

TRANSCRIPT

"UPDATES FROM UKRAINE: IMPLICATIONS OF A 'POST-MAIDAN' ENVIRONMENT FOR OPEN SOCIETY"

A Conversation With Inna Pidluska
Moderator: Tatyana Margolin

* * *TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: INNA'S ACCENT SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND.* * *

ANNOUNCER:

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TATYANA MARGOLIN:

My name is Tatyana Margolin. I'm seeing mostly familiar faces here. I'm formerly of the Public Health Program. And now I work with the Eurasia Program-- liaising with national foundations and have been working very closely with the IRF, our foundation in Ukraine on supporting them in what's been going on in the past, wow, it's been eight-- I guess eight months now. It's kind of hard to believe.

Inna Pidluska is the deputy director at the International Renaissance Foundation, which is a Soros foundation on the ground, and has been leading-- foundation efforts on, I mean, most mundanely, sort of adjusting the foundation's strategy to reflect the changes in the geopolitical situation-- but also essentially involving everything the foundation has been doing s-- always and especially since-- the events in the Maidan.

From my sort of visual estimation, I described to Inna the crowd being representatives of-- of many parts of OSF. There are a lot of here from public health. So Inna will-- make s-- you know, a special focus on-- of this conversation on how--

recent events have impacted, specifically, areas of public health but also, of course, a lotta people from the Eurasia program. And we're interested in everything having to do with Ukraine in terms-- other folks from OSF.

So the general knowledge about Ukraine is probably more than average. But-- it would be good if you gave us a little bit more context and-- sort of shared with you what you think-- what you wanna share. And then we'll leave a lot of time for Q&A.

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Thank you so much, Tatyana. It's a privilege to be here. And-- and I'm really sorry-- that-- we have so little time. It's-- always so inspiring to be these colleagues. And-- OSF is one focus the places-- which is quite rare, I would say, in the sense of-- sharing-- common values-- and-- common efforts. It's really great. And we back in Kiev feel that. And thank you so much for taking the time to-- participate in this conversation.

Well, I've got a lot of-- things I would like to share. But probably, I would like to-- start and maybe limit myself to things, three things, which shape whatever we do and whatever-- the discussion in Ukraine that the war, the elections, and reforms and where our civil society is in all of that and-- where Iran is in all of that.

So-- I will be speaking about the military aspects of the war. So those people (UNINTEL PHRASE) could-- see-- that we in Ukraine-- are-- experiencing the (UNINTEL) fighting in the eastern part, the regions-- which-- now are stricken by separatism and terrorism, which is Russian sponsored.

And there is no answer to that. And-- I'm really devastated to read the news. It just-- there was this week of conversation with the International Red Cross about-- supply of-- humanitarian assistance, which or whatever is disguised as that as fighting Russian Federation. And now I just read that the convoys have moved in without having the okay from the Ukrainian government-- from the International Red Cross.

Well-- so all that, I don't know how-- what-- what (UNINTEL PHRASE). So it's news on a daily basis. And a lot of those news (UNINTEL). To com-- add to the-- problems related with the occupation and then with the occupation in Ukraine, which you know-- was early on, I'm going to talk about that. Because it's immediately (UNINTEL) to some of-- the activities which we do and also some of the (UNINTEL) which we support.

So to add to that, to add to the conflict-- there is political instability. And there is an economic crisis. The national currency lost 65% of its value since February. Prices have gone up. Utility rates-- (NOISE) gone up. Everything, lots of people lost their jobs. So the region which was populated by almost 4 million people is now really severely bombed. And a lot of those people have no jobs.

By the estimates of-- the UN, there are 416,000 international-- internally displaced persons in Ukraine. Ukraine has never had any previous experience of dealing with

them. So it's also a huge management crisis in addition to having an economic crisis and the military crisis.

Well, not all of those people moved to the Ukrainian territory. About two hundred thousand actually moved to Russia. But the remaining one, which is probably 50% in Ukraine in different regions. And the government has an agency which is supposed to provide relief-- register those people. But a lot of what the governmental agency does is-- provide people with the (UNINTEL) numbers of volunteers and-- just refer them for help or that. In addition to all that, we are having two elections. And it's a second snap elections this year.

We have the presidential election at the end of March, you know, and the (UNINTEL) on the 23rd of July. The Parliamentary Coalition ceases to exist, which by law, means if a new coalition does not form within a month-- the president has the right to call a new election, which is-- what he is going to do on the 24th, probably on the 24th of August, next week. That will be Ukraine's independence day.

And since then, we will have a labor parliament to handle all the challenges and all the necessity to combine-- countering the war, reforming the economy, which has been failing for (NOISE) a little over 20 years. And (UNINTEL) Mediterranean crisis and also making sure that the new (UNINTEL) uprisings do not really take the scales, or the essential protests do not take the scale that will be really quite devastating.

So where do we stand on this? A few comments on your actions, (COUGH) why I wanted to talk about that. If the president does dissolve the parliament, it means that-- the earliest-- the earliest time when we are likely to have the elections will be the 26th of October, which is end of October.

And it will be the same law. There have been a lot of efforts from the civil society trying to change the law in a way that-- it's a proportionate system based on open party lists. The previous one, or the current one we have, it's 50/50.

The parliament is-- 450 members. Part of the parliament is elected on party ballots. The other part in simple mandated constituencies. The result, why this is important, is the result is that the lists are closed. And the simple mandate constituencies normally bring to the parliament the kind of politicians you probably would not want to see.

There is very little political accountability. There is a lot of-- incentives to bribe voters and buy votes and then ignore whoever is left-- in the constituency. And now, given that we have the conflicts and terrorists in a sizeable territory of the country, I really do not know what kind of people sponsored by who and what kind of external interests may be making it on the single mandate districts to the parliament. It's extremely dangerous.

So that said, the efforts of civil society and of some of the politicians to change the legislation, make it more manageable, didn't really materialize. And now it's too late to make-- to change the legislation. Some minor changes might be made. And this is what (UNINTEL) in Ukraine will start legislation when the campaign is already in

process. But still, the fundamental transformation of the electoral system will not occur before this election, which means that we will have new faces in the parliament. But that does not necessarily mean we will have a better quality and a more responsible parliament than the one we have today.

