break after they had reached the ceiling. They simply did not know what to do after they had used all the possible methods of struggle within the country. And I know!”*

# Script Writer

Daria Svyrydova

Yalta



## PROFILE

### Daria Svyrydova

**BEFORE.** Private law practice. Participant of the Center for Civic Education “Almenda” cooperation with the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union.

**AFTER.** Lawyer and coordinator of educational programs for lawyers in the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union. Left Crimea in April 2014.

**DREAMS** of getting enough sleep to the sound of the sea in Ukrainian Yalta.

“

*Unfortunately, today we observe a sort of inflation, depreciation of human rights. Sometimes they are talked about on every street corner but few understand what their value is... Much work needs to be done by the Ukrainian legal community so that human rights values become a source of inspiration and activity.*”

Daria Svyrydova

...Red carpet, paparazzi, floor-length satin dress and glint in the eyes... No, it's not about Daria Svrydova. It is worth saying that she would certainly be an ornament at an Oscars ceremony and deserves the highest praise. However, now it is more important for this decisive girl to find ways to protect human rights and return her native Crimea. She cannot imagine her life without her native peninsula. Over the past five years, she has been living in two parallel worlds: in Yalta and in Kyiv.

*"When I travel from Simferopol to Yalta and see Alushta, then Partenit, then Gurzuf along the way, I am overwhelmed with an anxious feeling: I'm already at home. I really know every turn, I know where the mountains are, where the rocks are, where the sea is about to burst upon my view..."*

*I have never understood people who said: "You live in Crimea and do not appreciate it!" I do not know how people could live in Crimea and not love it. I have been to all its corners and I would travel along these routes again,"* Daria says.

Daria is extremely quiet when she has to talk about herself. She is meticulous about her private space as if every phrase or disrespectful look make her suffer physical pain. One can only try to imagine what she was experiencing when invaders brutally broke into her house, tore her connection with her relatives and then roughly thrust her out into the unknown.

*"I do not remember whether I was sleeping that month. I saw myself in the mirror and understood I looked terrible... The month of occupation became a never-ending terrible nightmare for me. Sometimes, I was so busy that I did not sleep for two or three days. When you do not sleep for a long time you start to feel you are living in an aquarium: you observe what's happening through the glass distantly, as if it had nothing in common with you,"* Daria cautiously let me in her world.

Her office was located near the embankment, not far from the health resort "Yalta." Until that day, Daria did not bother with the fact that the health resort belonged to the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Ministry of Defense. One day, she saw several military vehicles driving in there. Then a lot of servicemen came out. She understood that they were strangers. Later they would be called "little green men."



Daria and other activists wrote letters to the Security Service of Ukraine, the then acting president of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov, other authorities and asked for help.

*“Now I understand that was a ridiculous thing to do. The letters were most likely going to fall into the hands of the wrong people. Perhaps, they did not contribute to the occupation, but they certainly were sympathetic toward it,”* Daria says.

In the first month of the occupation, she and her colleagues collected evidence of the violations of international law and helped the Ukrainian military units. Every day, they were surprised and glad, meeting more and more people who defended and were ready to defend Ukrainian Crimea.

Very quickly, Daria Svrydova started to receive hints that she was in danger if she did not stop “screwing around.” Those words still make her shiver: *“It feels like a burn. You touch something hot and you want to pull your hand back.”*

It wasn't only her, many people showed at least some activity, received such warnings. Many of her colleagues and friends left immediately after the "referendum." After a little while, Daria also left the peninsula.

...Ten years ago everything was completely different. In her student days, Daria worked as an assistant barrister and later took up her own law practice. Daria smiles, saying she got interested in human rights solely from selfish motives: *"I have always had ideas about some kind of ideal world in which I want to live. In my view, genuine human rights work is for sake of the values of human rights and other people but I started to do that for the my own sake. For the sake of the world I have painted, where every person can be the one they want to be, where human dignity, respect, and tolerance for another person are not just fancy words but the ideas and values sincerely shared by the majority. I feel very comfortable in such world and I understood that I could do something to make my fantasy world become a reality."*

The young lawyer attended workshops on civic activism, human rights, completed the all-Ukrainian educational program "Understanding Human Rights." However, when she shared her enthusiasm with colleagues, they just gave her a dismissive smile.

*"Then human rights were a kind of marginal movement. Few took them seriously but I persistently kept talking about human dignity, equality..."* she recalls.

Daria wanted to launch educational programs for lawyers, where they could simply and easily talk about human rights. Precisely, about values and standards not just about the letter of the law.

Daria was convinced: the main engine of progress is education, which changes people from within, and then these people can already change the world around: *"Education gives people freedom: freedom of thought, freedom in knowledge, it expands boundaries, removes the 'glass ceiling'", primarily, in our mind."*

Her ideas were supported by Sergiy Burov from the NGO "Mart", coordinator of the "Understanding Human Rights" program. Soon, together with the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, they began to conduct remote courses for barristers in cooperation with the Human Rights



House Foundation. The first program “International Law in Advocacy (ILIA)” (2011-2013) covered 100 lawyers from 5 countries including 25 Ukrainian lawyers. The program was a great success.

Daria was preparing to launch a second course when the EuroMaidan began. Then Crimea was occupied shortly afterwards.

Having recovered composure, Daria and her team still launched an educational course for barristers. They chose Crimea and Donbas as one of their key focuses (the armed hostilities were unfolding there). Teaching human rights standards, international humanitarian law, and revealing the peculiarities of protecting human rights in the armed conflict. The organizers and participants on the course together searched for support in protection of human rights.

*“We had cool guys from Donetsk and Luhansk on our course, some people came from occupied Crimea. Each of them has their own experience, their own plans in the profession, but all of them are united by the idea of human rights. Perhaps, at some point, they became unfortunate outcasts in their environment but they acquired a community of like-minded people in our course,”* Daria says.

In 2017, the national course “Human Rights Standards in Practice of Lawyers and Judges” was launched. Daria was especially impressed by the genuine interest and high motivation of the judges as they also wanted to work with the international documents and rely on the values of human rights in their rulings. The course participants have repeatedly noticed that the demonization of judges in Ukraine hampered their activity in many ways.

*“A recent graduate, and now one of the experts of our course, judge Pavlo Parkhomenko became the winner of the ‘Honor of the Year’ award, which was decided by a survey conducted by 24 TV channel with the participation of the DEJURE Foundation. It was for distinguished judges who have had a positive impact on judicial practice. Although, of course, everyone should do their work with honor, it is important to show a good example of genuine advocacy and judicial system.*

*Not many people have completed our educational course, up to forty participants a year but each of them is an agent of change in their communities,”* Daria says proudly.

Belief in universal human values helps Daria find the strength to fight but when she was nominated for the National Human Rights Award<sup>74</sup> she was sincerely surprised as, in her opinion, not only she deserves this award.

*“I know people who do not sleep for days. Perhaps their work is not visible. If you think about it, lawyers are not public people: we prepare documents, provide legal assistance, make analysis... and most of this work is done behind closed doors.*

*However, this is gigantic work for Crimea, which is done not by a large number of people, will definitely change the practice of the international*

<sup>74</sup> The National Human Rights Award was founded in 2016 by the Human Rights Agenda Platform. It is awarded for personal contribution to the protection of human rights in Ukraine.

*courts. This means that we, probably, will prevent the war crimes in the future,” Daria weighs each word before saying it. So much valuable time was already lost in breezy conversation or ... silence.*

*“Let’s be honest: Crimea is not the first to suffer from the aggression of the Russian Federation. After all, there were conflicts in Moldova and Georgia before... Each of these countries became a victim of the Russian Federation and I cannot say that Ukraine stood in solidarity with the victims or took sufficient actions in defense of international law.*

*Maybe... the situation with Crimea and Donbas is a hard lesson for our infantile behavior.*

*Perhaps, if at some point the countries had united and promoted the work of the international law mechanisms, we would have had very tough sanctions and the rulings of international courts on Russia by 2014. Then those people, who committed crimes, would get enough rebuff and punishment. Perhaps, the fact there was no tribunal for the crimes of the Soviet Union and no tribunal over Putin’s regime for unleashing several wars, is the reason for the continuation of the conflicts.*

*I believe that those responsible for human rights violations and war crimes must be held accountable. It’s not a thirst for revenge, it’s an inevitability of punishment.*

*If we realize that the rules do not work and the criminals are not punished then the world must honestly admit it and negotiate, look for effective mechanisms for the protection of victims.*

*My colleagues and I put a lot of difficult questions before the international courts. No less importantly, we also make the national authorities to assume responsibility and address the consequences of the conflict. It would be naive to believe that a kind of “The Hague” will settle everything for us. Of course, I hope that the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court will conduct an official investigation into the war crimes committed during the armed conflict in Ukraine. Above all though, it is the responsibility of the Ukrainian state to document the facts of human rights violations, investigate them, bring them to the courts. And the most important thing is to think about how to live tomorrow, overcoming the consequences of the war.”*



Daria Svrydova and her colleagues have already filed dozens of lawsuits with the European Court of Human Rights over enforced disappearances, torture, unlawful imprisonment of Crimeans after occupation as well as for interference with freedom of expression, arrests and fines for participating in peaceful protests. To Daria, none of these cases are simply just about the violation of European Convention articles, these are the fates of brave people who continue to struggle there, in the occupation.

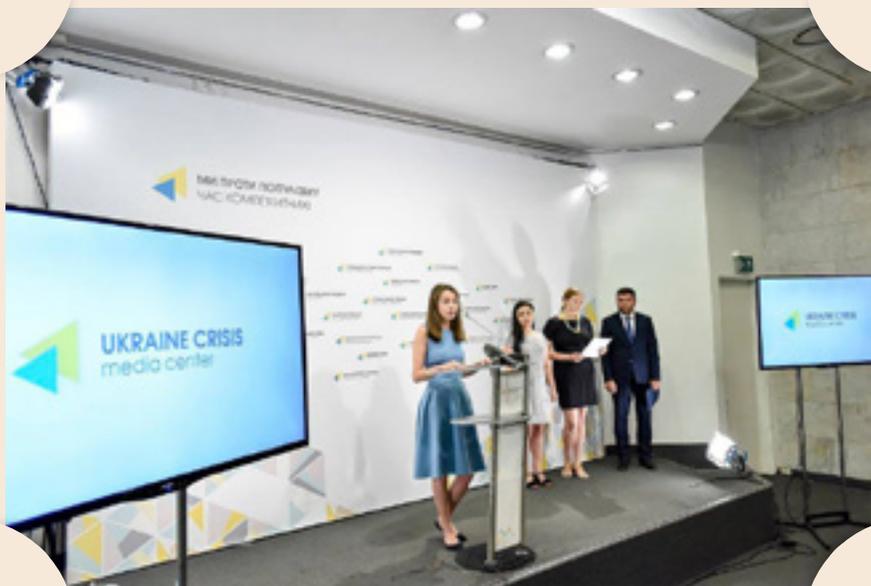
Daria spoke and I saw her standing in the spotlight on the stage again, excited and beautiful, and the huge audience sitting motionless lis-



On the air of Crimea.Realities special project of Radio Liberty



Human rights training course for barristers, May 2019



Press conference in support of Volodymyr Balukh. Kyiv, 2017



With colleagues before presentation of the Crimean Trial report, 2018

tening to her. She has no falseness. She is demanding with her colleagues, intolerant of the mistakes of her state but, first of all, she is ruthless with herself and won't allow herself to feel sorry for herself for a single minute.

