



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Ukraine and the World: Addressing Tomorrow's Challenges Together

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My 3rd time in Yalta – a look back

Ladies and Gentlemen, friends,

This is the third time that I have had the opportunity to join the energetic and informed debate which is the hallmark of the Yalta Conference. In the previous years, in 2010 and in 2011, I outlined here the huge opportunities that a closer relationship between the European Union and Ukraine would bring. At the same time, I did not hesitate to highlight our concerns about obstacles that could get in our way. Our discussion today is even more crucial as Ukraine is facing elections which are very important events in each and every democracy.

This year I want to start by taking a look back and see what has happened since my first address in 2010. I am thinking back to my first visit to Kyiv in April 2010, for the inauguration of President Yanukovich, which almost coincided with the beginning of my mandate in Brussels.

I did not come with empty hands to Ukraine: - I was full of enthusiasm, strongly motivated to work with a new administration and ready to put increased possibilities of European Union support at its disposal.

So what has happened since my first mission to Kyiv and my first speech in Yalta?

There was a promising start. We agreed on a matrix setting out key reforms and illustrating large possibilities for European Union assistance. This was how we set out our short, medium and long term priorities to show how the European Union could respond if the reforms were carried out. The European Union was bold and made all the room that it could for the new leadership to deliver.

Our discussions with Ukraine on key issues left no room for misinterpreting each other's expectations. The discussions left me in no doubt that Ukraine's European aspirations were ambitious and firm; that European integration will contribute to Ukraine's reform and that its ultimate goal would be to belong to our family. In my responses, I made it clear that the European Union was ready to provide support for reforms and that it was up to the Ukrainian side to deliver.

We spoke about liberalising the visa regime for Ukrainian citizens for short term travel to the European Union, just as European Union citizens can travel freely to Ukraine today. We provided an Action Plan on Visa liberalisation which set out what had to be done to reach this point. But we are not there yet. Ukraine is in the process of adopting legislation in a number of important areas, including biometrics, anti-corruption and data protection. We will monitor the effective implementation of these reforms and we will assess if your recently adopted legislation on anti-discrimination meets our requirements.

We also spoke a lot about our determination to have good relations between the European Union and Ukraine leading first to political association and economic integration and without prejudging what would come next. We have finalised the text of the most advanced Association Agreement the European Union has ever envisaged with a third partner; an agreement which also provides for the establishment of a deep and comprehensive free trade area between the European Union and Ukraine, thus opening up the internal market of 500 million consumers to Ukrainian businesses and investors, a market ten times larger than any of Ukraine's other neighbours. With its population of 46 million and a current GDP of €118 billion, Ukraine, on its part, has the potential to become a key trading partner as well as an attractive place for our investment.

Let me put it in very simple terms – the Association Agreement would be a reform agenda for Ukraine, and the best prospect for Ukrainian citizens to be assured of a future based on European values and standards in a whole range of areas that affect their daily lives including energy, transport and food safety, to mention just a few. It would also boost our cooperation in foreign and security policy, help on regional issues and promote cooperation and contacts between our citizens in numerous fields.

Yet the Agreement means much more than this - it is above all about sharing those values. Why? – Because it is about freedom: Freedom which makes you focus on your ideas and not on how to protect them or hide them looking over your shoulders all the time. Freedom, which unlocks the full potential of women and men. It is they who will benefit thanks to the protective umbrella of high democratic standards and real guarantees for their rights and opportunities that the Agreement offers.

It is the Ukrainian citizens who will be at the centre of this project building democracy, unity and prosperity in their country.

I want to be clear – we want to sign and implement the Association Agreement, but we can only do it if we have a confirmation that our European values will be upheld and respected.

A dream and making it come true

I had a dream. I dreamt about seeing Ukraine deeply rooted amongst European Union democracies. I dreamt about the end of the division of Europe and its unification, transformation and prosperity. I'm talking here about the most powerful foreign policy instrument of the European Union and the expression of its ultimate transformative power - the perspective for a country to accede. The perspective for a country to use the magnet of the EU to modernise, to transform and to build more democracy in its own heart.

So how can we make the dream a reality? Why only dream? Why not move forward? In 2010, here in Yalta I wanted to be sure that the message of the European Union was well heard and understood: "no compromise on values". In the meantime the meaning seems to have been lost in translation. How has it been translated in Ukrainian and Russian that after more than two years we still don't understand each other on this issue?

When talking about our relations I think it is worth recalling that after the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon, the Europe Union is a different type of animal. With the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy, Catherine Ashton at the helm, it is bolder and stronger in foreign policy. Member States can't be played off against each other now, nor can one institution be played off against another. That is why the European Union is courageous and forward looking enough to make an ambitious offer but at the same time, it will have no problem and will be strong enough to put its feet in the door if it has the feeling that a partner is living in denial and not delivering.

We want to move forward with Ukraine but how can we, when little action has been taken to redress the effects of selective justice, in the cases of Mrs Tymoshenko, Mr Lutsenko and others? Since the beginning of my mandate I have made seven visits to Ukraine, including one to a place I never thought I would end up at – prison.

How can we move forward if the rights of the people, freedom of expression, association or media are not fully respected?

No pause

All of us here are friends of Ukraine and we all know that the upcoming months will be very challenging. How Ukraine deals with the effects of selective justice, how it moves on the reform of the judiciary and the General Prosecutor's office and above all, whether it organises the forthcoming elections according to international standards will determine where Ukraine belongs.

Elections are a key step. What then? Shouldn't the European agenda offer a platform for shared responsibilities whether you win or lose?

All of that will show how inclusive the Ukraine has become over the last 2 years. Are citizens enjoying more freedoms? Is the media really free? Is the reform of judiciary delivering results? When I ask these questions, I don't want you to think that we are imposing the European Union on Ukraine. Not at all. We are about supporting Ukraine in her efforts to build the rule of law within Ukraine first.

No doubt, many of you have heard suggestions that there should be a "pause" in our relationship. But do the people of Ukraine really need a "pause" on new opportunities? I wonder myself: who is pausing? Ukraine on values? Or the European Union on the promises we made?

I firmly believe that by strengthening its democracy, Ukraine can reach the 'point of no return' on its European Union path.

Sometimes I have the impression that there are others that see the 'point of no return' as the point where they consolidate power among themselves. I couldn't disagree more.

Why am I telling you all of this? It is to stress that I want Ukraine to take bold steps and come closer to the European Union - but I want that to be on the basis of values, I want both. What do you want?

Thank you.