EU-Ukraine cooperation: key events in October, 2012

The first press conference held by Jan Tombinski, the new Head of the EU Delegation to Ukraine, conferences on public procurement and TEMPUS in Kyiv, and the participation of EU observers in an international mission observing the Ukrainian election have been key EU-Ukraine cooperation events in October. Below, see the highlights of these events and click for the full stories.

AMBASSADOR JAN TOMBINISKI: “WE HAVE TO CREATE CITIZENS, NOT ONLY VOTERS”

The Head of the EU Delegation to Ukraine, Ambassador Jan Tombinski, held his first press conference with Ukrainian journalists on October 16th. Here are some of the highlights of his statements and replies:

On EU-Ukraine relations: “The main message which I try to convey in all my meetings [in Ukraine]… is the following: we have to focus on Ukraine as an independent country using the natural potential of the country.”

On European integration: European integration “proved to be a success story for many other countries, and it is not excluded that Ukraine may also be a part of this story of European history.”

On the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA): “We still have to go through 21 linguistic versions [of the AA] to prepare a common text. With its very technical language, in particular on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), this process should be over before the end of this year. Then we have to ask Member States of the EU, and also Ukraine, whether there is a political will to sign the agreement and to submit it for ratification. For the political context for a positive decision, we need to show the EU Member States that the political elements are all there, and that there is no doubt that Ukraine is willing to continue on the way of associating with the European Union.”

On selective justice: “There is a quite large understanding [in the EU] of selective use of justice [in Ukraine]. And I rely upon the common knowledge and wisdom of the European Parliament and of international institutions observing the proceedings of the courts in Ukraine: they state that there are cases of selective justice.”

On elections: “We, as a European Union Delegation, don’t have an independent monitoring mechanism; we rely on the mission of the OSCE/ODIHR. We rely on the findings of the OSCE, and we are also in very close contact with Ukrainian bodies observing the election process, be it Opora, Committee of Voters, or Ukrainian political parties. There will be a comprehensive assessment of the electoral campaign, of the legal framework for elections, of how the election day is concluded and what happens with the vote of every single citizen: these are the major issues.”

On energy: “This is one of the major interests of Ukraine: to be less dependent on foreign suppliers of energy raw materials, especially on one energy supplier.” After the Ukraine-Russia crisis at the beginning 2009, “the EU made huge investments in making Europe less dependent on one source of gas supply which lowered our energy dependence.”
On citizens: “The citizen it is not only someone who has rights, but also the one who has obligations, and the main obligation of citizens is to care about their common country… This is what we have to focus all our attention upon: to create citizens, not only voters.”

Read more: http://euukrainecoop.com/2012/11/01/tombinski/

EU OBSERVERS MONITORED UKRAINIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Four EU Delegation staff members* joined the 800-strong OSCE/ODIHR observation mission monitoring the Ukrainian parliamentary election. In its Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, the OSCE/ODIHR mission said that “parliamentary elections were characterised by the lack of a level playing field.” The statement noted this was caused primarily by the “abuse of administrative resources, lack of transparency of campaign and party financing, and lack of balanced media coverage.”

A delegation of the European Parliament that joined the mission also “criticized preparations” for the election but “praised voters’ aspirations.”

“I was positively surprised that there was a high interest in the elections,” remarked Dominik Papenheim, sector manager of the EU Delegation and short-term observer of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission. “Representatives from different political parties were following the elections and they shared with us their observations about the election process,” he explained. Together with his observation partner from the French embassy, Papenheim visited polling stations in numerous cities and villages in the Kyiv region, including Bucha, Dernydiv, Dymer, and Novi Petrivci.

As did most of the observers, his team gave voting and counting processes mostly positive reviews. This assessment was reflected in the OSCE/ODIHR official report, which said that the “election day was calm and peaceful,” and that “voting and counting were assessed mostly positively.” It added, however, that the tabulation process “was assessed negatively as it lacked transparency.”

“The counting of votes lasted until 4:30 a.m.,” Papenheim said of his experience at one polling station. “It was definitely tiresome for the election committee members, who needed to personally hand in their protocols to the district election committees for tabulation,” he adds.

Background

The OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission assessed the entire election process in terms of its compliance with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, as well as national legislation. Observers followed campaign activities, the work of the election administration and relevant state bodies, the implementation of the legislative framework, and the resolution of election disputes.

*Joanna Smigiel, Kairi Merilai, Karoly Soos and Dominik Pappenheim are the four EU Delegation staff members who participated in the observation mission.

Read more: http://euukrainecoop.com/2012/11/01/observatio/
NOBEL PEACE PRIZE HONOURS EU VALUES

On 12 October 2012, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union, paying tribute to “the Union and its forerunners [who] have for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe.”

The Prize goes to the EU as a whole: not only to its founding fathers or to its key leaders, but to every EU citizen. It is a prize “for the 500 million citizens living in our Union,” said the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso and the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy in a joint statement.

“The raison d’etre of the EU and its predecessors is reconciliation,” explains Andrew Rasbash, Head of Operations of the EU Delegation to Ukraine. The European continent could have gone back to older conflicts after World War II, but “fortunately, Robert Schuman and others had more imagination,” he adds. “We don’t have armies defending our frontiers any more because we don’t need them,” Mr. Rasbash reminds.