Daria notes that slogans about Russian aggression will once again be used in the election campaign in Ukraine and politicians will start using Crimea in their promo. However, there are some specific issues that can be solved right now.

Why does the National Bank of Ukraine still consider Crimeans as non-residents? Why can't internally displaced persons vote in local elections? When will Ukraine settle the issue of protection of the property rights of people when entering and leaving Crimea or the issue of documentation of people from the occupied territories? When will the law on the protection of persons prosecuted for political reasons in the occupied territories and in the Russian Federation be adopted? When will the Ukrainian authorities stop submitting the personal data of the Crimean people to the Russian Federation to find out whether they receive pensions there? Why does a presumption of guilt of Crimeans exist?

Probably, if Daria really stood on the stage with an Oscar in her hands awarded for the best script of a film on human rights, she would say: *"My ideal world, where everyone feels comfortable, is no longer just a script."*

“

*Recently, I have been imagining a typical film frame. One person has almost fallen into the abyss and another person grabs out to seize the first one by the arm, trying to hold them. Both people are dear to each other. The camera freezes. Dramatic moment ... the one who is holding on thinks: “I cannot let you go, I will suffer all my life, you are a part of me... But I don’t have enough strength to hold you.”*

*Yet the person hanging over the abyss thinks: “Oh dear, let me go – it’s so difficult for you to hold me! Let it be this way.”*

*This “frame” reminds me of Ukraine and Crimea. You should decide: either “let it go”, it means a complete blockade of Crimea (although it is absolutely unacceptable for me!), or make efforts and pull it out of the abyss – take a step towards Crimea.*

*I am not even talking about the restoration of control over the territory. I understand that it is a long, complicated geopolitical process. Now, first of all, I’m talking about the people who stay there. It is important for the state to return Crimea and Crimeans to its agenda not in words but in deeds. To tell the residents of Crimea: “We stand with you, you are our citizens, we do not use you for our political struggle when it is convenient for us. We really worry about you and do everything possible...”*”

# Uncle Roman

Roman Martynovsky

Sevastopol



## PROFILE

### Roman Martynovsky

**BEFORE.** Private law practice, public activity in the organization “Regional Center for Human Rights”, aimed at provision of free legal aid

**AFTER.** Barrister, expert of the Regional Center for Human Rights, activity aimed at protection of internally displaced persons and documentation of war crimes in Crimea.

Left Crimea in March 2014.

**DREAMS** of a world without wars and lies, where human rights will be a solid foundation for the relations between a state and a person.

“

*I ranged over the whole Crimea by car and on foot, I climbed the mountains... I showed my friends my personal, completely different Sevastopol. A different Crimea, unusual for an ordinary tourist. I know a place in Sevastopol, where capers grow. Very few people know about this place but I know it because my godfather and I picked them. He then marinated those capers. They are delicious!*

*Can you indicate a place in Sevastopol which was hit by the German mortars before the official start of the war of 1941-1945? You will be extremely lucky to find a person on the streets of Sevastopol who takes you to this place. The Germans began to bombard the city even before 4:00 am on June 22. They were bombarding the Sevastopol Bay to block the passage for warships. Two of them hit the land, one hit a residential building in the city center, killing 21 people. Those were the first victims of the terrible and cruel war... When I learned about it, my first desire was to find that place and bring flowers... ”*

*Roman Martynovsky*

“What do you have here?” asked a Ukrainian border guard on the administrative border with Crimea, when Roman Martynovsky drove up to the control line.

The Crimean resident felt relief that he was not stopped with his belongings on the “other” side. He opened a trunk, began to show his things.

“What is it?” the border guard asked, catching sight of a small sofa.

“A sofa,” Roman replied, slightly puzzled.

“Do you know you are not allowed to transport it?”

Roman smiled condescendingly. Again? He – a lawyer with many years of experience, a man who is trying to stir up the Ukrainian state to make decisions that are adequate in terms of protecting human rights, a lawyer who forces national courts to work – again faces these discriminatory rulings that are made against displaced persons from Crimea.



Each time, he has to again prove their absurdity. How can he explain to this border guard that he needs to equip a human rights office in Kyiv at his own expense? How can he explain to him that a sofa is not a strategic raw material and that it won't harm Ukraine's defense or economic power?

An appeal against the infamous Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 10351<sup>75</sup>, which established a list of items that can be transported from Crimea, was already filed to the court of appeal. However, a sofa was a forbidden item so far, like many other things of sentimental value to the Crimean people who were leaving the peninsula.

*"How can I explain to this border guard why I bring the sofa from my Sevastopol office to Kyiv? It doesn't cost much but it has sentimental*

<sup>75</sup> After Crimea had been occupied by Russia, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law "On Creation of Free Economic Zone "Crimea" and on Peculiarities of Economic Activity in Temporarily Occupied Territory of Ukraine", which entered into force on September 27, 2014. The law empowered the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to temporarily limit the transportation of certain goods (works, services). Exercising these powers, the Government adopted the Resolution No. 1035, thereby significantly limiting the list of personal belongings that Crimeans had the right to transport them from the occupied peninsula. It was not allowed to transport personal belongings from the temporarily occupied territory except for 23 provisions provided for by Article 370 of the Customs Code of Ukraine.

value. *The chair you are sitting on is also from Sevastopol,*” Roman Martynovsky says in a trembling voice, pointing to ordinary furniture.

He brought almost the entire office to Kyiv. His wife was angry at him, wondering why he collected the office furniture when the things from the apartment should also be transported. However, Roman brought everything he needed for work to Kyiv and made his wife responsible for everything needed for family life.

*“I have always considered myself a conservative person for whom it’s difficult to change something in life. I have been very much confined to things. I like to re-read the same book 5-6 times. By the way, I also brought part of my library to Kyiv from Crimea... I have not disposed of a single barrister’s document since March 1993. It seemed to me that I am strongly confined to my house in Orlovka on the seashore, to my apartment, to my native places,”* Roman says.

After a moment of silence, he continued: *“Maybe it’s good that I had to change everything so drastically. I found out that I can do without many things. Especially after our first office in Kyiv was flooded, and all my photos, my entire archive which I had brought from Sevastopol with much effort, floated away during this flood... In fact, everything fell into disrepair. I realized that was the last thing that connected me to the past. Of course, I have recollections from Sevastopol life but I try not to focus on them.”*

How it is possible to explain to a border guard that he is a displaced person, that he leaves everything of value to him? How it is possible to explain that those things that fit in a small trunk, in fact, are the only part of Crimea which he can take to a new life?

The chief border guard approached him and, referring to the notorious Resolution No. 1035, said conciliatory: *“I see you have a lot of jackets there. Go back to your car, cover this sofa with jackets so that it cannot be seen. I will come up to your car once again, look at it, and you will move on.”*

*“So who needs these restrictions?”* Roman asks. His work at the Regional Center for Human Rights is aimed precisely at removing unnec-

essary barriers between Ukrainians on both sides of the administrative border of Crimea, no matter who builds them.

The human rights defender says that the Ukrainian authorities are very inconsistent and take a lot of measures, which are aimed not at maintaining contact with those living under the occupation but at creating additional and unjustified obstacles.

*“Ukraine breaks relations between people as it closes the transport connection. It is wrong and unreasonable not to let a car with Crimean number plates to enter Ukraine. Nothing bad will happen if people, including our colleagues, come to Kyiv by car with number plates of occupying power, settle their matters and return to Simferopol. But they will have a simplified connection with Ukraine. There are a lot of people such as this who are ready to go, even just for shopping in the Kherson region on a Saturday. However, due to the prohibition of entry to Ukrainian citizens by cars with Crimean occupation number plates, crossing the administrative border became impossible,”* the lawyer notes and continues:

*“There are no Ukrainian communication channels, information about Ukraine comes only via the Internet, though many web portals and news sites are blocked. Accordingly, people focus on what happens only there. This practice harms Ukrainians in Crimea very much. My mother stayed to live on the peninsula because the father was buried there. Fortunately, she often comes to visit me but if my mother stays in Crimea longer than half a year, I notice that she becomes a different person. The ability to adequately assess the reality returns to her after a week of stay in mainland Ukraine. Now imagine all those people who have never left Crimea during the occupation?”*

*Uncertainty and intimidation of people also breaks ties. A man worked at a fire station when Russia came to Crimea continues to work as a firefighter. So is he a traitor? Can he be tried for that? For the fact that he continues to put out fires? So he no longer travels to the mainland, being afraid he would be detained as a traitor.*

Provide our people here with the possibilities, which the occupation authorities cannot give them, and you will see the positive dynamics of change in the attitudes towards Ukraine. You should agree that



when the visa-free regime<sup>76</sup> with Europe was introduced, Crimeans recalled they have Ukrainian citizenship and started to go to the mainland to get a biometric passport. No matter how much you like Russia, the visa-free regime is a very pleasant thing, which reminds you that Crimea is Ukraine. Conversely, the careless statement of our president about the need to see which Crimeans can be issued with a biometric passport and which cannot immediately had a negative impact on the mood of our compatriots. The flow of people, who went to get Ukrainian passports, decreased. Many of those, who did not go, wondered again: are we a different class, are not we entitled to have this document?"

Roman Martynovsky left Crimea on March 30, 2014. Being in opposition to the regime of Viktor Yanukovich and defending the values of human rights in Sevastopol, he realized in the first days of March that he would not stay long on the peninsula.

<sup>76</sup> Visa-free travel regime between Ukraine and the European Union. On June 11, 2017, the citizens of Ukraine received the right to travel the Schengen area countries with a biometric passport only.

For many of his colleagues and friends in Sevastopol, Roman's decision was unexpected. After all, it seemed that Roman had every reason to be offended when, in 2013, the High Qualification Disciplinary Commission of the Bar suspended his barrister status for 6 months. The lawyer believed that the current leadership of the National Bar Association of Ukraine had been elected in violation of the law on the Bar and was, therefore, illegitimate.

*"As a member of the commission from Sevastopol, I was an outsider for the new leadership of the High Qualification Disciplinary Commission of the Bar and the National Bar Association of Ukraine – people from business and from government who came to the Bar but remained as businessmen and functionaries and did not become barristers,"* Roman comments on the reasons why people tried to expell him from the Bar.

Roman Martynovsky lost his barrister status as well as a source of income and clients for more than half a year and shortly afterwards the National Bar Association of Ukraine imposed a five-year ban on taking any positions in the law enforcement bodies for persons who were subject to disciplinary action.

Almost six years on, the judicial authorities have not put an end to the attorney's dispute over his right to tell the truth.

In order to get away from these surging problems, Roman submitted an application to the Council of Europe to participate in a law course focused on anti-discrimination standards. The training sessions were held in Kyiv. EuroMaidan has already begun so, after the lectures, he and his colleagues went to support the activists.

*"Since I had the image of a man who was unsatisfied with the Yanukovich regime, everyone asked me when I returned home to Sevastopol: "What is happening there on Maidan? How are your friends?" Some asked that question sincerely, some were mocking. I went to the Maidan protests because there was hope, there was a chance to change life for the better. We believed that we could, we must change,"* Roman says.

Roman was sincerely glad that the whole family supported him in his intention to leave Sevastopol and move to the capital but how difficult it was at first! On the one hand, everyone in Kyiv said: It's great that

you've made this decision, found the strength to give up everything and start anew. On the other hand, he had no housing, no work... He had nothing but relatives, friends and hope that he would make it. Today, he with appreciation recalls his friends, who offered him their apartment in the center of the city to live in free of charge and then helped him to rent an office.

