**THE ORIGINS OF THE CRIMEAN CRISIS:**

**POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND ETHNOPOLITICAL**

**CONFLICT IN CRIMEA UNTIL FEBRUARY 2014**

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the origins of the Crimean crisis in 2014, to establishment of practices and forms of political communications between ethnopolitical movements of the Russians, Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians in the Crimea. The article determines actors of the ethnopolitical conflict in the region and their political strategies. It reveals a type of communication between the region’s authorities and political actors. The author proves that Crimea is a plural, deeply divided community and it has stimulated a geopolitical competition of foreign political actors in the region. A type of the Crimean conflict defined as complex-compound. Factors of the conflict escalation in 2000–2013 have been revealed.

**Keywords:** political communication, ethnopolitical conflict, the Crimean crisis, the origins.

**Biography:** Baranov Andrey Vladimirovich (1966) is the Doctor of Sciences (Politics), Doctor of Sciences (History), Professor of the Department of Political Science and Political Management of Kuban State University (Russia). He is an author of works devoted to the political regionalism in Russia and Ukraine, interaction of political actors, regional identity.

Introduction. Forms and practices of political communication provide functioning of the political system, act as indicators of the civil society development level and democracy consolidation. Globalization influence on weak post-communist states is contradictory. In the age of globalization there is an activation of long-term ethnic, religious, territorial conflicts causing ambitious projects of proclamation of new states and intense competition for power. Within this context the Crimean case is pressing as it is a region of competition between the Russian, Ukrainian and Islamic Tatar identities and as well as of strong influence of Russia and Turkey. Crimea plays a key geopolitical role in the Black Sea transnational region. In a situation of increasing weakness of Ukraine (threatening to cause its collapse) it is urgent to reveal origins of the Crimean crisis of 2014.

Ethnopolitical and religious movements are a powerful actors of political process in the Crimea. The following research aspects are of priority: reasons of conflicts; actors of conflicts; their resources and strategies; interrelation of inner and outer ethnic, institutional, social and cultural factors of a conflict. It is important to assess communications between the Crimean conflict parties in order to find an effective methods for conflict resolution and post-conflict peace-building.

Theoretical framework. The article aims to define forms and practices of political communication between ethnopolitical movements of Russians and Tatars and Ukrainian state (2000–2013).

The article sets objectives:

- to define actors of ethnopolitical and confessional conflicts in the region, their resources of influence and political strategies;

- to reveal a dominant type of communication between the Ukrainian state and the region’s authorities and as well as foreign political actors;

- to define peculiarities of the Crimean regional community and disposition of its ethnic, linguistic and religious cleavages;

- to reveal a type of the ethnic-confessional conflict in Crimea;

- to define factors of escalation and de-escalation of the conflict within the context of the Russian Federation and Ukraine interactions.

Methodology. The research methodological basis is constructivism. It allows to interpret the ethnopolitical conflict as a collision of political actors in their intention to implement their interests related to public power, influence on the state policy and status in the social hierarchy (Rothschild, 1982, p. 23). The conflict parties are not ethnic and religious communities in whole but their leaders and elites. They use ethnicity or religion, their world outlook, organizing and ritual principles in pragmatic interests; they construct politicized myths and activity directives. Apart of ethnic and confessional groups which was politicized and involved into the conflict only becomes an agent of ethnopolitical mobilization. So the conflict is not fatal, its development level and dynamics depend on balance of political resources and structure of actors’ political opportunities.

The political segmentation lines broadly coincide with ethnic and religious ones; that makes Crimea a plural society. Therefore it is possible to apply the concept of a plural society grounded by A. Lijphart (Lijphart, 1977, p. 41-42).

The lines’over lay has created a complex-compound conflict. It is formed by conflicts’ diffusion, special features of their interaction are defined by a structure of parties’ political opportunities (Nikovskaya, 2009, p. 83-94). Composition of the conflict actors, their resources, “agenda” of counteraction cannot be reduced to one of such aspects: a civilizational, ethnic, confessional, international, socioeconomic ones, etc. According to V. Avksentyev, (Avksentyev et al., 2011, p. 8) such conflicts do not have a pronounced dominant aspect but there is the main line of counteraction which is a centre for bloc formation (aggregation). In Crimea these are ethnic confessional dissociations.

