

Ukraine: Remarks by the High Representative / Vice-President Jos



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Thank you, Minister [of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro] Kuleba, for your very warm welcome.

This is my first visit to Ukraine as High Representative of the European Union [for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission]. Sorry for being delayed [in my visit], but the coronavirus has been preventing us to come until it was decided that – coronavirus or not – I had to come, because if we were to wait for the coronavirus to allow me [to come], I am afraid we would have to be waiting for quite a long time.

I had the chance to have very long and interesting meetings with the President [of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy], with the Minister of Defence [Taran Andrii] and with the Minister of Foreign Affairs [Dmytro Kuleba]. I also met representatives from the Parliament and civil society.

The message that I passed to all of them is clear: the European Union stands by Ukraine and its people. We are the strongest and the most reliable partner of Ukraine and we will continue to support the reform process, your sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We have with Ukraine the most comprehensive Association Agreement. And Ukraine is the country that receives the biggest European financial support. We are very much committed to the future of Ukraine as a free and prosperous country.

I am coming back on Saturday – in just in a few days' time – with the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and we will be visiting the eastern part of the country, in order to have a clear understanding of the big problem that Ukraine has on its border.

Today, we have been focusing on some specific issues of our cooperation.

First, how to face the coronavirus. The coronavirus is posing a great challenge to all of us. It has been a new occasion to show the European Union's solidarity with Ukraine. We have mobilised almost €200 million in support. It is the largest amount of financial assistance to any of our Eastern partners.

We also stand ready to provide €1.2 billion in macro-financial assistance to help limit the economic fallout that the coronavirus has created, but Ukraine needs to constructively engage with the International Monetary Fund and also meet the rule of law conditions attached to this support.

The coronavirus has also aggravated the humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine. To address specifically this issue, the European Union together with its Member States have allocated €155 million. We are the largest provider of humanitarian assistance. But the European Union is not doing that because we are a charity or an NGO [Non-Governmental Organisation], we are political institutions and it is on our common interest. When we help Ukraine, we are helping ourselves. Because we have the strongest interest in having a prosperous, democratic and stable Ukraine.

Allow me, Minister [Kuleba], to say some words about your territorial integrity and about our bilateral cooperation.

On territorial integrity, I will be short, because everything can be said in a few words. We support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We do not and will not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea.

President Zelenskyy has taken important steps to give more space to dialogue and diplomacy and we are calling on Russia to reciprocate these efforts.

We have been talking about our bilateral relations during our meeting. I want to stress that we are going to have a Summit in Brussels in 10 days' time. It will be a good occasion to look at the implementation of this Association Agreement and how it is affecting the everyday lives of the Ukrainian citizens.

I am very much impressed, Minister [Kuleba] by the figures you provided me about the effect of this Association Agreement, which was signed immediately after the sad days of Maidan that we have been commemorating in the square.

The impact is evident. Let me just give you a figure on trade. In the past years, it has showed a tremendous increase of 65% and the European Union is today the most important trade partner of Ukraine. First it was Russia, but there has been a gradual shift and now we are the most important trade partner of Ukraine. We need to make full use of this Association Agreement and our Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.

I am glad to perceive how Ukraine has chosen the path of reforms and made a lot of progress. You can count on our support for the reforms, for the development of the anti-corruption infrastructure and the judicial reform. They are key to respond to the wishes of the Ukrainian people and to attract new investment.

Thank you.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-195293>