Back in July 2013, Roman and like-minded colleagues registered a non-governmental organization aiming to help people who cannot afford to pay for legal aid. When the occupation started, almost all of them moved to mainland Ukraine. Sergiy Zayets, also a resident of Sevastopol, joined them a bit later.

*"We all think the same way, we perceive the events taking place there through the prism of the same Crimean experience,"* Roman says about his colleagues.

The experts at the Regional Center for Human Rights decided to help their companions in distress: the internally displaced persons. First of all, they were interested in the issues related to freedom of movement. Already in the first months of the occupation, it was clear that the Ukrainian authorities were doing many things thoughtlessly, breaking ties with the peninsula and its residents. The cases of discrimination against the internally displaced persons have always come in view of lawyers. If it was not possible to find a solution to the problem in Ukraine, they sought legal redress in the European Court of Human Rights.

One of the cases is especially memorable for Roman. The Ukrainian courts delivered different judgments in identical lawsuits of two plaintiffs from one family of displaced persons. A husband and a wife quit the same Crimean enterprise, where they received a decent salary. Pursuant to the law, they could rely on monthly unemployment assistance worth about UAH 5,000. They decided that the family income in the amount of UAH 10,000 for four people (two children) would help them to settle down in Kherson at first and then find a job. So they moved to the mainland.

However, the Employment Center staff told them they could not count on receiving immediate assistance but their employment record books

indicated they had left voluntarily. They were offered registration but the payment of assistance could be started only in 90 days. The couple asked the Regional Center for Human Rights for help.

*“What did a new, occupying administration need to write in their employment record books: “left voluntarily due to the occupation of Crimea”? Don’t the representatives of the Employment Service know that at that time the word “occupation” in Crimea could become a reason for the investigation of a criminal case?”* Roman comments.

Things went from bad to worse. It turned out that the couple would receive the smallest unemployment assistance of about UAH 900. The reason is that they could not confirm whether the company paid obligatory social contributions during the last months or not.

*“How could they pay? First, Russia had already invaded. Second, Ukraine closed all treasury accounts in Crimea at the end of February. We tried to convince the Ukrainian authorities that the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers, which regulated those issues, must make exceptions for people who turned out to be in the occupied territory against their will. This did not make them guilty... One solution would be that the last 6 months during which the company paid the contributions could be taken as a basis for calculating an average salary but people must not be left alone with problems they did not create!”* Roman is outraged.

“We helped to file a lawsuit and the husband lost the case. We went further and filed appeals to the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Administrative Court. A little bit later, his wife went to court with a similar suit and eventually won the case in the court of first instance. However, the Supreme Administrative Court left the decision on the husband unchanged. The husband appealed to the European Court of Human Rights, but it did not recognize his complaint appropriate.

*“The European Court of Human Rights is not a panacea for Ukraine. We need to understand this. I am deeply convinced that the Convention should work primarily here in Ukraine, in the national courts. Filing appeals to the ECHR should be an exception to the rule. Yet we do it the other way around: we defend the rights in the European Court and we are happy! Furthermore, some of my colleagues initially intend to define*



At work. Kyiv, October 2014



Roman Martynovsky with his colleagues Oleksandr Pavlychenko and Liana Moroz. Kyiv, May 2018

*a mistake in the decision of the national courts in order to later prove their “professionalism” in the court in Strasbourg...” the lawyer sneers.*

...We talked for over an hour. Roman spoke sometimes fragmentarily but with such love about everything: his hometown, colleagues, grandchildren, even about unfamiliar people, who seek their help almost every day. He emitted such energy of tranquility and home comfort, as if we were talking not about the Crimean tragedy but sitting in a cottage house on a warm August evening in the country, eating marinated capers following a godfather’s recipe and smiling at Uncle Roman’s stories.

*“When I moved to Kyiv, I did not find a job here and went to Bulgaria to make a living. My friend was setting up his business – opening a children’s camp – and he needed a lawyer. I agreed. I liked that. Although I was doing everything: carried furniture, brought food, accompanied the children, even brought up children.” Uncle Roman smiled slyly. “In the end, I was making coffee at the bar. Later we restored and brushed up a restaurant...”*

I could listen to his stories for hours on end. Roman Martynovsky skillfully disguised his longing for Crimea, sometimes he joked at what was lost, but he always became serious when it came to the issue of punishment for war crimes in Crimea:

*“The first feeling was that all that happened to Crimea had been a gross violation of the norms of international humanitarian law. It is impossible to accept it, it is impossible to understand how one can commit a crime in plain view of the whole mankind in such an open, brazen and impudent manner. So what? Will that go unpunished?”*

*Already in Kyiv, I tried to gather all those sensitive on the fate of Crimea in a kind of coordination center. The point was to apportion all of the areas of activity: someone to provide services to displaced persons, someone to monitor the situation in Crimea, someone to provide legal assistance, someone to collect evidence of war crimes, someone to help to improve the legislation. However, at some point, I realized that it would be difficult to reach an agreement. Perhaps, this idea will be implemented in the near future.*



*But at the moment the activities of many NGOs and charitable funds overlap, often duplicate. Hence, we observe the inefficient use of already scarce resources: lack in one area and excess in the other.*

*But I can not leave everything without even trying to fight. My education at a military institute in Moscow in the 1980s (they wanted to make me loyal to the imperial ideology but did not succeed as my strong sense of justice took over), legal practice experience, almost 15 years of work in the field of human rights protection in the European Court of Human Rights, completion of the Council of Europe's educational course on countering discrimination. All this gives me strength to seek justice."*

“

*I often remember my grandmother Ania: I loved her very much. In May 1941, she was expelled to the Omsk region, and her sisters were sent to Komi, to different labour camps. Grandmother's parents were sent to the Kemerovo region. They tore and scattered the whole family ...*

*Grandmother told me scary things about how she survived with two small children; my father was a year old then. She made a dugout in the forest to live in because they were not allowed to live in the village. She and her friend, two women who had two small children each, lived in that dugout in winter. She recalled how the wolves howled on cold winter nights... Her husband, who fought for the independence of Ukraine, was killed by the Germans in 1943 but she did not believe and until her last day she listened to the rustle outside the door, hoping for his return...*

*Later, my grandmother was awarded some medals, certificates of honor, her new fellow villagers respected her.*

*After Gorbachev, when people could ask questions, I said: “Grandma, I can't understand how you haven't become embittered? You have awards and medals. How could you work on that power? It deprived you of everything! You were a prosperous family in Ternopil region, you had everything, you lived a big, friendly family...”*

*Although she had lived in Siberia for 34 years, she often started to speak Ukrainian when answering me: “Boy, those were such times. Completely incomprehensible times.” She gave me such a look! She always told me that bitterness gives rise to more bitterness in return. It's not a means to achieve anything. You always need to be human.*

*Probably, when the grandchildren will ask me in 20-30 years, how it was possible to survive the misfortunes that fell on us from Russia, to withstand the unreasonable policy that Ukraine pursued towards its citizens from the occupied territories, I will also answer: “Those were such times. Completely incomprehensible times.” Or maybe I will tell them something else... But I know for sure that we must not become embittered.”*”

# Cobweb

---

**Olga Anoshkina**

Simferopol



**PROFILE**

**Olga Anoshkina**

**BEFORE.** Student union “Student Action”, consultant in the Legal Aid Network of Crimea.

**AFTER.** Lawyer in the Charity Foundation “East-SOS”. takes part in analysis and advocacy of “East-SOS”.

Left Crimea in March 2014.

**DREAMS** of learning more. Olga would like to be more successful in analyzing the policies implemented by the state.

“

*Recently I have read an article written by my friend about the Boiler Room party in Kyiv. She wrote about the music performed by a musician from Yalta, Dima Vulfius. It was music about Crimea, about the blue and turquoise depths of the Black Sea, about the gray stones of the Crimean mountains braided with the curved trunks of the juniper, about the rich green crowns of the Crimean pine trees...*

*And about the sunlit slopes.*

*Indeed, Crimea is the sunniest place in Ukraine. When it was taken away, it seemed like the sun was overshadowed. I'm talking not only about nature.*

*Everything changed after Crimea was gone – Ukraine plunged into war.”*

*Olga Anoshkina*

*“At the end of the winter of 2013, we organized a screening of the film Pussy Riot<sup>77</sup>. Three members of the group were indicted for hooliganism for the video showing them dancing in church and sentenced to two years in a penal colony. We were very touched by this event and, although that was a Russian case and concerned the Russian context, we stood in solidarity with the activists and decided to conduct our film action. It happened just before the annexation.*

*During the movie performance, unknown people broke in. We were attacked, smoke bombs were thrown into a room, several people were beaten... We thought that a Ukrainian far-right group had attacked us but then we saw that they were completely different people,”* Olga Anoshkina begins her story.

*...Olga is gentle, airy, and transparent like a cobweb. It seems that it's enough to blow slightly and she will rise to the sun, holding on to an in-*

<sup>77</sup> Russian feminist punk rock band. After the political rally, during which the video “Mother of God, Put Putin Away!” was filmed in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alekhina and later Ekaterina Samutsevich were arrested. All the arrested were indicted for hooliganism on the grounds of religious hatred and sentenced to two years in prison in a standard regime penal colony. The human rights organization Amnesty International recognized those arrested as prisoners of conscience.



visible umbrella. But this fragility hides an acute sensitivity to the violation of human rights. They say that the strongest silk is made from cobwebs. Knowing Olga, you agree to that without dispute.

Before the annexation of Crimea, the girl worked as a consultant in the Sevastopol office of the Legal Aid Network of Crimea and in the “Action” human rights center where she dealt with the issues related to access to public information. She monitored the work of the police and accessibility of courts, in particular for people with disabilities.

She devoted a lot of time to the cultural projects in the Independent Student Union “Student Action”<sup>78</sup>, in particular, to the activity of the film club

---

<sup>78</sup> “Student Action” is an independent student union in Simferopol. It was created in 2010 in the wake of protests of students in the higher educational establishments of the Crimean capital against the introduction of charged services. The union had grassroots organizations and activist groups in all large universities of Simferopol, as well as in colleges and schools.

in cooperation with the art center “Pocket”<sup>79</sup>. She organized discussions for the “Open School”. Among the topics discussed were discrimination, xenophobia, racism, migration, and politically engaged art.

All of that was somehow connected with non-formal education for various people and Olga was interested in it very much. It turned out that the process of getting knowledge can be practical! For example, when organizing a campaign against homophobia, you can thoroughly analyze the problem.

Nothing like that happened in the Crimean universities. There, as a rule, a lecturer comes and delivers lectures. Knowledge was given strictly in a vertical direction: one could neither argue, nor doubt... Meanwhile, the Open School gave an opportunity to do important things and learn at the same time.

On the whole, a strong interaction between different communities was felt in Crimea at that time. *“It’s not true that Crimea was interested only in the tourism business before the annexation. I feel like something always happened in Simferopol, the activists from Kyiv and other cities came to us and we often visited them. Every year, I participated in the feminist marches on March 8. I felt that we were in the human rights, activist community... And everything was in motion, constantly evolved,”* Olga says.

So the attack by Russian nationalists on Crimean participants during the action in support of Pussy Riot came as a surprise. *“We didn’t even know about their existence... Previously, they were off the radar and when we raised the topic related to Russia, with our dislike for Putin, with our position that what is happening in the Russian Federation is authoritarianism and attempts to stifle freedom of expression, their reaction was an attack,”* Olga says.