Indeed, European integration has succeeded in overcoming the tragic legacy of the two World Wars, integrating newly-democratic Greece, Spain and Portugal in the 1980s, reconciling the East and the West after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the 1990s, and building an area of solid peace and prosperity.

“Now the challenge is to spread these benefits across the European continent – including of course to Ukraine,” underlines Rasbash, adding that “the EU Delegation is at the forefront of that challenge.”

Today the EU remains the leading contributor of foreign aid in the world, including for peacekeeping; in 2010, the 27 EU Member States spent €53.4 billion to provide development assistance all over the planet.
Read more: http://euukrainecoop.com/2012/11/01/nobel/

TEMPUS STRIVES FOR LONG-LASTING RESULTS

TEMPUS, the EU higher education programme, has been active in Ukraine for almost 20 years. Some of its projects were highlighted at the October 26 and 27 two-day international conference on the European integration of Ukrainian higher education in the context of the Bologna Process.

“Today we have gathered some of the most successful projects of the last 19 years, the results of which are still relevant today,” says Olena Orzhel, the National TEMPUS Office (NTO) monitoring manager. “If we talk about reforming the university management system, an important project was implemented by the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy to create a doctoral school,” she says.

“A good example of public-private partnership is the Career and Employability Centre: News Services for Graduates project of the National Metallurgic Academy of Ukraine,” Ms. Orzhel says, adding that the Academy worked with the business sector to set up a regular “Career Day” and help find employment for the Academy’s graduates.

EU TEMPUS Coordinator Giulia Moro confirms the growing trend of academic-public partnerships. “Since 2008, the number of projects involving partnerships between these two sectors is growing... Today, representatives of the private sector presented their expectations of the new graduates, the brains and the future of the Ukrainian economy.”
Ms. Moro also noted a growing interest in the TEMPUS programme among Ukrainian universities and authorities. The Ministry of Education was involved in seven Structural Measures projects selected in the last round of the TEMPUS programme. This year, Ukraine has exceeded Russia in the number of project proposals it has submitted: over 160 in 2012. The EU has noted Ukraine's potential and has increased its funding for 23 projects in 2012, ranging from €500,000 to €1.5 million each.

On October 22, the 23 new TEMPUS projects, representing 53 Ukrainian higher education institutions, met for the first time. Through this and future support and events, the National TEMPUS Office helps projects achieve long-lasting results. Thanks to TEMPUS and its Ukrainian office, Ukrainian universities have many goals for the next two to three years: 1) develop Bologna-style qualifications in informatics and management; 2) promote innovation in higher education; 3) improve efficiency of student services; 4) strengthen leadership potential among university leaders; 5) run integrated university management systems; and generally foster long-lasting independence in Ukraine's higher education system.

Read more: http://euukrainecoop.com/2012/11/01/tempu/

TRANSPARENT PUBLIC PROCUREMENT FOR BUSINESS & COOPERATION

“Transparent public procurement is one of the conditions for the EU to resume its budget support programme payments, worth up to €200 million,” said Andrew Rasbash, head of operations of the EU Delegation speaking at the International Public Procurement Conference at the Chamber of Commerce on October 18. Organised by the EU-funded project, “Harmonisation of Competition and Public Procurement Systems in Ukraine with EU Standards,” in cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and other organisations, the event brought together public procurement stakeholders from both the private and public sectors to discuss the efficiency of public procurement reforms, the latest legislative changes, and international practice.

Key public procurement expert Peter Gjortler noted the adoption of the Law on Public Procurement in 2010 as one of the project’s key achievements. “Even though it is definitely not a perfect law in the sense of approximation to EU standards, it is a major step forward,” said Gjortler. His colleague Olexandr Shatkovsky concludes that the new Law helped establish a complaint system, a useful facility for bidders who are taking part in public procurement.

Despite this accomplishment, the Ukrainian Parliament later made changes to the Law on Public Procurement that rendered it non-transparent, leading the EU to place budget support payments under review.

Experts believe that a transparent public procurement system is especially important in ensuring the best value for money. Public procurement rules and standards should also ensure equal treatment of trading partners in cross-border trade. The goal of achieving a free trade agreement with the EU was one of the motivating factors for the advancements made in public procurement.

Julia Trostynska, the deputy head of the Procurement Preparation Department for Building EURO 2012 infrastructure in Lviv, shared the practical benefits of the project’s work on the public procurement web portal. “Over the last year I had to make a lot of purchases for the preparation of the Lviv stadium for the Euro 2012 Football Championship. We were purchasing the goods, works, services, and all our public tender announcements were done online through the ‘Customer’s Cabinet’ facility [of the public procurement web portal].”
This portal has enabled thousands of people to post announcements and make purchases. “Over 20,000 organisations are now registered on the web portal and the overall number of active portal users exceeds 100,000.”

For more information: http://competitionproject.org.ua/en.html

Read more: http://euukrainecoop.com/2012/11/01/procurement/

Useful links:
For more information on EU-Ukraine relations, consult the following resources
http://euukrainecoop.com/useful-links/

Calendar of past and future events:
http://euukrainecoop.com/calendar/