

## Speeches

### Address by Hans-Gert Pöttering to the Ukrainian Parliament

06/04/2009 - Kyiv, Verkhovna Rada  
Mr Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, dear Volodymyr Mykhailovych Lytvyn,  
Honourable Members of Parliament,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Для мене є великою честю та надзвичайним задоволенням звернутися сьогодні вперше до Верховної Ради України у моїй якості Президента Європейського парламенту!  
(It is a great honour and an immense pleasure for me to address today the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine for the first time and in my capacity as President of the European Parliament!)

It is with true emotion that I speak to you, to the democratically elected representatives of the Ukrainian citizens, and all the more in this historic hall, which witnessed the dramatic events of the democratic transformation of Ukraine at the end of 2004!

These events, which came to be known in world history books as the "Orange revolution", not only marked a turning point in Ukrainian history, but also initiated a new era of EU-Ukraine relations, characterised by an ever closer political association and economic integration, strengthened by our shared European heritage to be cemented by our joint commitment to the common values of democracy, human rights and rule of law.

Let me convey today the warmest regards from my colleagues in the European Parliament, the only directly elected European institution, which represents nearly 500 million EU citizens.

The European Parliament has always been a true friend of Ukraine and a staunch supporter of your efforts to pursue democratic and market reforms and of your determination towards closer integration with the EU.

Clearly, Ukraine is a neighbour of strategic importance to the EU. Its population, size, resources and geographical position make Ukraine a determinant regional actor.

It is all the more since the latest EU geographic enlargements strengthened political and commercial ties between the EU and Ukraine, opening up new opportunities for cooperation in various areas, from energy, transport and customs to environment, justice, science and education.

We are already more interdependent and engaged with each other than ever before. EU-Ukraine relations are evidently the most dynamic, deep and ambitious in the entire region. I would even go further and say that they can provide an inspiring example for others to follow.

It is therefore no coincidence that Ukraine is the first country in the region, with which the European Union is currently negotiating an Association Agreement. And it promises to be an ambitious one. The Agreement should not only deepen economic integration, envision the creation of a Free Trade Area and open perspectives of a visa-free regime, which would provide very tangible and long-awaited benefits for the Ukrainian citizens, but also considerably strengthen political association between Ukraine and the EU.

The Eastern Partnership, to be officially launched on 7 May in Prague, will bring our relations even a step further and strengthen not only our bilateral ties, but also considerably boost multilateral cooperation in the region.

I strongly believe that Ukraine, given its size, geopolitical and strategic importance, could take a positive lead among the Eastern countries concerned, actively and constructively participating in the implementation and enhancement of this new policy.

Moreover, our respective parliaments are playing an increasingly important role in bringing our societies closer together. Dear fellow Parliamentarians, our work and prerogatives do matter, and my

conviction is that we can make a difference by adding our voice and our action to the ones of our governments!

Especially, I would like to commend the work of the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, which brings together Members of the European Parliament and of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, and which has considerably contributed to the successful development of the EU-Ukraine relations through its committed and active engagement.

Furthermore, a new Parliamentary Assembly for relations with the Countries of the Neighbourhood East (EURONEST), which will be established after the forthcoming European Parliament elections as a parliamentary dimension of Eastern Partnership for multilateral parliamentary dialogue and exchange, will provide our parliaments with an additional tool to further reinforce our relations and to promote good neighbourly relations between all countries involved.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The foundations of our relationship root on our strong commitment to the promotion of security, stability and prosperity on the European continent and beyond.

However, in these turbulent times of crisis, ranging from economic recession to the enormous challenges of climate change and energy security, and in the aftermath of the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia as well as the gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine this January, we can no longer take the words "stability" and "security" for granted.

Nowhere else it is truer than here in Ukraine, where recent months, weeks and days have brought about a worrying combination of major economic, energy security and political crises.

First of all, the global financial and economic crisis has hit Ukraine particularly hard. We in the European Union are very deeply concerned over the deepening economic recession in Ukraine.

However, the decisions of the Ukrainian government and Parliament to ensure substantial financial support from the International Monetary Fund and others need above all a strong political will and courage from Ukrainian leaders in order to take all necessary bold steps to implement the indispensable reforms and to stimulate the economy by narrowing the budget deficit, restructuring the banking system, restoring confidence in the financial system and improving the business and investment climate. International stability is also a matter of trust and standing up with mutual commitments. The implementation of a reform package is not a one-way road! Here again, Parliaments have a special responsibility!

Indeed, as shown at the G20 meeting in London some days ago, it is our common obligation as members of the international community to stabilise the world financial system and to pursue reforms that will decrease risks of future instability and crises.

We must all work together to strengthen the regulation of national and international institutions responsible for financial governance, to increase responsibility of credit rating agencies and to enhance the transparency of international financial markets.

More than ever, we must clearly assert our commitment to uphold principles of social market economy, fair business competition and transparent rules, since protectionist measures would only further aggravate the crisis.

Secondly, we are meeting today in the aftermath of the bitter gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine this January, which resulted in major disruption of gas supplies to the European market and left millions of citizens in Bulgaria, Slovakia and elsewhere without heating and hot water in freezing winter temperatures.