She recalls that the most important thing at that time was the support of various Crimean activists and human rights defenders. Therefore, Olga

<sup>79</sup> Art Center “Pocket” is one-of-a-kind public center of contemporary culture, art and non-formal education in Crimea. Art Center “Pocket” appeared on September 14, 2011 through the merger of the teams of the Simferopol theater studio “We” and the theater school “Image”. After Crimea had been occupied, the challenges and “preventive conversations” started to be held with the leadership of the Art Center in July 2014. The case of the imprisoned director Oleg Sentsov was cited as a formal basis for summons to the FSB. Due to the risk to personal freedom, head of the Art Center “Pocket”, director Halyna Dzhikayeva was forced to leave Crimea.



EuroMaidan in Simferopol, 2013



Olha Anoshkina at the press conference on discrimination of Ukrainian pensioners living under the occupation.

*Kyiv, April 19, 2018*

and her friends mustered up the courage and held a press conference to talk about freedom of speech, not only in Russia but also in Ukraine, in Crimea. Meanwhile, a video with threats against them was published on YouTube.

... Then I asked Olga about the events of March 16, 2014. And Olga, as thin as a reed, seemed to have become even smaller. She sagged, thinned down, saddened. She did not know where to start.

*“Everything that was happening was absurd. Even the seizure of the airport looked absurd... There were many journalists, many servicemen... Those servicemen were running in some strange direction. Several military men in Russian uniforms stood near the “Dining Room” sign... but the most absurd thing was that all that happened actually,”* Olga recalls.

The absurdity was ongoing. Military units were seized, activists went missing, Russian flags were hoisted all over Ukrainian Simferopol...

*“I had some kind of mystical feeling that a lot of crazy or drunk people appeared on the street,”* Olga says.

Olga planned to move to Kyiv long before the tragic events but later it became clear that she simply could not stay here. *“I ended up on the ‘Traitor to Crimea’ leaflets and they were hung not in Simferopol where I lived, not near my house, but in Dzhankoy where my mother lived... my parents. Those leaflets covered practically the whole neighborhood,”* Olga’s voice quivered.

Olga recalls how her mother saw people posting those leaflets. She came up to them and tried to explain that they were wrong. She felt aggrieved for her daughter and told them: *“Olga was a straight-A pupil at school, and now she provides free legal aid to people... and everything that she tries to do is for our country, for Simferopol and for Crimea. Why do you write that she is a traitor to Crimea?”*

*“Mom decided that she could explain something to them... It grieved me to see that my parents had to deal with all of that. Although I did not feel fear for myself,”* Olga says.

Having moved to Kyiv, she began to work with lawyer Evhenia Zakrevska on the cases of people held captive Donbas. A little later, she resumed

legal consultations on the hotline of the new non-governmental organization “East-SOS”. Moreover, Olga answered hundreds of questions from Crimeans and residents of Donbas in the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights twice a week.

*“For me, the cases when I cannot help give rise to much stronger emotions than those when I can. People do not come with one clear question. As a rule, these are very desperate life situations. For example, the payment of pensions in the uncontrolled territory for the elderly...They have nobody to help them, they have no money to leave Luhansk or Donetsk, they have no strength and they have nowhere to go. These stories are inevitably remembered and are etched in memory,”* Olga says. Perhaps this is the reason why helping a specific person is more important for Olga Anoshkina than to participate in large advocacy initiatives.

Olga recalls several court cases when the payment of pensions was stopped and court cases where people could not resign from their place of work located on uncontrolled territory. She also helped to resolve the issues related to the pass entry system:

*“Sometimes someone calls us who “just” needs to get a pass. Often older people, who cannot do this themselves, call us as they are not very well familiar with the computer system and you do such simple things as writing a letter to the coordination group on their behalf, ask to delete old data, enter new data – and that’s all: they can go home... I hear the words of gratitude – and that’s enough for me.”*

... Having left Crimea in early spring of 2014, Olga has not returned there yet. She does not want to take risks. She says that being on the “Poklonskaya list”<sup>80</sup>, on which she is named as a witness in a criminal case, as well as participation in a trade union together with Oleksandr Kolchenko is a signal for prosecution for the Russian system. Even though the criminal case was closed, it is impossible to predict whether you are under the threat of prosecution or not. Moreover, not so long ago police officers came to her parents’ house and asked about her.

<sup>80</sup> The so-called “Poklonskaya list” is named after the then “prosecutor” of Crimea Natalia Poklonskaya. The list includes the names of about 50 human rights defenders and activists persecuted for organizing EuroMaidan. Many of the “suspects” have already been somehow threatened or brought to justice by the Crimean “prosecutor’s office”, namely Refat Chubarov, Akhtem Chyigoz, Zair Smedliayev, Andriy Shchekun, the Kovalsky family, Sergiy Mokreniuk and other Crimeans.



Not so long ago, Oleksandr Kolchenko<sup>81</sup> participated in environmental actions in Crimea, defended the rights of workers, argued and dreamed... Now he is serving a ten-year sentence in a maximum security penal colony.

Olga Anoshkina's life, her work, friends and interests, is very closely intertwined with the Ukrainian human rights movement. Either when she was first attacked for her civic stance, or now, it is critical for her to have freedom of expression. She needs to talk freely and honestly about who you are, how you feel, what your political views are.

*"I am very concerned about an increasing growth of the nationalism in our country, the fact that right-wing movements are becoming stronger, more arrogant and confident. Often these movements block the manifestation of freedom, the ability to highlight the problems existing in the country.*

*In my opinion, these sentiments in society have a very strong impact on the internally displaced persons. We still have a discourse that people*

<sup>81</sup> Oleksandr Kolchenko and Ukrainian director Oleg Sentsov were detained by Russian special services in Crimea in May 2014. They were charged with plotting the terrorist attacks on the peninsula. In August 2015, a court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced Sentsov to 20 years in a penal colony, Kolchenko – to 10 years. The defendants pleaded not guilty. The human rights movement Memorial recognized Sentsov and Kolchenko as political prisoners. The Russian authorities included them in the list of "terrorists and extremists."

*from Donbas are somewhat different from us, that they are worse, that they should return to their homes... and these views are very much connected with government policy. After all, it is much easier not to pay pensions on uncontrolled territory if a significant part of the country thinks it is normal because “separatists” live there.*

*Donbas can be indiscriminately called a separatist area but when you see specific people and hear their personal tragedies, it’s very difficult to call all these several millions with one word, labelling them as “unpeople”... So it turns out that my current activity is linked with the global idea of freedom of expression, which resonates with me. I want people in Ukraine to be able to tell the truth about themselves freely, safely and calmly.”*

“

*I hate the policy that Ukraine pursues in relation to Crimea: the prohibition of links with Crimea, the blockade, a lot of inconvenient practices for ordinary people... This is done instead of building bridges, strengthening links between people who live here and there, instead of trying to understand each other. On the contrary, they emphasize that we are different, that we need to feud.*

*We need a completely different approach. I remember how I participated in the feminist march on March 8, 2014. The activists then filmed the video “Women of Maidan to the women of Crimea”. Kyiv feminists simply talked about what they think about the situation on the peninsula, how they feel it. They wanted people from Crimea to watch their videos and understand that they are not alone, that people in Kyiv support them. They did not appeal to politics or disagreements but simply said that women in Kyiv knew about Crimea, experienced this tragedy personally, wanted the same things: not to be attacked and used in political interests. For me, a Crimean girl, that was a manifestation of sincerity.”*

# Equilibrist

Anna Rassamakhina

Sevastopol



## PROFILE

**Anna Rassamakhina**

**BEFORE.** Legal practice in a private company.

**AFTER.** Lawyer of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union.

Left Crimea in May 2014.

Has no **DREAMS**. Says that her dreams have either come true or are underway.

“

*One day, a man asked me for legal assistance. He was forced to leave Crimea. FSB officers exerted pressure on him, his business was grabbed, his private house was taken away. He had many recollections associated with that house. His wife died of cancer there.*

*This man said one thing that struck me.*

*When some strangers had their eyes on his house, the man dismantled the floor on the first floor and put a bowl of mercury there... Should we condemn him? I understood that the situation in Crimea is complicated, but this story shows how far it has gone. A bowl of mercury is still there.”*

Anna Rassamakhina

*"I am an ethnic Russian, and all my relatives are in Russia. I was born and brought up in Sevastopol. In theory, I should have become a part of the 'Russian world',"* Anna Rassamakhina began her story.

A slight irony was heard in her beautiful ringing voice. The girl used that irony for filtering the toxic air, which she had to breathe for a long time. It helped not to become hardhearted. I looked at Anna. She is so harmonious, calm. It is the first surprising thing about her. I have got so used to the fact that pain and losses are an essential part of the recollections of Crimea. Therefore, listening to Anna, I could not immediately adjust to her calm tonality. Of course, she has been experiencing inner turmoil so, over the past five years, she has banned herself from raising personal memories connected with Crimea. The Crimean girl did not want to share them with the journalists.

*"I'm not an introvert, but private matters should remain private,"* she explained *"but when you called me, I suddenly felt that I could tell my story."*

... Upon graduation, Anna entered the National University "Yaroslav the Wise Law Academy of Ukraine" and left for Kharkiv. She was a diligent student, listening to the professors with interest (*"They were great indeed!"*), many friends and acquaintances appeared. During her studies, she enjoyed traveling across Ukraine.

*"I discovered this country..."* Anna makes a long pause and then adds: *"Why do I say that? For the majority of Crimeans, the word "Ukraine" is a blind spot in understanding, not filled with anything individual and even shrouded in prejudice. Should be our country blamed for this? I will answer with the expression, which became my favorite one after 2014. You can bring a horse to the river, but you cannot make it drink. You cannot make somebody swallow already chewed information in the age of the Internet. It's like thinking that someone may not know that women have the right to vote or that black people no longer have to ask permission to travel by tram."*

Her voice started to sound sharper. Anna did not accept compromise. She knew: you do need much to look at the world wider and the first step is to throw out the TV, where Russian news, TV shows and even entertainment programs aim to perform a single task: to cultivate a love for

Russia, to de-personalize Ukraine so that later it would be easy to incite hatred for it.

*“I have been living in this toxic environment since birth...” she says and I catch myself thinking that I see another Anna in front of me: impetuous, unshakable, strong. She had reasons for becoming such a person.*

When the occupation began, Anna Rassamakhina worked as a company lawyer, earned a quite decent salary, planned the future with her boyfriend. Everything went well.

But, one day, an armored infantry vehicle appeared on the streets of her native city. There was a lot of military equipment, a lot of strangers, who behaved as if it was their territory... Until March 16, she did not believe that Crimea would be occupied. As a lawyer, Anna was well aware of the consequences of a military invasion.

*“I did not have rosy illusions about Russia but it seemed to me that some people among Russian leadership would be able to describe the horrendous consequences for the country and honestly answer the question: do they need it? But life has shown there were no such people, or they were not heard...” Anna says.*

*She attended all the rallies in Sevastopol like the theater of the absurd, soaked up the dirt of what was happening: “Among the whole crowd, I alone had a straight face. I wanted to remember everything for life. I wanted to remember Valery Chaly, the “people’s mayor of Sevastopol” shouting from the stage: “Congratulations on the end of the occupation!” and everyone crying out with joy after these words. People, who did not know what Ukraine was just yesterday, who did not travel beyond the southern regions of Kherson and Mykolayiv, suddenly felt hatred for Ukraine. They were completely different people: my colleagues, pensioners, mothers with children.”*

Anna realized that now Crimea had the status of “unrecognized territory”. It would not be another Northern Cyprus, where the situation is controlled by the international community and security is guaranteed. The open military invasion and the threat of a nuclear strike against Ukraine which guaranteed the takeover, took place in Crimea. This could not but have consequences: the Ukrainian peninsula is expected to face serious sanctions, tough pressure, Crimea will become a toxic unrecog-



nized territory and the European Union, as long as it is crowded with people waiting for Russian money, is not the most uncompromising ally.

