

Yuriy Lukanov

## **The Press**

How Russia destroyed Media Freedom in Crimea

With a foreword by Taras Kuzio

# UKRAINIAN VOICES

---

Collected by Andreas Umland

- 28     *Oleksandr Melnyk*  
World War II as an Identity Project  
Historicism, Legitimacy Contests, and the (Re-)Construction of  
Political Communities in Ukraine, 1939–1946  
With a foreword by David R. Marples  
ISBN 978-3-8382-1704-8
- 29     *Olesya Khromeychuk*  
Ein Verlust  
Die Geschichte eines gefallenen ukrainischen Soldaten,  
erzählt von seiner Schwester  
Mit einem Vorwort von Andrej Kurkow  
Aus dem Englischen übersetzt von Lily Sophie  
ISBN 978-3-8382-1770-3
- 30     *Tamara Martsenyuk, Tetiana Kostiuchenko (eds.)*  
Russia's War in Ukraine 2022  
Personal Experiences of Ukrainian Scholars  
With a foreword by Tetiana Kostiuchenko and  
Tamara Martsenyuk  
ISBN 978-3-8382-1757-4
- 31     *Ildikó Eperjesi, Oleksandr Kachura*  
Shreds of War. Vol. 2  
Fates from Crimea 2015–2022  
With a foreword by Anton Shekhovtsov and an interview of  
Oleh Sentsov  
ISBN 978-3-8382-1780-2

The book series “Ukrainian Voices” publishes English- and German-language monographs, edited volumes, document collections, and anthologies of articles authored and composed by Ukrainian politicians, intellectuals, activists, officials, researchers, and diplomats. The series’ aim is to introduce Western and other audiences to Ukrainian explorations, deliberations and interpretations of historic and current, domestic, and international affairs. The purpose of these books is to make non-Ukrainian readers familiar with how some prominent Ukrainians approach, view and assess their country’s development and position in the world. The series was founded, and the volumes are collected by Andreas Umland, Dr. phil. (FU Berlin), Ph. D. (Cambridge), Associate Professor of Politics at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and an Analyst in the Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs.

Yuriy Lukanov

# THE PRESS

How Russia destroyed Media Freedom in Crimea

With a foreword by Taras Kuzio

*ibidem*  
Verlag

## **Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-1784-0

© *ibidem*-Verlag, Stuttgart 2023

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und elektronische Speicherformen sowie die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

Printed in the EU

# Content

Preface by <i>Taras Kuzio</i> .....	7
Introduction.....	11
Mayhem Panorama .....	17
OSCE, the UN and Obama Being Expelled from Crimea .....	17
Bloody Fight in Sevastopol.....	25
Russians Only.....	32
Limited “referendum” .....	35
Accused of spying .....	41
The son was held responsible for his father.....	46
Sevastopol detective .....	51
Kerch ferry service takeover .....	55
Injured journalist’s camera.....	64
Deprived of the Right to a Profession.....	67
Chornomorka was the first to shut down .....	67
Working without equipment .....	73
“Freedom” does not fit here.....	82
Reporter-“Extremist” Mykola Semena .....	93
They Will Stay in Prison for Five Years.....	125
Retribution for “Krym” battalion.....	125
Russian unwittingly .....	135
Crimea Is Not for the Crimean Tatars .....	143
ATR is not for sale .....	143
Notice: entry denied.....	157
The Last Word.....	189



# Preface

## **Russia's Soviet-Style Repression of Media and Freedom of Speech in Occupied Crimea**

The first edition of the book you are holding now is evidence of alleged criminal activity by the „courts“ of the Russian-occupied Crimean city of Feodosia. This is not an exaggeration. In Russia, books have been cited as proof of crimes, as they were in the Soviet Union.

Iryna Danylovych is a nurse, as well as a citizen journalist. Nowadays, it is not unusual to have such a combination of commitments in Russian-occupied Crimea, where Danylovych is currently serving a seven-year sentence on fraudulent charges. After Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in February 2014, Russian authorities created unbearable conditions for professional journalists to work, leading to the phenomenon of citizen journalism. People from various professions began to disseminate information about what was truly taking place in Russian-occupied Crimea.

