



Greeks in Ukraine: From Ancient to Modern Times

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(Translated by Lina Smyk)

Greeks have been living on the territory of modern Ukraine since ancient times. They first settled in the area in the seventh century BCE as the result of ancient Greek colonization. Most of those immigrants were natives of Miletus and other cities in Ionia. According to the information provided by ancient authors, more than 60 colonies were founded by Greeks on the territory of modern Ukraine and Crimea. The most popular of those were Olvia, Tyr, Feodosia (Theodosia), Tauric Chersonese, Kerkenitida (territory of Yevpatoria) etc. These ancient Greek settlements left behind a rich and diverse heritage. They were the first states on the modern Ukrainian territory that became activators of social and political development for local tribes; for example, they speeded up the formation of state institutions which included elements from both Greek and other ethnicities.

In the middle of the third century CE, the invasions by Goths and other tribes devastated the Greek cities. At a later time the appearance of Hun tribes in the Black Sea region and Migration Period in fourth and fifth centuries put the life of ancient Greek “polises” (city-states) on the territory of Ukraine to a complete end. The only city that was not destroyed was Tauric Chersonese, protected with strong defensive walls. In the fifth century, it became a part of Byzantine Empire and long served as a center of Greek life on the Crimea peninsular. Up to the eighth century Chersonese was the outpost of Byzantium in Crimea, gatekeeper of Byzantine culture, and facilitator for the spread of Christianity and Greek language. In 2013 during the thirty-seventh session of the Committee of World Heritage of UNESCO, Tauric Chersonese was added to the list of world heritage site. In addition to the city, a *hora* (agricultural land around Chersonese) was included. At present this territory has been annexed by the Russian Federation.

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In the Middle Ages the Greeks mostly resided in the southern part of Crimea, while the main outpost of Greek culture and Byzantine traditions in east Crimea was Sugdea. An important factor facilitating the unification of Crimean Christians was the Principality of Theodoro, which appeared at the beginning of fourteenth century in the Mountain Crimea, and existed until the Turkish invasion in 1475.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Greek merchants started to visit Ukrainian lands more and more often. Some of them even settled in big cities. One of the popular destinations was Lvov. The Greek merchants that were coming to Lvov arrived from Crete, Chios, Candius, and Constantinople. Other category of people arriving in Lvov was so-called Greeks of “*Volokh*-origin”. Most of them (first of all residents of Yas and Bucharest) became the middlemen for trade of Oriental goods on the territory of Rzeczpospolita.

From the very beginning Greeks in Lvov, although cooperating with Ukrainian population of the city, tried to keep a special position, to separate themselves from the Armenian and Jewish communities. In most cases Greek merchants offered customers exclusive Oriental goods such as rugs, spices and other luxury products, but the main reason for Greeks’ strength and popularity in Lvov involved wines. Step by step the Greeks became the important part of transnational wine commerce to the central European market. The wine was brought to Lvov via Moldavia. With the help of Polish and Armenian merchants in would move via Yaroslav and Krakow to Silesia, Czech territories, Moravia, Slovak territory, and sometimes German cities.

Greeks of Lvov made a substantial contribution to cultural and educational development of Ukrainian lands. They founded printing works, financed activities of various Orthodox fraternities, and provided support to the building of churches. Greek scientists, Dinosiy Paleologist in particular, made possible the appearance of the well-known Ostrog Bible in 1581 (this was the first printed edition of all the parts of the Holy Scripture in the Old Church Slavic language).

When the Ukrainian people fought to create an independent nation in 1648-1658, the life of citizens of Lvov changed substantially. Their trade visibly slowed down. The clearest reason for cutting of trade operations was criminal and military danger on the roads. As the result many Greeks left Lvov. Some returned to their motherland and others moved to safer districts of Ukraine.

The creation of Ukrainian Kozak State in 1649 and purposeful politics of Ukrainian Hetmans aiming at providing Greeks with certain benefits allowed for the people of Greek origin to become main suppliers of different Oriental goods on the Ukrainian territory. Another factor was that Jewish trade was suspended as the result of the war.

At first Greek merchants would come to Ukraine temporarily; however starting in late in the seventeenth century many of them moved permanently to Nizhin (Nezhin). This city was chosen by Greeks because it was one of the biggest cities in Ukraine at that time, and its convenient geographic location allowed made it an important trade center. Nizhin was a crossroad for trade with Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and the Crimean Khanate. Another reason why Greeks chose Ukraine to settle was that there was no suppression of the Orthodox religion, as was common in the Ottoman Empire. As an example, in 1657 Ukrainian Hetmans provided Greeks with the right for tax-free trade and for conduct of their own justice, as well as some other rights and benefits.

The Greek community in Nizhin organized itself as a church parish that became independent in 1680. The Greek merchants' community was founded next to the Greeks spiritual community, mostly due to the fact that the number of tradesmen in Nizhin was growing. In addition to enjoying a privileged position, Greek tradesmen found very favorable conditions for spiritual growth. Thus, Nizhin became spiritually and socially comfortable for Greeks. The Greek church, for example, was allowed to conduct worship and services in the Greek language. The city was social comfortable for Greeks allowing them to become affluent and influential. As time passed, these two elements merged together, which created Nizhin Greek community.

An important role in the history of Nizhin Greeks was played by Nizhin Greek magistrate, a community executive institution of self-administration, which was the main advocate of Greeks relations with local population, protecting political, economic and spiritual interests of Greek people. The Nizhin Greek fraternity also played a specific role in the development of business in Ukraine. Greek activities helped stock a Ukrainian market lacking goods during in the period when Ukrainian marking was still developing. The result of this influence was the widening of market for Ukrainian merchants, as Greeks tradespeople would open new trade routes in Balkan and Middle East countries.