*“For the entire civilized world, in particular, for the entire banking system, Crimea turned into a territory beyond the law. I saw the world going mad, the sleep of reason was producing monsters. I wanted to escape, following my instinct of self-preservation,”* Anna says.

She clearly understood she had different paths to follow with the “new order.” Anna convinced her husband to move to Kyiv (due to the best labor market there), packed their suitcases and left the peninsula.

Anna happened upon the human rights movement. The Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union was looking for lawyers, and she sent her CV. Anna was not afraid of dealing with the Crimean issue. *“Work could be worse,”* she says ironically. Although, looking at the dedication with which she is doing her work, it is difficult to imagine she does not like it.

Anna Rassamakhina and her fellow lawyers sort out a pile problems that, though everyday in nature, are very important to the individuals concerned: recognizing the facts of birth and death, issuing passports,



Walking along sunny streets. *Recollections of 2016*



Riding bike. *Recollections of 2016*



solving inheritance issues, overcoming barriers in education. These are the issues which the Ukrainian state, shocked by the occupation, was supposed to but could not respond in time.

*“We have won many suits and we will continue to win,” Anna says casually, without arrogance. “But it is not about Crimea, it is about our judicial system, which is recovering very quickly. I do not get tired of repeating that our courts have made great progress in a short period time: from 2014 until now. It’s amazing!”*

*“After all, if you think about it, we do not have any particular problems of IDPs or residents of the occupied territories. We have common problems. For example, our post-Soviet, post-totalitarian, clumsy state apparatus, where officials with glassy eyes sit and follow the instructions from the regional administration.”*

Anna indignantly recalls how Ukrainian officials send inquiries to the Crimean Pension Fund, give the personal data of the Crimean people to the aggressor country, just to clarify whether they receive a pension there.

*“It’s astonishing: Lviv send inquiries in Russian, with errors, but in Russian!”* the human rights defender feels angry and tells how she had to

quarrel with representatives of the Kyiv regional branch of the Pension Fund because of sending the personal data to the occupied peninsula.

The internally displaced persons are more sensitive to redtape. After all, they have been torn out of their normal life, lost their homes, many of them have no job and cannot open a bank account.

*“For example, they come to the office of the Migration Service to be issued a new passport and fall into a black hole of hopelessness. Creepy old tables, shabby wallpapers... Civil servants, who receive a salary smaller than a McDonald’s cashier, tell Crimeans all sorts of nonsense, saying they are traitors so they cannot expect quality services. This poisons the body of our country like a cancer,”* Anna says.

She is convinced: in order to restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine and improve the quality of life of all citizens it needs, primarily, to form a state apparatus with a human face that will be guided by the Constitution and laws.

*“Many countries have gone through this, and Ukraine will get through, but we need efforts, we need different people and the willingness to do at least something. Then a new “human tissue” will gradually heal the whole body. That’s what I’m doing in my life, and, frankly speaking, I’m happy with it,”* Anna says.

Anna skillfully, like an equilibrist, balances between the aching pain hidden very deep inside and a sense of self-confidence. This fantastic ability to withstand has helped her not only to cope with new challenges but, laughing in the face of those in her way, to build a safe bridge for Ukrainian citizens between Crimea and mainland Ukraine. May she walk on a thin tightrope, everything is calm behind her back.

“

*Everything is done in the foreign policy to restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine. It is difficult to do anything more. If you say that Crimea is Russian in the civilized world, you will destroy your reputation. Nobody can call Crimea a Russian territory, if they want to work in politics.”*

# Crimean Banksy

Volodymyr Chekryhin

Sevastopol



## PROFILE

### Volodymyr Chekryhin

**BEFORE.** Employee of a diving company. Participant in the EuroMaidan in Sevastopol, Co-organizer of Ukrainian rallies in occupied Crimea.

**AFTER.** Project manager in Crimean Human Rights Group.

Left Crimea in September 2014.

**DREAMS** that those involved in the occupation of Crimea will be brought to worthy and just punishment.

“

*I have lived in Sevastopol all my life. My childhood coincided with the 1980s, when the city was closed. As a child, I heard Ukrainian speech live only twice. On the first occasion, a woman in a trolleybus asked a driver to stop. The second time was when a girl in the queue at the store spoke Ukrainian. Both of those episodes were so sudden and unusual that I remembered them in the smallest details: where the trolleybus was at that moment or in what department of the grocery store everything happened. I liked how the word “please” sounded in Ukrainian so much that the voice of that woman is still in my memory.”*

Volodymyr Chekryhin

*“I have long had pro-Ukrainian stance, I supported accession to NATO and withdrawal of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in 2017. Studying in Kyiv, especially communication with people from all over Ukraine, had a great impact on my views. In school, I didn’t even have the Ukrainian language as a subject,” Volodymyr Chekryhin begins his story.*

Noticing my surprise, Volodymyr explains patiently:

*“Imagine that you live in the environment where ‘Crimea is Russia’ is written on every fence, when you constantly hear the stories about the members of Ukrainian national movement, who came here in 1990s and raised the flag of Ukraine over a boat. On top of that, you hear the horror stories that the Tatars will come and begin to ‘carry out a massacre.’ Such myths were circulating in the closed city of Sevastopol.*

*You have been told from the very childhood what a great city it is, how heroically it was holding the fort... Local residents consider themselves special. Even if you were not born there, but have lived in Sevastopol for 10 years, you already have the right to call yourself a Sevastopol resident and consider yourself special.”*

A lot of Crimean residents have never traveled by train in their lifetime, Volodymyr says. Living in one and the same environment was a fertile ground for propaganda. Only the youth were a little less exposed to that as they used the Internet, went to concerts, football matches, had a wider circle of friends. It’s no wonder that there had been no strong pro-Ukrainian ties in Sevastopol before the start of EuroMaidan.

*“One day, scrolling through VKontakte social network, I stumbled across a publication of one person, who offered to go to a rally in the city center to support EuroMaidan. At the first rally, there were just two of us. We agreed to hold such actions every weekend. Gradually, more and more people learned about us, more participants came,” Volodymyr recalls.*

Already then, we started to be spied on but the real opposition began only when there were a lot of activists and the rallies started to be shown in the news

*“At that time, the police guarded us. They made a cordon and prevented serious clashes, although there were minor clashes. We were caught after the rally...”*



*A lot of elderly people came to EuroMaidan actions in Sevastopol, not only youth. The businessmen also supported the rallies, understanding the prospects, they really aimed for the European vector and although the majority did not have the opportunity to go to Kyiv, we collected medicines and other necessary things at our rallies and sent everything to Maidan,” the activist said.*

EuroMaidan united many people and Volodymyr made new acquaintances. When the occupation began – the military equipment appeared in the city, the first attempts to capture the military units were made – the pro-Ukrainian Sevastopol residents were looking for an opportunity to help.

*“Once we asked some women to carry bags with food products to a military unit. We thought the women would not be attacked. I helped carry heavy bags and tried to find out what people surrounded the military unit. I told them: ‘I am a Sevastopol resident, I can show my passport. And who are you? Show me your documents.’ They immediately shouted: ‘He is a provocateur!’ They rushed to me, almost shoved me under the car – there was a narrow roadway there,” Volodymyr recalled.*

After mid-January 2014, the situation in Sevastopol escalated. Volodymyr came across a group that was talking about “the self-defense” in the city on VKontakte [a Facebook style social media network – *Translator’s Note*]. A terrible chronicle of one day. He saved it to remember.

*27 January 2014.*

*0:24 Bogdan-type and Etalon-type buses with tinted windows left the city through Ostriaki district.*

*1:03 Guys, about 15 masked men with clubs were spotted near Peremohy Avenue. They poured something in bottles. Be extremely careful. Data have not yet been confirmed 100%, but it’s better to stay alert.*

*9:12 Nakhimovsky district administration, 3 buses, 07:30. Stay alert and may God be with you!*

*9:31. As for the buses near the Omega, our “spies” hang around among them, detected anti-Maidan sentiments, so it’s quiet there so far.*

*10:30 Buses near the Nakhimovsky district administration disappeared. Be careful!*

*10:58. “URGENT! Reliable sources have just told us that 11 buses carrying Bandera fascists from Ivano-Frankivsk were sent to Sevastopol to capture the administration and the city council.” Guys, different sources report on different number of buses, but the fact remains to be a fact: these bastards are coming to us, be ready!!!*

*22:07. Attention. We received the information that the city center is crowded with people, there are groups standing near the administration. The law enforcement officers stand aside. Anyone, who is there, write back whether it is true or not, and what is happening there.*

*22:09. ATTENTION! The situation in the center is running high, many Ukrainian-speaking people continue to appear near the Nakhimovsky district administration! Storm is possible today! All who are there, beware!*

Volodymyr and his friends agreed not to vote in the so-called “referendum.” They were not alone in this decision. As Volodymyr recalls, the polling stations, that he looked into out of curiosity, were completely deserted.

*“I passed by the stations twice, in the afternoon and in the evening, and saw no rush there. And at seven o’clock in the evening, an hour before the closure, the TV presenters said in the newscast there was an overwhelming victory, a turnout of more than 90% and everyone voted ‘for’,”* Volodymyr comments.

Volodymyr was not going to leave his native city. The first month after the “referendum”, he was completely befuddled. He could not believe that those events happened in reality.

Volodymyr met with his friends to chill out, together they celebrated the holidays with Ukrainian symbols. They often traveled to the southern coast of Crimea with Ukrainian flags, national symbols on T-shirts and bags and often heard surprised exclamations: *“Wow! I’m not alone here”*, some people even took pictures with the flag.

Ukraine’s Independence Day was approaching. Volodymyr and his friends decided to sing a hymn near the Taras Shevchenko monument and decorate the place with yellow and blue flags. However, they changed their decision in the last minute as a lot of police officers were standing near the monument.

The activists moved a little further, to the place where the monument to Hetman Petro Sahaidachny had previously stood. The monument had been already removed, but the pedestal with the inscriptions was still there. The activists carried out an action there. The anthem of Ukraine was sung in occupied Crimea.

*“How many people came up! It was August. A month before, the Boeing was downed<sup>82</sup>, nerves were frayed... A wrangle started. Someone shouted: “Bring a grenade!” Someone called the police. We got in a car and left. A*

<sup>82</sup> Boeing 777 of Malaysia Airlines, which operated the flight MH17 Amsterdam (Netherlands) – Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), was shot down over Donetsk region on July 17, 2014. There were 298 people on board, including 80 children. They all died. On May 24, 2018, the international Joint Investigation Team announced that the Boeing had been shot down by the Buk anti-aircraft missile system from the 53rd air defense brigade of the Russian army, which had been delivered to the occupied territory of Ukraine from Kursk city.

*police car drove towards us. It was shiny, polished, packed with special operations troops. Obviously, they were somewhere near as they arrived quickly enough,”* Volodymyr says in a plain voice as if he was retelling a plot of an unpretentious detective film.