Good news as you may know, we will probably will not have communists in. And we probably will not have-- the previous president's party. There are quite a few-- individuals who will-- which will still make it, again, because of the single mandate constituencies.

But the party of regions of such will probably not be able to recover so fast of all the connections with the previous (UNINTEL) totalitarian regime. Bits and pieces of this party now reestablish itself in the p-- themselves in the parliament under all sorts of names, like European reform-- development and something else.

So there are sort of three groups of the parliament which are based off. They form a huge monolith, which was backing the previous-- president. And they will be doing-- making the-- doing their best to reemerge as-- active politicians.

But mainly-- the expectation is that-- well, expectation not always, unfortunately. But the expectation of the president, who was the leading and driving force behind having-- the early parliamentary elections is that we-- he will have a sizeable majority in the parliament, which will make his backing for implementing reforms that he says. And we hope he-- he means it.

I wouldn't go into details of who is-- where is whom and how much of percentage goes where. Just to tell you a couple of things which illustrate why we are so concerned every time we have elections and why we are so concerned, in general, between elections.

If you look at opinion polls, and there was-- there would be, like, say, Solidarity Party of Petro Poroshenko. That's the name of the president. (UNINTEL) would be like, whatever, 25% of people would be prepared to (UNINTEL). The second next would be radical party of the guy, (UNINTEL), like 25%, 20% would be prepared to r-- to vote for them.

The problem is that none of these are parties. So basically, the (UNINTEL) of political parties is extremely weak. I mean, they formally exist. They registered as a political party. But they are really tiny organizations. If you would like to ask, who's number two, number three, and number five, you probably would have trouble, well, understanding what this mean-- names stand for. So the political party system is extremely weak. The parties are privatized. Many of them actually are individual based.

And once the leader is removed, trouble starts in the political party. And who populates the party lists, which are closed lists and cannot be accessed by voters? It's a day-to-day question. One of-- the areas where civil society really pushed hard was to bring in more order into campaign finance regulation and political campaign regulations.

And the huge resistance followed. And it's not something new. I was doing campaign finance, like, 15 years ago. And the argument was the same. It's too early. And those bad guys would use everything they could find the campaign finance irregular it is to remove whoever-- to have political influence on them.

So basically, nobody buys this argument. But the (UNINTEL) is that parties across the spectrum really hate the idea of having more transparency of campaign finance, which means that we again will have individuals in the parliaments who will buy their places from the political party lists.

And the quality of their work can be predicted. And their loyalty can be predicted. So-- so far, we-- I will say-- not extremely optimistic about the new kind of parliament we are going to have. That said-- there is the huge, massive popular demand for having this parliament out.

It didn't do anything when it could during the fighting at Maidan. It didn't in any way support the citizens when it had to. It had no-- whatever made-- made the-- I would say no lessons learned for itself in terms of ensuring that reforms go ahead. And the-- majority on which the current government can rely, more or less securely, is about 180 people. With orders to have the minimum of 226, the government really has to (UNINTEL). And we can always only guess what the (UNINTEL) involves. So it's very situational, very-- so basically, the parliament has to go. That's a (UNINTEL) point.

And now, for the civil society, there is a huge and-- extremely important challenge to make sure that-- there is as much voter awareness as possible about the dangers of vote buying. There is as much information about those people who run in single mandate constituencies on their previous deeds, especially their human rights abuse record-- any corruption record, and any other things which would make us think these people should not be in parliament.

Anyway, lots of work on election monitoring, voting, educ-- or voter education, par-- parallel vote tabulation. There probably will be a huge observers m-- mission, like we previously had. But nobody probably-- we still don't the date for the election. So we do not know when the mission (UNINTEL). And what matters is to have a long-term observation mission. It makes no sense to observe it the day of elections. Because all the violations actually happened before.

I would be happy to answer any specific questions. But I will stop here on elections and move on to the second section, which is reforms. Well, it's just-- like, very commonplace phrase that Ukraine needs reforms. There are lots of dollars saying, "Reforms, reforms, reforms." We have been saying, "Reforms." There was a government (NOISE) reforms program which has 37 priority areas in no specific order. It's like a laundry list.

But there are several areas where civil society has seen-- the reforms should be fundamentally important. One is anticorruption. Fighting corruption was the top demand of the Maidan. It was a little big general, I have to say. Because nobody objects having no corruption. So now civil society has learned the lesson. And

actually, I have to say, in fighting corruption-- there have been some positive steps. Comprehensive anticorruption legislation is something Ukraine has been working to. And the big piece of that kind of anticorruption legislation has been push-- pushed through the government and has been adopted. There was-- significant incentive for that.

And that is graduation from phase one and moving towards phase two of the visa liberalization agreement with the European Union. Everybody wanted that. So they needed to adopt this anticorruption legislation. There was also pressure from (UNINTEL), the-- consul Europe's commission on anticorruption.

There has been pressure from the-- EU. And of course, there was a lot of pressure from the U.S. government, which linked-- anticorruption reform with the assistance with any financial support and other support, and the pressure from civil society, which-- was very specific.

So it's not just generally, fight corruption. It's change public procurement legislation. And in order to explain to everybody why it's important, there has been a lot of efforts done by-- our partners, (UNINTEL PHRASE) and I'm sure your partners as well in the s-- in the field, for instance, to show to people how corruption and non-transparency of public procurement affects the purchase of essential medicines, which are paid for from the national budget and, in a number of cases, cost twice as much as in the EU, for instance.

And-- so they wouldn't (UNINTEL PHRASE) for the people there, really very heavily af-- affordable for the budget. There was a huge corruption rent on them. And this is something which is being changed. Very good anticorruption legislation has been put in place.

I have to say that, at the implementation level, it has effectively blocked a lot of public procurement. Because the system resists. And it would really slow down the purchase of essential medicines. And only due to the pressure of the civil society groups, they now are trying to find a solution. Because for many, it's really-- an issue of life and death.

