



## EURASIA PARTNERSHIP FOUNDATION



### SUMMARY

March 17, 2014

11:00 – 13:00

Four Seasons Hotel, Shur Room

### Crisis in Ukraine and Its Influence on the Nagorno - Karabakh Process: Perspective from the West

Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) held a roundtable discussion on the topic of “Crisis in Ukraine and Its Influence on the Nagorno-Karabakh Process: Perspective from the West” on **March 17, 2014**.

The roundtable was organized in the framework of the project of “*Linking Civil Society Peace-builders with Political and Policy- Level Stakeholders*” implemented by the EPF with financial support from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. The event took place at the “Four Seasons” hotel with the participation of representatives from diplomatic missions, Azerbaijan government, members of parliament, and local experts in the field.

Main topics covered in the course of discussion focused on the current and possible developments of the Ukraine's political controversy, and foreign policy challenges it poses for the countries of the region. Participants of the roundtable stressed the importance of the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the states, international security mechanisms, and the importance of international cooperation.

It was noted that the Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine in a referendum that most of the world has condemned as illegal. Early results – when 50% of the votes were counted – showed that 95.5% of the ballots were in favor of joining Russia. The White House said that Obama “emphasized that Russia's actions were in violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and that, in co-ordination with our European partners, we are prepared to impose additional costs on Russia for its actions”. The participants discussed measures the US and

European countries can and/or should impose on Russia, and drew comparisons with the August 2008 situation in Georgia. It was noted by some of the participants that other countries, especially Moldova and Azerbaijan, are now waiting to see the response of the West to the Crimea crisis. “*The West needs to be serious about taking care of the Crimea case, otherwise the former Soviet States may lose confidence in them*”, said one of the participants. While some participants were more skeptical towards sanctions and their usefulness, there were opinions that Crimea was indeed “*a wake-up call for the US and its European partners*”, and that it was a turning point in how the West views their relationship with Russia. There is a growing gap between the West and Russia in the understanding of international law and how it should be applied.

The European Union works closely with its members and neighbors and was ready to sign the Association Agreement for Free Trade Area with Ukraine before the crisis. Now they are about to sign Association Agreements with Georgia and Moldova. Recently the EU announced that it is signing the Association Agreement with Ukraine, an independent state, and this clearly reveals the stance of the EU on the issue. In reality it will mean that the West will focus on the post-soviet region more than it did before Crimea. “*The European Union is a union of democratic states, and when decisions are made, they are made with a long-term perspective. More focus means more policy, more cooperation.*”

“*Azerbaijan must make the choice towards the US and its European partners, as it is not the neighbors to the North or South who will support Azerbaijan*”, said one of the participants. It was also noted, that

NATO can and should be more proactive in regard to post-soviet countries. ***“People suggest seeking help from NATO, but the question is does NATO accept you? NATO did nothing in the case of Georgia, nor is it doing anything substantial now.”***

Many participants shared the vision that with the Crimea's unilateral referendum on becoming a 'subject' of the Russian Federation, the secession textbook might indeed be opened again, and that Russia will continue its efforts to expand its presence in other post-soviet countries.

Participants also discussed the fact that Barak Obama's presidential approval rating is now at 43%, while Putin's ratings soared to 71%. Many attributed this to a proliferating propaganda machine in Russia, Kiev-which proposes that Kiev is now run by fascists and Putin does a great job in his efforts to bring Russia the dignity and respect it once possessed. It was noted that among the hundreds of news agencies and TV channels in Russia, there are only a handful of independent ones, such as “Dojd” (“Rain”). Most people in Europe do not watch Russian television, but they can watch the Russia Today international, English language channel, which delivers manifest propaganda every day. There are also ways that Russian propaganda is brought to other news agencies and opinion makers in the West. ***“Russia now learns a lot about soft power – the voice of Russia in the US is stronger than the voice of the West”.***

The opinions were divided with regards to possible foreign policy changes in Azerbaijan. Armenia will probably support the annexation of Crimea, as it would reinforce the principle of self-determination of nations. At the same time, if Azerbaijan continues to pressure Turkey and other states to exclude Armenia from international economic ties, it will eventually force Armenia into the embrace of Russia. ***“We have to detain Armenia and even though we cannot pursue an economic integration with them, we have to prevent them from closing the door because the more we push them, the more they lean towards Russia”.***

One of the points mentioned during the discussions, was about the role of civil society, which holds significant expertise and potential. This potential must be realized and the government needs to listen to civil society. It was also emphasized by a number of participants that EPF must continue to provide a platform for open exchange of opinions on this and other relevant topics in the country.