

DIFFICULTIES IN INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLING FOR RESIDENTS OF AREAS WITH UNDEFINED POLITICAL STATUS. CASE STUDY: CRIMEA

Ștefan Constantin - PhD student, Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies
constantin.stefan89@yahoo.com

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Abstract

In March 2014 a change took place on Europe's political map. The Crimean Peninsula became part of Russia, switching sovereignty after more than 20 years during which it was part of Ukraine. This took place following a Russian military intervention and a referendum. A majority of the world's countries however, do not recognize the Russian control of Crimea and still consider it a part of Ukraine, rendering the territory an area with undefined political status. Shortly after the sovereignty change, the region and its population started experiencing all kinds of hardships. An often neglected type of hardship Crimeans are experiencing is the difficulty of obtaining visas.

Following the referendum, many diplomatic missions in Russia have instituted a policy of not issuing visas to residents of Crimea who apply with Russian-issued documents. This article shall make a summary of EU and Schengen countries' positions regarding this issue, as these are the biggest groups of countries that requires both Russians and Ukrainians to obtain visas before travelling there. This research was made mostly directly, by requesting each country's diplomatic mission in Moscow to give an official position. The research had the purpose of verifying the information that certain countries do issue visas to Crimeans with Russian documents and also to give a more general and complex picture on the matter of visas for residents of Crimea. This theme is important as a policy of not issuing visas has significant repercussions on the region's economy and on the freedom of movement of its citizens.

Keywords: Crimea, tourism, visas, restrictions, diplomatic missions

JEL Classification: L83, F51, F59

Introduction: a brief presentation of Crimea's geography

Crimea is a peninsula located in Eastern Europe, on the northern shores of the Black Sea. It is bordered by the Black Sea to the west and south, by the Azov Sea to the east and it is linked in three points in the north to the Kherson Province of Ukraine. These points are the Isthmus of Perekop, a narrow strip of land, 5 to 7 km in width, and two bridges on the edges of the mainland towns of Chongar and Henichensk (Podgorodetskiy, 1988). Because of its shape, which can be described as "made up of three triangles", Crimea itself is divided in three peninsulas: Tarkhan in the north-west, Heracles in the south and Kerch in the east. The dominant type of vegetation in the peninsula is steppe, which covers all the area, except the south, which is home to the Crimean Mountains, located right next to the southern shores. The heights of these mountains range from 600 m to 1,540 m - Demir-Kapu Peak (Constantin, 2015, p. 1).

The climate of Crimea is temperate and less harsh than the one of the Russian and Ukrainian steppe, due to the influence of the Black Sea. Summers are quite warm with average temperatures around 24°C along the coast and winters are also warmer than in most of Ukraine and Russia, with average temperatures of 4°C on the southern coast and slightly lower averages of 2°C on the western coast. Temperatures in the mountains are typically about 5°C lower than on

the coast (Parubets, 2009). The coast is characterized by humidity, as levels never drop below 70%. Winds blow all year round across the whole peninsula, both on the coast and inland. Sometimes on the southern coast the following phenomenon occurs: winds blow from the inland for long periods of time, sometimes pushing the warm water away from the shore. This is known as *upwelling* and has the potential to create certain inconveniences for tourists (Ershov, 2013, p. 314).

One of the main components of the Crimean economy is tourism. The southern part of the peninsula is the main tourist region of the peninsula, as it is there that starting with the 1950's numerous seaside resorts have developed. The most renowned of these are, from west to east, Foros, Simeiz, Alupka, Koreiz, Haspra, Yalta, Partenit, Alushta, Sudak, Koktebel and Feodosiya. This area has become known as the *Crimean Riviera* or the *Ukrainian Riviera*. The main points of interest on the western coast are the cities of Sevastopol and Yevpatoriya. Some of these resorts offer water parks, like those located Alushta, Koktebel, Sevastopol, Simeiz, Sudak and Yevpatoriya. Apart from these, there is also an aquarium in Alushta, the biggest in the former USSR and a crocodile farm in Yalta, also the biggest such establishment in the region (Krymova 2015, p. 23).

