

U.S. Condemns Russia's 'Extremist' Label for Crimean Tatar Medzhlis

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Muslim Tatar men pray in the Great Khan mosque (Khan Dzhami) in the Crimean town of Bakhchisaray.

The U.S. State Department has urged Russia to reverse its decision to ban the Crimean Tatars' representative body as an “extremist” organization, the department press office reported Thursday.

The Medzhlis — the Crimean Tatars' representative body — was branded an extremist group by the Russian Justice Ministry on April 18 and is forbidden from operating in Russia. The ban prohibits the organization from meeting, publishing its views in mass media and holding public events.

Crimean Prosecutor General Natalya Poklonskaya first ordered the organization's immediate closure in March to “prevent violations of federal law.”

“We call on the Russian Federation to reverse the Ministry of Justice’s recent decision to designate the Crimean Tatar Medzhlis as an “extremist” organization and the decision by de facto authorities in Crimea to suspend this democratic institution,” state department

spokesman John Kirby said. The under-represented Crimean Tatars have a long history of oppression, he added.

Members of the Medzhlis, including former leader Mustafa Dzhemilev, have been accused of involvement in the ongoing blockade of Crimea by Ukrainian activists and of disrupting power supplies to the peninsula, Russian state-controlled television channel NTV reported. Dzhemilev has since fled to Ukraine and is on the federal wanted list.

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