Scientific schools for studies on political communication were established both in Ukraine and in Russia. Integrated papers on the Crimean ethnopolitical conflicts were published by V. Grigoriyants and A. Malgin (2011), T. Senyushkina (2005), O. Gabrielyan (2003), A. Filatov (2012), V. Vishnyakov (2011). Papers on language policy and mass communications in Crimea are of high importance (Herberts et al, 2011; Somov, 2012, p. 158-167). Russian ethnopolitical movements are analyzed by Yu. Kokin (2011), A. Filatov (2011), S. Kiselev (2004). The Crimean Tatar movement was studied by O. Ryabtsev (2007), E. Muratova (2008, 2009), E. Muratova & N. Kuts (2012).

Findings and discussion. Let us describe a historical factor of communications. Crimea has always been multiethnic and multiconfessional. In the area of contacts of Christianity, Islam and Judaism none of the ethnic groups is indigenous. Wars resulted in a frequent change of the region’s state affiliation. For example, before 1450s Crimea was a vassal of the Byzantine Empire and there was the dominance of the Greek identity. Then the Ottoman occupation resulted in the existence of the Crimean Khanate with the Islam dominance. In 1783 Crimea became a Russian Empire province. During the Civil War period (1917–1920) Tatar organizations were trying to obtain the Crimean independency under the trusteeship of Germany and Turkey. In 1921 within the Soviet Russia the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was constituted on the basis of equality of all ethnic groups. In 1944 Tatars, Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians were unreasonably deported to the Central Asia due to the collaboration between a part of their representatives with the Nazi Germany. The Republic was reconstituted into a province and was populated by Slavs. In 1954 the Supreme Concil of the USSR transferred Crimea from the Russian Federation to Ukraine; till 1989 Tatars had no right to come back. That led to the development of a seat of acute ethnic conflicts. In the context of the USSR collapse the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was proclaimed as a multiethnic subject of Ukraine. The repressed ethnic groups started to be repatriated. In 1992–1995 Crimea had a status of the federal subject de facto, the Russian language was declared as an official along with Ukrainian and Tatar, according to the Crimean Constitution. The Crimean president Yu. Meshkov conducted pro-Russian course; it caused a conflict with Ukraine resulting in a change of the Constitution in 1998 and reduction of the autonomy. Under the agreement of 1997, Russia recognized Crimea as a part of Ukraine but still there was a frontier dispute due to the Kerch Strait delimitation and Black Sea Fleet status. As a result, separate ethnopolitical communities of Russians, Ukrainians and Tatars were formed on the peninsula; they had totally opposite ideas about their political future.

According to the census of 2001, Russians accounted for 60.2% of total population of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol; Ukrainians accounted for 23.9%; Crimean Tatars accounted for 10.2% (“Size and Composition of Ukrainian Population”, 2001). A mutual strengthening of ethnic and religious identity of the conflict parties may be pointed as a special feature. 97.8% of Tatars considered themselves as Muslims. 85.1% of Ukrainians and 84.9% of Russians considered themselves as Orthodox (Ivanov, 2011). In Crimea, the religious revival rate was higher than countrywide. In 1990 Crimea ranked 27th in the list of 28 regions according to the number of religious organizations but in 2007 it ranked 8th because of Islamic organizations (“Network of Religious Organizations”, 2007). According to the data of the Ministry for Culture of Ukraine, as of January 1, 2014 in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea there are 2083 registered religious organizations affiliating themselves with 42 confessions. 42.7% of them are organizations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In Crimea, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate had 509 organizations and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate had 40 organizations. Muslim organizations rank 2nd and account for 29% (4% countrywide). Protestant organizations rank 3rd and account for 20%. Associations of the Judaism, Armenian Apostolic Church, Karaites, etc. are few in numbers (Report on Churches and Religious Organizations network, 2014). A survey carried out in February-March 2011 by the Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies named after Olexander Razumkov among 2020 people showed that 78.9% of respondents considered themselves as Orthodox, 8.8% - as Muslims, 5.2% called themselves “just Christians” or did not affiliate themselves with any confession (“Crimean Residents’ Attitude towards Possible Threats…”, 2011).

