

Joint press release following the 7th Association Council meeting between the EU and Ukraine



On 11 February 2021, the European Union and Ukraine held the 7th meeting of the Association Council, in Brussels. The meeting was co-chaired by Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Denys Shmyhal, Prime Minister of Ukraine.

The Association Council reaffirmed its continued commitment to strengthening the political association and economic integration of Ukraine with the European Union on the basis of the Association Agreement and its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) and to the common values enshrined in it.

The Association Council underlined the unity, solidarity and mutual commitment demonstrated in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU reiterated its readiness to help Ukraine gain early access to vaccines and support its vaccination campaign through a regional project with the World Health Organisation launched today. The Association Council looked forward to the resumption of non-essential travel for our citizens, once the epidemiological conditions allow.

The EU welcomed the reform efforts by Ukraine. The participants agreed on the need for Ukraine to step up efforts on strengthening the rule of law and to ensure the independent and effective operation of the anti-corruption institutions in order to secure broad public trust and support in the fight against corruption. They have reconfirmed that a comprehensive judicial reform remains vital. Following the decisions by the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, the EU commended the commitment of Ukraine to fully restore the electronic asset declaration system and emphasized the importance of adopting deterrent sanctions. The EU also highlighted the need for credible integrity checks for judges.

The EU reiterated its unwavering support and commitment to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The Association Council reiterated its strong condemnation of the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Russian armed forces and reconfirmed its support for a peaceful and sustainable political solution. The need for full implementation of the Minsk agreements by all sides was underlined and Russia's responsibility in this regard was stressed. The EU recalled that the scope and duration of economic sanctions against Russia remains linked to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. The importance of maintaining the ceasefire regime, and compliance with additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire in effect since July 27, 2020 was underlined. The Association Council called for the release all conflict-related detainees in line with

the Minsk Agreements. The Association Council also reiterated its full support to the efforts in the Normandy format, the Trilateral Contact Group and the OSCE and called for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission's full, secure and unimpeded access throughout Ukraine.

The EU reaffirmed its policy of non-recognition of the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol by Russia, including through restrictive measures. The Association Council condemned the deterioration of the human rights situation in the Crimean peninsula and the further militarisation of the peninsula and the Black and Azov Seas. The sides called for the immediate release of all illegally detained and imprisoned Ukrainian citizens in the Crimean Peninsula and in Russia, including Crimean Tatar activists. The Association Council also called on Russia to ensure unhindered and free passage to and from the Sea of Azov, in accordance with international law. The sides welcomed the diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. In this context, Ukraine further presented the concept of an "International Crimean Platform" and invited the EU to take part in the inauguration high-level meeting of this initiative on August 23, 2021, in Kyiv.

The Association Council reconfirmed the launch of the cyber dialogue in 2021. The sides also noted the importance of enhancing cooperation in the area of Common Security and Defence Policy and alignment with Common Foreign and Security Policy, welcoming in this regard Ukraine's participation in EUFOR Althea.

The Association Council agreed to continue enhancing Ukraine's economic integration and regulatory approximation with the EU in sectors such as digital economy, trade facilitation, customs cooperation and justice and home affairs, within the framework of the Association Agreement.

The Association Council reiterated the intention of the EU and Ukraine to take forward a comprehensive review of the achievement of the Agreement's objectives, as foreseen in Article 481. As a first step, each side is undertaking an internal assessment with a view to presenting the outcome at the Ukraine-EU Summit in 2021.

The Association Council reiterated the commitment of the EU and Ukraine to start consultations on the further review of trade liberalisation for goods under the DCFTA, in line with the Article 29 of the Association Agreement and to continuously update the relevant Annexes to the Agreement. The Association Council underlined the need to enhance joint work on further trade facilitation.

The Association Council agreed on the need for effective and timely implementation of the DCFTA in order to fully reap the benefits of the Association Agreement and underlined the need to fully respect commitments under the DCFTA.

The Association Council welcomed the launch of the pre-assessment mission on Ukraine's preparedness on an Agreement on Conformity Assessment and

Acceptance of Industrial Products and looked forward to its recommendations as soon as possible.

The Association Council acknowledged Ukraine's efforts in maintaining macro-economic and financial stability. Both sides acknowledged the disbursement to Ukraine of 1.1 billion Euro in 2020 under two EU macro-financial assistance programmes. The EU encouraged Ukraine to implement its policy commitments under the current Covid-19 macro-financial assistance programme, and to continue close cooperation with the International Monetary Fund. The Association Council reaffirmed the importance of the irreversibility of reforms in the banking sector, in particular the nationalisation of PrivatBank stressing the importance of bringing to justice those responsible for the large-scale fraud at PrivatBank, and the recovery of assets.

