



COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION



Council conclusions on Ukraine

*FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting
Brussels, 17 March 2014*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council strongly condemns the holding of an illegal referendum in Crimea on joining the Russian Federation on 16 March, in clear breach of the Ukrainian Constitution. The EU does not recognise the illegal “referendum” and its outcome. It also takes note of the draft opinion of the Venice Commission on this “referendum”. It was held in the visible presence of armed soldiers under conditions of intimidation of civic activists and journalists, blacking out of Ukrainian television channels and obstruction of civilian traffic in and out of Crimea. Furthermore, there have been clear signs of increasing Russian military build-up in Crimea as well as denial of access to the peninsula to UN and OSCE representatives and missions invited by the government of Ukraine. The EU deplors these further negative developments, which are in clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
2. The Council recalls the statement of the EU Heads of State and Government of 6 March which set out that negotiations between Ukraine and Russia needed to start within a few days, including through multilateral mechanisms, and produce results within a limited timeframe. In light of the developments of last week, and in the absence of any such results, the Council has decided to introduce additional measures, including travel restrictions and an asset freeze against persons responsible for actions which undermine or threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, including actions on the future status of any part of the territory which are contrary to the Ukrainian Constitution, and persons, and entities associated with them.
3. The European Union remains ready to support facilitating dialogue between Ukraine and Russia. We urge Russia to take steps to de-escalate the crisis, immediately withdraw its forces back to their pre-crisis numbers and garrisons in line with its international commitments, begin direct discussions with the government of Ukraine and avail itself of all relevant international mechanisms to find a peaceful and negotiated solution, in full respect of its bilateral and multilateral commitments to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this respect, the EU regrets that the UNSC was not able to adopt a resolution, owing to a veto by the Russian Federation.

P R E S S

4. There is still time to reverse current developments. Opportunities exist to avoid a negative spiral. The EU is ready for a constructive dialogue with all sides. The EU remains committed to the objective of developing the EU-Russia relationship, based on mutual interest and respect for international law. The Council regrets that Russia's actions contradict these objectives. The Council urges the Russian Federation not to take steps to annex Crimea in violation of international law.

Any further steps by the Russian Federation to destabilise the situation in Ukraine would lead to additional and far-reaching consequences for relations in a broad range of economic areas between the European Union and its Member States, on the one hand, and the Russian Federation, on the other hand. The European Union calls on Russia to return to developing a strategic partnership with the EU instead of isolating itself further diplomatically and economically.

5. The Council considers that there is an urgent need for an international presence on the ground throughout Ukraine, including in Crimea. The Council supports the swift deployment of an OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.
6. The Council welcomes the Commission's proposal for temporarily removing customs duties on Ukrainian exports to the EU and looks forward to its swift adoption. It furthermore looks forward to the signing of the political provisions of the Association Agreement on 21 March in Brussels and confirms its commitment to proceed to the signature and conclusion of the remaining parts of the Agreement which together with the political provisions constitute a single instrument. These steps will confirm Ukraine's free and sovereign decision to pursue Ukraine's political association and economic integration with the European Union.
7. The European Union is ready to stand by Ukraine and committed to provide strong financial support to its economic and financial stabilisation, as presented by the European Commission in its assistance package to Ukraine which we are committed to implement rapidly. The Council encourages the EIB to continue its operations in Ukraine. IMF support will be critical to enabling assistance from the European Union as the immediate priority is to restore macroeconomic stability through sound fiscal, monetary and exchange rate policies. At the same time, we reiterate our call on the Ukrainian government to launch urgently an ambitious set of structural reforms, including notably the fight against corruption and enhancing transparency of fiscal expenditure.
8. The EU also confirmed its readiness to continue to assist Ukraine in securing its energy supply through further diversification, enhanced energy efficiency, and effective interconnections with the European Union.
9. The European Union commends the measured response shown so far by Ukraine. The EU again encourages the Ukrainian authorities to implement an inclusive process, to pursue their efforts to ensure free and fair elections and to advance constitutional reform. All human rights violations and acts of violence need to be properly investigated and measures need to be stepped up to combat impunity. In this context, the EU looks forward to the early establishment of the Council of Europe International Advisory Panel. The EU also calls on the Ukrainian authorities to continue to reach out to all Ukrainian regions and population groups and to ensure the full protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, drawing on the expertise of the Council of Europe and the OSCE. It also supports the Council of Europe tasking of its Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities to review the situation of national minorities in Ukraine.

10. The Council reiterates the EU's commitment to enhance people-to-people contacts between the citizens of the European Union and Ukraine, i.a. through the visa liberalisation process, in line with agreed conditions in the framework of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan."
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