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Joint press conference with Foreign Minister Gryshchenko

Check Against Delivery
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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Visit to Ukraine

Kiev, 10 January 2011

I'm very happy to be here in Ukraine for the 4th time in the past 10 months. Your country is one of the countries I have visited the most since my appointment. This demonstrates the connected, dynamic and open relations the EU shares with your country, as well as the importance I personally attach to our relations.

This time, my visit aimed to capitalize on the constructive EU-Ukraine summit held recently in Brussels and to be an opportunity for me to share my vision of the priorities for the year ahead, hear from my Ukrainian interlocutors what they expect from the EU and agree on concrete steps to take together in the months ahead. It was also a unique occasion to hear from all stakeholders their perception of the current situation in Ukraine.

In my talks with the Ukrainian authorities, we focused on the challenges of 2011, in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, including in particular the wider reform agenda, and in this context first and foremost progress on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, implementation of the Visa Action Plan, and the situation regarding human rights, democratic principles and the independence of the judicial system.

Our first common priority will be the Association Agreement. My Ukrainian partners and I confirmed our determination to conclude negotiations in the course of the year. This will not be easy. There is still much work to do. Negotiations on the Agreement - particularly its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area aspects (DCFTA) – are complex and demanding. It is key for Ukraine to step up its efforts so we can see a substantial move forward on the DCFTA in the coming months.

The next efforts should concentrate on the Visa Action Plan. I attach great importance to the long term prospect of a free visa regime. This will offer unique stimulus to EU-Ukraine relations and concretely benefit Ukrainian citizens. The onus is now on you to undertake the reforms necessary to reach the various benchmarks. President Yanukovich underlined the efforts your country is making. Please be assured that the EU will continue to support you in this task.

Let's turn to the business and investment climate. The Ukrainian market has an enormous potential. The EU is however preoccupied by the many obstacles which economic operators have faced in Ukraine. Ukraine needs to make real progress to improve it.

Let me now turn to a particularly important part of EU-Ukraine relations, which is crucial for Ukraine's future development. I speak now of our common values, those which constitute the foundation of a healthy democracy. These values are respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law. In the 21st Century, democratic authority can not be sustained without an independent judiciary and media: this is a question of moral leadership. I would therefore like to recall the need to ensure that criminal law is not used for political ends, and that the principles of a fair, impartial and independent legal process are fully respected. Once more, we had an open and frank discussion on these issues.