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Meeting for Tatar Victims of Stalinist Deportations Could Be Canceled

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Russian President Vladimir Putin (C) attends a meeting with representatives of Crimean Tatars at the Bocharov Ruchei state residence in Sochi.

Crimean authorities have drawn up an order prohibiting any large scale public meetings on the peninsula until June 6, a move that could result in the cancellation of a planned Crimean Tatar event remembering Stalin's deportation of the ethnic group.

The order, carrying the name of Crimea's acting head Sergei Aksyonov and published Friday on Facebook, says that the decision was connected to violence in south-eastern Ukraine and aimed at eliminating possible extremist provocations.

A meeting had been planned for May 18, Crimean Tatars' traditional day of remembrance for those deported by Soviet leader Josef Stalin for their alleged collaboration with Germany in World War II. Many of the 200,000 deportees died on their way to into exile in Central Asia.

The Muslim minority group was eventually allowed to return to the peninsula in the 1980s.

The relationship between the Crimean Tatars and the current authorities in Simferopol is a troubled one, with many having boycotted the March referendum on joining Russia.

Furthermore, thousands took to the streets earlier this month after their spiritual leader Mustafa Dzhemilev — who was a former leader of the Mejlis, the ethnic group's representative body — was banned from entering Crimea.

Crimean prosecutor Natalya Poklonskaya said she has asked for criminal cases to be opened against those who protest publicly against Dzhemilev's ban and threatened to "liquidate" the Mejlis.

Crimean Tatars' interactions with Russian authorities have not been entirely negative, however.

Last month President Vladimir Putin signed a decree officially rehabilitating the Crimean Tatars, while some small Crimean Tatar groups have said that Kiev had done little to help them since their return and that they are happy to be part of Russia.

Meeting with Crimean Tatar representatives on Friday, Putin said "We cannot allow the Crimean Tatar people to become a bargaining chip in any disputes, including and above all intergovernmental disputes."

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