But public procurement is not limited to essential medicines only. It's the whole variety of things where public money becomes private money, I mean, individual taxpayers' money. And this is something which we think would shift mentality of a lot of people.

When they understand how much the state costs them, and they pay for it, they would be much more prepared to (UNINTEL) at least its functions properly. There is another very positive thing which is related, and this is access to information law. Ukraine had a decent access to information law.

It took is several years to have it, adopted in-- 2011, I think it was-- (UNINTEL) was there. And now the implementation was not something which made us happy. So in-- the spring of this year, while it was still the honeymoon between the society and the parliament and the government-- the positive changes to the access to

information law were actually adopted.

And now it requires a s-- a letter from everybody sent by email, by other things, saying, "(UNINTEL) the rate of information. Would you please mind sending me how much you-- your agency spent on this in previous year?" And you are supposed to get an answer in five days. If you don't, well, you can sue them.

Anyway, so anticorruption legislation is in place. Enforcement is difficult, because many agencies just do not have-- capacity in addition to will. I mean, we could speculate what's more? Is it lack of political will? Is it-- just (UNINTEL) and incompetence? (NOISE) Anticorruption cases, it's a lot of lack of political will and invested interests. In access to information, it's a lot of lack of capacity-- and lack of information as such. But anyway, some positive movements have been occurring.

Well, on the last positive note, extremely slow. That's probably all what I could quote in terms of-- reforms. If you look at economic reforms, a lot of economic reforms, actually, is exist in a way, like, we are (UNINTEL) the austerity measures.

And we need to raise taxes here, raise dues here, and relocate revenue here. Well, this is not reforms. And everybody knows this is not reforms. But somehow, the government pers-- persists in pretending this is what reforms are about. There is the external pressure, which is the (UNINTEL) with all the good and bad things about its impact.

But at least it-- tries to make sure that there is some fiscal accountability, there is some fiscal transparency. Well, the social effect of increasing the rates-- on-- especially on the (UNINTEL) is still to be seen. Because people already feel how that strikes their own-- incomes (UNINTEL PHRASE). But still-- at least in terms of fiscal transparency, there is some commitment from the government.

And they are trying to-- make sure that the b-- the budgets do not really go out of control completely, which is a huge risk, given the rate of-- inflation we've got. Ukrainian economic slowdown since-- the beginning of March has been 6.5%. For those who remember the crisis of two-- 2009, that was 8%. Well, anyway, we are almost there. And now where do we stand with this? I mentioned the role of civil society.

And indeed-- there has been unprecedented-- change, which-- makes me extraordinarily happy. On the one hand, it's not just NGOs which advocate for change. It's not just NGOs which are professional-- developers of bills which sub-- advocate them and so on and so forth. It's broader than that.

They finally, somehow, came together and-- work on a weekly basis with the parliament. There is what is called the Platform of Reforms in the parliament, like a number about 26 MPs who more or less understand how dangerous it is to ignore the (UNINTEL) changes.

So they come up with-- demands. And sometimes, this is like changing a couple of sentences, a couple of lines in a bill or adopting a regulation which would improve a

lot of things. It's an extremely difficult work. But what makes me optimistic and what makes them optimistic is that they require-- they have earned, again, a lot of attention in the people, in the public. Politicians still listen.

For-- just to give you an example, which may be a little bit ridiculous, given what I mentioned, like, w-- elections reforms and so on, the parliament was supposed to break for summer in early July and reconvene in mid-September. And when they (COUGH) (UNINTEL) "By the way, we didn't have time to adopt this and this and this. But we'll come back to that in September." There was such a massive outcry that they had to cancel vacations.

Unprecedented. But still, it shows that at least-- they do have some responsibilities in-- in a situation like this. I would say that (UNINTEL PHRASE) this. It's called the Reanimation Reform Package. Reanimation, we were laughing about this in the beginning, because it's like emergency medicines, medical emergencies being when you're really dying, you need reanimation. So it's Reanimation Reform Package.

And the list is huge. They work in-- 14, I think it's 14, they multiply themselves frequently-- action groups looking at reform of the judiciary, reform of law enforcement, reform of public health, reform of education, reform of administration, decentralization, so basically, the key things where reforms are needed. And that's for Ukraine almost everywhere.

To support their efforts and make sure that this (UNINTEL) of reforms meet the demand of reforms, actually, we've created, together with the secretary of the cabinet of ministers, we means IRF-- I think we just called the center for support of reforms. This is to make sure that-- the civic activists-- think tanks-- know what kind of areas or where there are windows of opportunity and where the government people, the governmental committees, will eventually be prepared to get a little bit of expertise, so that they could specifically move forward in some areas.

Again, difficult, not as fast as we wanted, but in this sense of (UNINTEL). And we have a lot of help for that. A couple more-- just one more-- one more thing here. And-- this is the strategic advisory groups, which is a different creature. And this is not exactly the foundation. And this is not exactly civil society.

This was the initiative of George Soros when he first came to Ukraine in-- March this year and realized that-- this country does need a strategy, d-- does need a vision. But it also does need the inputs from Ukrainian and international practitioners who could have done these things like in countries which transformed themselves in-- for instance, central Europe or elsewhere. So there are very able and effective groups of Ukrainian experts.

And indeed, this was specifically important for us. Because there are lots of-- advisors everywhere and advisory groups from all kinds of genres, always different in the way that they built on local expertise. And these people will remain after the (UNINTEL) end and after there is no longer (UNINTEL PHRASE) for something.

But they will remain. And they will engage with the governmental committees on very specific issues. So as such, there is a strategic communication group on

decentralization, strategic communication group on (UNINTEL), strategic communication group on education, seven all in all, and one on justice and cons-- and the constitutional reform.

I would specifically name one on which (UNINTEL) the crowd. Because it was formed-- in an experimental way from (UNINTEL). (NOISE) This is a strategic advisory group on public health. It was-- created through a competitive process. The ministry of health posted an announcement that there is this initiative.

And we may have a strategic advisory group (UNINTEL PHRASE). They've got about 100 applications for 15 positions, 12, 15 positions. There is talk at the (UNINTEL). So they've selected the people who did public health reforms in the situation which was also quite-- not so easy in the Ukraine. And they are trying, well, they are trying-- watching the process.