Danylovych published a blog, which was devoted to questions of medicine, but which also highlighted the political repression of all those who disagreed with Russia's occupation. Goons from the FSB (Federal Security Service), Russia's domestic successor to the Soviet Union's KGB, kidnapped her by forcing her into a car, and illegally imprisoned her in a basement for nine days without any criminal charges or the provision of legal assistance. She was threatened, subjected to extreme psychological pressure, and her eyes were exposed to a noxious mixture. The FSB's so-called „investigation“ accused her of manufacturing explosives, and claimed she was a terrorist. Danylovych faces up to eight years' imprisonment and a fine of up to 100,000 Russian rubles. Her experience is not uncommon. Her story is found with many other trumped-up cases throughout Crimea.

Yuriy Lukanov has updated the second edition of his book with new documentary information dedicated to the phenomenon of such brave citizen journalism in Crimea.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in spring 2014 was not only a blatant act of military aggression and violation of international law, it went far deeper. Lukanov's detailed book-length study is the first collated publication of memoirs and the evidence of journalists about the Russian authorities' repression of the media in Crimea since 2014. Media freedom has become far worse since Russia has become more like a fascist, totalitarian dictatorship after the constitution was changed in 2020 to allow Vladimir Putin to be de facto president for life.

Lukanov's book covers in depth the abuse of human rights and freedom of speech in Crimea under the Russian occupation, with detailed case studies of the repression of and extreme violence against journalists. Russia's annexation of Crimea led to the return of Soviet-era repression of Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians and Russians: indeed, anybody opposed to Russia's illegal occupation.

Heavy-handed repression of the media has gone hand-in-hand with discrimination against Crimean Tatars and what the author calls 'Ukrainophobic chauvinism'. Occupied Crimea has been flooded by FSB officers who eavesdrop, place under surveillance, undertake the wanton destruction of property, perpetrate savage acts of violence, detain under false accusations, and hold mock trials and convict journalists and civic activists.

President Vladimir Putin's occupation regime is undertaking systematic repression in Crimea of the kind last seen in the dark days of the Soviet Union. This includes the closing down and corporate raiding of media outlets, and the use of vigilante thugs (*titushky*) to severely beat journalists and, in some cases, murder civil-society activists. Peaceful pickets and protests are violently broken up and their participants savagely beaten, arrested, and convicted on spurious Soviet-style charges.

This book covers those areas that relate to the suppression of media freedom in Russian-occupied Crimea. These include the expulsion of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) from Crimea because the Kremlin does not want them collecting information and reporting the destruction of media freedom.



Lukanov's book also analyses how the Russian occupation authorities have undertaken steps to establish a Putin-friendly monopoly over the media in Crimea. Lukanov analyses how the FSB, the Ministry of Interior, the Prosecutor's office, and Cossacks and Russian extremist nationalist vigilantes have undertaken corporate raids on Ukrainian and Tatar media outlets. They have also used physical violence against journalists and civic activists, put on trial members of their families and thrown out of work journalists who refuse to toe the line on Russia's occupation of Crimea.

This book sheds light on a new wave of political repression of Crimean Tatars that began after Russia's occupation. Half of the Crimean Tatar people died during the Soviet authorities' ethnic cleansing of them from Crimea to Central Asia in 1944 on false charges of „collaboration with the Nazis“. Crimean Tatars are banned from commemorating their genocide in 1944 in May of each year. They were only allowed to begin returning to Crimea in the late 1980s and 1990s, and by 2014 accounted for 15 percent of the Crimean population. Since 2014, under Russian occupation, Crimean Tatar leaders have been expelled and imprisoned, their media outlets have been closed, and the unofficial parliament, *Mejlis*, has been banned.

Lukanov's detailed study of the infringement of human rights and media freedom in Russian-occupied Crimea is important documentary evidence for journalists, academics, civic activists, and policymakers. This extensive and groundbreaking study should be widely circulated to Western governments, media, and experts. The world needs to know about Putin's use of Soviet-style political repression in a territory that he has illegally annexed.

Taras Kuzio is a professor of political science at the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy. In November 2010, he published *The Crimea: Europe's Next Flashpoint?* which forecast Russia's invasion and occupation four years later. His 2022 book *Russian Nationalism and the Russian-Ukrainian War* won the 2022 Petersen Literary Fund prize. His newest book is *Genocide and Fascism. Russia's War Against Ukrainians*.

Taras Kuzio



## Introduction

On February 27, 2014 at four o'clock in the morning, armed men in unmarked uniform captured the premises of the Council of Ministers and the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. With bitter irony, the journalists compared it with the attack of Nazi Germany on the Soviet Union. Then, on June 22, 1941, the war started at four o'clock in the morning, too.

