

The 1954 Transfer of Crimea: Debunking the Myth of a “Royal Gift” to Ukraine

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Abstract: *This article deconstructs the myth of a “royal gift” which pictures the 1954 transfer of Crimea from Russia to Ukraine as an arbitrary act carried out unlawfully and unjustly at the whim of a wrong-headed Soviet ruler, Nikita Khrushchev. This, by now popular tale has been used by the Kremlin to justify the 2014 annexation of Crimea. By such a reasoning, in 2014, the Crimea was not annexed, but was rather “reunified” with the Russian Federation. Moscow’s land-grab was thus allegedly not a real violation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity. Instead, the annexation merely corrected a historical error and restored historical justice. Based on an examination of the Soviet legal norms and administrative practices regarding territorial changes within the USSR, the paper argues that, contrary to a “royal gift” myth, the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine was performed in accordance with then existing Soviet legislation, topical post-war economic considerations, and already customary intra-Union practices.*

Keywords: Crimea, Russia, Ukraine, transfer of Crimea, Soviet law, Khrushchev

Introduction

In March 2014, in the aftermath of the Euromaidan, the Russian Federation annexed Crimea. This event marked a turning point in modern European history and post-war international law. For the first time since the Second World War, a member of the Council of Europe (CoE), OSCE, and UN Security Council used force