As of January 1, 2013 the Muslim Spiritual Board of Crimea united 935 religious organizations and 576 organizations functioning without registration of a legal entity (Information Report of Ministry for Culture…, 2013). Since 1997 the All-Ukrainian Association of Social Organizations “Alraid” financed by Saudi Arabia was functioning in Crimea; the Hizb ut-Tahrir party recognized as extremist in many countries was functioning in the region as well.

It should be taken into account that in Crimea a civil identity of Russians was historically formed. It is shared not only by Russians by birth but also by many Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Jews, Greeks, Volga Tatars and others. For them historical symbols of pride and the Russian language are more attractive and efficient in terms of the Crimean society integration than the official Ukrainian language. According to the population census data of 2001, 97-98% of residents of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol used the Russian language in everyday life (“Size and Composition of Ukrainian Population…”, 2001). It is considerably more than the percentage of the ethnic Russians in the region population. About a half of the Crimean Ukrainians had the same identity as Russians. In Crimea, a part of those people who opposed themselves to “the Russian world” was scanty and they showed their position only on Internet.

A survey carried out in February-March 2011 by the Razumkov Centre among 2020 people revealed inequality of interethnic distances on the Bogardus social distance scale. The lowest distance level of the Crimean Russians is towards the Crimean Ukrainians (2.11), residents of the Southern and Eastern regions of Ukraine (2.89), citizens of the Russian Federation (3.11), residents of the Central Ukraine (3.12). The highest distance level is towards the Crimean Tatars (3.97 points), residents of the Western Ukraine (4.54), Turks (5.60) and Gypsies (6.02 points). However, since 2008 there was a significant decrease in the distance of Russians towards Tatars and residents of the Central and Eastern Ukraine as well as a significant increase in the distance towards residents of the Western Ukraine. It is indicative that a level of the distance between Russians and Tatars (4.22 points) was almost the same as the distance between Ukrainians and Tatars (4.10) (“Crimean Residents’ Attitude towards Possible Threats…”, 2011).

Fear in the Crimean citizens’ perception caused a potential ethnic conflict. It is reflected in results of a questionnaire survey carried out by the Razumkov Centre. In 2011 only 4.6% of respondents noted strained ethnic relations among the most important Crimean issues (in 2008 it was 16.4%); it was 3.1% among Russians and 14.7% among the Crimean Tatars. 76% of respondents did not feel safe from interethnic conflicts. In Sevastopol, where the Russian population is dominant, 88.6% of respondents admitted the presence of fears (Kuzmin, 2011).

An important aspect of communications between ethnopolitical movements is a choice of a language policy. In summer 2012, Ukraine adopted the Law “On fundamental principles of the state language policy” giving a regional status to the Russian and Crimean Tatar languages in areas where their speakers account for more than 10% of population (“The Law of the Ukraine”, 2012). It was approved by the Supreme Council of Crimea and the main political forces of the autonomy. On the contrary, the Ukrainian nationalists insisted on an exclusive official status of the Ukrainian language.

Materials from focus groups and questionnaire surveys conducted by the PATRIR Institute (Romania) and the Crimean political experts in 2010–2011 are of importance. It is referred to interconnected dimensions such as language policy in media, educational system, business, court proceedings, state administration. For example, interviews with media editors (from TV channels, newspapers, websites, news agencies) demonstrated a clear difference in positions of multiethnic and monoethnic media (Herberts et al., 2011, p. 84-113). Multiethnic media directors support trilingualism and interpret a problem as technical (in terms of deficit of financing, personnel, and infrastructure). On the contrary, editors and managers of monoethnic media interpret the trilingualism from a political point of view. The Russian media directors have the most critical positions and believe that the reform will reduce their audience and influence.

