



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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President of the European Commission

Remarks by President Barroso following the informal European Council

Press conference

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I'm going to focus on the issues of Ukraine, namely what the European Commission is now doing to support Ukraine. But let me start by highlighting that the statement we have agreed unanimously on Ukraine is significant. It's also, as President Van Rompuy just mentioned the basis that the European institutions and the Member States participating in the G7 which we are organising here in Brussels in the beginning of June, all of us, will follow.

And the central message of the statement we have agreed on Ukraine is important because it shows that we stand behind the legitimately elected new leadership and we will continue to give our full support to stabilise the country and increase its resilience to external pressures.

I also had the opportunity to convey that message to President elect Poroshenko when we spoke on the phone two days ago.

We stand united in our support and we will continue to deliver quickly in unprecedented circumstances.

From the Commission perspective, there are three key areas of action that can make a real difference.

Firstly, progress on constitutional reform, national dialogue and administrative capacity. We have concluded a second MFA - Macro Financial Assistance programme - worth 1 billion euros and a State building assistance contract worth 355 million euros. And we have created a support group within the Commission to help implement an agenda for reforms. To give one concrete example, the European Commission is proposing the opening of the second phase of the Visa liberalisation plan. This is something extremely important for the citizens and it will have a very important echo in Ukraine's society, following further steps by Ukraine, which we are now specifying, this will bring a tangible benefit for the Ukrainian citizens and this, in practical terms, will bring Ukraine much closer to the European Union.

Secondly, we are working to help Ukraine stabilise its economy. The delivery of the comprehensive assistance package of 11 billion euros - grants and loans - is underway with the first slice of macro-economic assistance having already been paid.

Thirdly, we are working intensively to increase energy security for Ukraine and for European customers. The Memorandum of Understanding on reverse flows of natural gas between Ukraine and Slovakia, a signature that I had the pleasure to witness in Bratislava, relieves some of the immediate pressure.

But it is not enough.

We are now heavily engaged in trying to facilitate an agreement between Ukraine and Russia in their ongoing dispute over outstanding debts, future gas price and modernisation of the gas transit system. Commissioner Oettinger has been developing his best efforts in contact with the ministers of energy of Russia and Ukraine and I believe that if there is good will we could reach an agreement. Once again, I'd like to call on both parties to finalise this deal which is in their mutual interest. Russia as a supplier of gas and Ukraine as a transit country and, of course, in the European Union interest as well. Once again I want to make clear that energy should not be used as a political weapon.

Indeed tomorrow the European Commission is going to approve in the college meeting the energy and security strategy. The European Council has asked to come with a comprehensive plan and that is precisely what we are going to adopt tomorrow so that we can discuss it in the June European Council.

So it was also a very good discussion on these issues related to Ukraine. Once again I think the statement unanimously approved and also now these specific points of the Commission competences are important to highlight in this moment.

Finally, as President Van Rompuy also mentioned, we have also discussed the devastating floods in the Balkans where the European Commission is working intensively on a coordinated approach, so we can demonstrate in concrete terms our solidarity.

At the request of the Governments of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Union immediately activated the Civil Protection Mechanism. The European Commission, through its Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), ensured the rapid deployment of EU Member States' rescue teams, equipment and coordination of assistance on the ground in close coordination with the governments of the European Union Member States.

In addition to these first immediate aid measures, the EU can also offer support via the European Union Solidarity Fund. In this respect, Serbia will be treated like a Member State. Of course, now it's up to the authorities of that country to present the assessment of damage and the application will be processed swiftly. We have also considered other options of help in case it is needed.

This is, on my side, what I can present to you this evening.