Conditions for Nizhin Greek merchants changed dramatically after Ukrainian Kozak State was cancelled in 1794 and Russian empire continued its expansion into Ukrainian territories. Russian emperors, beginning with Peter the Great, gradually changed Ukraine's economy direction towards Russia. For example, merchants could only use trade routes going through Russian territory to deliver Ukrainian goods. With these changes and the associated political realities, Nizhin lost its competitiveness. Greek merchants had to move to Russian cities and start business on new markets. In short, due to the politics of the tsars, there was a gradual decline of one of the most prominent Greek communities in Ukraine.

Some Greeks from Nizhin, mostly rich, moved to Crimea in the eighteenth century. They had a chance and the money to establish new business in new conditions, and sometimes even increase their capital. At the same time, the Crimean Khanate lost its social, economic and political stability, experiencing negative consequences of inside schemes for power as well as constant aggression from the Russian and Ottoman Empires.

In Crimea the Greeks lived in more than eighty settlements – in the mountains and on the South Shore, with around 40 % of them being urban residents. Most of those living in cities would do handicraft, about just one-sixth were tradesmen. Country people were mostly engaged in grassland farming, and agriculture (cultivating bread-corn, millet, wheat, barley, flax). Greeks dwellers on the South Shore also were engaged in fruit-growing, wine-growing, vegetable production and fishing.

Greeks of the Crimean Khanate were the main tax-payers in the state. Registries of immovable inventory performed by Khanate servants show that in most cases Greeks were in relative material welfare. The records also show that representatives of different faith denominations often worked together in business activities, sometimes including clergymen. Even in the existing conditions the Greek people worked hard to preserve their culture, language, and business trade routes. They remained in contact with other Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire who assisted them.

In the third quarter of the eighteenth century, the Russian government started preparations to include the Crimea into Russian territory. This plan was to be facilitated by means of economic weakening of the Khanate. With this purpose in mind and in order to create closer economic ties with Russia, the decision was made to remove Christians (mostly Greeks and Armenians) from the Crimean Peninsula. This relocation of Greeks from Crimea into the territory of the Russian Empire was a strategic decision, preparing the basis for non-aggressive annexation of the land. To persuade the Greeks to leave their homes the Russian government promised to buy out all the harvest gathered in 1777, refund all the expenses connected with relocation and settlement, and provide support with food. Although the cost was large, this was a very successful diplomatic action by the Russian officials.

The official explanation of the necessity of relocation articulated by the Russian government was the unbearable pressure on Greeks from Crimean Tatars in the spheres of religion and culture. Russia also wanted to be seen as a progressive leader in protection of the Greek population in the Crimea.

There is a long-going discussion in scientific literature concerning difficult relations between the Christian and Muslim populations of the Crimean peninsula. The consensus of the sources and literature on this question make it clear that the Crimean Khanate was similar to the Ottoman Empire in the structure of state, but it was not as

despotic. The Khanate was an establishment that accepted limits on Oriental authoritarian powers.

Modern Ukrainian historians have discarded the view that Christians suffered cruel persecutions in the Crimea. Greeks had very highly organized and independent spiritual and religious authorities on the peninsula. Gothic-Cathian Metropolitan Ignatius was the head of all Orthodox Christians. He was not only the spiritual leader of the Greeks, but also served as an official representative of the Greek community in the official government, being responsible for making sure Greeks executed their responsibilities. The metropolitan ruled the community independently, without pressure from Turkish-Tatar authorities. Archdiocese, churches and monasteries had property rights. Church services were conducted in the Greek language. The position of the Greeks was favorable and did not lead to the desire to leave the Crimea. The decision to leave was greatly influenced by the Russian-Turkish war. Christians were the main source of military personal (and casualties). They felt like hostages, living in constant fear of violent massacres, occasionally conducted by Tartars but more often by Ottoman surrogates.

When on April 23, 1778, after the Easter service the Metropolitan announced the agreement with the Russian government, the news was not taken favorably. Some Greeks openly opposed it and were ready to make official public notices about their reluctance. They considered the migration to be socially unjustifiable, partially because in 1777 the Khan issued an order to provide similar civil rights to the Tatar population of the Crimea and its Christian population (called *raya*). It took considerable time for the Metropolitan together with the Russian officials to persuade the Greeks to support the idea.

On June 16, 1778 several Greek representatives signed the resolution about voluntary relocation to Russia. The decision due to a promise to provide every male recorded in the census with a land plot of 30 *arpents* (one *arpent* is 1.09 hectares) within the borders of the Russian Empire. This was substantially more than even the richest Greek families had in Crimea. After selling their property, the Greeks started relocation from the peninsula in different ways, but with military escorts and a minimum of belongings. About 18,395 Greeks and 12,598 Armenians, Walachians, and Georgians are estimated to have left the Crimea in September of 1778.

The relocation was performed badly. It was a fall-winter period. Migrants had to face a lot of difficulties. A shortage of warm clothes and an irregular supply of food were just two. A devastating epidemic of disease led to high mortality rates. The scientists estimate that losses totaled from 3,500-4,000 people. Some of Greeks returned to the peninsula. Some of those who stayed protested. But Metropolitan Ignatius was able to persuade the majority of his parish to go on.

In the period between the end of 1779 and the beginning of 1789, Greeks founded Mariupol, city in the delta of Kalmius River, Twenty villages grew around the city. . They were given Crimean names such as Yalta, Karan, Laspi, Mangush, Sartana, and Stariy Krim.

The proper term for the relocation of the Greeks and Armenians from the Crimean Khanate into the Azov region of the Russian Empire is “forced immigration,” but not “deportation.” Although the Greek Metropolitan agreed, immigration that was initiated by the Russian authorities and was very profitable for the latter in turns of economic and political conditions of the time.

The Greeks that moved were granted different privileges by the Russian government. In addition to the free land already noted, there was life-long immunity from military service, the opportunity to develop any kind of trade, administrative freedom and liberation from taxes for ten years and monetary support for building a house and provisions. Another right was the extraordinary permission for exclusive residence on the given territory. For example, Mariupol was a closed Greek city. Non-Greeks were allowed to settle here only after 1859.