As for educational policy, the official data for 2010–2011 academic year collected by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine demonstrate dominance of the Russian language on all educational levels in Crimea (Herberts et al., 2011, p. 185-192). On the preschool level, 46,934 children of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea studied Russian and 1,693 children studied Ukrainian. In secondary comprehensive schools 148,452 people were educated in Russian and 13,609 people – in Ukrainian. In higher educational institutions of all levels 47,000 students were educated in Russian and 8,515 students – in Ukrainian. The Crimean Tatar language is learnt by the Orientalist students, theologists and historians of the Tauride National University as well as by students of Islamic educational institutions.

The focus groups and interviews with representatives of all ethnic groups of Crimea (according to the conclusions drawn by I. Brunova-Kalisetskaya and O. Dukhnich) showed that the language policy was interpreted as a form of interethnic, intercultural and power relations (Brunova-Kalisetskaya & Dukhnich, 2011, p. 152-154). In each group: of Russians, Ukrainians and Tatars a mother tongue has different functions. Russians and Tatars consider their languages as an evidence of the political influence and equality; they focus on foreign centers of culture and education. For the Crimean Ukrainians their mother tongue is a means to preserve their identity and to integrate into the state. Representatives of all ethnic groups interpret the Russian language in Crimea as a language of interethnic communication, business and joining to the globalization processes. The Ukrainian language is interpreted as official but it is rarely used in everyday life across the peninsula. The Crimean Tatar language is positively considered only as a means of communication between its native speakers. Among Russians and Ukrainians a policy supporting the Crimean Tatar language as the third language of communication evokes negative associations with “historical revanchism”, Islamisation and separatism.

Let us describe an institutional factor of communication. Ukraine is a decentralized unitary state but its regions have asymmetric weak statuses. Since 1998 Crimea has been divided into two administrative units – the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of federation subordination Sevastopol – in order to weaken the Russian irredentism (there are more Russians in Sevastopol than on the rest of the peninsula). Heads of both regions’ administrations were appointed by the President of Ukraine and were fully loyal towards him.

The results of the Ukrainian parliamentary elections of 2012 in Crimea showed that there was still a prevalence of pro-Russian parties. A ruling center party “Party of Regions” collected 30% of votes countrywide but it won 52.3% in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and 46.9% in Sevastopol; the Communist Party of Ukraine collected 13.2% countrywide, 19.4% in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and 29.5% in Sevastopol. On the contrary, a radical anti-Russian party “Freedom” won 10.5% countrywide but 1.0% in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and 1.4% in Sevastopol. A moderate anti-Russian party “Fatherland” collected 25.6% countrywide but 13.1% in Crimea and 5.9% in Sevastopol (Kochetkov et al., 2012, p. 160-161). However, the parliamentary parties represented voters’ interests inconsistently; it provided favourable conditions for the growth of new parties and ethnopolitical movements.

A key point of the conflict “agenda” was an issue of the political status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Claims of the Russian organizations ranged from autonomy level increase to federalization and (as a radical version) to unification of Crimea with the Russian Federation. On the contrary, Tatar associations strived for nation-building of an “indigenous people” idealizing a historical experience of the Crimean Khanate (XV–XVIII centuries). Tactically the Tatar and Ukrainian organizations’ interests coincided in weakening of the Russian movement.

Despite a great supporting basis, Russian ethnopolitical movements of Crimea were weakly represented in the regional authorities until January 27, 2014. They were weakened by splits and paltry ambitions of the leaders. S.A. Filatov (Filatov, 2011) relates to them such movements as the Russian Community of Crimea, the Russian Unity Movement, the Crimean Republic nongovernmental organization “Tauride Union”, the Congress of Russian Communities of Crimea –Russian Front of Sergey Shuvaynikov – a sociopolitical movement “Russian Crimea”, an organization “We are Russians”, the Russian Movement of Crimea, the Russian Bloc of Crimea, the Unity of the Russian Fraternities of Crimea.

