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Investigators Raid House of Arrested Crimean Tatar Leader

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Crimean Tatars praying in the local mosque.

Russian investigators searched the house of a senior figure in the Crimean Tatar community Friday who was arrested the day before, local media reported.

Akhtem Chiigoz, deputy head of the mejlis — the Tatar representative assembly — was arrested Thursday, Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement. He was detained on suspicion of organizing "mass disorder" over an incident in which Crimean Tatars and pro-Ukrainian activists clashed with pro-Russian activists outside Crimea's parliament in Simferopol on Feb. 26, 2014.

The raid on Chiigoz's house started early Friday morning with the arrival of a van full of armed officers from the Investigative Committee, the Federal Security Service and Public Prosecution Service, Krym.Realii website reported, citing a local politician.

"They [investigators] are behaving in a very aggressive manner," Chiigoz's son-in-law was quoted as saying by Krym.Realii, part of RFE/RL.

Earlier this week, the independent Crimean Tatar TV channel ATR was raided, and all the video recordings made during the Feb. 26 protest were confiscated by security forces.

The arrest of the mejlis's deputy head and ensuing search are the latest incidents in what appears to be an ongoing crackdown by the authorities on the Crimean Tatars, a Turkic ethnic group, since Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine last March — a move that most of the Tatar population opposed.

Members of the Crimean Tatar representative assembly believe the latest arrest will prompt a new wave of repressions, Krym.Realii cited the head of the mejlis as saying.

The Tatars were forcefully deported from Crimea under Soviet dictator Josef Stalin and were only allowed to return only in the final years of the Soviet Union.

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