Despite these benefits, the life of Greeks in the new lands was not easy. A new climate, new undeveloped lands, and maintaining food supplies required time to adapt. The main occupations for Greeks were livestock farming, trade, agriculture and fishing. Mariupol Greek community was mainly rural, and as considered by the modern Ukrainian scientists consisted of two sub-ethnic groups – *romaioi* and *urums*.¹ *Romaioi* use five dialects that are the part of the Greek group of the Indo-European language family. *Urums* communicate via four dialects of the Turkish group of the Altai language family.

The introduction and development of local independent administration was one of the main conditions for migration of Greek community. Soon a Mariupol Greek court was created, which became the institution that performed administrative, police and court functions for all the people belonging to Greek ethnicity, who resided within the borders of administrative and political territory (district). However during the middle of the nineteenth century the Russian government started systematic invasions with the aim of limiting and phasing out Greek rights and privileges. The Greek court was liquidated in 1869, and in 1873 the whole Greek district was merged with the newly created Mariupol district with a *zemstvo* (country council) at head. This led to gradual limitation of the Greek influence among the population of the district.

Russian expansion to the South and frequent wars with the Ottoman Empire were the main reasons for constant waves of Greek immigration to enter Ukrainian lands at the end of eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. The politics of the Russian Empire also contributed to the growth of the number of immigrants. If at

first volunteers mostly moved to the lands of the south Ukraine, later they were joined by tradesmen, farmers, craftsmen, and even representatives of local aristocratic families, who started to activate the economic, cultural as well as political life of the region.

Odessa soon became one of the centers of Greek immigration. From the time of city foundation in 1794 Greeks composed quite a valuable part of population of about 10-15 %.² Some of them became members of international trade guilds. Others mastered fishery or worked as marine pilots, sailors, port specialists. Within their community Greeks in Odessa were actively involved in religious, educational and non-profit activities, like creating educational institutions. The strong financial position of some families enabled them to become part of the local aristocracy, and later participate in political life and become members of the city council. The growing number of Greeks from all social layers in Odessa created conditions for formation of a Greek secret, political organization, *Filiki Eteria* (Brotherhood of Friends) with a program aimed at national and political freedom.

The strongest financial basis of Greeks in Odessa was export of wheat. In the nineteenth century the Greek monopoly was ruined by European, Russian and English merchants who entered the market. This led to the transformation of Greek trade companies into multi-functional firms, but they still played a significant role in the regional economy at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the same time, the Greek population in Odessa lessened in comparison to other ethnicities. For example, in 1910 there were around 10 000 Greeks in the city, comprising a little less than 2% of the total population. But social status of the Greek families was very high, and the community acquired features of a closed and aristocratic society.

Thus, there were several Greek communities on the Ukrainian territory at the onset of the twentieth century. The first one settled in half-closed region of villages around Mariupol. This community had restricted connections with the outer world, which allowed for better preservation of ethnical traditions. The second community was in Odessa, which was comprised of upscale merchant aristocracy and local administration representatives with wide international connections. The third community was Greeks living on the Crimean peninsula. Most of them were re-immigrants from Mariupol and surrounding territories; they were able to preserve the culture of the peninsula created in the Middle Ages. Here one could also find migrants from different parts of the Ottoman Empire and military men.

The territories of Mariupol, Crimea, and Odessa with their big Greek communities became the platforms for military and political fights during the Civil War 1918-1920. These were the times when local and regional authorities constantly changed. Greeks together with Ukrainians took part in military actions, fighting for different political groups and formations.

In the conditions of total disaster any effort to arrange cultural life of the Greek population or to establish connections with Greece and other diasporas was destined to fail. The era of revolutions, wars, fights for national liberation, and civil war brought Greeks nothing but substantial losses of people and huge property damages. This era eliminated many connections between Greeks in the Ukraine and their past motherland. Many felt very pessimistic about the future. The most active and educated Greeks (nobles, tradesmen, financiers, clergy, etc.) migrated abroad.

There were also substantial demographic losses of Greeks connected with the conflicts and the war as well as the famine of 1921. For example, the total Greek population of the Crimea fell by two thirds – from 23,849 people in 1913 (3.3 % of the total population of the Crimea) to 16,036 in 1926 (2.2 % of the total population).³ Similar demographic changes took place in other regions as well. For example, if we compare the number of Greeks residing in the Mariupol district in 1923 (53,865 people) with the number of Greeks living within the borders of Mariupol parish in 1897 (48,298 people) we will see that the increase of just 5,567 people during a period of twenty-six years, a loss in percentage of total population. To illustrate the scale of losses in the post-famine years, when the Greek population increased by approximately 10,000 people in just three years (from 53,865 people in 1923 to 64,200 people in 1926).

According to the very first all-Soviet Union census performed in 1926 the number of Greek people residing on the Ukrainian territory equaled 104,666 people. 93,600 (89.2%) lived in the rural areas. If we add the number of Greek people who lived in Crimea at that time (16,036) the approximate total number of the Greek population was 120,700 people (excluding the territory of the West Ukraine).

Thus, we may conclude that at the first decades of the twentieth century the Greek population experienced both quantitative and qualitative losses in social, professional and economic positions. Nonetheless, the Greeks were able to save their community as a whole, and continued to preserve their ethnical peculiarities in new social, cultural and political conditions.

When the Soviet power was established in Ukraine, national politics took a substantial part of the ideology of the new state. However the pronounced principles of equality for development of all the nations and the right for ethnical independence were advocated, depending on the political necessity. It was important to work with all the active Greeks in Ukraine in order to get them involved in the building of the Soviet state and to spread socialistic education among all the layers of society.

At first different national administrative units were created at the levels of districts and settlements. Their task was to satisfy the necessities of the Greek society with regarding language and culture. There were schools with Greek language immersion program that included, libraries, reading rooms, courses for Greek language.

This led to the revival of publishing (books, newspapers and other printed matter) that lasted until 1937-1938.