In response to the Tatars’ squatting a new phenomenon of the Cossacks started to be formed (that is not historically inherent in Crimea). The functioning Ataman Council of Crimea and Crimean Cossack Unity arbitrarily destroy Tatars’ illegal buildings, guard the Christian temples and symbols as well as land estates. On the local elections of 2010 the Ataman Council of Crimea (atamans S. Palochkin and S. Yurchenko) mainly supported the Russian Unity Party.

The Popular Front “Sevastopol – Crimea – Russia” took up the toughest stances calling the Ukrainian authorities “occupational” and harshly criticizing the Russian Federation for a weak support (In Crimea one more deportation…, 2013). The Russian Crimea movement and the organization “We are Russians” did not will to participate in establishment of political coalitions. The most numerous organization – the Russian Community of Crimea has not been represented in the Presidium of the Crimean Coordination Council of the Russian Compatriots’ Organizations since 2010 (Filatov, 2011).

In the context of political communications the Crimean Islamic community with its combination of ethnic and confessional identity principles and international support is of the highest interest (“Turkey proposed the Ukraine to count…”, 2012). The conflict is affected by irregularity of peoples’ resettlement which escalates the competition for economic resources. 245,900 Crimean Tatars mainly repatriated to steppe and piedmont areas. Tatars there account for 20-34% of residents and for 0.7% both in prestigious cities of Sevastopol and Yalta (Yakovlev, 2013, p. 43-50). Though a number of villages with Tatars’ compact settlement was restored, lands are actively squatted in order to secure a privileged status. The squatting mainly takes place on the Southern coast of Crimea where the Tatar community is small (Matishov et al, 2008, p. 45). According to data of the Republic Committee for Land Relations of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, as of 2005 the repatriants have individual plots on 113% of the norm and other inhabitants – on 50% (Maschenko, 2006). That led to the establishment of a land plot fund which is used for reselling operations and is weakly controlled by the law. In November - December 2012 the conflict was activated due to the demolition of Tatars’ unauthorized buildings near Molodezhnoe village made by unidentified persons (Afanasyev, 2012).

Interconfessional conflicts are also expressed in weakening of mediation institutes, in attempts to create an isolated information space. Since 1995 in Crimea there is the Interconfessional Coordination Centre “The World is a Gift of God” composed of 8 religious associations including the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Muslim Spiritual Board of Crimea. The Council regularly advances peace initiatives and acts as a form of dialogue between the confessions. However, in 2000 the Muslim Spiritual Board suspended its membership in the institution and in 2002 it joined a competing Crimean branch of the International Religious Liberty Association where the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate are not represented. As a result the religious relations worsened.

Since 1990s Muslim communities have been support in claims to eliminate memorial crosses placed on localities’ entries; in some cases their activists destroy the Christian symbols with the connivance of the authorities. The destruction of the cross near Feodosia in June 2011 led to the most serious public reaction. In the eastern areas of Crimea where crosses are actively destroyed Russians react on the officials’ negligence by creating Cossack brigades. They hold “Slavic anti-protests” in order to prevent from squatting and setting of Tatars’ tent camps (townships Sudak, Novy Svet, Partenit). In case of Feodosia the cross destruction led to counteraction of the Cossack brigades and a mass fight. Penalties were imposed not on the culprits but only on 15 Cossacks having reacted on the provocation (Nikiforov, 2011). Another option is a conflict related to erection or reconstruction of religious buildings. For example, Milli Majlis and the Muslim Spiritual Board of Crimea claimed the lands of the Assumption Monastery located near Bakhchisaray. Milli Majlis rationalized its protest against the Christian temples’ reconstruction with the fact that they are built on the place of the Muslim sanctities (Golubinka village of Bakhchisaraysky district, 2006). The Commission with membership of confessions’ representatives found a way out of the conflict in the temple relocation; a monument to Concord was erected on the place under dispute (Shvets, 2008, p. 76-78). In November 2012 there was a provocative arson of a cathedral mosque under construction in Simferopol (Ivzhenko, 2012).

