Crimean Tatars in Early 20-th Century Turkey (Through the Pages of the Newspaper "Istanbul News")

Elmira M.G. Zulpukarova

Abstract--- This paper aims to offer insight into the situation of the Crimean Tatars in Turkey relating to the emigration of a significant part of the Crimea's Muslim population and their tragic fate abroad. Crimean Tatars, who had been the mainstay of the Crimean Khanate, were one of the largest ethnic groups that migrated to Turkey in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Research interest in this topic is due to the discovery of an article, The Resettlement Issue in Turkey, published in the newspaper Stambulskiye novosti (Istanbul News) which came out for a short period of time in Constantinople in 1909-1910. Its only surviving copy has been preserved in the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. The Russian-language weekly Istanbul News provided, above all, Russian readers and Russian émigrés who lived in Turkey in the early 20th century with the opportunity to stay informed of the events taking place in the Ottoman Empire. The events of those years are of special interest to present-day researchers and to a wide general readership. Materials in this paper are introduced for the first time into research literature, complementing the existing sources on the resettlement of the Crimean Tatars to Turkey in the beginning of the 20th century, their situation and tragic fate. Research work conducted on this source confirmed that the history of the Crimean Tatars had been overshadowed by tragic events resulting from the migration of a significant part of them to Turkey. The Crimean Tatars who had left the Crimea and migrated to Turkey, endured considerable hardship. The existing publications on the situation of these émigrés in Turkey and their fate have not yet been sufficiently studied despite the significance and relevance of the topic. Importantly, the consequences of the Crimean Tatars' migration to Turkey were truly disastrous. Settlers incurred a heavy loss of people. Mass migration and a high mortality rate during resettlement are a major tragedy in the history of the Crimean Tatars.

Keywords--- Emigration to Turkey, Resettlement Policy, Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji, Crimean Tatars, Migration Processes.

I. Introduction

History of the Crimean Tatars is overshadowed by tragic events related to the emigration of a significant part of the Crimea's Muslim population to Turkey. Crimean Tatars, who had been the mainstay of the Crimean Khanate, were one of the largest ethnic groups that migrated to Turkey in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The existing publications (Kobuzan, 1998; Lyashenko, 1998; Aliyev, 2014; Dmitriyev, 2018 and others) on the situation of these émigrés in Turkey and their fate have not yet been sufficiently studied despite the significance and relevance of the topic. Studying the situation of the Crimean Tatars in Turkey is a highly important and relevant research topic. The population's aggravated socio-economic situation as well as national and religious problems provided major impetus

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for the emigration process. Increased landlessness, high taxes and land rent adversely affected the poorest Crimean

Tatars. Importantly, the consequences of the Crimean Tatars' migration to Turkey were truly disastrous. Settlers

incurred a heavy loss of people. Mass migration and a high mortality rate during resettlement are a major tragedy in

the history of the Crimean Tatars.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Research interest in this topic is due to the discovery of an article, *The Resettlement Issue in Turkey*, published in

the newspaper Stambulskiye novosti (Istanbul News) which came out for a short period of time in Constantinople in

1909-1910. Its only surviving copy has been preserved in the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian

Federation. The Russian-language weekly Istanbul News provided, above all, Russian readers and Russian émigrés

who lived in Turkey in the early 20th century with the opportunity to stay informed of the events taking place in the

Ottoman Empire. The events of those years are of special interest to present-day researchers and to a wide general

readership. Materials in this paper are introduced for the first time into research literature, complementing the

existing sources on the resettlement of the Crimean Tatars to Turkey in the beginning of the 20th century, their

situation and tragic fate.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper focuses on the situation of the Crimean Tatars in Turkey. Historians have always devoted close

attention to the fate of the Crimean Tatars who emigrated to Turkey, and this issue has not lost its relevance in

present-day political realities. Although there is a rich research literature on the topic under investigation, Russian

and foreign researchers still give it their full attention.

IV. AIM OF RESEARCH

The main aim of this research paper is to explore the situation of the Crimean Tatars in Turkey related to the

emigration of a significant part of the Crimea's Muslim population and their tragic fate abroad. To meet this

objective, the author intends to investigate the reasons which prompted the Crimean Tatars to move to Turkey;

socio-economic, national and religious issues that led to the migration of the Crimea's Muslim population; the

consequences which followed from their migration and, finally, the outcomes of their resettlement - a dark chapter

in Crimean Tatar memory.

V. RESEARCH METHODS

The paper is based on a research study on materials dealing with the Crimean Tatars's migration to Turkey in the

late 19th and early 20th century and with the discovery of new sources on this significant and relevant topic. The

newspaper Istanbul News, which contains valuable eyewitness testimonies to this tragedy, provides in-depth insights

into the Crimean Tatar's tragedy resulting from mass resettlement.

