

PRESS RELEASE

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Astana

Syrian Crisis: is the end in sight?

The issues that were discussed today at the panel sessions of the Eurasian Media Forum sparked keen interest in the audience. One of the hottest topics was the discussion on the Syrian issues.

All the speakers appreciated the merits of Astana as an important negotiating platform for the Syrian conflict. Earlier the capital of Kazakhstan also received diplomats on this issue. The "Astana Process" has become a platform towards the settlement of the war in Syria.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan **Kairat Abdrakhmanov** recalled that the first talks on Syria in the capital of Kazakhstan were held at the proposal of the presidents of Russia and Turkey, which was immediately supported by President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev. This has become a logical continuation of efforts undertaken by Kazakhstan to resolve the conflict. "In 2015, Astana hosted a group of Syrian opposition twice as part of the negotiation process on ending the war in Syria, and we gave the opposition the opportunity to be heard. United Nations, the United States, and Jordan were invited as observers. We believe that it is the United Nations that plays an extremely important role in the process of settling this conflict. A multistage plan for a peaceful settlement encompasses items on a ceasefire, constitutional reform, and establishing a transitional government. Astana, in turn, complements the agenda of Geneva by augmenting its efforts to combat terrorism through hosting negotiations. Kazakhstan has established itself as a peaceful country and an honest intermediary in this process", Minister said. He also stressed separately that the fact that the US has delegated an observer proved the seriousness of the country's intentions to start the peace process.

Commenting on the possibility of sending peacekeepers from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan into the zones of delimitation in Syria, Minister clarified that such concern is caused by the signing of a memorandum on de-escalation zones in Syria. "There are no official negotiations on sending peacekeepers to Syria from Kazakhstan," Minister assured. Participation of Kazakhstan's military in this process can be discussed only if there is a UN Security Council resolution and the relevant mandate of the organization.

"Fears that we will become hostages of the circumstances are groundless. Kazakhstan, according to the same Syrian opposition, contributes to the achievement of peace agreements thanks to the reputation of President N. Nazarbayev and our shared efforts", said **Kairat Abdrakhmanov**.

With the attempt of the Syrian and Kurdish troops to regain control over Raqqa, the capital of the ISIS, the question arose of the possibility of the emergence of an independent Kurdistan and of Turkey's attitude to this issue.

RT TV Channels' host Sophie Shevardnadze moderated the panel.

Answering this question, former Turkish President **Abdullah Gul** noted that there are professional terrorist leaders in ISIS, but among his supporters there are also a lot of people who were dragged into the struggle to protect their families, villages and cities. "A military solution will not work without political efforts; we must deal with the causes of the conflict. The main question is what we will do after we destroy the terrorists. I am sure that the political and territorial integrity of Syria must be respected in order to avoid revanchist sentiments in the future. We are friends with the Kurds, but among them there are enemies of our state and they are closely connected with the Workers' Party of Kurdistan. I think they would want to gain a foothold and expand territorially, and then oust Arab and other ethnic groups. Once again, territorial and political borders should remain the same", the speaker said.

Salim Hudhayfa, the speaker of the opposition **Free Syrian Army**, voiced an irreconcilable position regarding the possibility of a compromise with the current Syrian government. "Any political process with Assad and his entourage is impossible: they are the root cause of the current situation", the speaker said. Hudhayfa also drew attention to the conflict of interests of the main participants of the negotiation process: "All the big countries that stand behind the conflicting parties are trying to stick to their interests. These countries are also in conflict with each other and play with Syrian blood in order to achieve their interests. They take advantage of weak souls of Syrians and mercenaries. As a result, Syria and ISIS are the trunk and shadow, which it throws".

Syrian journalist **Alaa Ebraim** noted that it is necessary to study the phenomenon of radical groups: "They did not appear out of nowhere; there are reasons. These are the mistakes of the current government and the wrongly assessed potential consequences. We will not solve the problem without understanding its source. "

Answering the question of what efforts Iran can make to resolve the issue peacefully, Director of the Middle East Strategic Studies, Kayhan Barzegar, said: "Iran and Russia are trying to accelerate the political decision. A compromise cannot be one-sided on the part of Iran, since it is connected with threats to national security. We must think about the situation after Assad, because there is a possibility that the terrorists will regain power. Saudi Arabia and America, I think, should join".

Shahida Tulyaganova, the producer of the documentary "**Cries for Syria**", proposed to look at the war through the eyes of women and children, and raised the question of who to call a terrorist, whether it is possible to call terrorists a 14-year-old boy who succumbed to the influence of ISIS and his mother who took him out from Raqqa having previously put him to sleep to save him from the war.

Contacts for media:

Elmira Seydazimova

+7 777 713 0007

pr@eamedia.org