The confessional internal dimension shows itself in controversies between Islamic organizations. Their radicalization started from the mid-1990s when the Chechen separatists were undergoing treatment in Crimea. The organized criminal group “Imdat” was the main body of the extremists; in 1995 it organized mass unrest near Sudak (Tsykurenko, 2004, p. 177-178). In the late 1990s under the influence of Saudi Arabia a network of communities independent from the Spiritual Muslim Board of Crimea, headed by young imams with foreign education stiffened rapidly. The Hizb ut-Tahrir party functions semi-legally as a branch of the Society of the Muslim Brothers calling for creation of a global caliphate. According to M. Dzhemilev, in 2007 there were 500-600 salafites in Crimea. The newspaper “Segodnya” estimated their number as several thousand (Temnenko, 2008, p. 175). Mufti of the Crimean Muslims E. Ablaev is not pleased with a position of the authorities; he says that they “gave a green light” to Islamists and “throw send in the machine of Islam traditional institutions” (Kornievsky, 2010, p. 210). The Hizb ut-Tahrir party has intensified its activity since autumn 2012 in a form of mass rallies and protests against the movie “Innocence of Muslims” (“In Simferopol the Islamists Held a Meeting…”, 2012).

A line between a religious extremism and a secular nationalism is quite fine. The radical wing included the Adalet party forming troops of “national self-defence” and related to the Turkish groups “Grey Wolves” and “Nurdzhular”, the Hizb ut-Tahrir party, the Takfir wal-Hijra group (Veleshko, 2007, p. 137). Activists of these salafi-focused groups later acquired terrorist experience in the Syrian conflict.

A moderate line is represented by the Milliy Fyrqa party (headed by V. Abduraimov), nongovernmental organizations “The Crimean Unity” (headed by S. Nimetullaev), “The Crimean Generation” (headed by R. Balbek) and “Sebat” (headed by S. Gemedzhi). However, even they supported a project of a step-by-step peaceful establishment of the Tatar nation-building. The groups’ competition was strongly activated in 2011 but the opposition failed to obtain a position of the Majlis chairman (“Crimean Generation…”, 2011). The substitution of elderly Dzhemilev for R. Chubarov in November 2013 did not change the Majlis line.

The Crimean Tatar movement is not homogeneous. Its dissociation has increased since 2010. According to a survey carried out by the Crimean Sociological Studies service in 2007 and to the results of the Ukrainian Parliament – Supreme Council elections in 2012, the Crimean Tatar Majlis claiming an exclusive representation of interests was supported by no more than 43% of respondents in the ethnic group (Bekirov, 2012, p. 120-121). A status declared by the Crimean Tatar organizations contradicts to the legislation of Ukraine and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. For example, “Statute on the Crimean Tatar Majlis” and “Declaration on the national sovereignty of the Crimean Tatars” of 1992 aimed to achieve a political identity as an enforcement of the right to establish a national sovereign state (“Statute on Crimean Tatar Majlis…”, 2012). The Majlis Chairman M. Dzhemilev considered representative body Kurultaj (which under his control) as a legislative: “The authorities must interact with the indigenous people only through its legally-elected representative bodies” (“Majlis Members Will Not Participate in Work…”, 2010). The Majlis had a security service and intended to raise taxes for a “national budget”. This is a project of an ethnocratic state which is close to the Kosovo experience.

