Good morning colleagues, good morning panelists. As the Ukraine desk officer I would perhaps like to raise some general issues which are of major concern this year for the External Action Service. And especially 2011 being a critical year for EU-Ukraine relations we have not only a commemorate to the event of the 25th commemoration of the Chernobyl events but we will have in August the 20 years of independence of Ukraine and also we are very happy to take some final steps of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreements negotiations.

For the moment the EU-Ukraine relations are based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements which date back to the 1990s and the new, as we say, generation of Association Agreements will then be the Eastern Partnership Accord Association Agreement on Ukraine. As the most advanced country in the negotiation process we are looking forward to get the final steps by the end of the year at the EU-Ukraine Summit and also this should give a strong signal, not only through a very positive EU Presidency this year, now the Hungarian and then the upcoming Polish Presidency but also for the event which a lot of Ukraine citizens look forward to the Euro 2012 football championships next year with Poland.

To say that the Association Agreement that we are currently negotiating covers a very very wide range of cooperation areas and the guiding ideas are the political association and economic integration for whole Ukraine and including also particularly the region of Crimea. That is why, as Andrew Swan has mentioned, since 2009 the EU has started paying attention particularly to Crimea as a region and has started to look into possibilities of how Crimea and its economic and social development can be supported. So the idea back in 2009 was we only sign the framework agreement after the Ukraine government allowed the representation of Crimea on 13 May and it includes 12 million euros and also several member states are associated to this funding process. And to put the Joint Cooperation Initiative in Crimea in context; within the Eastern Partnership we are looking for so called Pilot Regional Development Programs of regions in the Eastern Partnership can be identified in order to use the knowledge and the experience that we have in the EU on regional policy and regional cohesion and to promote this kind of strategy and the development programs successfully used within the European Union to our partner countries.

Actually Crimea is a quite good example for this regional development program because it is a region where a lot of social and economic problems can be addressed and it is therefore a good region to test this initiative and perhaps later on to use this as a model for other regions in Ukraine. This program will focus on three major issues; how to find better development for tourism, how to support infrastructure programs and also how to attract foreign direct investments which is of big importance for this region in order to overcome the discrepancies in social and economic development; not only in Crimea but also in comparison to other parts of Ukraine.
More particularly as regards the Crimean Tatars issue I am not an expert as our colleagues here. But in all relationships we have with Ukraine it is only one item that the EU delegation in Kiev has dedicated one full time colleague who works on the issue of Crimea especially and who dedicates his time to the region. And the EU is also trying to engage in contacts not only with representatives of the Crimean Tatars but also with representatives from the authorities to tackle issues as human rights, the Land Code and interethnic cooperation. There is also the issue of e.g. the building of a mosque in Simferopol which was recently welcomed by the EU; I think it was back in February.

What else can I add? Also, what we consider as a positive development is the recent approval of the cabinet of ministers to use state funds for the resettlement and rehabilitation of deported Crimean Tatars. So there are some positive movements recently from the authorities how to address these issues and the EU side will try to ensure that this development will be turned into concrete actions and will encourage the authorities to raise these issues.

In general, from the EEAS we can only say that issues of human rights, minorities, rule of law and judiciary are raised on each and every meeting with officials and especially now because if we really want to get to a high-level relationship with Ukraine this year by signing this Association Agreement we have some essential elements which are based on our common EU values. And this needs to be assured in order to really step up the level of cooperation. It is also interesting that our member states are having more and more interest in this region and e.g. our Council working group has recently dedicated, I think a three-day mission, to go to Crimea. I think that is important because when we here from the headquarters are trying to raise the issue you actually need to have a picture of what is happening on the ground to report back. So colleagues have been visiting Crimea, have been visiting ongoing projects on the ground in order to report back to the headquarters. I know that Mr. Dzharty who is the Prime Minister of the Autonomous Region of Crimea also has been pushing on the issue of member states opening consulates in Crimea to facilitate the issuing of visas and in general facilitate mobility of Ukrainians to the EU. This is not in our competence but it is member state competencies and the EEAS and Commissioner Füle are pushing on addressing these issues also with member states because we believe people-to-people contact is really important. For the moment I think it is only one percent of tourists coming from outside CIS-countries to Crimea so it is important that EU citizens get to know the country and get to know the cultural heritage and history of Crimea and vice versa, that these people will be able to travel easier to the EU.

I can only thank you for the very interesting presentation and as I said we have a dedicated colleague who works on Crimea in the delegation in Kiev and I am happy to share contact details to him.