The Association Council agreed on the importance of continued implementation of reforms in the energy sector. The Association Council welcomed the launch of the Energy Efficiency Fund and underlined the need for adequate contributions from the Ukraine's State budget to the Fund. Both sides agreed on the importance of continued cooperation on integration of Ukraine's energy markets and energy systems with the EU energy market, based on effective implementation of the updated Annex XXVII of the Association Agreement as well as coordination of further steps.

The Association Council recalled the importance of strengthening efforts to address challenges in the fields of climate action and environment as stipulated in the Association Agreement and in line with Paris Agreement.

The Association Council welcomed Ukraine's ambition to approximate its policies and legislation with the European Green Deal. Both sides welcomed the dedicated kick-off meeting between Executive Vice President Timmermans and Prime Minister Shmyhal. Areas of shared interest that were discussed included: energy efficiency, hydrogen, coal regions in transition, industry alliances and climate governance architecture.

The Association Council welcomed cooperation within the High Level EU-Ukraine Dialogue on Horizontal Issues and Specific Industrial Sectors. The EU and Ukraine wish to intensify cooperation in the field of critical raw materials and batteries, with the view to launch a strategic partnership. The EU welcomed Ukraine's participation in the European Raw Materials Alliance and the European Battery Alliance.

The Association Council welcomed Ukraine's aspirations to further approximate its national legislation with the EU acquis in the area of the digital economy, welcomed the progress on the implementation of the telecommunications provisions of the Association Agreement and underlined the need for continued efforts in this area, notably ensuring the independence of telecommunications regulator. Both sides welcomed a joint working plan for co-operation between EU and Ukraine on electronic trust services.

The EU recalled the importance of freedom of expression and the independence and pluralism of the media, including the important role played by the independent public service broadcasting. The sides recognized that Ukraine's

efforts to defend itself from information manipulation are legitimate, in particular given the scale of disinformation campaigns affecting Ukraine including from abroad. Any measures taken should not come at the expense of freedom of media and should be proportional to the aim.

Both sides recalled the common values of democracy, rule of law, respect for international law and human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as well as gender equality. The Association Council agreed on the need to ensure the respect for rights already exercised of persons belonging to national minorities as enshrined in UN and Council of Europe conventions and related protocols, non-discrimination of persons belonging to national minorities and respect for diversity, on the basis of a substantive dialogue with representatives of persons belonging to national minorities.

The EU side underlined the need to implement fully the recommendations of the Venice Commission regarding the education law. The Ukrainian party underlined that with the adoption of the Law "On General Secondary Education" in January 2020, followed by the extension of the transitional period until 2023 on implementation of article 7 of the law on education it had implemented key recommendations of the Venice Commission regarding this law. The EU encouraged Ukraine to implement the recommendations of the Venice Commission regarding the State language law and adopt a national minorities' law.

The Association Council agreed on the need to swiftly and thoroughly investigate attacks against civil society activists and journalists and to ensure that the instigators and perpetrators are brought to justice. Furthermore, the EU referred to recent developments against representatives of persons belonging to national minorities including a Member of the European Parliament. Ukraine stated that it remains committed to the protection of human rights including those related to national minorities and commits to exchange any information and to take any action that might contribute to dispel the concerns.

The Association Council welcomed progress on the decentralisation reform and recognised the need to complete a legal framework. The EU underlined the need to continue public administration reform and to adopt measures to fully implement the land turnover reform. The Association Council welcomed the launch of the College of Europe Natolin project for Ukrainian civil servants.

The Association Council recalled the importance of concluding the Common Aviation Area Agreement at the earliest possible date in 2021.

The Association Council welcomed the adoption by Ukraine of the law on inland waterways and the intention of Ukraine to include its inland waterways (Dnipro and Southern Bug) in the regional Trans-European Transport Network.

The Association Council welcomed Ukraine's interest in cooperation with the EU on the basis of the upcoming EU New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

The Association Council welcomed Ukraine's intention to deepen Research and Innovation cooperation with the EU, including through participation in Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ and other programmes, as well as continued

integration in the European Research Area.

The Association Council agreed to continue cooperation within the framework of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

The Association Council commended Ukraine's active participation and contribution to the bilateral and multilateral dimensions of the Eastern Partnership in view of the Eastern Partnership Summit in 2021.

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