

Committee: The United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

Issue: The question of the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation

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Introduction

The Crimean peninsula was annexed from Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February–March 2014. Ever since then, they have been administered as two Russian federal subjects (cities)—the Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol. The annexation was accompanied with military intervention by Russia in Crimea in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution and was part of unrest across southern and eastern Ukraine.

In early 2014 Crimea became the focus of one of the worst East-West crises ever since the Cold War, after which Ukraine's pro-Moscow president Viktor Yanukovich was driven away from power by political protests in Kiev. The 2014 conflict began when Kremlin-backed forces seized control of the Crimean peninsula and conducted a referendum in which the people voted in favor of joining Russia, an action deemed illegal by Ukraine and the West. In this committee, delegates should seek to secure Ukrainian sovereignty while resolving the multifaceted tensions between Russia, Ukraine, and the European Union.

Definition of Key Terms

Annexation: The act of a country seizing and taking control of a territory belonging to another state.

Crimea/Crimean peninsula: Crimea is a peninsula in Eastern Europe located north of the black sea and south of Ukraine.

Current Situation

Historical background

Crimea was once annexed by the Russian Empire in 1783 during the reign of Catherine The Great and remained part of Russia until 1954, when it was transferred to Ukraine by the then Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. After the Soviet Union collapsed, people returned to a newly independent Ukraine where they faced high unemployment rate and poor housing conditions. In response to the Ukrainian independence, political figures from local Russian communities sought to assert sovereignty and strengthen ties with Russia through actions declared unconstitutional by the Ukrainian government. The Ukrainian constitution effective since 1996 stipulated that Crimea would have an autonomous republic status. Crimea had its own government with powers over agriculture, public infrastructure, and tourism, but its legislation needed to align with that of Ukraine.

The Annexation

Ukraine and many world leaders condemned the annexation and considered it to be a violation of the international law and Russian-signed agreements safeguarding territorial integrity of Ukraine, including the Belavezha Accords establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, the Helsinki Accords, the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances of 1994, and the Treaty on friendship, cooperation and partnership between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. It led to the other members of the Group of Eight (G8) suspending Russia from the group and introducing the first round of sanctions against the nation.

The United Nations General Assembly also rejected the vote and annexation, adopting a non-binding resolution affirming the "territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders". This resolution also "underscore[d] that the referendum had no validity [and] cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of [Crimea]" and called upon all States and international organizations not to recognize or to imply the recognition of Russia's annexation. In 2016, UN General Assembly reaffirmed non-recognition of the annexation and condemned "the temporary occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine—the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol".

Major Parties Involved and Their Positions

Ukraine

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Crimean peninsula had been a constituent entity of independent Ukraine. After its annexation in early 2014, pro-Russian separatist protests erupted in eastern Ukrainian cities. Kiev authorities accused Russia of facilitating the conflict by sending its own forces and military hardware to bolster the separatists.

Crimea

Following the Crimean status referendum, Crimea declared its independence from Ukraine and requested to join the Russian Federation. In February 2014, it was annexed by Russia.

Russian Federation (Russia)

After the Ukrainian Revolution and the ousting of Viktor Yanukovich, Russia refused to recognize the new Ukrainian interim government. It called for the overthrow of Yanukovich and a coup d'état and began a military intervention in Ukraine. Putin justified this aggression with the referendum and asserted that Crimea is mostly comprised of ethnic Russians. Since the annexation in 2014, the Russian government has been administering Crimea as part of Russia. It invested heavily on its infrastructure, including roads, hospitals, and energy sources. It also built the Crimean Bridge which connects the peninsula to mainland Russia.

United States

The United States strongly opposes Russia's annexation of Crimea and insists the restoration of Ukrainian territorial integrity. As put in a statement of Pompeo, US Secretary of State, "Russia, through its 2014 invasion of Ukraine and its attempted annexation of Crimea, sought to undermine a bedrock international principle shared by democratic states: that no country can change the borders of another by force."

European Union

The leaders of the European Union suspended trade and visa liberalization negotiations with Russia. The union is also considering a second stage of sanctions to freeze the country's assets and the travel banks of unnamed Russian officials.

Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Sanctions

Following the Russian military intervention in Ukraine, various countries, including the US and nations in the EU, have imposed sanctions on Russia and urged Russia to withdraw its annexation. Canada has suspended participation in a bilateral economic commission with Russia and has frozen assets of members of the Yanukovich government.

Minsk Protocol

Minsk Protocol is a ceasefire agreement signed by Ukraine, the Russian Federation, the Donetsk People's Republic, and the Luhansk People's Republic in September 2014. It aimed to alleviate the ongoing war in eastern Ukraine but has failed to end the violence in Donbass, a Ukrainian conflict zone. Minsk II was drafted in February 2015 following the collapse of the Minsk Protocol.

UN peacekeeping troops

In June 2018, the foreign ministers of Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France met to discuss the implementation of a ceasefire for Ukraine and the deployment of UN peacekeepers in its conflict zones. However, no agreements have yet been reached as Russia and Ukraine held different opinions on the implementation of UN peacekeeping mission.

Possible Solutions

To resolve this issue, delegates must tend to multiple aspects of the Crimea question and consider the interests of the opposing groups.

The most immediate problem at hand that has to be resolved is the armed conflict between Russian and Ukrainian forces occurring in conflict zones of not just the Crimean peninsula but also Donbass, an eastern Ukrainian region southwest of Russia. Potential solutions may detail the disarmament of both parties and demilitarization in those areas, which could include an issued ceasefire, stricter border controls, etc.

Eventually, Russia and Ukraine must attain mutual agreements via facilitated communication. Ensuing such compromises would be a fair referendum conducted by representatives from both countries and overseen by the UN or an impartial third party such as OSCE. Unlike before, only people in Crimea could vote on their legal status to ensure that the voting results well reflect their decisions. However, such referendum might be extremely unfeasible given the present tension. The UN should foster effective communication between Russia and Ukraine to prevent creating yet another inefficient peacekeeping mission.

Delegates must also consider the socioeconomic aspect of the conflict, during which civilian safety has been jeopardized and the economy damaged. A vital long-term solution would consist of humanitarian aid for and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) created by the Crimean crisis and the preservation of economic relations between Russia and Ukraine through implementing free trade areas or improving infrastructure and transportation networks.

Lastly, the committee should devote effort to the protection of rights and access to supplies of Crimean people. This would accompany discussions regarding legal concerns of Crimea so to prevent further disputes between the two forces in the peninsula or other conflict zones.

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