Soviet policy began to change in the 1930s with the goal of de-indigenization of local nationalities. In 1932 Greek national districts were eliminated. Step by step other measure was taken to end all cultural and educational institutions that did not reflect the new Soviet policy. The anti-national policy of Stalin regime, collectivization, forced collection of wheat, bread, and other withdrawals led to the horrible famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine that affected Greek villages as well.

The second half the 1930s was characterized by ever tougher repressions against Greek population, both local and Greece citizens, who happened to stay in the USSR at that time for whatever reasons. Many prominent figures of culture and science were arrested and taken to prison in 1937-38. Simultaneously the Greeks were said to have a nationalist organization that aimed to create a "bourgeois-fascist state" in territories where Greeks resided. Although a total lie, this charge allowed for the arrest of 5,474 people in 1937-1938 on the charges of counter-revolutionary activities.

In January-March 1938, under the decision of Special Commission of NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs), 3,125 Greeks were condemned to death by firing squad and 109 people sent to the gulag (labor camps) with sentences of five to ten years.. In September-November of that same year the Commission in Donetsk region condemned to 345 more Greeks to death and sent another 49 to labor camps. Among the political prisoners 83 were the citizens of Greece Sentences of time years in camps were given to six and 77 o were executed.⁴ We still do not have a full picture, but estimates are that the total number of Greek victims of repressions in the Ukraine was 7,600-9.400 with 5,700-6,500 of those living in the Donetsk region. Most of the executions were in 1938 and executions in general account for 84.5% of those charged with treason. Among the nationalities in the USSR, Greeks had the highest percentage of executions.⁵ Most of the victims were from middle class families and some 40 % were workers from villages. Thorough analysis of the files of political prisoners shows that all the accusations were false and all the wrongly convicted were rehabilitated.

Total terror had difficult political, economic and social consequences. Greek communal traditions were virtually eliminated. Most of the qualified specialists were executed and cultural connections were broken. Greek schools, newspapers, and theaters were closed and the use of written Greek was prohibited.

The onset of World War II slowed down the scope of repressions but never completely stopped. Repression even continued during military actions when Greeks were fighting side-by side with Ukrainians and Russians. Many Greeks showed outstanding heroism and bravery, and later receiving awards and honors.

Most of the Greeks living on the territory of modern Donetsk region were mobilized in September 1943, after Donetsk was liberated from the Germans. Newly enrolled soldiers were sent to a very difficult part of the frontline, near Melitopol in the Zaporozhie region. During the course of a few days of fighting for the city, some 20% of the Greeks were killed.

The Greek population of the Crimea took an active part in heroic partisan and underground resistance. One consequence were violent responses from the fascist army, which destroyed entire villages and settlements in retaliation. A vivid example is the fate of the village of Schastlivoe (Lucky), which was surrounded by Hitler's army and burned down, taking the lives of all the residents, including women and children.

Greeks were active in major military actions of the kind just described and took part in guerilla units.. The Stalinist authorities "thanked" the Greeks right after war, not with medals and honors, but with more repression and arrests. The spring and summer of 1944 brought wider and crueler actions towards national minorities in general. Now, whole national groups, not just individuals were declared to be "traitors." The 16,248 Greeks in Crimea were among the victims of these policies.

Deportation on the basis of nationality was first performed with Crimean Tatars. It took place after the resolutions # 5859ss of May 11 and # 5937ss of May 21 were issued by the State Defense Committee in 1944. The same authority passed resolution # 5984ss on June 2, which order the NKVD deport 37 000 people, including Bulgarians, Greeks and Armenians from the Crimean territory. By the end of June the number of deported people was 38,202, including 15,040 Greeks, 12,422 Bulgarians, 9,621 Armenians, 1,119 Germen, and smaller numbers of Italians, Romanians and other nationalities. On June 26-27, non-Greeks were sent to regions such as Kazakh SSR and Bashliria SSR. On the same dates, 3,531 Greeks were sent to Uzbek SSR.

All the people deported from the Crimea were given a special status of "life-long relocates," Should they try to escape the newly assigned territories, they would be sent to labor camps for twenty years as declared by the Order of Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, November 26, 1948. Only in 1956 were the Greeks and other deported nationals were granted pardon from the horrible charges – betrayal and support of occupants. They were given back their civil rights back, permission was not granted at that time to return to the Crimea. That did occur until November 14, 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued a declaration that that recognized the repression acts against peoples forcibly deported as unlawful and criminal, and contained a provision about of rights for the peoples named in the declaration.

Greeks population suffered huge losses during the World War II, and data from all-Union censuses proves it. In 1939, for example, the number of Greeks on the territory of Ukraine was 127.700, in 1959 – 104.359, in 1970 – 106.909 and in 1979 – 104.091.⁶ As

can be seen from the numbers, the tendency for reduction of Greek population was continuous but less drastic as the years mounted. However these data should be studied with caution, as many Greeks may have wanted to hide their real nationality in the fear of repressions and arrests.

When in the latter half of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union authorities announced the beginning of the process of unification of all the nations to become one soviet people, the Russification of the Greek populations continued and became stronger. Greeks were deprived of the possibility for national and cultural development in the times of *perestroika* (period of restructuring of the state initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev). The revival of Greek cultural and educational institutions took place as part of the bigger process of recovery of national identity. The All-Soviet Union Greek Society was created in 1988. A year later, three new sub-societies were founded in Mariupol, Donetsk and Velikonovoselovka. Several non-profit organizations also were established in other cities of Ukraine (Kiev, Kharkov, Crimea).

Purely as the result of the Democratic Ukrainian state reorganizations the necessary conditions for unhindered progress of the Greek community and for formation of extensive infrastructure were established. According to the data of the All-Ukrainian population census of 2001 there were 91.5 thousand Greeks in Ukraine⁷, 77,000 (84.5%) lived in the Donetsk region, 2,800 –in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, 2,200 in Zaporozhie region, 2,100 in Odessa, and 1,100 in the Dnepropetrovsk region.