A brief history of Crimea: from ancient times to current events

The Crimean Peninsula has been a center of civilization ever since the early Iron Age, when history recorded the settling of Scythians and Taurids, a people of unclear origin, who were some of the only ones native to the peninsula throughout the past three millennia. Some public institutions were named in their honor, such as Simferopol's main university: The Tavrida V. I. Vernadsky National University (1918-2014, renamed under Russian administration) (www.crimea.edu). Afterwards, starting with the 7th century BC the Greeks established numerous colonies in the peninsula, especially on the western and southern shores, most notably Chersonesos, Theodosia - modern-day Feodosiya and Kerkinitis - modern-day Yevpatoriya, but also more inland, like Neapolis - near modern-day Simferopol (Babenko & Dioulitchev, 2009, p. 23). These colonies have eventually formed the Bosphoran Kingdom, which would eventually become the client kingdom of the Roman Empire. Ruins from this period have survived to this day in the famous Chersonesos and Penticapaeum (near the Kerch Strait).

The collapse of the Roman Empire signaled the start of the decline of Greco-Roman culture in the area. From the 3rd century AD to the 8th century AD numerous migratory peoples have passed through Crimea, the most notable of which were the Goths, Huns, Bulgars and Khazars. The Eastern Goth which came to Crimea developed a culture and language of their own, unique to the peninsula. It is believed that the Crimean Gothic language lingered on until the second half of the 18th century (Krause & Slocum, 2011). The last stronghold of Greek culture on the peninsula was the Byzantine city of Chersonesos. Eventually, along with the rest of the peninsula, it was conquered by the Kievan Rus. It is at this point that the area's special bond to Russian culture begins, for it was here that Prince Vladimir I of Kiev made the decision to convert his kingdom to Christianity in the year 988 (Andreev, 2013, p. 37).

Kiev lost control of Crimea following the Mongolian Empire's invasions in the 13th century. After the death of Genghis Khan and the collapse of the Mongol Empire, the peninsula came under the influence of the Golden Horde (Andreev, 2013, p. 39). During the Mongol phase, Crimea started to be colonized by Tatars, who developed the Crimean Tatar language - distinct from the language spoken by Kazan Tatars. Also it is at this moment that the peninsula received the name it bears today, which originates in the Turkic root *Qırım* (Vinogradova, 2008). Soon after the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire took control of the peninsula and helped to consolidate the rule of Tatars, in the form of the Crimean Khanate, a client state of the Ottoman Empire. For most of its history, the Khanate's administrative center was located in Bakhchisaray. Finally, another small nationality unique to Crimea was formed during the Khanate: the Karaites (Levitskaya, 2012). These are a Turkic people who practice Judaism and speak the Karaim language, which today is becoming extinct. At the same time, from the 13th

century to the late 15th century, a number of Genoese possessions existed in Crimea: Cembalo - in modern Sevastopol, Caffa – Feodosiya, etc (Krymova, 2015).

Although there have been several attempts of capturing Crimea, especially by Cossacks, it was only in 1784 that the peninsula became part of the Russian Empire, after its annexation by Catherine the Great, following the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, which ended one of the many Russo-Turkish wars (Starikov & Belyaev 2015, p. 225). At the time Crimea was incorporated into the empire under the name Tavrida Province, making reference to the first ancient inhabitants of the area. This was also the moment when the ethnic structure of Crimea started to change significantly (Starchenko, 2013). The Crimean Tatars went from being a majority, to a plurality by the end of the 19th century and then a minority later on, while the numbers of Russians, Ukrainians and other nationalities from the Russian Empire rose. A big role in these changes, but also in the strengthening of the Russian hold on the peninsula was played by the Crimean War (1853-1856), a war fought between Russia and a coalition made up of the UK, France, the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Sardinia.

During World War I, Crimea did not see any fighting. However, after the Russian Empire's withdrawal from the war and the October Revolution, which saw the end of the czars' reign, Crimea and Sevastopol in particular, were the site of important battles in the Russian Civil war, which was fought between the Bolsheviks and White Movement (Kakurin & Melikov, 2002). After the war ended in 1922 the Crimean Peninsula became a part of the newly established Soviet Union, as an autonomous republic of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). Unlike the First World War, during World War II, Crimea was the site of some major battles, including the Siege of Sevastopol (1941-1942). Before the war ended, on 18 May 1944 the greatest mass deportation in the history of the Soviet Union took place. Joseph Stalin, the country's leader ordered the relocation of the entire Crimean Tatar population to Uzbekistan and the Ural area on the grounds that the members of this community allegedly cooperated with and aided the Nazi invaders (Seitovna, 2011). Almost half of the deportees died during the deportation itself or in the following years. Soon after the end of the war Crimea was turned from an autonomous republic into a simple province of the RSFSR.

