



London, 21 February 2014
140221/07

R E M A R K S

by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton in reaction to the agreement signed between President of Ukraine Yanukovich and the opposition leaders

"Can I begin by saying how much I welcome the agreement that has been signed today between the three opposition party leaders and President Yanukovich.

As you know I have travelled three times in the last two months to Kyiv and this week, as I was engaged with the Iran talks, I was delighted that the three foreign ministers - Foreign Minister Fabius, Steinmeier and Sikorski - were willing to go to Kyiv on the behalf of myself and the European Union. They have worked tirelessly alongside the President and his team and the opposition leaders to reach this agreement.

I have to say that the purpose immediately must be to see an end to violence. We have been very shocked by the amount of violence especially in the recent days and I called an emergency Foreign Affairs Council yesterday in Brussels to bring ministers together. We were in touch throughout the day with the three foreign ministers who were in Kyiv on the ground. We took our decisions to provide the framework to take further action with sanctions, obviously we are now looking at events as they unfold today.

Implementation is going to be key and very challenging and in everything we now do we need to support the Ukrainian people, to implement this agreement. This is a Ukrainian agreement and it should be implemented by them and we will support them to do it now.

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1Q - The opposition say that President has reneged on compromise deals many times. What faith do you have he will not renege on this one?

Well, I think this is what the whole point about implementation is. You know I spent five and a half hours talking with President Yanukovich about the elements of what needed to happen: the end of violence, bringing people to justice, the question of constitutional reform - what we call "the 2004+ constitution" - and then moving to free and fair elections.

So the elements have been discussed in great detail. I think by signing this, President Yanukovich has now staked himself on this and we need to support the implementation plan in the right way, together with organisations like Council of Europe who can be very helpful and engaged in parts of this and I hope that we will see this happen. But you are right: implementation is key.

2Q - Why should the opposition believe the President? Do you believe he is acting in good faith? And haven't you and Washington been out-manoeuvred by Vladimir Putin?

First at all, the opposition has been sitting with the President and they have made the decision to go to what they described as Maidan Council - they went there today to put forward that this agreement was an agreement worth signing. These are three highly experienced politicians who have been working very hard and they know that this agreement provides for them the platform to be able to move forward. They have made that decision, I respect that decision, these are politicians who have been now pushing forward. And they know that they have to do this in the context of working closely with President Yanukovich, who has made it clear by his signature that he wants to do this. We now have to make sure that this is what happens.

I don't think this is about being out-manoeuvred. I have just had a long conversation with my colleague Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, we have been talking about the situation and we both agree it is very important that the violence stops and that we begin to see a move forward. This is about the European Union in our neighbourhood, actually working with the people and the politicians of Ukraine to try and ensure a stable and prosperous future for all of them.

3Q –Who is now going to be in charge in Ukraine? Is it still president Yanukovich, or the Parliament? And what does this mean for the EU, do you foresee new negotiations on a new partnership deal?

First of all, the President is the President and one of the elements you have seen in the agreement is looking to elections that have been brought forward. This has been part of many discussions that I and many other people have been having in Ukraine on the visits that we have made - getting to free and fair elections and doing that in good time. But he is still the President. The Parliament has been very active in the last 24 hours, I am glad to see that happening. It is important that the Rada takes its responsibility and that it is allowed to do so. And of course it is important that politicians reach out to the whole country. The regions have been very engaged, as you know, lots of people have been demonstrating there, there

have been lots and lots of discussions. But it is very important that the implementation includes them as well.

As for the EU, we spent many years negotiating the agreement with Ukraine, it was initialled and ready to sign. And my visit in December was about talking to President Yanukovich, which I did for many hours, about the detail of the economic challenges that they are facing in Ukraine, because that was the reason that he felt unsure about moving forward. We can answer all of those, we have been talking about the economic package - short, medium and long term. I have been talking with the institutions like IMF, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development - all of them are engaged in Ukraine. And also the recognition as in so many other places that the political stability and economic stability go hand in hand. So the offer, if you'd like, the agreement that we have reached is a good one, we would like the country to move forward, President Yanukovich told me many times that is what he would like to see as well, and I hope that that's what would happen.

4Q - How confident can you be that they have pulled back from the brink and what will be the repercussions if they haven't?

Well, they have signed an agreement - that is the first step. Now what has to happen is the implementation that begins with the withdrawal of any threat of violence. And that means anyone threatening violence, it is not just about what is happening in terms of the government, it is also about anyone who is threatening violence. I have said it very loud and clear that it is so important that the perpetrators of violence are brought to justice, whoever they are. I met civil society when I've been in Ukraine, I have met people who have been the subject of violence and intimidation. It is so important that - something I have said to the President - they deal with it in a transparent way. This is where the Council of Europe and the OSCE come in, being able to put forward – as the Council of Europe has done – a process which will give that transparency. Because that what gives people confidence in the future. But these next hours are crucial: it is so important that everybody now acts to calm the situation and to start seeing the very beginning of the implementation. And I really want to see that to happen right now.

5Q –An agreement on early elections, but may be as late as December, and this will not make people on the streets happy. Is there a timetable to see this implemented?

I think it is very important that the elections take place in proper time. The process of getting the elections done well is not necessarily something that can be done in weeks. What we have been saying to the government and to the opposition parties and to the civil society: you need to do this properly and therefore the timetable needs to reflect that. Presidential elections are due early next year, parliamentary elections later. They are talking about doing them by the end of the year, which is bringing them forward. But it is so important that the process is done well and done properly and so my argument would be: yes, we want to see the elections happen, and people need to have confidence that they will happen, but they also need to happen in good time, properly, free and fair.

6Q –What does the agreement mean for EU sanctions? Are they on hold now?

Well the meetings have taken place this morning – as we said yesterday from the Foreign Affairs Council – to start looking at what we might do. But we are in touch of course with the Foreign Ministers who are still there, the Foreign Ministers of Poland and Germany, who are still on the ground, and we will make the decision in the light of what their information is telling us. It is important to synchronise this properly.

Thank you everyone."