Currently in Ukraine there are more than 50 Hellenic communities of different types from regional to village levels. All Hellenic communities are consolidated in three large organizations: the Union of Ukrainian Greeks (headquartered in Donetsk), the Greek Societies Federation of Ukraine (headquartered in Mariupol) and the Federation of Crimean Greeks (headquartered in Simferopol). These organizations seek to revive the national consciousness and cultural identity of Ukrainian Greeks. They have been able to restore the original names of some Greek settlements.

Ukrainian Greeks attach great importance to the study of the language, history and culture of modern Greece and the Greek Diaspora. At the premises of regular schools there were founded classes with advanced curriculum in modern Greek as well as weekend schools. Thanks to the fruitful activities of the Federation of the Greek Societies of Ukraine the number of schools where children could study the Greek language increased to 66 by 2000-2001 serving nearly 5,000 pupils. In the period of 2003-2004 the continued support of the Ministry of International Affairs of Greece, city halls of different Greek cities, youth and non-profit institutions from Greece, Cyprus, Germany, and Australia 45 schools in Ukraine are fully equipped for studying the

Greek language culture, and history. All the equipment is modern and includes computers, copying machines, music centers, and the like.⁸

During the past two decades the Hellenic communities of Ukraine have been actively involved in training qualified teachers and, researches in the sphere of ethnic history, culture and ethnography. One of the leading centers for this training is Mariupol State University, the only higher educational establishment in Europe (except in Greece and on Cyprus) where more than 700 students study the modern Greek language either as their main or second specialty over a five year period.. Mariupol University actively cooperates with the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the University of Ioannina, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and other higher educational institutions in Greece and Europe. *TIME* magazine named Konstantin Balabanov, the Rector of Mariupol State University, as is one of eight outstanding Hellenes abroad who had won international acclaim for his activity in the sphere of education, culture and the economy.

Mariupol State University holds annual Greek language competitions among schoolchildren, including rounds in the history and culture of Greece and Greeks in the Ukraine. The Federation of Greek Societies of Ukraine is usually the orchestrator of the events. Up to 700 people from all over Ukraine, including Crimea, may take place in those events. Competition in the Greek language is held on four levels, depending on the age of the children, level of knowledge and form of how they study Greek (as a main subject or as extra curriculum).

The World Council of Hellenes Abroad (European Region) has initiated and produced many educational programs in Ukraine. For example, more than 45 teachers of the Greek language were able to participate in six-months training session in the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus. The "Mothers of Hellenism" program gave the possibility to many kids of Greek origin from needy families to receive welfare assistance in 2001-2007.

Different social programs are executed on the territory of Ukraine thanks to the support of the Ministry of External Affairs of Greece and the World Council of Hellenes Abroad. The initiative of Federation of Greek societies has allowed many Greeks of Ukraine to receive humanitarian help since 1998. That same year another program began to provide rural communities residents with primary medical help. Part of the municipal hospital # 2, with the support from the international non-profit Hellenicare, was converted to Greek Medical Center in 2001, and a completely new Hellenic Diagnostic Center was built in 2003. A year later, the World Council of Hellenes Abroad helped to found and finance the Greek Medical Fund named Hippocrates. The fund is successfully working nowadays, under the financial support of the Hellenicare, the State Department of the USA, the Greek government and other patrons.

Ukrainian Greeks vigorously pursue not only the revival of Greek culture but its popularization among other ethnic groups. The majority of Greek communities have vocal, instrumental, theatrical groups, and dance companies. They also publish specialized and popular scientific works devoted to the issues of Hellenism and the works of Greek writers. Exhibitions, seminars, round table discussions and conferences are held to promote Hellenism in Ukraine.

Greatly contributing to rebirth of the national consciousness of Ukrainian Greeks and their knowledge of the native are folk festivals and celebrations of traditional holidays. Among these events are celebration of *Mega Yourty* (Big Holiday), *Panair*, of Greek Independence Day on March 25, and *OXI* on October 28.. Currently the festival *Mega Yourty*, in particular, seamlessly combines a lively modern professional show with amateur folk performances and becomes a medium for uniting Greeks on the basis of values and achievements of their national culture.

Recent events in Ukraine could not leave Greek population of the country indifferent. After the February events in the capital city of Kiev: shootings of protesters on the Maidan (Square of Independence), fleeing of the former president V.Yanukivich and his appeals to Russian for help, the formation of a new temporarily government, and related events, worsened conditions for all, including Greeks.

The major cause in the political differences among the Greeks living in Donetsk region and Crimea was mainly the result of what I believe is a distorted picture of the western Ukrainian population painted by the Russians with charges that they are led by “banderamen,”⁹ fascists, and extreme nationalists. The Russians seek to create an artificial division between west Ukraine which is for integration into Europe and east Ukraine which is oriented to Russia.

Pro-Russian views certainly existed before the crisis, and such views were actively supported by the Russian government as well as pro-Russian politicians. Many Greeks sincerely believe that obtaining Russian Federation citizenship will improve their standard of life by, among others services, providing them bigger salaries and pensions. I believe such Greeks have been misguided by mythical stereotypes created first by Soviet and now Russian federation propaganda. Such Greeks seem to have forgotten that it was the independent Ukrainian state that allowed them to renew and develop their national culture.

After the change of the government in Kiev, the executive authorities in Sevastopol and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea were changed. Newly appointed servicemen refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and appealed to the Russian government for help and support. Russian power facilitated the appointment of pro-Russian politicians and sent Russian military forces in disguise to the Crimea. During the following weeks the new Crimean government announced

without the consent of the Ukrainian government that the Crimea and Sevastopol were to be independent. They called for an all-Crimea.

The referendum offered two choices: Crimea joining the Russian federation or Crimea returning to the Constitution of 1992 with Crimea remaining Ukrainian territory. The question of preservation of the status-quo (that is Crimea staying in Ukraine under the present Constitution of 1998) was not mentioned or discussed.