The rebuilding of the region's post-war economy included the starting of the development of the tourist industries by establishing numerous seaside resorts and sanatoria. The most notable event in Crimea's post war Soviet history took place in 1954, when Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the USSR decreed the transfer of the Crimean Province from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. This transfer was motivated by the fact that the region had close economic, trade and cultural ties with the Ukrainian SSR, but also by the geographic proximity between Crimea and the Ukrainian SSR (Starikov & Belyaev, 2015, p. 83). At the moment of the transfer, the political impact was limited, as it consisted simply of redrawing some internal borders of the USSR.

This state of affairs continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when following a referendum across the whole Ukrainian SSR, Ukraine became an independent state, encompassing Crimea. The following years were marked by growing political tensions in the newly formed only autonomous republic of Ukraine. The root of much of this tension were the ethnic differences between Crimea and the rest of the country. According to the 2001 Ukrainian census, ethnic Russians formed 60% of the population of the Crimean Autonomous Republic and the city of Sevastopol and 79% of the population spoke Russian as a native language, not Ukrainian (www.gks.ru). A demographic change that most notably took place in the late 80's and early 90's was the return of a significant number of deported Crimean Tatars and their descendants. In the same census they constituted just under 10% of the peninsula's population, a sharp increase from 0,2% in 1979.

Another important issue concerning the peninsula was the Russian Black Sea fleet. Ever since its foundation, the bulk of this fleet was stationed in Crimea, more exactly in Sevastopol (Sosnovskiy, 2014). This situation persisted even after the collapse of the USSR, as even though the territory belonged to Ukraine, the port infrastructure for maintaining a fleet already existed and the soft climate allowed it. The stationing of this fleet was the object of several treaties

between Russia and Ukraine since 1991. There was some tension regarding the subject of the stationing of the fleet in 2009, when some Ukrainian politicians were determined to force the Russian ships to leave until 2017, but eventually, the next year, a new treaty was signed allowing them to remain in Sevastopol until 2047 (www.dw.com).

These ethnic and cultural differences reached their peak in early 2014, when following the toppling of the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich, major riots, which came to be known as *Euromaidan*, broke out in Kiev and across Ukraine and a new government, led by Arseniy Yatsenyuk formed. The reason why these riots spread to Crimea was the abolition of a law concerning regional languages which had the potential to cancel the privileges the Russian language held in many regions of the country (Shevchenko, 2014). The end of February 2014 saw daily demonstrations in Simferopol, Crimea's regional capital, both pro-Euromaidan and anti-Euromaidan. On 27 February government buildings and military bases in many points on the peninsula were surrounded by unidentified and unmarked troops, which came to be known popularly as *little green men*, and checkpoints were established at the two points linking Crimea to the Ukrainian mainland, effectively cutting off ties with the rest of Ukraine in establishing a de facto government of the peninsula, completely autonomous from the one in Kiev.

On 1 March 2014 Sergey Aksyonov, the leader of this self-proclaimed government, asked Russia for assistance in maintaining peace and public order in the region. By the next day Russian troops exercised complete control over the peninsula. On 16th March Crimean authorities held a referendum on the future status of Crimea, namely whether the region should join the Russian Federation or remain part of Ukraine. The official results were overwhelmingly in favor of becoming a federal subject of Russia, with over 95% of the votes in favor of such a union. The voter turnout was above 83% (www.ria.ru). A treaty of accession was signed on 18th March and the formal change of sovereignty was completed within days. Russia almost immediately started to make the shift of sovereignty in all spheres.

Reactions to the Crimean status referendum and effects of the sovereignty change

However, Ukraine does not recognize the Russian authority over Crimea and still considers it a part of its territory, currently under occupation. Also, most of the world's countries do not recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea and as such continue to view it as Ukrainian territory. As of October 2015, only a limited number of states have made statements concerning the recognition of Crimea's new status. These countries are: Afghanistan, Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea, Syria and Venezuela (www.un.org). Another seven countries (Armenia, Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe) have recognized the results of the referendum, but not the reunification itself.

Many western nations, such as the US, Canada or Australia and international bodies, such as the European Union, have criticized the facts that the referendum was hastily organized and there were no international observers, like the UN or the OSCE, which could have led to frauds. The Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, the highest representative body of this minority, has even gone as far as claiming that the actual turnout was under one third and that the vast majority of Tatars did not vote. In these conditions the referendum should have been invalidated, as the results were not representative for the entire population of the peninsula (www.pravda.com.ua). The UN has drafted a resolution condemning the referendum, but it was not approved by the Security Council, as Russia used its veto right and China abstained from the vote.

