

Crimean Court Sentences 'Extremist' Tatar Leader to 8 Years

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Akhtem Chiigoz Screenshot Krym Realii Youtube Chanell

A court in Crimea has sentenced a leader of the peninsula's Tatar community to eight years behind bars for inciting civil unrest, the Krym.Realii news website [reported](#) Monday.

The Crimean Supreme Court found Akhtem Chiigoz guilty of provoking clashes between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian activists [outside](#) a government building in Simferopol on Feb. 26, 2014.

Chiigoz' attorney Nikolai Polozov told supporters gathered outside the courthouse on Monday that the verdict "is against the entire Crimean Tatar population," according to Krym.Realii.

Chiigoz, deputy head of the Tatar representative assembly known as the Mejlis, was detained in late January 2015.

The fact the court recognized Chiigoz as a citizen of Ukraine "gives us a chance to talk about his extradition," leader of the Mejlis Refat Chubarov said at a press conference in Kiev.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman told Krym.Realii that Kiev plans to seek Chiigoz's release through appeals to the international community. "Ukraine will continue to fight for all citizens who fell victim to the Russian occupational authorities," she said.

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Crimean leader Sergei Aksyonov [described](#) the ruling "fair and reasonable" in a Facebook post on Monday.

The case against Chiigoz is seen as part of Moscow's crackdown on the Crimean Tatars, a Turkic ethnic group, following the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in March 2014. Many Tatars boycotted a referendum on March 16 in which local authorities said 97 percent voted to join Russia. Kiev and the West refused to recognize the referendum.

The Tatars were forcefully deported from Crimea under Soviet dictator Josef Stalin and were allowed to return only in the final years of the Soviet Union.

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