

Remarks by the High Representative- Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the meeting of the EU-Ukraine Association Council

Bruxelles, 19/12/2016 - 12:55

Remarks/speeches

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Brussels, 19 December 2016

Let me say that I am very happy to welcome you here to Brussels, First Vice Prime Minister [Stefan Kubiv], together with many other Ukrainian government representatives, ministers-at-large, and your delegation for the third meeting of the EU-Ukraine Association Council.

I also know Prime Minister [Volodymyr] Groysman very much wanted to be here as well. I spoke to him over the phone, but I know he had to stay in Kyiv today. Let me use this occasion to commend Prime Minister's, President's, Government efforts to restore confidence in the financial sector, as we have seen through a bold and courageous decision to nationalise PrivatBank. This step should help ensure that all banks in Ukraine are held to the same prudential regulatory standards, making the banking sector stronger and more resilient. It is also a vital component of larger reform efforts that the European Union together with international partners supports strongly.

Today, we looked at the broader progress made over the past year and priorities for the months ahead. We have seen tremendous work by the Ukrainian authorities and by the Government, in extremely difficult conditions linked to the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. And let me express my condolences for the loss of lives of 6 soldiers, with more people wounded, this weekend in Donbass. This very saddening news is a further reminder of how necessary the full implementation of the Minsk agreements is.

Our support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity is unwavering and we will continue to not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. We have also discussed today increased EU support for the diplomatic work to find a lasting peaceful solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine through the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Our meeting today took place against the backdrop of the EU-Ukraine Summit just a few weeks ago and the intense engagement is another demonstration of our continuing joint commitment to our political association and economic integration.

Last week, as you know, in the European Council the Heads of State and Government of the 28 EU Member States took a decision on the Association Agreement that opens the way for its full entry into force. This decision addresses concerns raised in the context of a referendum in the Netherlands, while conforming fully with the Association Agreement and the EU treaties.

Important parts of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which we signed in 2014, have been applied provisionally for two years now, and the trade part since the beginning of this year. We are already seeing the benefits, including increased trade between us compared to last year. We were looking together at the numbers - we are around 40-44% of trade in both ways between the EU and Ukraine - which increased significantly last year.

On visas: another issue that I know is very much close to the Ukrainian population and authorities' hearts. The Council and European Parliament have agreed on the revised suspension mechanism. This paves the way for final procedural steps, which will enable visa liberalisation for Ukraine soon.

I already touched upon reforms, and let me stress that the implementation report on the Association Agenda we published last week gives an outline of the intense and unprecedented reforms Ukraine has been carrying out across its economic and democratic system. Ukraine has taken important steps to address vital systemic challenges like corruption.

We see the determination of the government and of the authorities in this respect. For example, the recent launch of electronic-asset declarations and the establishment of new anti-corruption bodies are very important measures recognised also during our meeting today.

Ukraine has implemented reforms to clean up the banking system, has embarked on ambitious energy reforms, has strengthened its rule of law system. Many challenges remain, of course, and this is why this work must continue and it is crucial to move from passing legislation, which is the first very important step and setting up institutions, to full implementation of these reforms so that all Ukrainian citizens can see the benefits of these reforms.

This is, at the end of the day, what all citizens of Ukraine were asking three years ago with the beginning of the Maidan demonstrations: a better Ukraine, a better life, a better future for all Ukrainians. And our message today, as it has been constantly in these three years is: count on the European Union to be there, at your side, to accompany this process of transformation, for making Ukraine a better country and providing a better life for all Ukrainians.

In this regard - and I will close with that - earlier this morning we also signed a financial agreement for the Public Administration Reform programme, with a €104 million contribution to support policy development, civil service and human resource management; we looked forward to the new programme of €52.5 million to support rule of law in Ukraine, namely judiciary and law enforcement; and we signed financial agreements for four Cross Border Cooperation programmes in which Ukraine participates.

And this afternoon Ukraine and the European Investment Bank will sign agreements for up to €600 million that will allow the European Investment Bank to reach its €3 billion commitment under the EU's support package for Ukraine. This comes on top of the Cooperation Agreement between Ukraine and Europol signed last week in The Hague, with a view to combating organised crime and trafficking; and the list could continue.

So our cooperation is strong, results start to come. We had a very productive, positive, comprehensive meeting today, and let me say again that it was a pleasure to welcome you, first Vice-Prime Minister, all your delegation in Brussels today and continue our work in the future. Thank you.