Michael Emerson, CEPS Associate Senior Research Fellow  
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Below is the transcript of the recording

Thank you very much.

I work for CEPS think tank in Brussels. We are the partners associated with the project that Natalia Mirimanova has been describing, supported by the government of Finland. It is an excellent project. It has a good time price in 4 to 5 years, but it is not a quick job.

I would like to make 4 points.

First of all, the UNPO paper that I have read. Very nice paper, very clear one, a nice piece of work. I like cover in particular. I guess not everybody in the room has actually been to Crimea. Maybe we all have, maybe not. Those who have not been to Crimea, look at this huts on the cover page. You arrive probably by air to Simferopol, the capital city and then you drive to the countryside and in the suburbs of Simferopol you see these huge fields with these strange small huts on them. And it looks like rather driving into the European suburbs where people have allotments and little cabins for doing a bit of weekend gardening. This is the scale of these huts. These are the attempts by the Crimean Tatars to have home on land because who have lost the hectares of land as the UNPO paper describes.

Secondly, on the project, Natalia Mirimanova has described. I have been in this a very minor partner, but I have been at least from the beginning, about two years ago that the project has been conceived. At that stage, practically we had no idea whether this simple idea of doing something about the Crimean problems connects with the people interested about it on the ground, whether it could be a living project of a policy dialogue. Natalia and Mr. Matveev, who is not here, but in Kyiv and who is another co-director of the project, they have actually something going here. In the meeting that we hosted a few months ago in Brussels, there were around 20 Crimeans—a mix of Tatars, Russian speaking and Ukrainian speaking Crimeans. That was a real event. I recall one of the Russian speaking Crimeans there saying ‘we see the opportunity to turn this Crimea thing round from a threat to civil peace to an exemplary case of intercultural living together’. So, my message to UNPO people, who will go on and do more on this project, is to get as close as possible to Natalia Mirimanova who is not very far away, because there is something going on there in terms of research work and actually people, the Crimeans who are beginning to work together.

My third point is, basically, the huge potential problem that has actually evaporated in the last year or two and that is the geopolitics of it. When we began the project the question was if the Russian Black Sea fleet will get thrown away from Sevastopol, when the lease comes to the end shortly and if it leads to an escalation not only in the geopolitics but in Ukraine and Russia and in the West but also one could see extremely clearly how Russian nationalists organisations, peoples and movements within Crimea could make the link between the Black Sea fleet and the Tatar question.

The potential for the escalation was really excellent in terms of the synergy. The negative disastrous synergies between geopolitics and local multi ethnicity. Well, Yanukovich, as you will recall, 5 minutes after he became the president, he signed off another 20 or 25 years for the Black Sea fleet in a deal that I would consider a very dubious deal, because the counterpart was rather non-
transparent discount on a gas price for a short period. I thought it looked as a pretty dumb deal at the level of bargaining. However, it defused this geopolitical question. So this is one, which will be, I presume, relatively quiet and won’t be inflaming it.

My final point is on how to look at this. Mr. Busdachin, you have not exactly drawn a comparison line with Catalonia, South Tirol and Flanders, but you have put that as a marker of comparator. I would rather as a comparator take the issue within the European Union of the states of the new Muslim communities within the European Union, which has two points of comparison with Crimea. The first one is Muslim factor and secondly, new or renewed in case of Crimea, new in terms of European Union. And here I offer to the reception on CEPS side a study that we are just publishing now in CEPS, which is called “Interculturalism. Europe and its Muslims in Search of Sound Society Models”. Well, we could have included Crimea in the study. I fact it is about Germany, Balkans, UK, Netherlands and Spain. But the methodology may be of use. The methodology here is ready to take a part in a presently raging debate, polemicized debate between the multiculturalism and assimilation as two extremes in opposing polar lines, to take this part and look at the policy set that defines where regime actually is between these two polar opposites. I just run through the list, the citizenship issue is relevant for Crimea. Education issue, support for Islamic schools: yes or no, support for special language classes. Housing, deconcentration, organisation of the land issue. Health care and treatment in hospitals, questions of meals, Muslim meals, chaplaincy, translation, languages. Employment, formative action for disadvantage groups. Policing, ethic profiling, inclusion of the minority groups in the police forces. Allowance of Islamic practices, mosques, Muslim burial grounds, halal slaughtering, Islamic courts, head scarfs burghers and other religious symbols. We can go on with this. Somehow whatever the relationship between the majority community and the minority, which is the Muslim minority, there is some set of the possible settings, let say around 25 qualitative variables. The arguments in this book are that the European Union has to really get out of this very destructive and dangerous polemicized debate between multiculturalism and assimilation, which many of our highest leaders from Sarkozy to Cameron or Markel are engaging in a rather simplified and dangerous way and get into all these mechanisms and work out pragmatic solutions.

Going back then to Natalia or our project, which is really getting into the mechanics of education, political rights, land etc. That is the way to go.

Thank you.