So the ambition is to have, if not a blueprint, then at least a clear set of-- suggestions, recommendations, proposals for the new parliament as soon as it becomes operational, for the government as soon as-- well, the government is ready to move on. And-- as a side effect of-- the-- activity is more something-- something which was proposed, actually-- by (UNINTEL) as well, the national sec-- national reform council has been created by the presidential office-- the second day after we had the meeting of the strategic advisory group. So it's a little bit unexpected and early.

And we actually thought it would be with the government. That's where reforms should be. But now, as I said, the president has decided to take (UNINTEL PHRASE). So we are expecting-- this system to become fully operational and really absorb all that knowledge and talent.

And there is specific recommendations but also (UNINTEL) aid, which is available for making transformation possible. I stop here on this. And there is another thing-- which is part two in our conversation. And I see I have maybe some questions.

TATYANA MARGOLIN:

Maybe some questions--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Questions first, and then we go to public-- with the public health. Okay, questions. (LAUGH)

TATYANA MARGOLIN:

If nobody asks, I will take the-- anyone? Well, I-- (THROAT CLEAR) you mentioned-- thank you so much, Inna. I mean, it's fascinating. I think-- one of the things that happens from afar is that the news is dominated by the war. And so we watch a lot of

the fighting. And we think that-- (COUGH) that's the major problem facing Ukraine today.

But what you just told us about is all the sort of other stuff that Ukraine is still faced with-- the government stuff that doesn't so much make it to the news here. So-- the fighting is, of course, important and one element of the issues you're dealing with. But-- the government reshuffle and the dissolution of the parliament, of course, is-- incredibly important as well.

But my question would be very sort of us centered. If you just had to pick two things the IRF has done since the Maidan-- that you think were sort of the most successful, most impactful, and I know you mentioned the (UNINTEL). But maybe something that you haven't yet mentioned about, what would you choose?

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Two is impossible. We've got-- quite a lot areas. And all of them are really (UNINTEL) to other parts and independent of each other. What I would-- say is important is that, and I know that-- again, this is not the initiative which-- (UNINTEL) suggested when he was-- in Ukraine in March, is starting the original offices to-- and also doing the work and helping-- the people who were there at the Maidan, not necessarily members of NGOs, but people who felt committed and wanted to participate, so that they would be able to participate in the local formats-- so that they would be able to continue-- things which are relevant for their communities-- even though they may not be-- willing to become parts of formal NGOs and networks.

So the original offices-- and these are like original-- original hubs for communication, information-- and-- support of-- shared initiatives and shared projects, which would then grow into something big, probably a (UNINTEL PHRASE). Because what we would be suggesting is just really small support of the initiatives and a meeting place.

So these places will be-- (UNINTEL) servicing the north and east of-- Ukraine, Odessa in the south and east of Ukraine. These are the areas not just-- the ones which require a lot of attention for a variety of reasons, given the social and demographic factors and political factors.

But these are the areas where a lot of IDPs moved from-- the Crimea and also from the Nietzkan Ugaz (PH), which is stricken by fighting now. And there will be one of them which will be working with the western part of-- the country. They will be working cross-- cross-country. And the idea is really to build links between people in-- different-- regions or help them maintain those links.

Because many of partnerships have emerged during the Maidan-- in different areas between (UNINTEL) people who would otherwise-- really never connect. There were lots of people from different professional sectors, from small business, educators-- from local governments. They were also from NGOs, students as well.

And we think it's fundamentally important to keep this spirit alive and-- continue-- for-- for these people to be able to continue, probably in a different format, what they are doing. Some are d-- working with-- with IDPs now. Some are working on pushing the government-- local governments for making sure that they do not forget why Maidan happened in the first place. Some are exploring possibilities for community development, whatever.

But what we really want is that citizens become and remain active. And-- one of the positive things we've observed was a lot of self-organization, solidarity, self-reliance, and really creative attitude to addressing problems people see without relying on the (UNINTEL) and providing a grant to do something, which of course is important. And we continue to-- to support them. But still, a lot of such things emerge. And we really want people to become mature citizens. Because this is what (UNINTEL) is all about.

I named one. And-- probably another important one, and I (UNINTEL PHRASE). And I also know that-- I promised to talk about this anyway. This is-- absolutely-- but I will say revolutionary project for Ukraine. It's about the-- helping-- OSC patients in Ukraine. Nobody did that.

Nobody would dare do that, I have to say. So the idea is we don't know how much of the ground you know. But anyway-- on the territory of the Crimea, aft-- out of 26,000 people who use drugs-- 806 were on-- opiate substitution therapy. And once (COUGH) Crimea was annexed by Russia-- these people found out that it's illegal in Russia to have methadone treatment.

And-- what the Russian government proposed, they call it the toxication program. But basically, they withdrew with the use of police and the use of-- drugs control-- agencies about 46,000 methadone pills, punished those who had them. And others were just left to themselves.

(COUGH) So that was-- the project. The initiative was to provide, if not all of them, but possibly it was to provide at least some of them and then possibly to-- to relocate to the mainland Ukraine. (UNINTEL PHRASE) some funds for relocation. And-- it-- it's initially for four months. And then basically, it's never coming to an end.

Well, from the Crimea, we had-- 57 people enrolled in all this process. (UNINTEL PHRASE) people are really afraid and under tremendous pressure. And all-- they all face criminal penalties. And they really fear that. For many of them, that was really not an option.

But-- once we were unveiling the, like-- starting the-- launching the program-- the fighting in Donetsk and Slovyansk began. And there were a lot of patients there as well, about 1,000 in those areas. And we now have an increasing demand coming from that part. People really want to-- have access to this program. So far, the program has helped 135 people all in all, out of them-- 57 from-- coming from Ukraine, and the rest coming from (UNINTEL) and Lugoj. So they were relocated to-- Kiev, (UNINTEL PHRASE) so several places in Ukraine.

