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Crimean Tatars' News Channel Warned for 'Extremist' Content

By Allison Quinn

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A Crimean Tatar television channel has come under fire from Russian authorities for allegedly broadcasting content that borders on promoting extremism.

The channel, ATR, announced on air Wednesday that it had received a letter from the Russian Interior Ministry's center for combatting extremism, showing the contents of the letter to the camera so that viewers at home could see for themselves.

The letter said Russia's media watchdog had complained that the channel was "persistently presenting the idea of possible repression on ethnic and religious grounds, promoting the formation of an anti-Russian public opinion and deliberately fueling distrust among the Crimean Tatars toward the government and its actions, which indirectly holds the threat of extremist activity."

The channel — owned by a Russian businessman with Tatar roots, Lenur Islyamov — is now

required to provide police with several official documents, including its registration, information on its personnel and the lease agreement for its headquarters.

It was unclear how long the channel was given to submit the requested documents.

The Crimean Tatar community has repeatedly been accused of extremism by authorities since Russia's annexation of the peninsula from Ukraine in March. The annexation was broadly opposed by the local Tatar community.

Both the current and former leader of the Mejlis, the Crimean Tatars' informal executive body, have been banned from the peninsula by prosecutors for allegedly displaying "signs of extremism."

Mustafa Dzhemilev, the former leader of the Mejlis, was banned from his home in late April and has warned since then that the peninsula's ethnic minority would face discrimination and harassment under the new authorities.

Refat Chubarov, the Crimean Tatars' current leader, was also banned from Crimea and has echoed Dzhemilev's warnings, referring to the new authorities as "occupiers."

The Crimean Tatars were deported en masse to Central Asia under Soviet dictator Josef Stalin in the 1940s and were only permitted to move back to their ancestral homeland in the 1980s when perestroika began.

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