

Crimean Government Steps Up Property Confiscations

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Crimean government has seized 160 hectares of illegally acquired land located in a protected nature reserve, as local authorities and private groups continue to redistribute property following Russia's annexation of the peninsula in March.

The territory seized includes two kilometers of beachside land and vineyards, and is valued by the authorities at over 3 billion rubles (\$186 million), the Interfax news agency quoted Crimean Deputy Prime Minister Mikhail Sheremet as saying.

According to Crimean authorities, the land's 90 owners, mostly high-ranking Ukrainian government officials from Kiev and eastern Ukraine, paid nothing for the land when they acquired it between 2004 and 2010.

The illegal transaction came to the Crimean authorities' attention when the owners recently

attempted to sell the land. According to Sheremet, investigators suspect that the 90 registered owners are merely a front for one high-ranking Ukrainian official.

Around 4,000 businesses have had their property seized by government or private interests since Crimea became part of Russia, according to Ukraine's Justice Ministry, The Associated Press reported in earlier this month.

Last month the Crimean government stepped up nationalization efforts by amending a private property seizure law to allow the state to take control of assets of "particular social, cultural or historical value."

The same day the law's revisions were introduced, authorities nationalized the peninsula's largest bread producer, Krymkhleb, accusing it of funneling profits to Kiev to fund military operations against separatists in eastern Ukraine.

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