The government does provide free-- government support and-- opiate substitution

therapy. But there are still a lot of-- needs which these people have. And-- basically, the whole idea was to provide the necessary social support. We are having reports here, and I will be happy to share some of the figures-- well, some would say-- that the figures are not extremely large.

But if you look at-- the very vulnerable break which we are dealing with and the very dramatic situation, you would know that, if we speak about 20-plus people who have already found jobs in new places, this is something about people who managed to come to their families and relatives and convince, somehow, m-- families and relatives that-- they are not that bad guys. And they would-- they-- they actually require and they deserve-- treatment. So we-- we do have-- situations where people found it very promising for themselves.

The not-so-bright thing is that everything is finite. And this was for four months only. And we were trying to have the buy in from other donors who would be able to pick it up. Well, there was a lot of appreciation. And-- everybody said that this is such a wonderful thing we were doing.

And to be honest, I was-- positively impressed with the fact that we received very little-- bad comments after the press conference happened in Kiev and-- spoke about this program. And-- there were a couple of patients who came and said-- how important it is for them. It's really a matter of life and death. Because 20 people already, by that time, died in the Crimea because of-- the termination of the OST therapy. But still, in addition to appreciation-- like by the (UNINTEL) or by-- our ministry of health or by the UN agencies, we so far have not had-- do not have anybody who would come, "Great, we are picking it up. We will continue funding that--" which is sad.

But still, I wanted to share this with you. It I think is a very important-- case how urgent and timely assistance really saves life. And even if it's not picked up by others-- it gives a good opportunity and a good entry point to try-- with the Crimea, I think, it's-- there was nothing we could do there.

I mean, we sat. If there were some more people (NOISE) who want to relocate, they will be accepted. But-- we cannot come in the Crimea and-- and-- cannot have the-- OSTs repla-- restored there and so on and so forth. But with other regions, it's very important that the government now is aware of the problem. And people who relocated from the eastern areas have direct access to the governmental agencies which-- then continue-- taking care of-- their treatment needs. So this is-- what makes us hope.

We have got a request-- from the group for additional patients who would be coming from the east. Well, (UNINTEL PHRASE) do not have the resources to meet that. So it's probably something we would like to discuss for the how we handle it. And also, there is another issue, which is the exit strategy.

As many of these people will be socialized and-- will-- who we can provide with as (UNINTEL) support as is possible. But that will probably not be support in terms of free housing and free food and anything. We will have to rely on volunteers. But

there are very few volunteers who are ready to engage in this area. So it's very much an open question. And I would be really grateful if-- we could have-- your views on what solutions could be here. Thank you.

TATYANA MARGOLIN:

Thank you, Inna. So-- questions?

QUESTION #2:

I'm just gonna ask about-- your opinion just in reference to the-- methadone patients. In the midst of all everything else that's going on, that you outlined in the first part of your talk, what is the level of discussion that you're aware of around-- the impending funding crisis for methadone when the global fund is-- is--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

You mean the--

QUESTION #2:

--stops funding the--

TATYANA MARGOLIN:

I didn't hear that.

INNA PIDLUSKA:

I mean, the question is about-- overall-- reduction of funding for methadone in country, not necessarily related to--

QUESTION #2:

So yeah. So in the-- in the short term, these patients--
(OVERTALK)

QUESTION #2:

--from Crimea. And they can receive methadone services in Odessa or maybe

(UNINTEL). And so much else is going on, the collection, the reform, and war. So is the-- but in the midst of all that, is there any discussion, or what is the level of discussion about the impending long-term funding crisis when the global fund stops paying for methadone in--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Well, there is no discussion. Because all the discussion is now on the-- on the war. So nobody talks about methadone patients. And-- the cuts are not something which is publically discussed, although the minister-- there have been efforts from-- the-- patients' groups-- to raise this issue.

How successful they were, so far, I cannot really recall anything which would show that there were any decisions taken already, that they will-- cure. So the problem has been-- expressed. It hasn't been expressed-- expressed (UNINTEL). But I doubt if we have any meaningful answer on (UNINTEL PHRASE).

QUESTION #3:

How approachable is the government right now to discussing minority rights in general? Because I mean, I-- I-- I work with the human rights (UNINTEL) for-- for a while. And we-- we're covering Ukraine. And--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Oh, this cause what, in general? I'm sorry.

QUESTION #3:

Human rights issues--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Oh, human rights issues.

QUESTION #3:

And minority issues. Like, because the response I would get is that it's-- you know, it's a war. And we cannot do anything right now.

INNA PIDLUSKA:

In terms of discussing human rights issues, the government is-- well, I would say relatively approachable, especially individual parts of the government. Yes, there are some which are more approachable than others, like the ministry of justice-- surprise, surprise.

But that's mainly due to-- the good dialogue we have with them in other areas. So we are trying, in many cases, as-- as often as we can also bring the human rights issues to the table whenever we talk of anything else in which they are interested.

If we are not speaking about the government as the executive branch but look at-- well, the ministry of health, of course, is-- more attentive than others. And it's-- it's fully approachable now-- partly due to the fact that the minister himself comes from the Maidan and from civil society and from the s-- from the-- organizations which were working in the previous ministries with the format of the public councils, advisory groups. So also, he's perfectly aware of this approach problem.

And but the question is-- well, again, elections mean we might be having new people in government. How that will affect their willingness to reform, their willingness to engage with us and others remains to be seen. We will not stop, of course-- convincing them why-- they should be approachable. But-- how they react, we'll see.

Then-- there is another-- ally in the official system, which is the ombudsperson. This is the human rights representative of the parliament. And this is our first point of call when, for instance-- a human rights advocate and patient groups and advocacy groups want to enact what is called the National Preventive Mechanism. It's a mechanism-- implemented the UN conventions against torture.

And-- this mechanism involves that there should be regular monitoring of-- places of no freedom, how we call them. That's detention facilities, prisons, (UNINTEL) settings for treatment or for-- special needs patients, so on. And the idea is that-- representatives of the ombudsperson's office are coupled with-- human rights people.

And we actually provide specific capacity building to the vulnerable groups so that they would have their own monitors. Because there is a specific UN-- regulated procedure of how the monitoring then gets translated into a report and how the report is sent back to the-- for instance, law enforcement agency and how it's supposed to be sponsored.

