R E M A R K S

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton

during her visit to Ukraine

"Thank you everyone for coming.

Can I say that I am glad to be back here in Kyiv. It is always for me a privilege to have the opportunity to meet with you all here. But I would not want anyone to think that in the interim – since the time when I was here last year – that the situation here has been anything other than on the top of our agenda. From my discussions with the Presidents, to the Foreign Affairs Council, in my bilateral talks with Member States and indeed in my contacts with my colleagues across the world, not least in the United States, Canada, other countries. The situation here is of enormous importance to all of us.

But I have come back in the wake of other visits from colleagues and envoys on my behalf to have an opportunity to talk with people here and to both get my own view and assessment but also to give perhaps some thoughts on the situation. As ever, the European Union does so in the spirit of friendship. This is your country. The country and the future of the country will be determined by the people of Ukraine.

In the course of my discussions today, I have met with civil society people – many young people especially – who are deeply engaged in the discussion on the future of the country. I have to say that I have been very shocked by the reports that many have been giving me on the situation. And of course one of the most important aspects that we need to address is the prevention of violence and intimidation. I am very worried about people who appear to be missing. There is much talk when you discuss this with many people about the concept of

people almost being taken hostage. And wherever it comes from, the sense of violence and intimidation, it must stop.

But we have also talked about the future and in discussions elsewhere, including with President Yanukovych, it seems to me that there are very particular points that I just want to mention.

The first, as I've said, is that it is important, time-critical to stop any sense of violence and intimidation.

The dialogue that has happened from time to time needs to become a real dialogue. It seems to me that from looking from the outside, from the information we have, that there is a real opportunity that must be grabbed right now, to get a serious dialogue going between different parties, people, in order to try and address the concerns the people generally have about the future of the country and to bring people together. And I really hope that this will happen – and of course if there are ways in which we can help we are pleased to do so, but this is and must be Ukrainian led, and it is really important that it goes forward.

We are very conscious about what is happening in the Rada, in the Parliament today, and the passing we hope of the Amnesty Law and the importance moving on from that – from the work that is going on – to think about the Constitution and constitutional reforms. We have heard a great deal about that today as well and I think that is important.

And then moving further forward, to think about forthcoming elections, free and fair elections, that will take place in the future and the importance of engagement of those who can help support that process. So these are short and longer term issues that in the course of my discussions have been on the top of the agenda.

And as I began, it is always a privilege to be here and I hope that we will see real progress in these coming days. Time is really of the essence here."

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