The activists failed to keep out of sight. After a while, the activists noticed that the car was following them. A driver made a short stop and all the passengers ran into the courtyards. A little later, the driver Viktor Nehanov, was detained. The police did not know what charges could be brought against him, so he was released in three hours. Viktor immediately left Crimea.

The second action dedicated to the Independence Day, which Volodymyr was going to attend, was to be held in the city center. The participants wanted to attach the flag of Ukraine to balloons and release them into the sky. There were different inscriptions in the Ukrainian and the Crimean Tatar languages on the balloons: “Glory to Ukraine!”, “One Country.”

*“We parked the minibus in the waste ground, were sitting inside and putting the balloons together when two men noticed us. They began to shout, took a video, called the police, saying that Ukrainian nationalists were going to arrange provocations,”* Volodymyr says.

They had to change everything at the last minute again. The activists released the balloons into the sky in Balaklava<sup>83</sup>, took video and photos and put them on the Internet. This is how they congratulated Ukraine on Independence Day.

*“The most interesting thing is that different people in Sevastopol did something to protect our country. Later, in Kyiv, I met my friend Mykhailo Dzhamal, who had organized a motor rally with Ukrainian flags in the city and I found out about that only after I had left.*

*To be honest, sometimes you did not know what views people had. The atmosphere on the peninsula did not encourage anybody to talk openly about pro-Ukrainian views. There was even a website for posting the photos of all “Ukrainian nationalists”. There were cases when the information about which road and at what time the person usually walked to work or brought*

<sup>83</sup> Balaklava is a location on the southwestern coast of Crimea. Until 1957, it had the status of a city; now it is a part of the Balaklava district of Sevastopol. It is separated from the rest of Sevastopol by an undeveloped space of several kilometers.



Officers of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation wearing unmarked uniform in Sevastopol, 2014



Ukraine's Independence Day. *Balaklava, 2014*



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.  
*Warsaw, September 2017*



EuroMaidan in Sevastopol, 2013

*a child to kindergarten was published... As the writer Dovlatov said, many had a longing for denunciations,” Volodymyr explains.*

One summer day, the city of Sevastopol woke up in the morning and saw a fresh wall painting near the monument to the flooded ships reading ПТН-ПНХ<sup>84</sup>. It was impudent. Later this art was published on the VKontakte social network. A little later, Crimean Banksy<sup>85</sup> began to write the abbreviation in full as not everyone in Sevastopol understood its meaning.

From that moment on, Sevastopol has been “decorated” with new reminders that the occupants are not welcome here before the mass events, such as the Russian Fleet Day. They have been drawn at night and the public utilities failed time to wipe them off.

Volodymyr Chekryhin made such a protest for several months. Once in September, during a blackout in Crimea as a result of an accident on the territory of mainland Ukraine, the activists decided to take advantage of the situation. However, blackout played a cruel joke on them: they did not notice a dismounted patrol who wore black uniforms. The activists were caught and detained. Two cans of paint were found in the belongings of one of the painters.

*“Of course, they immediately seized the phone and I had all the photos there: the paintings in front of the Navy Officers House, the monument to Catherine, on the alley of the Hero Cities where Moscow is... Luckily, there was password protection on my phone. They began to ask me the password. I replied that I did not remember it. One patrolman was especially mad at me. He poked his baton braided with St. George ribbon [primarily related to WWII, this symbol has recently become widely associated with Russian nationalist and separatist sentiment – Translator’s Note] to my face and asked: “Are you are sick of it?” He could not believe that we were*

<sup>84</sup> ПТН-ПНХ is a Russian-language abbreviation, which means “Putin, go fuck yourself.” The meme was started to be used in March 2014, after it appeared on a billboard located on the Kyiv-Boryspil highway. Since then, this inscription often appears in Ukraine on clothing, car number plates, pedestrian crossings, in lyrics and during laser shows. ПТН-ПНХ can be used as a synonym for “Putin – khuiol”, the Ukrainian- and Russian-language slogan deriding Russian President Vladimir Putin, which means “Putin is a dickhead”. This slogan was invented and performed for the first time by the fans of the FC Metalist Kharkiv during a joint march with the FC Shakhtar Donetsk fans in Kharkiv on March 30, 2014. The expression has become popular among the opponents of Vladimir Putin’s policy both in Ukraine and abroad, including Russian opposition politicians.

<sup>85</sup> Banksy is the pseudonym of the notorious English underground graffiti artist, political activist and film director, whose identity has not been established. There are a lot of controversies around his biography. In the late 1990s, he began to draw graffiti and for a long time acted as an ordinary artist. Over time, his drawings became more ambitious, and it became increasingly difficult for him to escape from the police. One day, hiding from the English police, Banksy decided to start using stencils to save time.

local residents and shouted: “You cannot be from Sevastopol and oppose Putin!? Tell me, have you come from Maidan?!” the activist says and adds:

*“We were held at the Prymorsk Boulevard for three hours. The patrolmen were shining the flashlights on the embankment, looking for paintings. The most curious thing is that they found only two old paintings. Another squad arrived. One officer was particularly arrogant – he was Russian apparently, judging by the accent – and was jumping for joy:*

*‘You will be sentenced to five-year imprisonment! It is dishonor on the president! Desecration of monuments.’*

*I said: “It is the pavement.”*

*And he replied, grinning: “The Prymorsky Boulevard is a monument in itself.”*

*Many police officers arrived at the scene: “So many resources were involved in identifying the undesirable persons. Two policemen came to my sister just because she liked a publication about the action on Independence Day in the city. They were relentless in their search for such people, to come to them...” Volodymyr says.*

The activists were taken to a police station. Volodymyr didn’t have any documents with him and an investigator having hesitated for a while, let him go “on his honour”: “You have two hours, go and get your documents...” Volodymyr returned with a passport, which came as a surprise for the law enforcement officer.

*“I was ready to spend some more time in the police station, but the investigator hushed at me: “Get out of here!”... I don’t know his motives. Maybe, he realized what we were facing and felt some kind of sympathy. He let us go. But the lawyer that we contacted advised him to leave Crimea urgently as the interrogations would begin. They could even put me in a remand prison as I was registered in Sevastopol,” Volodymyr says.*

Later, the activists found out that the case was not “stalled”: police officers came to their places of work, conducted searches, checked the printer as at that time someone was handing out leaflets, and the investigators were looking for clues.

At first, Volodymyr stopped in Ivano-Frankivsk city. Initially, some people from Sevastopol helped him there. Before the annexation of Crimea,



Volodymyr worked for diving companies engaged in underwater technical works: inspection and repair of ships, hydraulic engineering installations, subsea pipelines, oil derricks. In the eight years prior to 2014, he held senior positions, was responsible for the quality of the services provided. However, his working experience was not needed in Ivano-Frankivsk as, in fact, there is no sea there.

Where to start from? He will run out of savings... Soon he was invited to a human rights workshop for Crimeans. So he ended up in the Crimean Human Rights Group.

*“That workshop opened the world of human rights protection to me. I realized that I could be really useful to my country and Crimeans through engaging in the human rights activities. I have understood that human rights protection is, perhaps, the longest and least obvious ways for the return of Crimea, but one of the most important and effective ones.*

*Collecting information, documenting the facts of human rights violations, analyzing, submitting data to the bodies that may have impact on the situation, for example, to introduce economic sanctions. This activity allows you to feel involved in one big thing: the process of Crimea return. To feel that you continue to fight for your home and the people who remain there.*

*It is difficult to call this activity a job. Human rights protection has a strong impact on your worldview and lifestyle. It is impossible just to finish your work in the evening and stop thinking about all the Crimean “affairs”. Look at Volodymyr Balukh, for example, whom I know personally. On the one hand, it is difficult, but on the other, it is additional motivation, especially when you see that your efforts have helped a particular person to get out of some kind of misfortune.”*

“

*We felt strong emotions, when we left occupied Crimea. We took photos near each flag. Although we lived under the occupation only for six months, I try to imagine what people who have not gone outside of Crimea for five years and continue to root for Ukraine feel?*

*I know from my own experience how important it is to see and know that you are not alone. There is a whole system of signs in Crimea, according to which people can understand that like-minded people are near. The good with yellow and blue packaging are located near on the shelves in stores. Towels on the balconies are hung in a way to form a flag. There is combination of national colors in clothing, all sorts of ribbons, charms, lighters with Ukrainian symbolism. There is also a huge number of wall paintings, spoiled billboards and murals with the image of invaders. All this inspires and gives strength for further resistance.*

*After I had moved to the mainland, an idea almost immediately appeared to make a flag with the inscription “Sevastopol”. I decided to raise the flag at mass events (football matches, concerts) and during my trips. Unfortunately, there are many people who do not know anything about the resistance of the Crimean people on the peninsula. Some are even surprised that we left the Crimea, saying “it is so good there now.” Moreover, our flag is also a way to lend moral support to those who stay in Crimea.*

*Later, we also began to take photos with this flag near Russian diplomatic institutions abroad (Croatia, Poland, Iceland, Denmark, Georgia, Czech Republic) and put them on the Internet. Crimeans react to these photos, write comments and personal messages. Those who live under the occupation need to know that we have not forgotten about them, have not dissolved in a new life, have not given up and continue to fight for their return.”*

# Patriot

Synaver Kadyrov

Simferopol



## PROFILE

### Synaver Kadyrov

Participant in the Crimean Tatar national movement, last political prisoner of the USSR, co-organizer of the all-Crimean conference.

Left Crimea in January 2015.

**DREAMS** about the Crimean Tatar state autonomy as part of Ukraine.

“

*When it comes to Russia and its policy, you may often hear scornful phrases, say, “it’s Asia, what can be expected of it?” Is it right to say so? Asia is very different. Japan and China are also Asia. What do we know about Asia?*

*We are in thrall to stereotypes of the European civilization. However, it is very young compared to the Asian – so why do we allow ourselves to despise it? ”*

*Synaver Kadyrov*

*“I do not hide. I do not steal. I am not involved in some criminal affairs. Freedom of speech is proclaimed in Russia... Why have you stopped me? What is the problem?”* Synaver Kadyrov asked the FSB officers on the Crimean administrative border.

An activist of the Crimean Tatar national movement, Synaver Kadyrov looked straight in the eyes of the people who had detained him. Being a former political prisoner of the USSR, he has seen many such officers in his lifetime.

The officers of the Security Service of Ukraine, who had turned into the officers of Crimean department of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), did not bother the man. They knew Synaver well: his deeds, his views and his participation in the Crimean Tatar national movement. Since he was a member of neither the current convocation of the Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar people, nor the Mejlis, they tried not to notice him at all.

Another thing was the Russian FSB officers who had arrived in Crimea. They did not miss an opportunity to “talk” with Synaver Kadyrov when he was traveling to the Mejlis offsite meeting in the summer of 2014<sup>86</sup>.

Synaver Kadyrov talked about freedom of speech.

On January 17, 2015, he participated in the All-Crimean Conference in Simferopol which was attended by almost fifty representatives of the Crimean Tatar people. People tried to disrupt the even with the help of local hired thugs but it still took place and important documents were adopted to address to the presidents of Ukraine, Turkey, the UN Secretary-General. No appeals to Russia were made.

*“If we approved at least one document addressed to Putin, the situation could have been different but we demonstrated that Russia was undesirable for us and the FSB made a note of that. After all, those forty participants at the conference would return home and tell their relatives, friends, neighbors about the decisions taken and this would inspire them and other people. Our ideas would diverge like circles in water. They understood that perfectly well,”* Synaver says.

---

<sup>86</sup> On the same occasion, Refat Chubarov, the Chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, was notified that he was banned from entering the territory of Crimea.