The US have started imposing sanctions soon after the moment when Crimea severed ties with the Ukrainian government, starting with freezing the US financial assets of people involved in the events leading to the undermining of Ukrainian control in Crimea (Executive Order). The EU has followed this line of action soon after the referendum took place and restricted the access to its territory of certain persons involved in the recent events. Soon thereafter, other European countries, like Albania, Iceland and Montenegro have followed this example. Travel bans and financial sanctions were imposed by Australia too (www.abc.net.au). Japan has also announced the suspension of talks with Russia in fields such as the military and visa requirements (Drennan,

2015). A second and third round of sanctions regarding transaction bans on individuals and Russian companies - especially from the energy and oil processing sectors, were announced by the US in light of the escalating tensions in the Eastern Ukrainian Donbass area. Similar sanctions were imposed or expanded by other western nations like Canada, Norway, Switzerland, Japan and Australia. Other fields affected by the sanctions, apart from the afore mentioned, are restrictions on selling arms and military equipment to Russia, as well as restrictions on high-tech goods and services in the energy sector (www.gov.co.uk). Another international body that imposed sanctions was the G8 Group, which suspended Russia, thus becoming the G7 (www.ft.com). The terms of all these sanction were prolonged in the beginning of 2015.

The effects of these sanctions are starting to take effect. More exactly, the growth of the Russian economy has slowed down from 1.3% in 2013 to just 0.6% in 2014 and it is forecasted to be negative at the end of 2015. The exchange rate for the Russian ruble compared to the US dollar has devalued significantly from a level of 32.65 at the beginning of 2014 to 70.75, the highest level in 2015, as of October (Todorov, 2015). These effects have been deepened by the drop of oil prices on international markets, as roughly half of Russian exports consists of oil and oil-based products.

There has been a response to western sanctions from Russia. The most notable of them was the embargo on agricultural products on all countries that imposed sanctions, which began in August 2014 and was prolonged for one more year in 2015 (www.bbc.com). The agricultural exports were 10% of the total exports of the EU to Russia. Russia has also closed its airspace to Ukrainian aircrafts and has threatened to do it for other nations that imposed sanctions, but has not put such plans into practice as of October 2015. Russia has also published a list of individuals, mainly politicians, who will be denied entry to the Russian Federation.

As far as sanctions on the Crimea itself go, the most immediate one was the recalling of all diplomatic personnel of all western nations. All consulates which existed on the peninsula, including those of all EU states were closed soon after the moment when Crimea severed ties with Ukraine (Resolution 12078/2/14). After the points that linked Crimea to the Ukrainian mainland were closed, Ukraine instituted its own blockade on the Ukrainian side. As of October 2015, trucks and other transports carrying Ukrainian goods are officially banned from entering Crimea (www.bbc.com). As mentioned before in a previous section, all international flights to Crimea were cancelled in early 2014, as Eurocontrol (European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation) banned all flights to and over Crimea, due to the inability to determine which country the airspace over the peninsula belonged to (argumentua.com). As a consequence, as of October 2015, there are no direct international flights to and from Simferopol. In June 2014 the EU has announced a ban on the import of goods originating from Crimea and Sevastopol (Resolution 11076/14). The example was soon followed by the US and Japan.

Given that traffic to and from Ukraine is now significantly restricted, most goods are now shipped to Crimea from Russia's Krasnodar Kray via ferry. This has led to problems such as delays in supply, diminished choices for consumers and rising prices for every-day consumer goods (www.bbc.com). Although there are plans for the construction of a bridge linking Crimea to the Russia via the Kerch Strait, it is estimated that this bridge will become operational only in 2019. Another problem is represented by the fact that most of the peninsula's electricity still comes from mainland Ukraine, as it has for all the period when it was part of the Soviet Union and Ukraine. This leaves it vulnerable to price increases from the Ukrainian side and also to power shortages and blackouts (news.allcrimea.net). Finally, another inconvenient for Crimean locals is related to the fact that Visa and Mastercard do not operate in Crimea anymore and credit card payments have become impossible.