Needless to say that this gas crisis raised deep concern in the EU and forced the EU to rethink its overall energy policy and to seriously envisage the creation of a common energy market, forging a viable external energy policy, diversifying its energy sources and investing more in alternative and

renewable sources.

This crisis has also highlighted Ukraine's critical role in ensuring the energy security of the EU and in guaranteeing unhampered transit of gas to the EU consumers, and underlined that Ukraine's full control over its energy independence is directly connected to its political stability and prosperity.

It also signalled that the time has come for the EU and Ukraine to develop a joint strategy on common energy security based on the principles of the Energy Charter Treaty, such as openness, transparency and reciprocity as regards the access to markets, infrastructure and investments.

While learning from the mistakes of the latest energy crisis, we must do everything possible to avert in the future any similar gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine, by finding a sustainable long-term solution in ensuring the security of energy supply to the EU market and by making the gas trade more stable and transparent.

The European Union, as a main energy consumer, is not a mere bystander and must therefore be much more actively engaged, aiming at diversifying energy sources and achieving higher energy security in the region.

In this regard, the recent investment conference on the rehabilitation and modernisation of Ukraine's gas transportation system organised by the European Commission and the Government of Ukraine on 23 March 2009 in Brussels was an important step.

Finally, we are meeting today in the midst of an ongoing domestic political instability, which to our worry sharpened considerably over the last days.

Of course, an occasional political crisis is an attribute of any democratic system, and in this regard a young, dynamic and pluralistic Ukrainian democracy is no exception. However, a prolonged and permanent political instability generates much harm for any country at stake and considerably hampers progress in implementing urgently needed reforms.

I am speaking not as a lecturer or a teacher, but as a true friend of Ukraine. I am speaking on behalf of many of your friends in the European Union, who wish Ukraine well and who are sincerely concerned about recent developments.

We believe that the Ukrainian people deserve to live in a stable, prosperous and successful country. I would like to encourage political leaders to overcome their internal political divisions in order to ensure the long-term political stability of the country, to work for the general interest of their constituencies and move ahead together on the path towards closer European cooperation.

There is never an easy fix to any serious political crisis; however a number of effective remedies do exist, and they have been successfully implemented in many European countries before.

Of particular importance for Ukraine is the implementation of a proper constitutional reform, which would establish a viable system of checks and balances and define clear distribution of competences between all branches of power, on the basis of the recommendations issued by the Venice Commission.

The consolidation of the rule of law through implementing judicial reform and ensuring the independence of the judiciary are just as important measures to be taken.

Finally, strengthening the political party system, decoupling business from politics, stepping up fight against corruption and promoting openness, transparency and accountability in public life is also in Ukraine's best interest.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear fellow parliamentarians,

Against this backdrop of political tensions and economic difficulties, and given the testing regional and international political and economic context, we at the European Parliament strongly believe that the relations between the EU and Ukraine should be qualitatively reinforced and considerably

strengthened.

Undoubtedly, a stronger engagement between the EU and Ukraine will contribute to stability in the region and provide Ukraine with the necessary support in its efforts to strengthen its economy, to increase the stability of political system and to reinforce its national unity.

Moreover, Ukraine's closer cooperation with the EU could play an important role in mobilizing the country's human, material and political resources and in directing the country towards the development of a real, pluralistic and vibrant democracy, of a functional social market economy and of a free and open society.

This should be our paramount goal, since a stable, secure and democratic Ukraine means also a stable and secure Europe.

Let me add, dear colleagues, that for the European Union and for the European Parliament in particular, solidarity is not an empty vessel. Ukraine can count on us when it comes to the defence of its sovereignty, which applies of course to its sovereign freedom of choosing and deciding about having a privileged relationship with or belonging to one or the other international or regional organisation.

The same readiness exists in overcoming together our respective pasts. For instance, I had the opportunity to clearly express myself about the need to acknowledge and commemorate the tragedy of the Holodomor, and the European Parliament did adopt a resolution in that respect at the end of October 2008.

In this context and at a broader level, I can only deeply regret that your -and our- Russian neighbour has not yet done so for the crimes perpetrated under the Stalin regime. Last Thursday, on the 2nd of April, the European Parliament adopted with a large majority a resolution condemning the totalitarian systems of the 20th century, namely national socialism and communism.

This resolution states: "the ultimate goal of disclosure and assessment of the crimes committed by the Communist totalitarian regimes is reconciliation, which can be achieved by admitting responsibility, asking for forgiveness and fostering moral renewal". Reconciliation and cooperation must be based on truth and remembrance.

Yesterday the Summit between the European Union and the United States took place in Prague. There US President Barack Obama rightly expressed the need for good relations with Russia. Dear colleagues, let us work together with Russia on the basis of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This is our vision for the future of our European continent in the 21 st century.

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Facing our common challenges, my message to the Ukrainian people is clear: you are not alone! We are one Europe, united in our vision, rooted in our common values and committed to the principle of solidarity.

I trust that we shall endure from the current challenges together. And we shall endure stronger, rather than weaker, united, rather than divided!

Thank you for your attention!