

Catherine Ashton

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and
Vice President of the European Commission

Speech on the situation in Ukraine

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

European Parliament

Bruxelles, 12 octobre 2011

I have no doubt all members of this house will join me in expressing condemnation about the verdict against Yulia Tymoshenko pronounced in Ukraine yesterday.

I have myself issued yesterday a strong statement on behalf of the EU. And I fully share the views expressed in the statement of President Buzek.

There is no doubt that the prosecution of Yulia Tymoshenko was politically motivated. Her conviction yesterday followed a trial which clearly did not respect international standards as regards fair, transparent and independent legal process. Regrettably her case is not an isolated one in Ukraine. Several other members of her government have been prosecuted and convicted in the same way.

These judicial proceedings have been criticized not just by Ukraine's partners, but by independent monitors and experts. This is not acceptable for a country which holds the Chairmanship of the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe, or for a country which claims to share our fundamental values.

Selective and politically motivated justice is not the European way. Governments are accountable to their electorate. Their political decisions should be judged through the ballot box, not in courts. This principle is a cornerstone of democracy.

There is absolute unity among our Member States that Ukrainian authorities must allow for swift and comprehensive appeals, without limitations to the right to stand in the parliamentary elections next year.

I am interested to see that President Yanukovich is now expressing unhappiness with the Criminal Code in Ukraine and recognizes the need for change, but this is not enough. It does not excuse the Ukrainian authorities from the responsibility to guarantee a process which is fully in line with international standards.

Ukraine also needs to press ahead with critical reforms to the constitution and adopt an electoral law which reflects a cross-party consensus in parliament. A level playing field is essential if we are to see confidence and credibility in Ukrainian democracy restored.

2011 was to have been a year of unparalleled opportunity and development in EU-Ukraine relations. Our aim was to sign an Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, by the end of the year.

That Association Agreement was not conceived as a gift to Ukraine, or a gift to the EU: it was envisaged as a mutually beneficial contract sharing our values and standards, opening our markets, modernising and diversifying the Ukrainian economy and entrenching the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

The Association Agreement would have been the first of its kind under the renewed European Neighbourhood Policy and the reinvigorated Eastern Partnership, whose leaders met only ten days ago in Warsaw and reconfirmed their commitment to closer political association based on common values.

The offer of concluding an Association Agreement with Ukraine should remain on the table. Yulia Tymoshenko herself asked us to carry on with association agreement work. Both Ukrainian and EU citizens stand to benefit, and it offers the Ukrainian government the roadmap for transformation that the country needs.

I believe we should not walk away from the technical negotiations, but continue them with the aim of having before us on the table, a document which makes it clear to both sides what is possible – and also what could be lost. Ukrainian voters will have the options clearly before them.

But we can only sign such an agreement if we are convinced that the Ukrainian leadership believes in the values on which it is based, and is committed to upholding them.

It is clear that this house would not accept such an agreement if it did not have this conviction.

Tomorrow, I will meet President Van Rompuy and President Barroso and Ukraine is on our agenda.

We will review our contacts with Ukraine, including our political -level dialogue and will continue to pass clear messages to the leadership on the systemic problem they need to face in re-establishing the Rule of Law.

As friends of the Ukrainian people, we owe it to them to spare no effort in helping Ukrainian leaders take the right decisions. It is clear to us what they are. And I believe it is clear also to the people of Ukraine what they are.