It does require training. We are doing this. And this is what we are using. And in fact, this has been-- well, it has been working. I mean, we do not have a lot of cases yet. But at least this is where we see a possibility to push forward.

With the parliamentary committee on human rights, we have-- of course, a good dialogue. And again, this is subject to whatever we will have after the elections. But this is not the first time we had this. We had 19 ministers of health in the past 21 years. This is not new. And when a minister changes, everybody changes.

(BACKGROUND VOICES) Institutional memory in Ukraine, it's something which is

really a practically nonexistent concept. So it's constantly coming back and forth. But it is not something new. And this is not something which is going to stop us.

QUESTION #4:

So it's interesting that we, in this same space yesterday, had a talk from some Russian activists that are working on LGBT rights and visitors' rights and harm reduction. And so I was wondering, is there any, you know, despite all the problems that are having between the countries, is there any solidarity between Ukrainian activists and Russian activists about the oppression that you're both feeling?

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Yes, there is solidarity. And actually, I-- you could probably hear about some-- Russian people, not necessarily activists, but-- people who would-- sp-- I was speaking about them with Steve (PH). There was the case of the-- European Court of Human Rights submitted by three Russian activists. And I know that many of-- some of them-- at least one of them has been getting--

TATYANA MARGOLIN:

You're talking about--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

--the same treat-- treatment in (UNINTEL), which is Ukraine, and also a lot of world support coming from the (UNINTEL). And-- we look at that as a possibility that the same path could be possibly explored-- (UNINTEL). And if that is somehow-- Russia will (UNINTEL) the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, even though, well, it's not the first time for it.

But still, I think it's significant. And it would be important to have the message spread across the board and everywhere. Well-- there is solidarity and a lot of collaboration between people. But this is on individual lines. I mean, and I have to say that sometimes, we do have many conversations which-- are affected by the situation, by-- the-- fighting, by sometimes different perspectives and other things.

So it's there. We would like to have it more. We-- well, due to the situation in Russia, we are actually not really very hopeful that the improvements there will happen and will create more possibilities for people to engage on a more stable level. Like, I don't think Ukrainian experts will be able or activists will be able to travel there freely. This has been a problem for quite a while. But we still have Skype. (LAUGHTER)

TATYANA MARGOLIN:

Jonathan (PH)?

JONATHAN:

Inna-- sorry if you addressed this before. But on-- on a different note, I'm curious to know how the conflict and the transition have affected the foundation's Roma portfolio.

INNA PIDLUSKA:

The foundation's...

JONATHAN:

The Roma--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Roma.

JONATHAN:

Yeah, 'cause I know you were really building it up beforehand. And of course, we know from other contexts that, you know, Roma and other ethnic minorities fare differently in transitional and-- and hostile environments--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

I do not want to s-- I do not want to say that it affected it positively. (LAUGH) Yeah, but the work has been suspended, surprise, surprise, probably because the Roma community has-- is facing a lot of changes now-- is facing challenges now, especially in the east, especially in (NOISE) the regions that were attacked.

And-- we did have Roma groups with-- with which we didn't work before who just came to us and said, "We heard that you are doing this. And we want to establish our own points where we would have Roma communities which, in addition to fighting, have also all the stigma, have also all the attacks because of other things and so on and so forth."

And-- we help them to make connections with local groups working on-- providing access to primary legal aid but also with local groups which were working directly

with local governments, supposed to be dealing with this. And-- again, it was not an easy pr-- process.

We did hear some tensions between different groups of IDPs, including Roma IDPs. But this is not something unusual, again. So at least there is an increasing understanding in the Roma community that they need to act-- with using the legislation and the systems which already exist, even though we know that those systems are imperfect, I mean, the state.

They don't even know that the-- possibilities to get-- financial support from the state for this and more funding and more attention is really (UNINTEL) limited. But still, it exists. We have positive stories, actually, in the-- western region with the Roma community. That's where we-- have our strongest-- Roma community centers. We are planning to have eight Roma community centers based in Roma community.

And this will-- communities, and this would be pr-- providing-- all sorts of things like primary legal aid-- consultations on how you deal with the governmental regulations, help if-- people need, for instance, passports and whatever-- mediation, like, good health mediation.

Then in addition to that, we want to have education mediation. And we have already started talking with the local-- education authorities in the areas where the com-- Roma communities are quite sizeable, so that they would have these education mediators-- to help teachers and to help Roma families-- to understand the value of education and how kids could be better prepared for-- being in mainstream schools.

Because-- some-- something we are really-- against is those segregated Roma schools, which-- still exist. It's like-- it's de facto. I mean, it's not by law. But it's because there is a community. And it is the only school there. Only Roma kids are there-- which means low quality of education and all sorts you could imagine.

So what we want to do is really engage with local and regional education authorities, so that they would somehow work with the teachers, somehow work with the families. And that includes also the early childhood program that we (UNINTEL PHRASE)-- so the real situation is addressed.

At the national level, we had a positive development. Ukraine now has a special representative on minority rights. That's ethnic minorities, so that we understand. It's not-- vulnerable groups and not-- and it's not on-- antidiscrimination. Antidiscrimination is handled by-- by the ombudsperson. But here, it's a special representative of minorities. And-- the reason for creating this position was because of the Crimea, was because of the massive Crimean Tatar issue, who are really under (UNINTEL) oppression now from the Russian authorities and probably Ukrainian authorities.

But this person happens to be a friend of OSI. So there have been-- he w-- he was very well involved in visiting Roma settlements, especially those Roma who moved to Ukraine-- to-- to Kiev-- out of the east of Ukraine and-- also, using his authority, moved them to the regional and the local-- self-governance bodies, trying to see how we can facilitate very basic-- needs these communities have.

And the situation is becoming, by the way, extremely dangerous, no-- not just with Roma, but in-- in g-- in general (UNINTEL) the sit-- the crisis here. There are about 70,000 people around here, not just Roma, everybody. They are-- located in temporary-- housing, like-- ki-- kids' summer camps-- recreation areas, which means that, in a month, when it becomes cold, they will no longer be able to stay there.

