

2010**Sergey Khrushchev on Crimea [excerpt]****Citation:**

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Summary:

Sergey Khrushchev, son of Nikita Khrushchev, recalls the 1954 transfer of Crimea from Soviet Russian to Soviet Ukraine. At the time it was an uncontroversial decision, but later after the fall of the Soviet Union the loss of Crimea was seen in a negative light by the Russian public.

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On January 25, 1954, the Presidium of the Central Committee reviewed the 11th point on the day's agenda – the question of administrative reassignment of Crimea. The issue was decided in 15 minutes and the corresponding Order of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet was scheduled to be made public in time for the anniversary. That winter marked the 300th anniversary of the reunification (this was the term back then for unification) of Ukraine and Russia. In 1654 the Cossack Rada, headed by Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, signed a union of left-bank (in relation to the Dnieper River) Ukraine with the Russian Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich. Right-bank Ukraine remained under Poland's protectorate.

The anniversary was celebrated on a grand scale. Crimea's reassignment was presented as a symbol of everlasting friendship of the Russian and Ukrainian people. It should be noted that in 1954 the transition of Crimea from one jurisdiction to another did not stir any response from the public. These kinds of decisions had been made before, people were used to them. For example, in the 1920s Abkhazia was its own republic in the Union, but later was reassigned as an autonomous republic subordinated to Tbilisi. Until 1940, the city of Vilno and Vilenskaya oblast belonged to Belorussia, then the city was renamed Vilnius and became the capital of Soviet Lithuania. In 1940 the Karelian Autonomous Republic was changed to Karelo-Finnish SSR, and in a decade and a half it was changed back. These were all major changes, while transfers of regions or other territories from one oblast to another, or from one republic to another, took place all the time and nobody cared besides the local government. Crimea's reassignment to Kiev's jurisdiction in 1954 happened just as inconspicuously: the road signs were changed, Miskhor turned into Mishor, gorod Yalta into misto Yalta. Nobody cared. The Black Sea was just as gentle and the Crimean chebureki were just as juicy. By the way, chebureki are not a Russian or Ukrainian dish, it is a Tatar dish. Just like Crimea itself is Tatar.

The Crimean problem came up much later, when in 1991 events took place that my father could not have imaged in his worst nightmares. Boris Yeltsin, the President of the Russian Federation, was blinded by hatred of Mikhail Gorbachev, the President of the USSR, and in order to remove his enemy from the Kremlin Yeltsin started the dissolution of the Union; he sacrificed the country without a second thought. That's when everyone started talking about territorial losses, first and foremost about Crimea, which had Sevastopol and Yalta and the wine cellars of Massandra. Now it was a foreign country. Immediately people remembered about Prince Potemkin-Tavricheski, who brought Crimea into the Russian Empire. Now giving it to the Ukrainians was practically a crime against the state. I don't disagree, except that for some reason the blame fell on my father. I also regret the loss of Crimea, but Crimea was not the only thing that Russia lost. There is also Odessa, and Ochakov, and Izmail, and Kinbun Foreland – these are all places that Potemkin and Suvorov once won from the Turks. But once you chop off the head, you don't cry about the hair. These things should have been considered ahead of time. Complaining about it today sounds like the old joke: "Once upon a time a grandfather moved a chest of drawers from one room of his apartment to another, and forgot about it. Many years later, a ne'er-do-well grandson in a drunken stupor sold the room with the chest of drawers to the first person who came long. When the grandson sobered up, he started picking on his grandfather, 'You old fool, if you hadn't moved the furniture, I would have at least had the chest of drawers right now!'"

It is true that my father initiated the reassignment of Crimea to Ukraine. But it was not conceived as a present for the anniversary; that was only a coincidence. My father was guided by purely pragmatic considerations. If you look at a map it is clear that geographically and economically Crimea gravitates towards Ukraine. Moreover, it is completely dependent on Ukraine; there is not even a small land corridor to connect the peninsula to Russia.

At the end of World War II, in 1944, Stalin put the burden of Crimea on my father. The Tatar population had been resettled to Central Asia, the land was deserted. Stalin

ordered to settle Crimea with neighboring Ukrainians and partially with Russians. Neither Ukrainians nor Russians wanted to move to the new place so they had to be persuaded and sometimes forced. The burden of feeding and supplying the necessities to the migrants fell on the Ukrainian SSR, which was still recovering from the war. My father was in charge of the effort, just as he was in charge of rebuilding Sevastopol. I already mentioned this special order from Stalin. While father was responsible for Sevastopol even Nikolai Proskuryakov, head of construction and my father's protégé, was not formally his subordinate. He was formally under a special Sevastopol central administrative board or a trust in Moscow. This meant that every trifle had to go through Moscow, through the RSFSR Council of Ministers, where each member had his own peculiarities. Sometimes the smallest details would require an appeal to the Union government, or even to Stalin himself. Father grew tired of the bureaucratic web and ambitions and suggested to Stalin to cut loose the knots and reassign Crimea to Ukraine. Stalin refused. Why? I do not know. My father never told me.

After moving to Moscow in 1949, father forgot about Crimea, he didn't even go on vacation there. In those years he didn't take any vacations at all, except maybe once when Stalin invited him to his dacha in Sochi.

After Stalin's death father had to take on the entire country, including Ukraine and Crimea. The question of Crimea came up sharply during the discussion of the construction of a cascade of hydroelectric power stations on the Dnieper. The plan was to dig irrigation canals from the lowest of the stations; the South-Ukrainian canal to Donbass and the North-Crimean canal to Crimea, naturally. The Ukrainian SSR was responsible for building the hydroelectric power stations and digging the canals. This is when the new Ukrainian Party Secretary Kirichenko started talking with my father about Crimea. He asked him to transfer Crimea to Kiev's jurisdiction, because otherwise the work would not go smoothly. My father remembered his former ordeals of going through Moscow and supported Kirichenko. Sevastopol was not affected and remained under Moscow's jurisdiction as a naval base. But the Ukrainians were not affected by Sevastopol; the affairs of the closed city had nothing to do with them.

Around this time the 300th anniversary came up, so the decision was made to aid the construction work and make a nice present for the celebrations. On February 19th, 1954, newspapers published the Order of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR "On the transfer of the Crimea Oblast from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian SSR." And at the regular session of the Supreme Soviets of Russia and Ukraine (special sessions were not called for such small matters) the respective republican laws were stamped: "Crimea handed over. Crimea accepted."