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New Russian Bill Condemns 1954 Transfer of Crimea to Ukraine as 'Illegal'

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Russia's parliament plans to pass a bill this spring that will annul the Soviet Union's 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine, in a symbolic move intended to vindicate Russia's recent annexation of the peninsula by canceling what seemed an equally symbolic move six decades ago.

The bill aims to restore "historic and legal justice," Federation Council speaker Valentina Matviyenko said, Interfax reported Wednesday.

"No one asked the residents of Crimea or Sevastopol then, no one consulted the regional authorities," Matviyenko was cited as saying in the report.

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev handed over Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 in a symbolic gesture that appeared to be of little consequence at a time when both Russia and Ukraine were part of the U.S.S.R.

But after the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, many Russians felt they had lost a territory that was rightfully theirs.

The bill aims to "establish the fact that already back then, in 1954, an illegal act was committed," Matviyenko said. " We want to document the injustice done to Crimea and Sevastopol. It will be like a historic fact and a historic document."

The annexation of the Black Sea peninsula by Russia in March last year has been widely condemned by the West, which disputes the results of a referendum in favor of joining Russia and refers to the annexation as an invasion.

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