Before the illegal referendum that was to take place on March 16, 2014, representatives of the Greek population from all over the Crimean peninsula held a general meeting in Simferopol. Larisa Georghidi, a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Crimea, and Olga Kovitidi, vice-prime minister of the Crimean government, took part in the event. The main question was the social and political situation on the peninsula and in Ukraine. At the conclusion of the conference, the participants prepared an appeal to Vladimir Konstantinov, Chairperson of the Supreme Soviet of the Crimea, and Serday Aksenov, Prime Minister (both of whom are not acknowledged by the Ukrainian government) that stated that Greeks supported the actions of the Crimean government and parliament. At one point the document states: "Our destiny has been connected to the history of the Crimea and Russia since the dawn of time.. Russia supported Greece in its fight for independence in the nineteenth, and it provided many of our ancestors with shelter in the twentieth century, when they had to leave Turkey because of holocaust. We, Orthodox Greeks, always have felt the support of our brother-Slavs in the times of need and hardships. That's why we, Greeks of the Crimea, being one of the indigenous peoples of the territory, cannot stay apart when our multi-national land needs support and unity."¹⁰

The appeal omitted mention of the forceful migration of more than 18,000 Greeks in 1778 initiated by the Russian government. At that time, Greeks were forbidden to return to the peninsula, and those who tried to do so were arrested and returned to the new lands. The appeal also omitted mention of the horrible events of 1944 when Tatars and Greeks, including pregnant women, children and elderly people, were deported from the Crimean territory and transported in cramped and airless freight cars with limited supplies of food, water, and clothes to remote parts of the Soviet Union, where many died of hunger, illnesses and cold weather.

The appeal also stated that the chain of events – armed takeover of power in Kiev, creation of the new "illegitimate" government supported by the fascists and nationalistic organizations – allowed Greeks in Crimea to feel the country they used to live in had ceased to exist. The Crimean government argued that the referendum offered the only way out of the existing situation.

There also was an appeal to the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin from Ivan Zelilov and Klimentiy Balabanidis coordinators of the Greek-Russian

Cooperation social and political movement. Writing as if from all the Greeks now living in Greece but previously residing in former USSR republics, they announced admiration with the politics of Mr. Putin, and pointed out that if the State Duma of Russia and Mr. Putin personally decide to allow Crimea to join Russia, historical justice will be restored. They also indicated that Greece's position is not favorable at present, because no law is passed in the Greek parliament without external approval and many newly issued laws violate the Greek constitution. They also stated that population income is twice less as it used to be, unemployment was 40%, to 70% in the families of repatriates, and that's why millions of Greek people looked to the religious Russian and its people with hope and respect.¹¹

The referendum of March 16, 2014, was not acknowledged by Ukraine, the states belonging to NATO, the European Union, or the European Council. Access to ballots is not available, but the voting clearly took place with severe violations and the margins of victory are more than questionable. The official results were that 83.1 % of the Crimean population voted with 96.77 % of them in support of Crimea joining the Russian Federation. The results in Sevastopol were 83.1 % of total voters with 95.6 % in favor of joining. Just one day after the election, the Republic of the Republic of Crimea was proclaimed as an independent and sovereign state. The follow day, the Russian Federation signed the treaty accepting the Republic of Crimea as part of the Federation.

Exactly how the Greeks in Crimea voted is unknown, but their official position is clearly stated in the appeal already cited. The fact that several web-sites, posting information about everyday life of Greek communities in the Crimea, changed their legal addresses from Ukraine to Russia, serves as another proof that Greeks in Crimea supported the annexation.

The Greeks of the mainland of Ukraine took the news about annexation with pain and grieved over their compatriots' positions. An open appeal to all the Greeks of Ukraine by the leader of the Greek patriotic movement stated, "All the years of existence . . . we were closely connected to the Crimea – land of our love and our memories. We were connected through friendship, and we never doubted its sincerity. However the events that took place on March 16 and the wide support of the referendum about separation of Crimea from Ukraine cannot be taken in any other way but as separation from us. Yes, there are a lot of arguments proving that the population of Crimea does not support the negative thing happening in Ukrainian politics. But exactly this was the reason why a big part of Ukrainian population had risen, hoping to build a society free from corruption and totalitarian power. How can it be that Greeks of Crimea do not believe in our pursuit of civil and moral human values? What does the word 'Motherland' mean to them? Is it promised 'cheap food' or might it be widely spread but fake accounts about suppression of Russian-speaking people? Maybe our

compatriots believe that the new government in Crimea will take actions for intensive development of Greek and other ethnicities in Crimea? However history proves that such annexations usually take place for more pragmatic reasons...."¹²

The National and Cultural Autonomous Community of Crimean Greeks was founded on March 25, 2014. On May 6, 2014 the extended meeting of the Soviet Association of Greek Community organizations of Russia and Federal National and Cultural Autonomy of Greeks of Russia took place together with representatives of different Greek social organizations of Crimea. Despite the addresses and appeals of the Greeks of Ukraine to the Crimean Greeks, the meeting led to the decision to approval joining the Russian Federation, and the National and Cultural Autonomy of Crimean Greeks decided to merge with the Federal National and Cultural Autonomy of Greeks of Russia. Moreover, the participants of the meeting decided to appeal to the President of the Russian Federation asking to find a possibility for the Greeks in the southeastern part of Ukraine to return to Crimea.¹³

In the city of Mariupol, which is in the Donetsk region, starting in November 2013, meetings in support of European integration and the Maidan were held. The gatherings were small in number of participants, but spirited and heartfelt. An active protest movement began with separatist slogans in Mariupol at the end of February following the change of government in Ukraine. This movement was actively supported by the Communist Party, representatives of the Party of Regions and the pro-Russian local population. At the beginning of March, protesters came out in support of President Viktor Yanukovich and demanded decentralization of power, but by the end of the month their slogans changed. They asked for a referendum, the federalization of the Donetsk region. and the possible accession with Russia in the manner of Crimea.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) in Donetsk was proclaimed was April 7, 2014. Six days later, armed protestors captured the city administration building in Mariupol, and the city was declared the territory of the DNR. There is no indication that even a majority of Greeks support the creation of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic or desire separation from Ukraine and incorporation into Russia. An indication of actual Greek sentiment was the official positions taken by the chief magistrate of Mariupol, the Chair of Federation of the Greek Societies of Ukraine, the mayor of Mariupol as well as heads of different organizations who happened to be Greeks by nationality. An "Open letter to the Greeks of Ukraine" published in the April issue of the paper *Hellenes of Ukraine* (published by the Greeks' Federation of Ukraine) and signed by the activists of the Greek movement from all regions of the Ukraine stated a desire to preserve the territorial unity of Ukraine and affirmed that neo-fascists and neo-racists could not be seen in the streets of the cities and towns as claimed by the enemies of Ukraine. They pointed out that there are no known cases of Ukrainian

Greeks being persecuted or victimized because of their nationality. They found no sign of a xenophobic climate in the country. These leaders further noted that the forces calling for a split in the state were harassing and destabilizing a peaceful society, activities that could not be accepted in Europe of the twenty-first century.¹⁴

Personally I must note that the majority of the citizens of Mariupol, which is often referred to as "the Greek city," use Russian as the main language of communication, and they never felt pressure or discrimination because of the language. Nonetheless, pro-Russian propaganda has been successful in convincing some local people that their lives are threatened by mythical "Bandera men" and fascists.

Despite the official position of the Federation of Greek Societies of Ukraine which stands for the territorial integrity of Ukraine, *Hellenes of Ukraine*, the main newspaper of Ukrainian Greeks, periodically publishes articles that contribute to the spread of false information about the situation in the country and the situation of the Greek diaspora. For example, Stelios Elliniadis, a journalist based in mainland Greece wrote an article in April 2014 titled "The Greeks of Ukraine: Democracy and Culture" in which he states that the new Ukrainian government includes radical nationalists and neo-fascists, that extremists who have utterly negative attitude towards both the Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizens and indigenous Ukrainians who travel the territory of Ukraine freely. According to Elliniadis, nationalists and fascists consider all the Russian-speaking people to be traitors and the dregs of the society. They regard Russian-speakers as non-Ukrainians. They also despise Ukrainians who are married to Russians and the children born in these families.

Stelios Elliniadis believes that "The Nazi Hydra has raised its head high. The Greek people are again at risk. Quiet life, which began with the 1950s, ended today. Memories of the horrors of repression come to mind again and again. The increasing influence of nationalists and neo-fascists directly threatens the entire country and the people inhabiting it....Their rhetoric and their deeds are poisonous. National minorities live again in fear. People do not talk on the phone, do not write in social networks, do not speak out publicly. They are afraid of expulsion and repressions."¹⁵

I am a person living in the territory of Donetsk region since my birth, having Greek roots and talking in Russian. I have never felt the negative attitudes about which this Greek journalist writes. We talk on the phone, actively defend our position in social networks, and the Ukrainian blue and yellow flag is often used in social networks in the form of avatars as a symbols of our love for the country. The population of Donetsk and Lugansk regions is not afraid of so-called fascists, whom they do not encounter, but worry about the coming to power of puppet terrorist governments of Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics and possible subsequent repressions because of their support for Ukraine.

At the end of his article Elliniadis indicated that during the times of this exceptionally sharp crisis, the Greek government deprived the Ukrainian Greeks of its support, which had been continuously provided in the past even though with interruptions and difficulties. More precisely, the author emphasizes, an attack against the Greeks had already been undertaken by the Greek government and the ruling party. According to Elliniadis, the European Union has shown once again the danger it can bring when supporting subversive activities within the community to create a puppet government as in Greece. That government will then be used in a geopolitical struggle, with complete disregard for the possible catastrophic consequences of their policies on local people.

That the main newspaper for Ukrainian Greeks published such an article, which states a totally distorted picture of the events in Ukraine to any person not being involved to the events directly or not living in the region is puzzling. The response was not positive. In a following issue of the newspaper, for example, the chairman of the Melitopol society of Greeks wrote that he was shocked and "shot dead" by the article of Elliniadis. After the illegitimate referendum held on May 11, 2014, part of the pro - Russian population of the Eastern part of Ukraine started to reconsider its views because they realized these territories will not be included into the Russian Federation and will probably stay unrecognized.

Mariupol was one of the few cities in the Donetsk region where president's elections were held without incidents. Low attendance rates can be explained by the fear of provocations by separatists. In May, the chairman of the Federation of Greek Societies of Ukraine (the headquarters of the society at that time was in occupied Mariupol), condemned the rhetoric and actions of the protesters in the southeastern regions such as the seizure of administrative buildings, the taking of hostages, and the use of violence against civilians. It also deplored the unfriendly bellicose attitude of the Russian Federation towards Ukraine, the Russian show of force in the border zone, the economic pressure created by Russia, Russian *defiance* in dialog with Ukraine, and Russian *disregard* of international law and agreements.¹⁶

Mariupol was freed from the rebels of the Donetsk People's Republic on June 13, 2014, and became one of the few free cities in the Donetsk region and a stronghold of the Ukrainian state. Greek views in the region remained divided. Some still do not accept the new government in Ukraine and oppose its anti-terrorist operation. Another segment actively helps the Ukrainian military and aids refugees from different localities of the Donetsk region fleeing from the cities and villages taken by Donetsk People's Republic.

Watching as terrorists continue to capture and destroy towns and villages on the territory of the region, seeing civilians being killed, and observing some regions of

Ukraine shelled by the Russian Federation forces, even the Greeks with a pro-Russian orientation have grown doubtful of their original views. They do not see the “Banderamen” and fascists depicted by Soviet propaganda in the past and currently shown on Russian television.¹⁷ Instead, they have come to know that most of those now fighting against the terrorists for the territory of the southeast of the country are mostly conscripts from western and central Ukraine.

