

Crimean Tatars' Headquarters Vandalized in Simferopol

September 01, 2014



Former chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars Mustafa Dzhemilev walks near a checkpoint in Kherson region as he attempts to get to the territory of Crimea.

The community headquarters of the Crimean Tatars in Simferopol were vandalized ahead of upcoming elections on the peninsula, local media reported Monday.

The group's secretary, Dilyaver Akiyev, said the incident occurred around 2 a.m. Monday, regional news agency Crimea.Reality reported.

"The night caretaker saw an unknown person kick in the front door of the building around 2 a.m. Monday and then flee. When the caretaker walked out of the building, she then saw that obscene signs had been drawn on the building, as well as something resembling a target," Akiyev was reported as saying.

A photo of the graffiti posted on Crimea.Reality shows the number "666" and what appears to be a penis.

The Crimean Tatar community vocally opposed Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in March and has called on people to boycott upcoming local elections as illegitimate.

Describing the vandalism as part of a "provocation against Crimean Tatars," Akiyev said that although a complaint had been filed with police and video evidence taken for review, he didn't expect police to find the culprit.

"This is just the latest provocation. The elections in Crimea are approaching, and the Crimean Tatars have called on their community, as well as everyone else, to boycott. According to our information, most of our people have listened to this advice," Akiyev said.

The news of the vandalization came amid accusations by Refat Chubarov, the group's head, that the FSB had been confiscating books written by the group's former leader, Mustafa Dzhemilev, from bookstores in Crimea.

"As I am told from Crimea, in August, raids were conducted by the FSB at bookstores and among private book sellers, during which — without the presentation of any documents to justify the action — books were forcefully taken because the contents did not correspond to their [the FSB's] idea of what is permissible for citizens to read," Chubarov wrote on Facebook on Sunday.

Dzhemilev was banned from Russia — and therefore his former home in Crimea — for five years in May after the Crimean prosecutor accused him of "extremism." Dzhemilev has repeatedly warned of an impending crackdown on the Crimean Tatar population and referred to the new Russian authorities as "occupiers."

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