With Roma, this is a ch-- a specific challenge. They have nowhere to go. So we are hoping to g-- get a solution from the government (COUGH) and some kind of something, temporary solution. But so far, it's-- well-- the support is there. The funding is not.

TATYANA MARGOLIN:

I have-- sort of, again, a different-- a question in a different direction. I don't see anyone ask a question. Do you think healing-- like, how will-- should u-- Ukraine go about healing itself-- healing the rift between the west and the east?

Are there-- or maybe there aren't these divisions there. They just appear to us from, you know, maybe even watching Russian television. Or is it there? And if it is there, what do you think should happen? How can the foundation play a role?

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Well, the divisions are there. It's-- some of the division are indeed-- there. Because-- for quite a while, Ukrainian government ignored the situation that a lot of people would not ever listen to them if they still tried to communicate them as a ch-- in Ukrainian. 'Cause people don't just understand them.

And-- there were a lot-- also other reasons, of course. There was lots of prejudice-- lots of manipulation, including that-- for which-- many of the current members of parliament are responsible for-- supporting separatists, supporting the political base for the future.

The situation has become worse after-- of course, after the conflict. And-- I do not know to what extent those people who are-- running away from the conflict to the mainland Ukraine are satisfied with the way the government responds to their needs.

There always will be people who are not satisfied. So it's very easy to generalize and say the government's not doing something, or it's not doing the proper thing, and so on and so forth. And still, if suppose it would be perfect, there would still be people who would (UNINTEL PHRASE).

A lot of people have lost housing, houses, jobs, everything. And they do blame Ukraine for that. They do ask, "Why didn't you want to let us go peacefully?" Like, they-- many people thought it would be like in the Crimea. Referendum, Russia, Russian passports, Ukraine withdraws, everybody happy, or many people happy, or many people unhappy but quiet about that.

In this situation, it's totally different. We do face a lot of lost lives. We do face the problem when many underprivileged, urban youths in-- economically devastated mining towns of the (UNINTEL PHRASE) found-- utmost social lift, which is a gun. And taking away the gun from them will be not easy.

I mean, this is not something new. It happened in the Balkans. It happens in Africa. It happens elsewhere, where is the fighting. And there is nothing the state can offer to those young guys. I mean, the-- the industry has always been destroyed. How they come back to normal, that's going to be a huge issue. And it goes way beyond whether or not they would like to speak Ukrainian or Russian.

I think the huge role will have to be played by the economic regeneration. That's where international community needs to step in. And it's not just the Soros Foundation. Because we will need to rebuild the country, and it's really so. What we could do is, after the fighting stops, or even before the fighting stops, number one, make sure that-- whatever can be helped and whatever the government could do to minimize the human rights abuse, the government sincerely wants to do. I mean, even (UNINTEL PHRASE).

Number two, that those people who moved to-- mainland Ukraine would know where to turn for services, would know where to turn for assistance, would know that there are other people and communities willing to help. And those communities would actually be prepared for some time to-- accept that they are not dealing with-- Ukraine (UNINTEL). Many of those people would probably have a totally different solution for that.

But you mentioned reconciliation. We have it as one of our-- plans, immediate plans, I would say, in February. And we still haven't solved it. 'Cause the fighting hasn't started, or it hasn't stopped. I mean, you cannot do reconciliation when people have their towns destroyed. But once it's over-- we will start slow ways, support for cross-sectoral groups.

I would be specifically happy to have women's groups involved-- also youth groups involved, even faith-based groups involved, who we normally would not work with-- the-- religious, any religious associations. But sometimes now, for instance, (UNINTEL PHRASE) huge amount of work to-- to help the IDPs and so on.

How to do that? Well, we'll need to learn. Again, Ukraine has been fortunate not to have conflicts. We can learn from our colleagues in Georgia. We can learn from our colleagues in Armenia, Azerbaijan-- in Africa, in Latin America. And I was-- talking with (UNINTEL) earlier-- y-- yesterday or a different day before yester-- during our (UNINTEL) here-- that it would be great to see how-- people who used to fight finally sit at the table. We hope to rely on that nation n-- network's resources. And-- IRF is prepared to take the lead there with-- all other donors. But-- how to do that, when to start, and what kind of resources will be needed, that remains the big questions so far. Yeah.

QUESTION #5:

To be the devil's advocate, are you prepared to face--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Just missing the beginning--

QUESTION #5:

To be the devil's advocate, are you prepared to face an intervention from Russia?

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Oh, we are prepared to face the integration from r-- Russia. It won't have to be a devil's ad-- advocate. Yeah. (LAUGHTER) That's like, you read the news? Well, being prepared means what? Being morally prepared, I think everybody's prepared to (UNINTEL) solutions. And we've been prepared to that since November, when we actually announced we would not collaborate with the government anymore.

And then there was this-- foreign agents act and other things and-- investigation on civil society and-- and ourselves and everything. But now it's a total different thing. And prepare yourself morally for military intervention, that's totally different.

Well, you know that Ukraine's got-- something new, which we still do not know how to interpret. And one way, it's self-organization. In another way, it's-- something which can be potentially dangerous. I'm speaking about-- volunteer battalions.

They deflect what-- how people-- people's attitude to that. I mean, this is not just a small minority of people who participate. But a huge number of people, including those activists, support the process, I mean, support meaning feeding them, equipping them, bringing all possible stuff which the state is supposed to be providing, if not.

So the country is morally prepared, let's say. It will never be-- ready to stand up and say, "Come," of course. But (THROAT CLEAR) worse comes to worst, I think we'll have-- how-- how we will-- we respond, that's a different question. We do not have a strategy to respond to a military invasion.

When I say we, we mean-- I-- I mean IRF. The state doesn't have a strategy to respond to (COUGH) a military invasion. What we know is that almost-- all of the-- activists and partners with whom we worked are now safe. And we helped to make sure that they are safe and in safe places. That's as much as we could do now.