Travelling difficulties for Russia's newest citizens - examining the policy of EU countries regarding the issuing of visas to residents of Crimea

Regarding the recognition of Russian passports issued in Crimea there have been mixed reports. The official line of the EU and the US is that they do not recognize the peninsula as a part

of Russia, so Russian passports issued there are considered invalid, so the embassies of the countries mentioned refuse to grant visas to citizens carrying such documents, advising them to reapply as Ukrainian citizens, with Ukrainian documents, at diplomatic missions on Ukrainian territory, as Ukraine still considers residents of Crimea its citizens (eudo-citizenship.eu). Although regularly this country does not allow double citizenship, they have made an exception for Crimeans, as there are special circumstances in the region. These circumstances refer to what Ukraine considers a temporary occupation of some of its territories. Despite these restrictions on granting visas to Crimeans carrying Russian issued passports, there have been reports according to which some EU embassies and consulates in Russia do not put these restrictions into practice (www.ria-trans.com).

The position of most EU embassies and consulates in Ukraine is clear: they are willing to process visa requests from residents of Crimea, but only if they apply using Ukrainian documents. Russian-issued documents are considered invalid, as the peninsula is considered an illegally occupied territory and Ukrainian military forces guarding the border with the Crimean Peninsula do not allow holders of Russian issued Crimean passports to cross the land border, on the same grounds (OBSE Ukraine, 2015).

From March 2014 to January 2015, Crimean authorities have issued Russian internal passports to all of Crimea's residents, which is essentially equivalent to granting Russian citizenship to the entire population of the peninsula. As of October 2015, according to local authorities, all Crimeans have been issued Russian (internal) passports and were made citizens of the Russian Federation, except in the rare cases when individuals expressed their desire to refuse the new citizenship (Hartog, 2015). According to Russian authorities those residents of Crimea who have refused Russian citizenship after the annexation are able to demand it later on, should they reconsider. The internal passport is the Russian Federation's most common type of internal identity document (Presidential Decree No. 232/1997). Possessing such a document allows one to interact with the Russian state on all matters, including receiving an external passport (загранпаспорт *-zagranpassport-* in Russian), which is the equivalent of passports for international travel issued by every country in the world.

The problem in the case of Crimea, is that considering its unclear international political status, many countries which require Russian citizens to obtain visas prior to travelling to those countries refuse to ground visas to holders of Russian (internal and/or external) passports issued in Crimea because they do not recognize the region as part of Russia and expect those who reside in the region to apply for visas with Ukrainian documents, as they still consider Crimea to be a part of that country. As mentioned before, this was the official position of most countries - particularly the EU and the US- immediately after the events of March 2014. However, there were reports of certain countries not following this official line.

Methodology

The scope of the research contained in the following pages aims to determine the official position of numerous European countries on the matter of issuing visas to the residents of Crimea who apply with Russian documents. Such a policy has negative implications on numerous aspects, especially the economy of Crimea, which can be influenced by international relations and international trade. The freedom of movement of the region's residents plays a great role in maintaining a fully functional economy. Therefore, it can be said that the very position diplomatic missions adopt on Crimea has the potential of influencing the state of the region's economy to a great extent on a medium and long term. This research is a qualitative one and it was carried out mainly in the form of an online interview. Secondary sources of information were also used, mainly news reports on the subject. An e-mail containing questions on the issue was sent to the embassies or consulates of all EU and Schengen Area member states in Moscow (31 countries in total), with the purpose of determining their position on this issue. Membership in EU and Schengen Area was the selection criteria of the countries.

The online interview contained seven questions about several categories of Crimean residents who could request visas based on different kinds of documents issued by the Russian Federation. Prior to exposing the questions, a short presentation of the author of the research, the research itself, its aims and the future usage of the results was made. The questions were as follows:

1. Is your country issuing visas to permanent residents of the Rep. of Crimea and Sevastopol who possess Russian external passports **issued in the Rep. of Crimea or Sevastopol**?
2. Is your country issuing visas to permanent residents of the Rep. of Crimea and Sevastopol who possess Russian external passports **issued in other parts of Russia**?
3. Is your country issuing visas to permanent residents of the Rep. of Crimea and Sevastopol who possess **temporary residence** permits in other parts of Russia and external passports **issued in the Rep. of Crimea or Sevastopol**?
4. Is your country issuing visas to permanent residents of the Rep. of Crimea and Sevastopol who possess **temporary residence** permits in other parts of Russia and external passports **issued in other regions of Russia**?
5. Is your country issuing visas to **permanent residents of other regions** of Russia besides the Rep. of Crimea and Sevastopol who possess external passports issued **in the Rep. of Crimea or Sevastopol**?
6. Is your country issuing visas to **permanent residents of other regions** of Russia besides the Rep. of Crimea and Sevastopol who possess external passports **issued in those regions**, but who **have in the past been residents** of the already annexed Crimean Peninsula?
7. Is your country issuing visas to Russian citizens from the Rep. of Crimea and Sevastopol who for some reason **do not have Ukrainian citizenship** (and have Russian citizenship ONLY) and thus do not have the possibility of obtaining any Ukrainian documents?

These particular blocks of countries were chosen because this is the biggest groups of countries in the world that has a common policy of demanding both Russian and Ukrainian citizens to obtain a visa prior to travelling to those countries.

The message containing all of these questions was sent on 6 December 2015 at 10 pm. The official time limit for responding to such requests for most embassies in 30 days. Therefore, answers were gathered in the interval 7 December 2015-7 January 2016. The average response time for the consulates that chose to reply to the message was 6 days. As for those countries that have not replied to the message, it was assumed that they ignored the message. 31 e-mails were sent, as described above (one to each country) and 10 of the countries did not offer any answer, which means there was a 32% rate of ignoring the request to participate in this research.

Results and discussions

All but two of the countries which responded to the message have given short answers, usually in forms such as: "Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of this consulate/embassy/diplomatic mission" or "*Country X/The EU* does not recognize the annexation of Crimea". Sweden and Germany were the only ones that answered all seven questions. However, the Swedish consulate only replied that so far they have received no requests fitting in the descriptions of questions 3, 4, 5 and 6 and the German consulate has only given a very short "mass reply" in relation to these questions. Table 1 presents the position of every EU and Schengen member plus the USA on the issue. The only country that has an explicit position on question 7 is Portugal, which is willing to process the visa requests from such persons.

Table 1 The position of EU and Schengen states and the USA regarding the issuing of visas to residents of Crimea

Country	Does the country issue visas to residents of Crimea with Russian passports?			Reason/Observations	Source
	YES	NO	N/A		
Austria		X		This country does not recognize the annexation; Only issues visa to residents of Crimea with Russian documents if they received Austrian visas before on an Ukrainian passport.	e-mail; http://www.travel.ru/
Belgium		X		Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of this diplomatic mission.	e-mail
Bulgaria	O		X	Declined to comment the issue; Multiple sources indicate that this country issues visas to Crimean residents with Russian documents on Russian territory.	e-mail; http://yug.svpressa.ru/
Croatia		I		Ignored message; No information from other sources.	N/A
Cyprus		I		Ignored message; No information from other sources.	N/A
Czech Republic	O		X	Declined to comment the issue; Multiple sources indicate that this country issues visas to Crimean residents with Russian documents on Russian territory.	e-mail; http://izvestia.ru/ ; http://www.tourskidka.ru/
Denmark		I		Ignored message; No information from other sources.	N/A
Estonia		X		This country does not recognize the annexation.	e-mail
Finland		X		This country does not recognize the annexation.	e-mail
France		O	X	Declined to comment the issue; Multiple sources indicate that this country issues visas to Crimean residents with Russian documents only in Kiev.	e-mail; http://pressorg24.com/
Germany		X		Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of this diplomatic mission and Germany does not recognize the annexation of the region. All residents of Crimea must apply for visas on Ukrainian territory. Answer to questions shown above: "1-7: no"	e-mail; http://www.rg.ru/
Greece	O	X		Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of this diplomatic mission; However, multiple sources indicate that this country issues visas to Crimean residents with Russian documents on Russian territory.	e-mail; http://www.tvc.ru/ ; https://russian.rt.com/ ; http://izvestia.ru/ ; http://www.tourskidka.ru/
Hungary		I		Ignored message; No information from other sources.	N/A
Iceland		I		Ignored message; No information from other sources.	N/A
Ireland		I		Ignored message; No information from other sources.	N/A
Italy	O		X	Declined to comment the issue; Multiple sources indicate that this country issues visas to Crimean residents with Russian documents on Russian territory.	e-mail; http://www.tvc.ru/ ; https://russian.rt.com/ ; http://izvestia.ru/
Latvia		X		This country does not recognize the annexation; Russian documents that contain the mention "Crimea" or "Crimea, Russia" are considered invalid. Holders of such passports are advised to return with "correctly inscribed" documents.	e-mail; http://www.baltictimes.com/
Lithuania		X		This country does not recognize the annexation.	e-mail
Luxemburg		X		Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of this diplomatic mission.	e-mail
Malta		I		Ignored message; No information from other sources.	N/A
Netherlands	O	X		Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of this diplomatic mission. „Normally diplomatic missions of the Netherlands do not process requests from applicants outside their jurisdiction“; Multiple sources indicate that this country	e-mail; http://www.tvc.ru/ ; https://russian.rt.com/ ; http://izvestia.ru/

