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Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton
and European Commissioner for Enlargement
and Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle
on Ukraine before the European Parliament

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission and European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle made the following statement:

"We are pleased to have this opportunity to make a statement on the current situation in Ukraine. These remarks are made in the light of three important upcoming events: The EU-Ukraine Ministerial meeting which will take place in Brussels on 26 October; the local elections which will take place on 31st October and the 14th EU-Ukraine Summit which will be held in Brussels on 22nd November.

In recent years Ukraine has enjoyed a high level of political freedoms. Successive elections have been recognized internationally as having been conducted in accordance with international standards. Ukraine has developed a dynamic and diverse civil society and media environment. And there have been consistent improvements across the board in respect for human rights. This is a significant legacy of the Orange Revolution.

As a consequence of these developments, and of the commitment of successive governments to the path of closer ties with the EU, relations between the EU and Ukraine have acquired considerable momentum. This is reflected most clearly in the ambitious and far-reaching EU-Ukraine Association Agreement which we are currently negotiating and which aims at achieving the twin goals of political association and economic integration with the EU.

President Yanukovych’s government has undertaken a number of important economic reforms in recent months which should be commended. These include the adoption of a Public Procurement Law which should play an important role in the fight against corruption and in increasing competitiveness. The adoption of a gas sector reform law, which paves the way for Ukraine’s imminent accession to the Energy Community, as well as the Agreement it recently reached with the IMF for a Standby Agreement are also critical steps in securing macro-financial stability, transparency and a return to growth. These reforms go in the right direction and must be sustained.

The Ukrainian government has also managed to achieve a level of stability which has eluded Ukraine’s political establishment in recent years. This is an important and necessary development in ensuring effective governance of the country.

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Nonetheless, we are concerned at consistent and wide-spread reports of deterioration in respect for fundamental freedoms and democratic principles in Ukraine. Particularly worrying are complaints related to freedom of the media, freedom of assembly and freedom of association.

Respect of these fundamental values is essential. They are the best guarantors of individual freedoms. They ensure a genuine competition of ideas. They are an essential component of truly open, innovative, and competitive societies.

On 1 October, the Ukrainian Constitutional Court handed down a judgment which overturned constitutional changes made after the 2004 Orange Revolution. This decision only increases the need for Ukraine to achieve wider constitutional reform through an inclusive constitutional reform process, and very much takes up a key theme of your resolution of 25 February this year. Such a process should seek to establish an effective and lasting constitutional system of checks and balances in accordance with European standards.

For the European Union and our Member States respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law are fundamental principles that bind us together. They are principles that cannot be compromised - so too for our relations with key partners such as Ukraine. The pace and depth of our rapprochement with Ukraine will be determined by full respect for these values.