Let me conclude on a personal note. I believe the Greeks of Ukraine want to live free in a free, democratic developing country where the rule of law and civil liberties are the cornerstones of statehood. We hope that the situation in Ukraine will calm down and that Ukrainian Greeks will continue to actively develop and promote Greek culture in a democratic Ukrainian state.

¹ Ponomaryova I.S. *Etnichna istoriya grekov Priazovia (Ethnical history of Greeks from the Azov Sea region (end of XVIII – beginning of XXI century))*, Historic and ethnographic research, Kyiv, Referat, 2006, p. 4.

² Greki na ukrainskih terenah: Narisi z etnichnoyi istoriy. Dokumenty, materialy, karti (Greeks on the Ukrainian territories. Stories from the history of the ethnos. Documents, materials, maps) / by M.Dmytrenko, V.Litvin, V.Tomazov, L.Yakovleva, O.Os', Kiev, 2000, page 71.

³Vinnichenko I.I. Naselenie Krima: chislennost i nacionalniy sostav v retrospektive // Problemy istorii Krima: Tez. dokl. nauch. konf. (Simferopol, 23-28 sentyabra 1991) (Population of the Crimea: numbers and national composition in retrospective// Problems of the History of the Crimea: theses from the science conference in Simferopol Sept. 23-28 of 1991.), Simferopol, 1991, issue 1, pages 67-68.

⁴ Terentyeva H. Greki v Ukraine: Istoriya i suchasnist. (Greeks in Ukraine: History and modern times). Textbook for higher education establishments / N.Terentyeva, K.Balabanov, Kiev, 2008, book 2, page 98.

⁵ Ot antichnosti do nashih dney. Ocerki istotii i kultury grekov Ukrainy (From the ancient history to the present days. Essays on the history and culture of the Greeks in Ukraine), Mariupol, page 129.

⁶ Greki na ukrainskih terenah... (Greeks on the Ukrainian territories...), page 97.

⁷ Chisennost i sostav naseleniya Ukrainy po itogam Vseukrainskoy perepisi naseleniya 2001 gods (Number and composition of the population of Ukraine according to the all-Ukrainian census of 2001) : <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/nationality/>

⁸ Ot antichnosti do nashih dney. Ocerki istotii i kultury grekov Ukrainy (From the Antic history to the present days. Essays on the history and culture of the Greeks in Ukraine), Mariupol, page 154.

⁹ Stepan Andriyovich Bandera (1909-1959) was an ultra-right Ukrainian nationalist. Organizations he founded committed anti-Semitic crimes. His major foe, however, was the Soviet Union, which he thought was Ukraine’s historic oppressor. He was assassinated in 1959 with the Soviet KGB the likely culprit. Many Ukrainian politicians have honored him while others have condemned his legacy. The Right Sector group which is part of the present government support Bandera’s nationalist perspective. The Russians have consistently assailed the Right Sector and charged it is a major force in the current government.

¹⁰ Article: Crimean Greeks are definite that referendum will provide unbiased view of the people’s opinion and define the future of Crimea: http://www.rada.crimea.ua/news/12_03_2014_3

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- ¹¹Letter of the Greeks-repatriates to the President of Russia:
<http://www.litmixbest.ru/index.php/news/262-piples/4955-2014-03-16-13-53-41>
- ¹²Otkritoe pismo grekam Ukrainy (Open letter to the Greeks of Ukraine) // Hellenes of Ukraine, April 2014, pages 3-4.
- ¹³Nacionalno-kulturnaya avtonomia grekov Krima prinata v sostav FNKA grekov Rossii (National and cultural autonomy of Greeks of Crimea merged with National and Cultural autonomy of Russia):
http://www.greek.ru/news/greek_diaspora/crimean_greeks_joined_russian_greeks_organization/
- ¹⁴Otkritoe pismo grekam Ukrainy (Open letter to the Greeks of Ukraine) // Hellenes of Ukraine, April 2014, page 3.
- ¹⁵Stelios Elliniadis, Greki Ukrainy: za demokratiyu i kulturu (Greeks of Ukraine are for democracy and culture) // Hellenes of Ukraine, April 2014, page 7.
- ¹⁶“V moment opasnosti edinstvo nastolko luchshe vnutrennih razdorox, naskolko mir lichshe voyny!” (In the face of danger the unity is better than internal discord is peace better than war!) / Hellenes of Ukraine, May 2014, page 2.
- ¹⁷*Encyclopedia on the History of Ukraine*: (five volumes) edited by: V.A.Smoliy (head) and colleagues (Kyiv, 2003). V.1, p. 177 states Stepan Andriyovich Bandera (1909-1959) was the theoretician and a leader of Ukrainian national movement for independence of 1930-1950. When the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) was founded in 1929, Bandera was a member of this highly disciplined underground revolutionary movement whose actions were aimed at the overturn of the Polish, Romanian and later Soviet powers on the Ukrainian territories). He was put in a Polish prison in 1933, and after he was released in 1933, he became a leader of the opposition movement of the Ukrainian nationalists, voicing support for extreme actions. Bandera was one of the initiators to the proclamation of the independence of the Ukrainian State on June 30, 1941. From 1941 to 1944. He was imprisoned by the Nazis and sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. In 1959 was killed (most likely by a KGB agent) in Munich. Bandera became the symbol of the Ukrainian movement for freedom of the nation. Many Ukrainian politicians have honored him while others have condemned his legacy. As for the Right Sector (Praviy Sector), it has no party representatives in the Parliament, because during the special elections to Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) the party got less than 2% of the vote and the threshold for seats is 5%. The single individual for the Right Sector party holding a place in Parliament is Right Sector leader Дмитро Ярош, who won a place with 30% of the vote in his district.

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