



## The People's Republic of Crimea (1917-1918)

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**Hryhoriy Potemkin wrote in 1794: “Remove Tatars from Belbek, Kacha, Sudak, Uskut, Old Crimea, and generally from mountainous regions; of those Tatars who live in the steppes, no one should be left behind; and if any of the Moors wish to leave, they should be immediately added to the appropriate list and ordered to leave within 24 hours.” This note explains a lot. Thus, the great resettlement began. According to Turkish sources, of the 1.5 million Tatars who lived in Crimea in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 250,000 remained at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Crimean Tatars suffered greatly from Russian imperialism, and in 1917, Tatar national movement had a chance for freedom.**

The February revolution became a time of possibilities for nations of the Empire. Crimean Tatars took this possibility and used it as much as they could.

In 1917, from revolutionary circles of Crimean Tatar intelligentsia, Milliyy Firqa (People's party) was created. It was a democratic, Muslim party with a socialist orientation, which advocated for a democratic parliamentary republic, with freedom of assembly, trade unions, party activities, individual freedom and inviolability, and liquidation of estates. It also held high the value of national freedom, equality of languages, cultures and peoples, in particular, supported the struggle for autonomy or independence of all enslaved peoples of Russia and advocated broad guarantees for all nationalities inhabiting Crimea. Milliyy Firqa was built as a centralized party that allowed only muslim members as a national party to represent their interest. One of the main stated goal were establishment of classless society and state or autonomy governed by democratic interpretation of Sharia law

One of the leaders and founders of the party was Noman Çelebicihan, an ardent socialist, a poet and a lawyer. Çelebicihan gave his character to the party and became a symbol of a newborn revolution on the peninsula.



Noman Çelebicihan

*Crimea has quite a lot of flowers, different colors and aromas. These flowers are the nations living in Crimea: Crimean Tatars, Russians, Jews, Greeks, Germans and others. Kurultai's task is to rally everyone and, making them one wonderful bouquet, turn Crimea into a real cultural Switzerland. The National Kurultai will care not only for Muslims, but also for other nations, it invites them to cooperate, and it will move at the same pace with them. Our nation is only the initiator in this matter - Noman Çelebicihan*

Crimean Tatars formed their national battalions in the army, and started to create legal cultural and political centers. However, these actions were taken negatively by the Russian government.

Kerensky's government opposed this movement of the Crimean Tatars and on June 23 Çelebicihan was arrested (by Sevastopol counter-intelligence) for "illegal activities". This dealt a crushing blow to the national feelings of the Crimean Tatars. After more than 5,000 signatures were collected in protest, Çelebicihan was soon released.

*The February Revolution overthrew the old regime, and our people rallied under the red banner. But months passed, and we still saw neither science, nor knowledge, nor art, nor industry, nor order, nor justice. Moreover, the order has deteriorated even more, and all our hopes have been dashed. All around us is a terrifying emptiness that is sobering. We were waiting for a solution to the problems from the central authorities (from Russia). However, from there, only anarchy came from the Provisional Government, and the whole region (Crimea) plunged into darkness and conflict. In this regard, we said: "Nation! Don't expect anything more from the central government, take your fate into your own hands!"*

On October 2, 1917, the Second All-Crimean Muslim Congress in Simferopol decided to hold elections to the Kurultai, parliament of Crimean Tatars. During the elections held in the second half of November, 76 deputies were elected to the parliament, including 4 women. Election of women deputies in muslim republic was seen as a symbol of social progress of which members of the first Crimean parliament were proud of.

*The Kurultai recognizes the general equality of people as the basis and affirms the equality of the rights of men and women and entrusts the development and adoption of the corresponding law on equality to the Parliament - Article 18 of Constitution of Crimean's People's Republic*



Kurultai of Crimean Tatars

Some time later, on December 13, 1917, Kurultai proclaimed the Crimean People's Republic, based on the ideals of national liberation, social equality and democracy.

The decision to declare the CPR was also supported by Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar members of the Council of People's Representatives.

It was the first turkic republic, the first Muslim republic to give women's equal rights, and the first socialist republic in the Muslim world. Most of the elected members of parliament were from Milliy Firka party, and started to realize their program, including political, cultural and economic reforms.

Milliy Firka declared the socialization of factories and plants: *"...In the labor issue, Milliy Firka is completely in solidarity with the demands of the social democrats."*

The majority of the Crimean Tatars were peasants, almost half of whom were landless. Therefore, the party agitated for the liquidation of waqf (church) land ownership: 87,614 acres of land were transferred to the state and leased to the poorest peasants. *"All the land belongs to the communities"* (jamaats): each person was guaranteed as much land as he or she could cultivate.

**Administrative, church and landlord lands were subject to alienation without compensation.**



Crimea, 1917.

But unfortunately, the vision of the Republic wouldn't hold for long.

Soon the Bolsheviks, seeing themselves as the legal successor of all land previously held by the Russian Empire, declared war against the Crimean People's Republic and completely occupied the Crimean peninsula. They captured Noman Çelebicihan and, on January 27, the head of the Crimean National Government was imprisoned in Sevastopol. How he was tortured or interrogated by the new bolshevik authorities - we do not know, but soon after, on February 23, 1918, he was shot, and his corpse was thrown into the Black Sea.

The Crimean People's Republic became a vivid example of the struggle of an enslaved people for their rights, state and freedom. The republic did not last long, and the population of Crimea suffered a difficult fate - Russian occupation regimes, French and German troops. The Milliy Firka party faced persecution by all of the forces — Provisional Government, Bolsheviks, The Whites and French forces. Left-wing of the party decided to collaborate with the Bolsheviks and adopted the Soviet platform. But after the wave of repression, they were finally banned by Bolsheviks in 1920.

1. Resolution (to be adopted) rejecting the agreement with the group as a whole as a harmful and

unnecessary relic.

2. Start a campaign against “Milliy Firqa” with oral and written agitation
  3. Issue a pamphlet directed against “*Milliy Firqa*”..
- November 30, 1920 RKP(b) resolution on Milliy Firqa.

This meant a complete ban of the party.

However, the legacy of the short-lived, but ambitious and brave republic still lives on.

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