

Reports of Russian Harassment of Crimean Tatars 'Lies,' Turkish Officials Claim

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Crimean Tatars hold a flag with their movement's emblem on it as they rally in Simferopol, Crimea.

Alexander Polegenko / AP

Turkish officials have dismissed claims that ethnic Tatars are being harassed in Russian-controlled Crimea as “lies,” [the RIA Novosti news agency reported](#) on Monday.

Hasan Cengiz, the head of the Turkish Association of Eurasian governments, made the comments after visiting the peninsula as part of a business delegation last week. Officials on the trip included a special representative of the Turkish president, and the deputy-mayor of Ankara, Ahmet Tunc.

Cengiz claimed that Crimean Tatars were living “comfortable lives,” contrary to allegations made in the “Western press.”

Groups including [Human Rights Watch](#) and [news agency Al-Jazeera](#) have criticized Russia's harassment of the Crimean Tatars, reporting that mosques, schools and homes were being repeatedly raided in a campaign of harassment.

"All this news is made of lies," Cengiz said at a press conference. "Life for the Crimean Tatars is going well."

The official said that the construction of a new central mosque proved that Tatars had the right to freely practice their religion and speak their own language.

"People are satisfied with their lives," he said.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 saw the Crimean Tatar parliament [banned in Russia](#) as an "extremist organization" and an arrest warrant issued for former Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev. The Tatar community largely opposed Russian rule in the area.

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