				issues visas to Crimean residents with Russian on Russian territory.	
Norway		X		Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of this diplomatic mission.	e-mail
Poland	X			Accepts applications from residents of Crimea with Russian documents, but a "special permission" is required from the embassy.	http://crimea.ria.ru/
Portugal	X			Accepts applications from residents of Crimea with Russian documents, but only under "special conditions"; For example, loss of Ukrainian citizenship.	e-mail; http://crimea.ria.ru/
Romania		X		The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of this country cannot express an official position, as it has not yet received any applications like the ones described.	e-mail
Slovakia		I		Ignored message; No information from other sources.	N/A
Slovenia		I		Ignored message; No information from other sources.	N/A
Spain		X		Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of this diplomatic mission.	e-mail
Sweden		X		This country does not recognize the annexation.	e-mail
Switzerland		X		Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of this diplomatic mission.	e-mail
UK		X		Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of this diplomatic mission.	e-mail
USA	X			As of 30 October 2015, the US accepts applications from all residents of Crimea with both Russian or Ukrainian documents. All requests shall be processed in the same manner.	http://news.mail.ru/ ; http://nation-news.ru/
X - Answers received to the e-mail sent to each diplomatic mission					
I - It is to be assumed that the countries who ignored the message share the official position of the EU, which is not to issue visas to residents of Crimea with Russian documents					
O - Represents the position of states that issue visas to residents of Crimea with Russian documents, collected from other sources than the e-mail sent as part of this research					

Source: Own work based on the online interview and various other sources shown in the last column.

Summing up the findings we can say the following:

- 14 countries (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK) do not process requests from residents of Crimea with Russian passports;
- 1 country (France) has declined to comment on the issue, but there are reports about the fact that this country receives visas request from Crimean residents carrying Russian passports, but only at their consulate in Kiev;
- 2 countries (Greece and the Netherlands) have stated that Crimea is not in the jurisdiction of their diplomatic missions in Russia, but there have been numerous reports in 2015 about the fact that they do not follow the official line of the EU and do issue visas the residents of Crimea with Russian passports;
- 3 countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Italy) have declined to comment on the issue, but there have been numerous reports in 2015 about the fact that they do not follow the official line of the EU and do issue visas the residents of Crimea with Russian passports;
- 2 countries (Poland and Portugal) have officially stated that they are willing to analyze requests from Crimean residents, but in special circumstances, such as petitioning the embassies of those countries or loss of Ukrainian citizenship.
- 1 country (USA) has released an official statement according to which it is willing to process requests from residents of Crimea carrying Russian passports in normal circumstances. This change in the policy of the US is surprising, considering that this country was one of the biggest critics of the change of sovereignty that took place in Crimea;

- 9 countries (Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia) have not answered the online interview and have not given information on the subject in any other online source.

Therefore, a simplified version of the list above, answering to the question "what countries grant visas to residents of Crimea with Russian documents on Russian territory?" would look like this:

- NO (15 countries): Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK;
- YES (8 countries): Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, USA.
- No information (9 countries): Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia.

But even if a significant number of countries refuses to process requests from Crimean residents with Russian documents, that does not mean the roads are closed to those countries. Crimeans have a few options. The first one, recommended officially by the EU is to apply for visas with Ukrainian documents. For those who have Ukrainian passports issued before March 2014 and which are still valid, this is not a problem. There are however people who do not have such documents. And for them, travelling to Ukraine in order to obtain such a document can be a problem, because of the time and money required to undertake such a trip. There is also a category of citizens who do not possess valid Ukrainian internal passports anymore. Those cannot leave Crimea and go to Ukraine on land, as Ukrainian authorities, as mentioned before, do not allow Crimeans to cross the border with Russian documents. Ukrainian documents are, of course, no longer issued on Crimean territory since the change of sovereignty.

Another possibility is to apply for a visa to one of the Schengen countries listed above, which accept requests from Crimean residents with Russian documents. A Schengen visa allows to travel throughout the entire Schengen Area, no matter what state issued it. For example, if one possesses a visa issued by Italy (a country in the YES category), he or she can travel freely to Germany, Austria, Hungary and other states in the NO or „no information” categories. However, if one receives a Schengen visa, there is an obligation to first use it in the state that issued it (www.schengenvisainfo.com). So, a person who receives an Italian visa, must first travel to Italy. Only after that can they travel to other countries in the Schengen Area.

