

Authorities Threaten to 'Liquidate' Crimean Tatar Council

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Crimea's prosecutor has threatened to outlaw Crimean Tatars' main self-governing body for "extremist" activities, reading out a warning to their leader in Russian despite his repeated appeals for a translation into the official language of their autonomy.

The Sunday admonition by prosecutor Natalya Poklonskaya to Mejlis leader Refat Chubarov was seen by some as an ominous sign for the Crimean Tatars, whose former head Mustafa Dzhemilev was banned from entering the Black Sea peninsula the previous day.

In a video posted on YouTube, prosecutor Natalya Poklonskaya described the massive rallies by Crimean Tatars against the ban on Dzhemilev's entry as "illegal" gatherings marked by "violence and threats of violence,"

"I am warning Refar Abdurakhmanovich Chubarov, the chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, about the unacceptability of carrying out extremist activities, I demand an immediate secession of extremist activity," Poklonskaya said.

Chubarov attempted to cut in: "I am having much trouble catching on the meaning," he said. "Please, in Crimean Tatar, in an official language, or at least in Ukrainian."

Poklonskaya plowed on, raising her voice to drown out the protests.

If the "violations noted above are not eliminated," the "Crimean Tatar Mejlis will be liquidated" and "its activity on the territory of the Russian Federation will be banned," she said.

"You have violated my rights," Chubarov said told Crimea's prosecutor by reading out her warning "not in my native language, not in the official language."

A reader on the Ekho Moskvyy website said Sunday that the "repressions" constituted "nothing new" for Russia, but that repressing the "Crimean Tatars, who have already survived the horror of the purges, may backfire for the regime — and it will."

Crimean Tatars, whose members were persecuted and exiled from their homeland under Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, have opposed Russia's annexation of Crimea, though Moscow has sought to appease any protests by promising to grant Crimean Tatars the same kind of self-governing and linguistic autonomy they enjoyed in Ukraine.

In a televised appearance last month, Putin said he had signed a decree to "rehabilitate" the Crimean Tatars and other ethnic minorities on the peninsula — "all those who suffered during Stalin's repressions."

The decree, published on the Kremlin website, also said it aimed to "restore historical justice and remove the consequences of the illegal deportation" and to "foster the creation and development of national-cultural autonomies."

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