TATYANA MARGOLIN:

I think this-- I mean, it's-- it's very heavy to think about-- eastern European region sort of needing, at this point, a shared framework with our colleagues from other countries-- a conversation on post-conflict or rather in-conflict healing. But it's definitely something that the Eurasia program is, I think, what plays to, you know, (UNINTEL) help you with if needed.

It's unfortunate that it sounds like something that we will have to do and not something we ever imagined we would have to do. But-- it's very sobering. If-- I just-- you wanted to say something?

QUESTION #6:

Well, I-- I have a question that-- maybe you mind. It's on a slightly more positive note. (LAUGHTER)

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Thank you. I need that.

QUESTION #6:

I-- you-- this idea of the spirit of the Maidan and you've mentioned-- earlier today and-- and even just now sort of groups that have emerged as-- as having self-organized, w-- women's groups, earlier, you were talking about-- small business owners.

I think at the time of the Maidan, we got a little bit of a snapshot of sort of, like, the different pieces of that. And-- so-- so how is it (UNINTEL), you know, whether or not we are supporting these individual moments or self-organization efforts? Sort of, can you name a few of the more notable ones and--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Well, we do not-- support individuals. We do support, and we plan to-- engage more through the regional-- regional representatives-- the work with-- well, it's not the legacy of Maidan. Because there is something bad about the word, legacy, but this-- the-- the movement, the people, and the initiatives. Many of the-- we do support them specifically when the partner with existing NGOs.

QUESTION #5:

Yeah, but can you just talk about it--

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Yes. For instance, there is-- there is a human rights school-- in-- (UNINTEL), which the people-- people who work with human rights would probably know, of course. So there have been a couple of sessions already which would invite, like, up to 20 people-- many of them coming from-- the east of Ukraine, many of them coming from the nont-- like, non-NGO-- world yet, to have some-- general ideas of what human rights movements are, what human rights work is about.

And-- I think this is, for many of them, it moves-- it moves them beyond-- their individual activism, if I may say so. There is a special-- product which has been-- created. It's called the People of Maidan. It's a collection of about 600 oral s-- stories.

It's-- of people who-- participated and who now-- looking for different ways for them-- to move on. For many, it's quite-- difficult. Many still have the-- this thought that Maidan was-- such a great experience in their life. And they cannot really stop doing what they are doing.

Again, when-- George Soros was in Ukraine-- somehow happened that one of-- it was a global (UNINTEL) was-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) and-- also-- one of the solidarity-- prominent personalities, (UNINTEL) was there as well. He came specifically to meet-- Ukrainian people who were engaged very closely in the Maidan movements and helped them move post-Maidan. We call it this, post-Maidan.

So it's Maidan University. There is this school of civic leaders which we now have included in our strategy. So we're-- (UNINTEL) some (UNINTEL) there in-- except to-- to engage these people-- saying-- that this is a specific project. This is something like-- well, we do have specific projects. For instance, we have supported-- self-organization of families of-- (UNINTEL) school, the Heavens Hundred, the people who were killed during the shooting on Maidan.

So it's about-- well, over 100 people, because it's not just wives or husbands. It's also children and so on. And they now feel that the state is not really doing what it's supposed to be doing. So they found a way for themselves to organize an NGO so for advocating.

And basically, they are not advocating for their own, like, pensions or benefits or whatever. They are advocating for having the investigation. This is what hasn't started. And this is, if you ask me, one of my biggest problems with what the government hasn't done is that it really ignores-- its duty to investigate the human rights abuse which happened during the Maidan.

It looks like, well, there's the ICC, International Criminal Court. But the process is long. And Ukrainian government has allowed a very small window which is-- only

covering-- the events of November, dash-- dash-- February. And there doesn't seem to be a lot of initiative coming from the Ukrainian-- justice system to investigate that.

So in this case, there are people who really want to make sure for the-- the things are investigated. I could give you a lot of more examples. These are the things which fall into our emergency strategy, which the Eurasia program, thank you, Eurasia program, has been supporting.

And-- it's-- it's about whatever how many projects. There's almost 50 projects by now. Most of them are really small. But some are-- s-- some are bigger. But-- the idea is really to respond to these initiatives, which otherwise-- probably would never emerge. Yeah.

TATYANA MARGOLIN:

I think we have to wrap up, because Inna does have to leave for the airport very soon. But I just wanted to say a few words about-- IRF and sort of from our perspective, how impressed and proud we are of the way IRF has-- reacted and positioned itself in the conflict.

And you know, of course, we're proud of the work IRF's been doing always. But it is truly phenomenal-- that IRF has been the place of-- has taken place of sort of-- a place of convening, a place of-- has been playing in-- a very important part in-- beginning the healing process.

We as a foundation in-- in s-- in the past several years, we have been feeling like we are no longer as responsive as we once were. We were no longer as quick as we wished we were. But I really think IRF turned it around in this conflict. And-- even in the way that-- you were able to send the money for the Crimea OST patients very quickly is very impressive and obviously lifesaving. So-- we just wanna say that, from our end, we're really in awe of the work that you've been doing.

And also, you know, this brown bag is an excellent opportunity. But it is such a small speck in our-- in trying to fill our understanding in the profound ways in which the region has been changed, in the way in which our-- all of our work has been impacted by what's going on in Ukraine.

And we hope that we'll have more opportunities-- to learn from you and with you. And of course-- people have been traveling, more or less, beginning to go again. So we just really thank you. And we admire you. And thank you so much for coming and for everything that you're doing.

INNA PIDLUSKA:

Thank you. Thank you so much for this. (APPLAUSE) (UNINTEL) it's-- it's-- it's really inspirational, I'm sure, for all of us to be able to-- do what we feel is extremely important for the country and for the people. And it's so much a relief to feel that we

are not alone and have all your support and have all-- your interest in what we are doing.

And we are always there and here. Whenever there is anything you would like to say with us, question, anything, you are more than welcome. And I think, again, on a positive note-- Ukraine is a case start-- like, a big case or a collection of case studies, some positive, some are less positive. But-- we are trying to extract (UNINTEL) from what we are doing. And-- we hope this may be useful. And-- I am back to Ukraine today and hope, by the time I get there, to have some positive news, not (UNINTEL PHRASE). Thank you.

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *