Thank you very much for the invitation. It’s always a pleasure to be here to discuss things that do not get press coverage, do not get TV coverage, that are not part of the political discourse. In regard to that it is a very important event and I hope there will be a continuation.

I am going to talk about a particular initiative that involves Tatar communities of Crimea as one of the actors who in dialogue and in negotiations and in joint research with other ethnic groups of Crimea try to craft policy proposals that would tackle the issues that we are talking about, that are issues concerning Crimean Tatars and other issues that are cross-cutting in Crimea.

The project is called the Crimean Policy Dialogue. It was designed to bring together influentials from different ethnic-political groups. And I call them ethnic-political and I refer to three groups which is Russians Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars because all of them they have a political agenda, or some sort of political agenda, let’s put it this way. Or they express political views on how things ought to be. So bringing them together, people who represent the groups, people who represent themselves, people who represent their organisations in an informal setting where they get a chance to discuss the issues that are the most divisive in Crimea. And we have come up together with this group three main dividers if you wish, the three main fault lines as we call them in Crimea, which are language land and, as I call it, geo-politics of identity. Or, as [some] refer to it, internal geo-politics which means that external geo-political influences map onto Crimean society to the extent that they become internalised. And they become part of everyone’s identity, this identification with the outer geo-political force. So I think it could be useful for the case studies that you are planning to do if I focus a little bit of the outcomes of the research and dialogue that we have come up with in these three particular areas.

First of all, the CPD structured the way that there is an actual dialogue, of people talking to each other and doing cooperative analysis and trying to come up with political policies. And then it has a research upon it, which also a very important thing very much lacking in the Crimean context. What we have come across was that research that is being done there is either very partisan or perceived as partisan because the first question people ask you is “ok you referred to this and that sociological survey, who did that?”. As if it matters, but it does in reality given the high level of mistrust within the society. Research is also being very partisan and is perceived as serving one or the other force. So we tried to break this pattern and we created a pool of researchers who do not have any political baggage, who have gone through an intense course of empirical research and who actually do research to serve the dialogue, to inform the dialogue. Because very often people talk about things that they don’t really know about or there are a lot of myths and misperceptions as you can imagine. So what we do is take the ideas that come out of the dialogue or we take the points of unclarity and misunderstanding and put them into the empirical research framework. For instance, in the language strand of our work, there was a proposal from the dialogue to sense a prospect of introducing tri-lingual education in Crimea; meaning Crimean, Russian and Ukrainian. So it sounds like a good idea but we thought that we need to test it first. So we commissioned two research
projects and one was on the actual subjective assessment of the prospects of tri-lingual research by three different communities and by different stakeholders to choose officials from the education sphere and parents who also have an immediate interest. For instance, a very interesting result that we have come up with is that for Crimean Tatars the matter of tri-lingual education is a political question because they link it to their rights, to the restoration of their rights and to their status. For Russians in Crimea, it’s more like a cultural matter. But why not? Generally, they don’t think that it is necessary because, again, from their perspective, where does it end. So it was a very interesting thing, how differently different ethnic groups perceived the matter of language for instance.

On the prospect on tri-lingual media for instance, what we have come up with was that in the nearest future nothing is likely to happen in Crimea first of all because media is business and according to chief editors of the most prominent media in Crimea and according to the audience, no one is going to pay for trilingual newspapers or trilingual TV. So we said alright, its unresolved, we’ll park this issue for the moment and we’ll continue with others. So this shows how research is serves the purpose of strategizing steps in creating policy.

Another aspect is land, and first of all understand that land is highly divisive and very explosive matter in Crimea, it immediately concern Crimean Tatars and their rights, although not exclusively. Once again we approached the issue, let’s say of self-squatting which is usually labelled as a Crimean Tatar phenomenon which Crimean Tatars tend to call the self-reclaiming of land rather than self-squatting. So we approached this question from the academic point of view, let’s see what is the meaning of self-squatting, let’s look at it outside the legal framework, let’s look at the political and social meaning of self-squatting. And right now there is research going on that will be over by the end of July when we will have our second land dialogue in Crimea and the main research question is Crimean Tatars’ self-squatting brought into the political and social context of Crimea. And we have done field research and focus groups on Slavic self-squatting places. Self-squatting is not only Crimean Tatars and many people don’t know and don’t understand and you know, commercial self-squatting, we do media analysis and such.

Another research that we do on land is on why all the previous conflict resolution methods failed because there are courts, there are reconciliation conditions, all sorts of mechanisms normally existing and available to resolve these issues and yet nothing functions. Our hypothesis here was that it’s again because people do not perceive them as just and fair. And this is sensed again to be very, very low social capital in Crimea in general, deep mistrust, divisiveness etc. and when we map even ideal methods of arbitration or mediation they don’t work because people just don’t trust each other. So I will not jump into conclusions but I am just giving you the examples of research that we do, that backs our policy proposals.

And the final stage, what this dialogue exists for, is advocacy. So what we do with research and dialogue serves towards a creation of a cooperative consensus on the proposals which I feel is quite an innovative thing in the Crimean society because we cannot come up with a policy proposal to the government to the Crimean government or the Ukrainian government unless it is endorsed by all parties and it is quite a challenging thing as you can understand. But I have to say, in the last year and a half, the timespan of the project, and we still have three years left ahead of us, it’s been working extremely well. I expected people to be walking out of the room, slamming doors and simply not talking to each because this is what happens in the real life. We have people in the room
who normally don’t talk to each other but, interestingly, this format provided everyone with a
gooder platform and people started listening to each other and now things are happening even
outside the dialogue. They go to presentations together, like a Crimean Tatar and a Ukrainian
presenting our project in Moscow, and things like that happen which is very, very encouraging. So I
just wanted to highlight this platform, this format if you wish, that we hope may serve towards the
resolution of many issues in Crimea, including the issues pertinent to the Crimean Tatars but not
exclusively. So we place Crimean Tatars back into the society and their political underrepresentation
is being compensated by their participation in this dialogue. We have a website and we have
publications, if anyone is interested please contact me and I’ll be happy to share information.