VI. FINDINGS

A severe confrontation between Russia and Turkey for the right to possess the Crimea took place in the second

half of the 18th century. A Russo-Turkish war broke out in 1768 and lasted five years. In June 1771, the Russian

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army led by General V. M. Dolgorukov seized the Perekop Fortress and entered the Crimea, and soon the Russian troops took possession of the entire peninsula. A peace treaty was signed between Turkey and Russia on 10 June 1774 in the Bulgarian village of Kuchuk-Kainarji. Under this treaty, the Crimean Khanate passed under the protection of Russia [1]. Turkey wanted to gain time by signing this treaty in order to regain its strength sapped by Russia and to take up arms again. In July 1774, a major Turkish naval assault party landed in Alushta. The Taman Fortress was taken and its residents announced Turkish subjects. These actions forced Russia to take countermeasures, and on 8 April 1783, Catherine the Great signed a manifesto annexing the Crimea to the Russian Empire [2].

Aware of the significance and the military importance of the Crimea's annexation to Russia, the tsarist government used all the means available to it in an attempt to gain the new subjects' favor, especially since the Crimea had been Turkey's vassal for three centuries and the Turkish sultan had been considered as sovereign of the Crimea. Naturally, the latter's ties with Turkey had not been severed. In February 1784, Tatar feudal lords were granted the right to enjoy all Russian nobility privileges. Later, the Tatars were exempted from military service. The local population had the right to have recourse to *Ulemas* to solve their local disputes and their decisions were regarded irreversible. Muslim leaders were permanently exempted from tax payments, and by the early 19th century, personal freedom of Tatar peasants was reaffirmed. Despite all of the above measures, however, a part of the Tatar population emigrated from the Crimea to Turkey. Emigration was also due to a number of government measures which infringed on the Crimean Tatars' rights, including dispossession of land, high taxes, elevated land rent, enslaving of the Crimean Tatar population, arbitrary behavior on the part of landowners, their disadvantaged position as compared to colonists flowing into the Crimea, repressions by the authorities and exiles, among others [3]. All of the above led to an increase in the number of Crimean Tatars migrating to Turkey. The exact number of Tatar émigrés in Turkey is difficult to estimate. According to various researchers, some 300,000 people left the Crimea in 1783-1800 and in 1854-1862 [4]. Many researchers point to several major waves of migration that peaked in 1874, 1883 and 1901-1902 [5].

Available research literature on the history of Crimean Tatar migration leads to the conclusion that researchers have given serious attention to this topic. Specialized literature covers the history of the Crimean Tatar migration process. A. Andriyevsky [6], E. Gorchakova [7] and V. Kandaraki [8] were among the first researchers who studied, in the second half of the 19th century, the history of the Crimean Tatars as subjects of the Russian Empire. These historians also touch upon important aspects of the Tatars' lives such as mass migration to Turkey. The article written by G. Levitsky, *The Tatars' resettlement from the Crimea to Turkey*, is of special interest to researchers of emigration processes. Based on his in-depth analysis and appropriate conclusions, the author compiled a list of reasons that prompted the Crimean Tatars to migrate to Turkey [9]. The well-researched article by A. Ozenbashly, *The role of the tsarist government in the Crimean Tatars' migration* [10], contains many interesting findings relative to Russia's colonial policies in the Crimea. D. Zolotaryov's article, *Specificities of Russian policies in relation to the emigration and pilgrimages of the Crimean Tatars (1860s-early 20th c.)*, contains rich factual information [11]. According to Zolotaryov, the Russian government did not seek to solve the Crimean Tatars' problems and, what's more, it contributed to the development of migration processes. Vacated lands were used for further colonization of

the Crimea. The most valuable topic-related information can be found in D. Abibullayev's article entitled *Emigration of the Crimean Tatars along the Pages of the 'Terdzhiman' Newspaper* [12] which documented the views of the newspaper's editor Ismail Gasprinski on the Crimean Tatars' emigration issues [13]. Of great interest is N. Shcherban's article, *Resettlement of the Crimean Tatars* [14], focusing on Russia's resettlement policies in the Crimea. Shcherban does not identify the causes and consequences of the Crimean Tatars' mass migration to Turkey. Instead, he highlights the colonization of the Crimea's vacated lands by smallholder peasants from Russian governorates or by Europeans who had been granted resettlement privileges. The consequences of emigration, i.e. devastation of the Crimean land, are also echoed in local literary works and travel guides of the second half of the 19th century. As an example, E. Markov observes that "the former vibrant and active village has now turned into a wasteland; today, entire districts are full of such wastelands as they were once full of villages... Workforce and sustenance prices have increased dramatically after the departure of the Tatars" [15].