A couple of days after the meeting, he talked to French journalists and showed them the squatter developments<sup>87</sup>. When Synaver went to mainland Ukraine on the night of January 23, he found out on the administrative border that he had been already banned from entering Crimea. The ruling of the court of Armiansk town dated January 23, 2015, expelled Synaver from his native land. Synaver still does not know whether the expulsion is connected with the holding of the conference but he has no other reasonable explanation.

He is genuinely surprised and says that the court ruling to expel him from Crimea is totally stupid and I understand why they are afraid of him. The physical force is not the reason. There is so much kindness, strength and wisdom in his eyes that a weak, mean or dishonest person cannot stand it. When the whole system is rotten, it ousts the freedom-loving people out of fear, being unable to conquer or break them.

*Synaver Kadyrov, smiling magnetically, speaks about Crimea, like an encyclopedia, in simple words as if to a child:*

*“If we to try to be honest from a historical perspective, Crimea is one of the founding regions of the Turkic-Islamic civilization. For Crimean Tatars, Crimea is a nest, our shell, our habitat from which we originated and in which we feel comfortable spiritually.*

*Ukrainian historians are still blinkered with the Russian school of historiography, although they try to represent themselves as independent and the history of Ukraine, which is presented as the Ukrainian one, in fact still remains a splinter of the great myth of the “Russian world”, where only some minor changes have been introduced in the part about Ukraine.*

*In fact, the role of Crimea for Ukraine is extremely significant. Unfortunately, Ukrainian historians have not dared yet to analyze such topics as “The Role of the Crimean Khanate in the Formation of the Ukrainian Statehood” or “The Turks in the Ethnogenesis of the Ukrainian Ethnos”. To do this, one just needs to be an honest, unbiased scholar and, if possible, delve into historical materials.*

<sup>87</sup> The buildings, which are built without permits. After returning from deportation, the Crimean Tatars often built such houses as they were not able to return their property lost due to the deportation.

*Love of freedom is a Ukrainian feature, which distinguishes them from Russians. The Cossacks were the most freedom-loving people: it was an impact of Turkic blood. This trait made them very similar to the Tatars. The very lifestyle shaped them. A cattle farmer needed extensive areas to feed the cattle. And, by the way, they all knew the boundaries of their territories, did not go beyond them. If they did, a war would begin. So the principles of mutual respect were laid. They respected the borders because a neighbor could fight back and it was unknown who would survive.”*

I listened with bated breath, and Synaver repeated: to find honest answers, you need to immerse yourself deeply in your history.

*“Ukraine itself is very young. Having not been strengthened as a state, it spent a lot of resources and energy on our assimilation,” Synaver notes. “We fought against assimilation with the Soviet Union. We continued this struggle in independent Ukraine as well, though we often had to restrain ourselves so that our common enemies could not use the situation to harm Ukraine. Apparently, Kyiv viewed that as the weakness of the Crimean Tatars. How else is it possible to explain the fact that the Ukrainian state so desperately opposed the restoration of our rights, not only political but also humanitarian? The study of the Crimean Tatar language in school turned into an insurmountable problem. The historical names of settlements in Crimea, renamed after the deportation of the indigenous Crimean Tatar people, remained unrestored. This is our Crimean Tatar history. We were called robbers and barbarians harassing the Ukrainian land in the history of Ukraine books. The media actively covered the issue of abolishing the status of autonomy, turning Crimea into an ordinary region and renaming the peninsula “Taurida”. We were robbed once again when the authorities transferred the ownership of land belonging to our people to the post-war displaced persons.*

*But there is a difference between the concepts of “people” and “authorities.” The Crimean Tatar national movement has always distinguished between them and has never blamed people for a crime committed by the authorities. Therefore, to some extent, we were forced to restrain ourselves and not react to the stupidity and provocative behavior of the Ukrainian officials, but rather to promote the idea of Ukraine’s independence in Crimea.”*



Tamila Tasheva and Synaver Kadyrov at the public discussion on the anniversary of occupation of Crimea at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, May 2015



Synaver Kadyrov participates in the rally in support of Ilmi Umerov near the Russian embassy after the sentence was pronounced. Kyiv, September 2017

*No matter how cruel it may sound, the occupation and the war make us reconsider the important things. As if the body mobilizes its internal forces to fight the disease.*

*“We were tamed to unite around the authorities, not around the settlement of some problem and the authorities are always a little bit corrupt. That is why we still cannot pull through. Politics has turned into a business. Elections require enormous material expenses. “Normal” people, driven by ideals, do not have this opportunity and no one, will let them take the lead just out of courtesy.*

*The paradox of all previous revolutions in Ukraine is that one cannot change the state without powers but one is not in a hurry to change the state after obtaining the powers. Is this a reason why Maidan loses? Maidan replaced the power at the cost of lives of many people. People fulfilled their task and those who were given the power should be responsible. But they are what they are. Therefore, it turns out we once again went wrong. This time in a new way. Society’s fault is that it stops controlling the people who were given the power...”* Synaver comments.

... I prepared a long list of questions for Synaver Kadyrov. He is the last political prisoner of the USSR, a member of the Crimean Tatar national movement, one of the first activists banned from entering Crimea, grandfather of a 10-month-old boy... You can listen to Synaver for hours. He is an amazing interlocutor: interesting, deep, caring.

*“Drink your coffee, it is cooling down,”* Synaver smiles at me.

I arranged a meeting with him to discover something new about the Crimean Tatars, but I received much more as I learnt something new about myself, Ukraine and Ukrainians.

His whole life is a struggle. Does he regret it? The Crimean Tatar shrugs his shoulders: the philosophy of life itself is a struggle. Every person struggles when making decisions. Another thing, are they aware of this struggle?

*“Solving the national issue is important to me. I have never got tired of repeating: ‘I am a component of the Crimean Tatar world.’ I won’t exist if this world disappears. Therefore, when the annexation occurred, I did*



*not take it too tragically and did not fall into panic as the struggle continues. I was very disappointed thinking about how much time it might take though!*

*I dream of implementing our national idea, namely, restoring our statehood. Under the present-day circumstances, we regard it as a national-territorial state formation within Ukraine, a national-territorial autonomy of the Crimean Tatars.*

*People feel meaningful when they defend the weak. Ukraine as a state could become a defender of the Crimean Tatar people and represent their interests in the world. I am convinced that this would greatly rebuild the Ukrainians and Ukraine as a whole in psychological terms.*

*If our national issue is solved, I would love to engage in science or have a rest. I will enjoy completely different things. I'm not a masochist..." Syn-aver says.*

“

*Parental duty does not mean giving birth and leaving the inheritance to children. The important thing is what will you leave? In my opinion, children should inherit freedom and conditions in which they can develop.*

*Money does not always give this freedom. Are all our oligarchs free? Hardly they are. They are not free, because, as a rule, they have made their money dishonestly. If they take one wrong step, all their wealth will be taken away.*

*Therefore, I believe that I should leave my children the restored homeland. First, to restore it, and then make it free and rich.”*

# Voice

## Tamila Tasheva

Kyiv



### PROFILE

#### Tamila Tasheva

**BEFORE.** PR and communications manager.

Last place of employment: PR manager of Ukrainian band TiK

**AFTER.** Co-organizer and coordinator of Crimea-SOS initiative.

Lives in Kyiv.

**DREAMS** of drinking morning coffee brewed by her mother in free Crimea.

“

*Before the occupation of Crimea, I understood that Ukraine had no idea who Crimean Tatars were. We could be recalled just once: on May 18, on the day of the deportation of our people.*

*Tourists could tell you something about Crimean Tatars, saying they ate the most delicious chebureki in Crimea or a good Crimean Tatar driver gave them a lift. To be honest, such summer memories insulted me. The Crimean Tatars are not samosa, chebureki and polite taxi drivers. It is an ancient culture and its roots are deeply interwoven with Ukraine in Ukrainian history. Listen to Crimean Tatar music, it is in harmony with Ukrainian motives! Look at the patterns of embroidered shirts and carpets: they are so similar!”*

Tamila Tasheva



March 2014. Kyiv, the Arsenalna metro station. It was raining and snowing, and I was shivering. It is always cold at this time of the year... I was in a hurry to interview Tamila Tasheva, the initiator of Crimea-SOS. The organization was only a week old but already had about 35,000 followers on Facebook. Then, few people understood what was happening on the peninsula, and on Crimea-SOS it was possible to find out the new and, most importantly, verified information.

Tamila was easy-going but that beautiful young girl with a raven-black bush of hair and a ringing voice had red tired eyes. Tamila and her colleagues worked non-stop, there was no time to sleep at all.

Later, when selecting the photographs for the article, I realized that I did not have time, and actually did not want, to “make” her glance fresh. That would be untrue.

Then Tamila told me something important: “Crimea-SOS” responds to requests in the “here and now” but its goal for the future is to tell the world who the Crimean Tatars are, to explain their political choice, to represent the beauty and power of these people.

We did not speak for very long, but her words clicked with me. Almost for the first time, I wondered: why did only the start of occupation make us start to discover the unique entwinement of two cultures: Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian?

Today, the human rights defender reminded me of that bright conversation. Both then and now she speaks with deep respect and love about two peoples, and each is native to her, inalienable.

*“When we just started, Crimea-SOS started to receive letters from Ukrainians. They wrote that they would like to help the Crimean Tatars very much because they are fraternal people. I had never heard anything like that before the occupation,”* Tasheva says.

Crimea-SOS was born on the night of February 27, 2014, in the publication on Facebook which informed about the seizure of the administrative building in Simferopol, cordoning off by “little green men”. Three Crimean residents – Tamila Tasheva, Sevgil Musayeva<sup>88</sup> and Alim Aliyev<sup>89</sup> – became the initiators as they tried to find out what was happening and inform others.

<sup>88</sup> Sevgil Musayeva is a Ukrainian journalist of Crimean Tatar descent, editor-in-chief of the *Ukrainynska Pravda* (Ukrainian Truth) online media outlet. In 2011-2013, she worked as a correspondent for the *Forbes Ukraine* magazine. In 2014, Musayeva launched the online business media outlet *Hubs* and became its editor in chief. She is of the co-founders of the Crimea-SOS initiative.

<sup>89</sup> Alim Aliyev is a civil society activist of Crimean Tatar descent, one of the co-founders of the Crimea-SOS initiative. Before the occupation, he worked in the *Pro.Mova* consulting company, lived in Lviv, and later coordinated the Lviv direction of the Crimea-SOS. At the time of publication of the book, Aliyev works as the program director of the *Crimean House* in Kyiv.

*“We did a lot of things intuitively, though we had hundreds of “live” contacts in Crimea, we personally knew leading Ukrainian journalists, bloggers, public figures, and musicians. Meanwhile, other people knew even less. Then we decided to publish reliable, verified information in social networks. We thought that the situation would not last for long,”* the girl smiles sadly.

However, the initiators of the Crimea-SOS realized very soon that just information was not enough. From the very first days, according to Tamila, they began to help Crimeans to leave the peninsula. The girl jokingly notes that Kyiv officially accepted the first displaced person from Crimea on March 2, 2014. That was famous Crimean Tatar artist Rustem Skibin<sup>90</sup>.

Since the first days of March, the first displaced persons appeared in mainland Ukraine: soldiers with families, journalists, activists, and ordinary Crimeans, who disagreed with the occupation. Most of them needed help. Thus, the organization in a very short time turned from an information center into a center of assistance to people leaving Crimea, and later, in April, Donbas.