Just over a week before, on February 18-20, at the Independence Square in Kyiv, more than eighty people were shot. The funeral ceremony was held in the same place, at Independence Square, accompanied by a sad melody of the song "Duck's floating."

After this terrible crime, the pro-Russian President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych fled to Russia. His government fled together with him. The country was dominated by anarchy. The opposition supporting the Maidan, which came to power after its victory, did not have time to form a Cabinet of Ministers. This is when the government buildings in Simferopol were occupied.



Hot discussions during the pro-Russian rally in Simferopol.

Photo by Yuriy Lukanov

The next day after the capture, Simferopol was raging. People were walking down the streets with the Russian tricolor and shouting slogans urging Russia to come to the peninsula. The streets were also full of organized groups of young men in sportswear or militarized uniform with St. George's ribbons on their chests. These ribbons were the symbols of the Russian Empire.

They called themselves the "self-defense of Crimea." They held campaigns near Ukrainian military units and then started blocking and capturing them together with the Russian military men.

As the subsequent events showed, most of the activists and organizers of these rallies were imported from Russia. In fact, these riots were organized by Putin's Russia, which has been developing the policy of annexing foreign territories for years.

The pro-Ukrainian citizens, who came out with the slogan "*Crimea is Ukraine*", opposed them. The Crimean Tatars, the indigenuous people of Crimea, who yet in the 40s' of the last century experienced the imperial colonization policy of Moscow, being deported by the Stalin's regime and being able to return home after the USSR collapse only, were particularly active.

No one doubted that the seizure was made by members of the Russian armed forces. It was clear that Russia started the campaign of the occupation of Crimea, an act further continued by the war in Donbas and cost thousands of lives and millions of broken destinies.

Russia has ignored the Budapest Memorandum, which it signed with the US and the UK, ensuring the territorial integrity of Ukraine in exchange for Ukraine's giving up of the nuclear weapons located on its territory. One of the guarantors of Ukraine's territorial integrity hypocritically violated this integrity after 20 years.

On February 27, the Verkhovna Rada of Crimea, at an extraordinary session in the presence of the armed Russian military men, scheduled a "referendum" on the state independence of Crimea for May 25. This resolution was contrary to the Constitution of Ukraine and international law established after World War II. Then the date of the illegal "referendum" was adjourned twice. Finally, it was

held hastily on March 16. Numerous witnesses say that the results of the “referendum” were rigged.



Rally for Ukraine in Simferopol. Photo by Yuriy Lukanov.

The residents of Simferopol, as well as the entire peninsula, told to each other the rumors that “fierce nationalists” from western Ukraine are going to come to Crimea, carry out a genocide of the Russian-speaking Crimeans and instill their “Nazi” order. All this allegedly was done with the consent of Kyiv, where the “fascist junta” seized power.

The pressure was maintained through the Russian media popular in the peninsula, which rapidly spread the fake news. Besides this, they were played up by many local media, on which the Russians had decisive influence.

The author of these lines had a very revealing dialogue on a bus. I asked where I'd better get out.

- Are you a visitant? – an elderly woman asked me instead of answering.

- Yes.

Are you not from Western Ukraine? – according to the disseminated mythology, the greatest Crimea haters live in Western Ukraine.

- No, I'm from Kyiv.

- Did you come to us with good intentions?

A major role in this shameful campaign was played by the Kremlin-controlled Russian media, which have been working for several years, deliberately washing the brains of not only the residents of the peninsula, but also of all Ukrainians.

*“Crimean audience listened to the Russian news about events on the Maidan,”* describes the current situation, the author of the Annexation of Crimea, **Myroslav Mamchak**, a military journalist. *“Russian media described Maidan as Nazis’ riot against the legitimate authority. The government, which replaced Yanukovych, was called “fascist junta” by the Russian media. This coined term was repeated by Crimean media, followed by the inhabitants of the peninsula.*

*Scared Crimean officials not only repeated, but also invented dramatic situations on their own. This is how the rumors about Nazi troops appeared, which nobody has ever seen in Crimea, but everybody knows that they are ready to come to Crimea and arrange the massacre of civilians. They were discussed and feared, especially among the older generation. The ‘witnesses’ of their crimes began to appear.*

*The inflation of the ‘anti-fascist’ hysteria and dread in the face of the imaginary “Maidan Nazis” appeared to be quite efficient. The people were psychologically determined to seek salvation. Where? Certainly, asking the ‘great and brotherly Russia’ to protect them from the “bloody maniacs” of Kyiv. This is how the Russian propaganda worked.”*