However, historical events that took place in the Crimea and Turkey during emigration have not been sufficiently studied due mostly to the fact that access to sources of information in some countries was restricted to Russian researchers for well-known reasons. One of such countries was Turkey. One of the issues of the *Istanbul News*, discovered by Prof. A. Zheltyakov in 1980 in the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, [16] can fill this gap.

Istanbul News was the first and, within the following 100 years, the only Russian-language newspaper published in Turkey. This newspaper was a unique source of direct, hands-on information available to the Russian readership about the events that took place in Turkey during the transition period. The newspaper was published for about ten months, with a total number of 33 issues [17]. So far, Istanbul News has been the only source of information that enables researchers to characterize the historical events that took place in early 20th-century Turkey such as the events of the transition period related to the Young Turk Revolution (July 1908) in Turkey. This is understandable because Turkey, mostly a feudal country, began to become involved in the global capitalist society only in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The weekly newspaper Istanbul News provided its Russian readers and Russian emigrants residing in Turkey the opportunity to obtain interesting and varied information on many issues relating to the domestic and international situation of the Ottoman Empire. Materials published in the newspaper are a major source of information on the economy, public and cultural life of Turkey [18]. Readers get insight into Turkeyrelated events covered by well-known politicians and journalists and, furthermore, each newspaper issue provides its readers with an overview of other Ottoman newspapers, this information being of great significance for researchers. Among them are Tanin and Vesti (a Bulgarian-language newspaper published in Constantinople), Azadamar (in Armenian), Sadai-Millet (an opposition newspaper), Ikdam (in Turkish), Proodos (in Greek), a newspaper published by the Chamber of Commerce, Jeune Turk and many other newspapers that were published in that period. The newspaper Istanbul News also contains information about editions that were irretrievably lost. The author has examined some historical events that had occurred in Turkey and published the research findings in a number of academic journals [19].

The intensification of the revolutionary situation in Turkey in 1906-1907 contributed to the further development of the Young Turk movement. Political life brightened up considerably in Turkey: various public organizations,

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associations and clubs were established and political parties started to emerge. The Russian-language Istanbul News

started up during these turbulent revolutionary events in Turkey. It was the first illustrated weekly newspaper in

Turkish history. Ahmed Djevad was the accountable Director of Istanbul News, and Djelal-ed-din Korkmasov

(Djalaleddin Korkmasov as spelled in the newspaper – E. Z.) its Editor-in-Chief.

Ahmed Djevad was known in Turkey as an active member of the Young Turk Movement, a participant in the

Young Turk Revolution and publisher of a number of Young Turk newspapers, including Tanin, the official

newspaper of the Committee of Union and Progress. In the Russian-language weekly Istanbul News, Ahmed Djeval

often acted as a representative of the radical part of the Committee. Ahmed Djeval is also known to have published

other newspapers in Turkey: Sabah, Shura i Umet and Sepir i Saika.

Djelal-ed-in Aselderovich Korkmasov (1878-1937) was an outstanding public figure, statesman, politician,

professional revolutionary, head of the revolutionary movement in Dagestan and an illustrious early 20th-century

Dagestani social and political thinker.

Under the Turkish Press Law, publishers of political periodicals, such as Istanbul News, were obliged to employ

the so-called 'accountable directors' of Ottoman origin who also had to meet certain requirements. This is why

Ahmed Djeval was appointed Director of Istanbul News, although Djelal-ed-din Korkmasov personally financed this

newspaper [20].

In their address to the readers, the "editors of Istanbul News aim to give wide, comprehensive and detailed

coverage of the complicated and unique evolution that present-day Turkey is now going through" [21]. According to

Editor-in-Chief Dj. Korkmasov, "the process of the Orient's revival is interesting in every way. So far, the extreme

isolation of Oriental life has hidden its slow and natural movement forward. Istanbul News seeks to record and cover

the most outstanding manifestations of Turkish thought and life and to acquaint its readers with the development and

thrust of its intellectual, political, economic and social evolution" [21].

When examining the newspaper *Istanbul News*, the author discovered a published article by A. Shirinsky headed

The Resettlement Issue in Turkey which gives a short description of episodes of the tragic fate of the Crimean Tatars

who arrived in Turkey during another wave of emigration (1901-1902). A. Shirinsky's article appears in two issues

of Istanbul News and, undoubtedly, provides additional material for research into the tragic fate of the Crimean

Tatars in the early 20th century.