The Ukrainian laws do not stipulate collective rights to the ethnicity-based territorial autonomy as well as to privileges of “indigenous people”. The representation of interests was provided by means of quotas in Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, its commissions and deliberative bodies (since 1994) and in the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (since 2002). As a result of the municipal elections of 2010, the Tatar organizations were represented by 5% of deputes of Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and by 13.1% of district deputies (“Crimean Politics…”, 2011). According to the statement of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, in 2010 Tatars accounted for 7% in the executive authorities (“More than 7% of Crimean Tatars Work in Crimean Authorities…”, 2010). However, since 2005 a status of the Council of the Crimean Tatar Representatives under the President of Ukraine was lowered. Since 2010 the procedure of its forming and membership have been defined by the President of Ukraine. 11 body members out of 19 are not supported by Majlis; its members boycotted the Council meetings (“The Decree of the President of the Ukraine…”, 2010). Therefore, the Ukrainian ruling elites provided acceptable representation of Tatars in the national and local authorities but strived for control over the Tatar movement.

To what extent does a confessional conflict influence public opinion? A study conducted by the Razumkov Center in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (in October - November 2008 among 6,891 people of all ethnic groups) proved that among different reasons of the conflict the Crimean citizens considered ethnic controversies (26.2%) and the clash of economic interests (25.2%) to be the main ones. Religious fanaticism and intolerance (10.3% of answers) as well as the authorities’ prepossession towards different religious organizations (8.5%) were seen as derived from the abovementioned reasons. The respondents charged responsibility for the conflict upon representatives of foreign political and nongovernmental structures (2.68 points out of 5), foreign religious centres (2.14), ordinary parties of conflicts, leaders of the Crimean religious organizations (2.13), authorities of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (2.06) and Ukraine (2.02) (“Sociopolitical, Inter-ethnic and Inter-Confessional Relations…”, 2011).

The readiness to personally engage in the conflict (especially in violent forms) is low. However, a stable conflict of identities has been formed. According to a survey carried out by the Institute of Social Studies and the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research in August 2007, 24.7% of the Tatar 17-36 year old young people are sure that the best future is an independent state of the Crimean Tatars. Projectively, 50% of respondents considered this status as real in 20 years (Tischenko et.al, 2008, p. 76). A survey among Tatars carried out by the Tauride National University (in November - December 2008 among 600 people) revealed support of confessions’ cooperation if it does not violate religious norms and sensitivities (74%). A level of criticism towards the government is not related to the religiosity level. However, 1/3 of respondents did not condemn “non-traditional” movements in Islam which may cause a conflict (Muratova, 2009, p. 39-45, 30-32).

Conclusions. In the post-Soviet Crimea prevalent forms of political communication between ethnopolitical movements of Russians, Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians were direct forms of pressure on the authorities (demonstrations, rallies, protests), lobbying of group interests through the regional and local authorities, discussions in ethnicity-partisan media. There is a prevalence of the conflict avoidance and its verbalization. However, from the mid-2000s a tendency of local violence (cross destruction, arsons of religious buildings, fights) started to spread. Political elites and parties as well as authorities are leading actors of the ethnopolitical and confessional conflicts in Crimea. Their political strategies presuppose step-by-step weakening of competitors’ resources, achievement of dominance in the economic and information space. The article revealed dominance of the communication between the regional authorities and political actors in forms of participation in the elections, discussions of political issues in media.

The ethnopolitical communication agenda includes such priority issues as the Crimean political status, ethnic and religious equality, language balance, representation in the public and local authorities, land policy. The article proves a hypothesis that Crimea is a plural, deeply divided society but ethnic, linguistic and religious dissociations partly compensate each other. A bloc (complex - compound) type of the Crimean ethnic confessional conflict is determined. In terms of expression it is mostly latent and “put off for the future”. However, the Islamic radical project can destabilize the balance of ethnoconfessional interests.

It is important to underline that in 2000–2013 Crimea faced the development not of a set of “horizontal” ethnic and confessional conflicts between the population groups but of a complex - compound conflict. An active role in the latter was played by the Ukrainian and Russian authorities, the region’s elites, ethnopolitical movements. At the same time the region faced the development of inner conflicts in the local Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities.

An effective conflict settlement became possible on the basis of a consistent policy of integration of the Crimean ethnopolitical movements and confessions into the democratic state, the establishment of institutes and practices of their political representation in the plural society.

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