There is a similar agreement between four non-Schengen members of the EU (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania). According to an agreement from June 2014, a visa obtained in any of these four countries is equivalent to a visa obtained in the other three (Decision no. 565/2014). Possessors of such visas are allowed to stay in any other of the three countries for up to 90 days and even to first enter any of these four countries. But there is the unofficial obligation of travelling to the country that issued the visa. According to representatives of a travel agency that facilitates the obtaining of Bulgarian visas, if one for example receives a Bulgarian visa but uses it only to travel to Romania, he or she might encounter difficulties next time he or she shall request another Bulgarian visa.

Finally, another way of avoiding the difficulties of obtaining visas for residents of Crimea is terminating their status as a resident of Crimea. That can be done by obtaining residence in any other region of Russia, apart from the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol. Since most countries explicitly stated that they do not issue visas to residents of Crimea, changing this status should cancel of these restrictions. There is now another question. Changing the residence normally means adding another stamp with a new address in an already existing internal passport (www.gosuslugi.ru). Some countries might still refuse to receive requests from such citizens, because the passport itself will still be issued in Crimea, a region not recognized as part of Russia. Should this happen, the possessor of such a document shall have to obtain a new internal passport issued in that region of Russia where they have received a residence permit. This can only be done by going through a lengthy bureaucratic process. Therefore, this is perhaps the most

complicated of the choices presented in this part of the article, both because it implies a time and money consuming process and because it implies tricking the authorities by obtaining a (most likely) fictive residence in another part of the country. For countries that do not require an internal passport to grant a visa, obtaining an external passport in other parts of Russia is sufficient. Obtaining such a document is much easier than a new internal passport and there are certain agencies which facilitate the endeavors necessary for receiving such a document (www.gosuslugi.ru).

Advantages and limitations of the research

It is clear that since the largely unrecognized sovereignty change of Crimea a series of difficulties in travelling internationally have arisen for residents of Crimea when trying to receive visas with Russian documents. As the vast majority of these people now possess Russian documents, this is a theme which concerns more than 2 million people, virtually the entire population of the peninsula. This constitutes a problem mainly because it is now much easier to obtain Russian documents than Ukrainian ones. This situation is essentially a combination of economical, legal and administrative problems, which will continue to haunt the region until a compromise will be reached on an international level.

The primary advantage of this research is that it offers a clear picture of the positions on issuing visas to Crimeans of a large number of European countries. This is especially important because Europe generates the biggest volume of people's traffic to and from Russia and Ukraine. Another advantage is that it offers certain possible solutions which, according to the descriptions above can facilitate access to most countries in Europe.

The main limitation is that not all the countries that were questioned agreed to answer the questions in the interview, so it may be said that the general picture is still incomplete to a certain extent. Furthermore, certain countries which are geographically close to Crimea and which are easily accessible to the residents of the peninsula, such as Hungary, Slovakia or Croatia, have declined to answer.

Conclusions

When it comes to travelling internationally, it is obvious that Crimea's sovereignty changed and the subsequent undefined international political status has created several difficulties for the region's residents. The majority of the countries which have imposed such restrictions are in fact some of the biggest tourist industries in the world (for example, many of the countries of Western and Central Europe - more specifically, the EU) and also some of the most economically developed countries in the world. There are however certain countries which do not follow the policy of the EU on the issue and issue visas to residents of Crimea with Russian documents.

By obtaining a visa in any of these countries, residents of Crimea can travel practically to almost every other European country. The only European countries that accept exclusively visa requests from Crimeans based on Ukrainian documents are the UK and Ireland. True, there are certain conditions they have to meet, which were described above. But, theoretically at least, fulfilling these conditions, legal travel is possible with Russian issued documents. For the moment, this is the state of affairs and it is unknown for how much longer this will continue. Of course, the most effective way of cancelling all these restrictions will be the clear definition of Crimea's international status. This would render all documents issued there completely valid internationally for all purposes. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing when this will happen. There are negative examples of other regions with even more undefined statuses across the former Soviet Union, such as Abkhazia, Nagorno Karabakh, South Ossetia, Transnistria and the more recently self proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics.

The situation of the inhabitants of these unrecognized or not very widely recognized states is even more complicated because if they wish to travel internationally they have to obtain passports issued by fully recognized and fully functioning countries (e.g.: Armenia, Georgia,

Moldova, Ukraine etc). And some of these unrecognized states already have a history of more than two decades, during which time their status remained unchanged.

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