Crimea-SOS, which early on was a small initiative uniting dozens of volunteers around the country, became the executive partner of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the summer of 2014. Crimea-SOS started to provide assistance systemically, not in the “emergency” mode.

Tamila says that over five years of activity of the organization she can remember more than a dozen stories that bolster up her courage in the difficult days. For example, many families with children moved to mainland Ukraine during the first wave of migration from Crimea and the east of the country. It soon became clear that they were not ready for school. How to help them? Crimea-SOS decided to hold an auction of children’s drawings and to buy shoes for schoolchildren money earned.

<sup>90</sup> Rustem Skibin is a Crimean Tatar ceramist, artist and ethnographer. In 1996 – 2000, he worked as a chief artist at the Tavrika ceramic enterprise in Simferopol. Based on the ornaments of the Crimean Tatar embroidery, collected and decoded by the artist and art historian Mamut Churlu, Rustem Skibin created his own style of polychrome ceramic painting to continue the Crimean Tatar traditions. After Crimea had been occupied, he left for Kyiv with his family and a large collection of things and works of art that are of value for preserving the culture of the Crimean Tatar people.

*“The children drew their dreams. That was very touching. Some people even paid UAH 1,000 for their unsophisticated pictures. We managed to provide more than 100 schoolchildren with good quality shoes,”* Tamila recalls.

One day, a family from eastern Ukraine addressed us. A daughter played the violin and she had to participate in an international contest but did not have an instrument. Crimea-SOS managed to raise money and buy a violin for the young musician. Six months later, her mother called, thanked the organization and told the girl had won the contest.

*“These little stories are not only about the joy in the eyes of people whom we help but also about a huge involvement of ordinary Ukrainian citizens and their willingness to support each other,”* Tamila says, and continues:

*“And what letters we received at the beginning of March 2014! One couple, who lived in the Dnipropetrovsk region, invited one or two Crimean displaced persons to stay with. They lived in a two-room cramped apartment with two children and a dog but really wanted to help.*

*Musician Oleh Skrypka invited the Crimean Tatar family to live in his country house but who knows about this and hundreds of other good deeds? When you read such letters, your eyes are filled with tears.”*

Although the news from Crimea was not usually very happy as the activists were detained and the actions were lost in courts, the resilience of people there was inspiring.

Crimea-SOS took part in a fund-raising campaign to pay fines of the Crimean Tatars, who were brought to administrative responsibility for single-person protests. All that money – more than a million rubles – was exchanged for ten-ruble coins<sup>91</sup>. Crimea, Kyiv, the whole of Ukraine

<sup>91</sup> The Crimean Marathon action was announced by the Crimean Solidarity initiative at the end of July 2017. It was triggered by two rulings of the Bakhchysarai court on imposition of RUR 150,000 fines on Crimean Tatar activists Emil Bilialov and Osman Belialov, who had come to support their compatriots during searches in Bakhchysarai, conducted by Russian security forces. As a result, their actions were qualified by the occupation authorities as an unauthorized rally. The families of activists could not afford to pay those fines, so a fund raising campaign was organized to support them. Donations were taken in 10-ruble coins. For the first month, RUR 826,100 was collected. The second similar action allowed to raise about 2 million rubles. The sum became a record donation ever collected on the peninsula for such a short time. The activists used that money to pay fines imposed on participants in single-person protests against the reprisals against Crimean Tatars and Muslims.



Participants in the rally in support of the ATR Crimean Tatar TV channel.  
From left to right: Rustem Skibin, Tamila Tasheva, Jamala. *Kyiv, March 2015*



At the rally dedicated to disappearance of Crimean activists, *Kyiv, January 2015*



Tamila Tasheva and leader of Crimean Tatar people Mustafa Dzhemilev



Tamila Tasheva with singer Jamala

joined the campaign. The buckets full of coins were carried to Crimean banks to pay fines. It was also a way for Crimean activists to voice their protests against the restriction of freedom.

Today, Crimea-SOS is trying to show not only the tragedy of the Crimean Tartars but also to present them as European people who have something to say in literature, music, dance, and cinema. The world, saturated with wars and reprisals, needs the spiritual power of musicians, actors, directors. Perhaps, that is why because the song of Jamala<sup>92</sup> at the 2016 Eurovision international song contest had a ripple effect from heart to heart.

*“Jamala told through her performance not just about the deportation of 1944. She opened up to the world, telling about the tragedy of her family and her personal tragedy but there will be a flourishing, like a beautiful tree with strong deep roots blossoms...”* Tamila says almost quietly.

Tamila has kept her word. Over the past five years, she has been speaking about Crimea and Crimean Tatar people, about their future with Ukraine at many international venues. It is a confident, powerful voice. Every time I see her, I recall that girl with tired eyes, who was ready not to sleep all night long but to fulfill the promise she had made to herself.

However, the five-year informational and cultural struggle at a frantic pace had consequences. Physical exhaustion, chronic fatigue, painful sensitivity to any requests. A short break no longer helped. The girl fell silent. But soon she began to receive letters containing worries about her, offers of assistance...

*“Then I felt for the first time for many, many days how important was our activity in Crimea-SOS. For example, to defend the lawyer Emil Kurbedinov when he was arrested in December on charges of allegedly extremist activity. We and other human rights defenders joined and wrote appeals to various authorities. You feel a genuine inspiration when the European officials prepare their statements based on your appeals and this helps to release one of the key lawyers.*

<sup>92</sup> Susana Jamaladinova a.k.a. Jamala is a Ukrainian singer of Crimean-Tatar and Armenian descent, the People’s Artist of Ukraine. She performs songs in jazz, soul, funk, folk, pop and electro genres and takes part in the opera performances and shows. In 2016, she became the winner the 61st Eurovision Song Contest in Stockholm with the song 1944 about the deportation of the Crimean Tatars.



*I cannot say: I'm tired, I'm leaving. People in Crimea cannot take such a liberty. They also have had not had time for rest over the past five years. Lawyers and barristers are engaged in hundreds of cases, many "ordinary" people come to court sessions to express their support for those accused of crimes they did not commit...*

*Sevgil Musayeva said once: "We thought we were on a sprint race but it turned out that we had entered the marathon distance and it is necessary to maintain strength for a much longer way. Therefore, we need to be fueled by something to go this grueling distance."*

*I have realized only recently how important such a source of power is to me... Family, friends, personal leisure, spiritual practices... All that receded into the background and I had to regain them," Tamila said slowly.*

Tamila is often asked: are you still in Crimea-SOS? After all, she has such a great experience in PR and communications in the public sphere. After the 2004 Orange Revolution, she headed the Simferopol branch of the Foundation for Regional Initiatives. Back then it was a powerful organization that supported the youth movement and trained young leaders.

Having moved from Crimea to Kyiv 12 years ago, the activist paid great attention to cultural and educational projects. She worked in the Parliament of Ukraine, later in the music and publishing industry. Tamila collaborated with famous Ukrainian musicians, worked as a PR director of the TiK band from Vinnytsia city. She also worked with Oleh Skrypka and organized the Crimean stage at the Kraina Mriy (The Land of Dreams) Festival for five years. Inviting Crimean Tatar performers, she showed Ukraine the musical beauty of one of the indigenous peoples of Crimea. She managed to create a Ukrainian-Crimean-Tatar musical project featuring talented Crimean-Tatar singer Elvira Sarykhalil and Kharkiv band Sunsay, who performed on the festival's main stage.

After relieving the acute pain syndrome, she could easily return to commercial PR and make big money. However, the girl believes that abandoning the activity related to Crimea is akin to abandoning her life ideals, principles, and people who live there.

*“Crimea is my inspiration and pain. It is a place of power. Like Crimea-SOS, it is not just an organization, it is something very personal... Therefore, all my thoughts and activities over the past five years have been aimed at bringing my dream closer.*

*My dream is of a free Crimea. I dream of coming home, where I have not been for five years, walking along the streets of my native Bakhchysarai, climbing the rocks... You know, there is a plateau above the Khan Palace. I wish I could just sit there, watch the busy city and listen to a muezzin<sup>93</sup> calling for prayer. I wish I could be there, breathe that air, look in the Crimean sky...*

<sup>93</sup> A muezzin is the person appointed at a mosque to lead and recite the call to prayer for every event of prayer and worship in the mosque.

*When I was at home, my mom made me coffee every morning. Her coffee has a unique taste. And I really wish I was in Crimea in the morning and my mother brewed her coffee for me...”*

“

*I often hear young boys and girls saying they are the Generation Z living in a global world, being able to go anywhere, studying at the edge of the world... and I argue with them, saying: “Indeed, you can do everything you wish for your self-improvement or future, but you must give a part of yourself to Crimea. There is no other way to return our homeland. Crimea will be de-occupied sooner or later and we’ll have to rebuild it.”*

Iryna Vyrtosu

# CRIMEAN ALBUM: STORIES OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Editor and author of idea: *Tetiana Pechonchyk.*

Production photographer: *Valeriya Mezentseva.*

Transcription of the interviews: *Yana Khmelyuk.*

Translator: *Olga Lobastova.*

Proofreader: *Arthur Rogers.*

Design composition and layout: *Pavlo Reznikov.*

Sign to print 18.03.2019

Layout 60x90/16. Font Set DinDisplay.

Paper offset. Print offset.



**CRIMEAN  
ALBUM:  
STORIES OF HUMAN  
RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

ISBN 978-966-2403-16-9



9 789662 403169 >

## About Author

Iryna Vyrtošu is a journalist of the Human Rights Information Centre.

Graduated from the Institute of Journalism of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

Author of articles on human rights published in such media outlets as the Ukrayinska Pravda, Radio Liberty, Dzerkalo Tyzhnia, Den, etc. Graduate of the all-Ukrainian educational program Understanding Human Rights and the international program International Visitor Leadership Program (USA).

Adores works by Somerset Maugham and Sergey Dovlatov.

Iryna Vyrtošu was in Crimea during the occupation, in March 2014:

“ ...March 9, 2014. I was traveling to Simferopol, the train delayed for 20 minutes. I received a call from Alyona Luniova, who was expected to meet me at the station: “Iryna, just do not worry. The members of voluntary people’s patrol are inspecting belongings at the railway station. Hide your camera and press card somewhere deep in you bag.”

Indeed, strong men with red arm bands were standing near the exit from the platform where the train № 28 Kyiv-Sevastopol stopped. I hugged my friend and gave a heavy backpack with the equipment to her husband, and then I thought: perhaps, I should take it away, they seem not to inspect girls... Later, I found out that Crimean activists Andriy Shchekun and Anatoly Kovalsky had been kidnapped just 15-20 minutes before my arrival.

That was a start of a series of my reports for Radio Liberty in a column “Crimean Diary.” Then few people understood what was going on. Any eyewitness reports were extremely valuable. The events unfolded very quickly. We took part in rallies, visited military units, listened to people talking in shuttle buses and to local radio. When being outside, we deliberately chose crowded places, always looked around, tried not to use in one sentence such “explosive” words like “Mejlis”, “Maidan”, “Hrushevsky Street.”

I stayed in Crimea for less than a week, but it seemed to me that I lived a month there as we had countless meetings with different people, continuous talks about the situation in Ukraine, experienced intense emotions. It was a difficult, restless month. And it was scary also: primarily, because of misunderstanding of what was happening.

While preparing the articles for Radio Liberty and the Human Rights Information Centre, I was kind of checking up: I’m still here, I’m still writing, it’s still Ukraine. ”