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Tatars Demand Return of Crimea in Ukraine-Russia Talks

By AFP

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Crimean Tatars hold flags during a commemoration meeting on Independence Square in Kyiv. **SERGEY DOLZHENKO / EPA / TASS**

Crimean Tatar community leaders on Tuesday demanded that returning the peninsula, annexed by Russia in 2014, should be a condition imposed by Kyiv in its talks with Moscow to end the war in Ukraine.

At a virtual meeting of the Mejlis — the traditional assembly of the Tatar Muslim minority in Crimea — members declared that returning to the peninsula should be an "obligatory condition" in all negotiations with Russia.

"The re-establishment of the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including the republic of autonomous Crimea and Sevastopol, should be an obligatory condition for official negotiations between Ukrainian representatives and the aggressor state," the chief of the assembly, Refat Chubarov, said on Facebook.

A new round of talks between Russia and Ukraine in Istanbul on Tuesday initially gave cause for optimism, but the Kremlin dashed those hopes by saying Wednesday it saw nothing "promising or any breakthrough."

Ukraine's chief negotiator David Arakhamia has said his country was demanding an international agreement guaranteeing its security.

He proposed that Crimea and eastern Ukraine under separatist control be "provisionally excluded" from negotiations.

Russia has demanded that a peace agreement include recognizing Crimea as Russian as well as eastern Ukraine as autonomous.

The Tatar community, which accounted for 12-15 percent of the two million Crimea residents, had largely boycotted the 2014 referendum organized by Moscow after it seized the peninsula from Ukraine by force.

The vote was also not recognized by the international community.

Moscow then banned the Mejlis, declaring it an extremist organization.

Human rights organizations have accused Russia of political repression against the Crimean Tatar community.

Around 30,000 Crimean Tatars, including their leader Mustafa Dzhemilev, left the peninsula for mainland Ukraine after the Russian annexation.

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