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A Tatar School in Crimea ENTHUSIASM KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES

"It's always the same nightmare," says Aishe Tchabanova, Principal of School No. 2 in Saryj Krym, Crimea. "First an explosion... and then the school goes up in smoke. Our heating system is rickety and antiquated and frequent power cuts make it dangerous to use." Aishe Tchabanova has a strong personality and a loud voice, but they don't hide the fact that she is very worried. She runs a Tatar school with 540 pupils and 36 teachers in a small village in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, in the Ukraine where the population is predominantly Russian-speaking. Her daily life is a mixture of trouble-shooting and keeping everyone motivated. Aishe Tchabanova's school has a particularly heavy burden to bear. Like all schools in the Ukraine, it is facing the consequences of poverty and the general disintegration of the old school system. But that's not all: As a school designated for children of an ethnic minority - the Tatars - it is among the poorest of the poor, along with all the other minority schools.

On an empty stomach

The temperature in the school building never rises above 12° C. Classes begin at 7.30 a.m. and finish early. "We work while it's still daylight," says Tchabanova. This is partly because of the constant power cuts. There's no question of asking the parents to help. "Most of them can't even give 50 kopecks (30 centimes) for their children's lunch," sighs Vice-Principal Levaje Abibulajeva. "So many pupils work on an empty stomach now. Under the Soviets the most underprivileged were served hot meals at no cost. Today, we don't have the means to offer free food." Those who can afford to eat at school in a cafeteria without tables or chairs. A few benches are reserved for nursery school children, and one corner has become a dispensary for the school doctor.

Teachers work out of "pure enthusiasm," said Levaje Abibulajeva, proudly. Their salaries are never higher than \$20 ...when they are actually paid. Before presidential elections last fall, they all received several months of back salaries. Since then, nothing, "not even for Christmas," she said, admitting, "there are times when it's really difficult to motivate them".

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