The author of *The Resettlement Issue in Turkey* A. Shirinsky observes that, "owing to its huge unpopulated

lands, Turkey has long had a magic impact on Muslims from the Crimea and Caucasus resulting in regular waves of

emigration. Besides, rumors about carefree life in the Ottoman Empire also played a major role in the creation of the

migration movement, along with the widespread belief that migration from Russia, the land of Infidels, to Muslim

Turkey, or ak-toprak, is synonymous with a pilgrimage to Mecca" [22].

Land was allocated, indeed, but nobody was informed of what kind of land it was, and in what climatic

conditions. In addition to the economic and religious reasons behind emigration, rumor had it that there was a lot of

vacant and fertile land in Turkey and that the Turkish government was giving settlers as much land as they could

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plough. Land ownership would be tax-free for the first three years and then settlers would have to pay one tenth of their income in tax. Livestock would also be provided for free as a supporting measure for newcomers. Letters that Tatars were receiving from their acquaintances and relatives in Turkey were the main sources of these rumors, and nationals of Turkey who promoted these rumors constituted a secondary source of such rumors.

A. Shirinsky continues as follows: "The first wave of migration from the Crimea in this direction took place in 1783 following the peninsula's official and actual annexation to Russia when 300,000 Tatars had moved to Anatolia. The next relocation occurred in 1812, and then, in the late 1850s, another mass migration concerned almost two thirds of the Crimea's Tatar population. Finally, the last wave of migration brought to the shores of the Bosporus thousands of new Tatar families (early 20th century – E. Z.). How did the Turkish government meet them? Did these seekers of the Promised Land find the marvelous legends they had pictured in their mind's eye? These questions naturally suggest themselves" [22]. The author himself gives the answer to the above questions: "Until recently, the Turkish society had had no idea of these settlers' fate. The latter came in thousands to the shores of the Bosporus, somebody sent them somewhere from there, and then they disappeared into the unknown" [22].

After the coming to power of the Young Turks and the restoration of the constitutional regime when freedom of the press replaced forced silence, emigrants came into the spotlight and their real situation became known to everyone. "The astonished society," A. Shirinsky writes, "saw the reality in all its horrifying nakedness. Sheer precariousness, deaths from the climatic conditions, the survivors' movement back to the Crimea – that is what the settlers' reality was like" [22]. He continues as follows: "I remember a telegram, horrible in its plainness, sent from Adava by the Crimean Tatars. Back then (in last August (1909 – E. Z.)), this telegram flashed around the press, producing a highly distressing impression. It said the following: 'We are sending this telegram with the money obtained from the sale of our last blanket. We are dying. Help us'. It turned out that this part of settlers from the year 1902 had settled in the houses of the Armenians who had fled to America from pogroms. After the proclamation of the Constitution, they returned to their homes and the Tatars have been left in the open. My personal observations of the emigrants' life in the provinces of Asia Minor, printed in the Crimean press, had been identical" [22].

Let's now try to understand the reasons behind the failure of the 1902 migration. First of all, it should not be forgotten that the last wave of migration took place during the rule of Abdulhamit V when all areas of public life in Turkey were in this sovereign's hands. The resettlement process presented a disheartening picture, being implemented unsystematically and without any plan. The people in charge had absolutely no information about the locations intended for colonization. Unenlightened and semi-literate, they light-heartedly sent newcomers to the depths of Anatolia without considering climatic and other conditions.

According to A. Shirinsky, "this abnormal situation led to a number of sad misunderstandings and irreparable mistakes. Only due to their total ignorance of this region did some Tatars and Caucasians go to malaria-infested areas such as the village of Kollar, Gevzo and others (in Brussa vilayet) which have now turned into abandoned cemeteries. Many other places reserved for settlement, such as Eski Sheyr, were full of swamps whose evaporations bring about a devastating effect on the newcomers' organism, hence a horribly high death rate among them. Furthermore, it turned out that some districts had been previously settled, and only after many ordeals and

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wanderings would settlers be provided with another land plot. Also, migration agencies were no different from Dante's Purgatory which emigrants left empty-handed. Government-issues subsidies would be pocketed before they could make it to emigrants. In the past, when grim Abdulhamit occupied the sultan's throne, settlers would not dare utter a word about their woeful position because any such attempt was regarded as an attack on the Empire's statehood. Following the fall of the blood-and-gallows regime, complaints and petitions started showering on the updated central commission, most of them concerned with hardship and sufferings. My heart trembles at all this human grief. It is difficult, almost impossible, to forget the sorrowful impressions I gained from my wanderings from one emigrant settlement to another. The shadows of the dead, ruined lives keep crowding, embracing and oppressing me like a nightmare. I have the impression of have wandered around a giant, forgotten cemetery" [22].

One can assume that if the resettlement problem in Turkey had been in charge of knowledgeable and experienced people, it would have probably been resolved. However, even in that case, the project aimed at sending the Crimean Tatars to colonize the Anatolian wasteland would have been a fiasco too. The Anatolian climate was too severe for the Tatars who had lived in the Crimea's mild climate and, therefore, even the best organization of this project would have produced the same dismal results. At that time, mild or acute malaria swept almost the entire Anatolia and other Turkish regions. Anatolia's harsh climatic conditions made living there utterly impossible. Harsh climatic conditions coupled with epidemic illnesses caused incredible havoc for settlers and claimed many lives. "You can always recognize the Crimeans by their emaciated, sallow complexions, a sure sign of malaria. They have failed to acclimatize to the local conditions, and almost every family paid its bloody tribute to the god of death" [23]. In addition to climatic and epidemic reasons that influenced the lives of the Crimean Tatars, the author of the article under investigation analyzes the reasons behind their inability to adapt to the new conditions. "...Bitter past experiences have shown that the Crimean Tatars seem utterly incapable of being colonizers. The latter need to be energetic, knowledgeable and accustomed to hard work whereas the Crimeans lack all of these qualities. Only the most ignorant and weak-willed Crimean Tatars migrate to Turkey; they are familiar only with the basic agricultural techniques, but they hope for mountains of gold and give up as soon as they encounter harsh living conditions. Their initial fervor disappears and they are overtaken by a sense of hopelessness and painful yearning for their abandoned homeland. Unsatisfied, they keep seeking the Promised Land, unwilling to say farewell to the dream. They do so until they lose their last money and get exhausted both physically and morally. Then they inevitably become gamals, carriage drivers and shoe cleaners. The Crimean Tatars have now monopolized these jobs throughout Anatolia. The Tatars perish this way, away from their natural environment and unable to adapt to their new place. It goes without saying that, in such conditions, Crimean emigrants have done nothing to improve agricultural technology in Turkey. Furthermore, they live in isolation and their relations with the local population have been strained from the very beginning and remain such until now. Marriages between them are extremely rare. The Crimean Tatars' unwillingness to disappear among the Turks is surprising. They protect their traditions and their lifestyle from any exterior influences with fanatical perseverance. Their only small concession was to replace their traditional sheep hats with bright red fez" [23].

"The Crimean Tatars' response to the harsh blows life had inflicted on them was to return to their homeland. This movement is expanding and involving new hundreds of people. Presumably, it will expand even more this

coming Autumn (1910 – E. Z.) because an abundant crop is expected to be reaped, which will provide means for many people to move back. During my wanderings in Anatolia, I often met deeply despaired emigrants returning from the depths of Asian provinces to their native Crimea. I remember one such encounter near Modania on the shores of the Sea of Marmara: it was an old man with one foot in the grave. His entire life was a malaria paroxysm, yet, sick and hardly able to move his feet, he was dragging himself along to the Crimea to see his dear fatherland one last time with his moribund eyes" [23].

The endured sufferings and hardships were well expressed in the *Emigrant Song*, composed during the first wave of migration; settlers complemented and slightly modified it in 1902. The song echoes a whole range of emigrants' emotions: initial excitement, ecstasy followed by hardship and, finally, nostalgia and disappointment. The song's lamenting, painfully plangent motive repeating in the words *Aytyrdaaglerym* changes into moaning and wailing.

We have seen the disastrous outcomes of the Turkish government attempt to settle Anatolian provinces with emigrants from the Crimea. This idea resulted in thousands of devastated households and lives in the Crimea as well as in unnecessary expenses incurred by Turkey.

VII. CONCLUSION

Among major reasons behind the Crimean Tatars' emigration in the early 20th century were the worsening socio-economic situation of the population, national and religious issues and many others. Increased landlessness, high taxes and land rent adversely affected the poorest Crimean Tatars. Importantly, the consequences of the Crimean Tatars' migration to Turkey were truly disastrous. Settlers incurred a heavy loss of people. Mass migration and a high mortality rate during resettlement are a major tragedy in the history of the Crimean Tatars. Uncovering and introducing new, topic-related materials into research literature plays an important role in the study of migration processes of the Crimean Tatars as they make it possible to offer a more comprehensive and objective recreation of past events. Consequently, the Russian-language newspaper *Istanbul News*, published in Turkey 1909-1910, provides an excellent opportunity to introduce new topic-related materials into research as it contains highly valuable information on the history of the Crimean Tatars.

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