

UKRAINE REFORM CONFERENCE, 06 JULY 2017

IRELAND - STATEMENT BY DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD AND POLICY, MR EOIN O'LEARY



Ireland welcomes this excellent initiative by the Governments of the United Kingdom and of Ukraine in hosting this international conference on Ukraine's reform agenda. Ukraine has travelled a long distance in a relatively short period of time. No country has made as much progress on internal reforms and economic stabilisation while simultaneously dealing with an armed conflict on its territory. It is important that the international community recognises this and acknowledges the scale of the transformation that the government of Ukraine has overseen.

The courage demonstrated by the peaceful protesters at the Maidan set Ukraine on a new course. Their vision was firmly rooted in a determination to embrace democratic principles and the rule of law. They wished to leave the corruption of the past behind and to have the opportunity to decide on their own destiny for themselves without external interference or pressure. This spirit and resilience is driving the government as it implements Ukraine's ambitious national reform programme.

Ireland strongly supports the transformation that is taking place in Ukraine. Our financial support is primarily channelled through multilateral organisations such as the European Union, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. It is striking that the investment by each of these bodies in programmes to support Ukraine is the largest they have ever undertaken. This is a tangible demonstration of the value that the entire international community places on the future of Ukraine.

The EU's relationship with Ukraine has developed and deepened substantially in recent years. The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement has now been endorsed by all EU Member States. This Agreement, which Ireland ratified in 2015, will come into force very shortly. The agreement not only strengthens the foundation of EU-Ukraine relations, but charts a course for political and economic reforms as Ukraine seeks to become a modern democracy. Ireland re-affirms its support for a firm and productive friendship and for a brighter future for the people of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian reform programme is ambitious and rightly so. Ukraine has made impressive progress in eliminating corruption, reducing debt, improving public procurement procedures, and reforming the police and security sector. Tackling corruption in all its guises must remain a central plank of the Government's reform efforts. The establishment of the new anti-corruption bodies is a key milestone. It is vital that these institutions are given the necessary resources and autonomy to operate effectively and that they are not hindered in any way in carrying out their duties.

An independent, impartial judiciary is a crucial element in developing respect for, and trust in, the rule of law. This is why we encourage Ukraine to continue to engage with experts, such as those at the Venice Commission, to ensure that the judicial system reaches the highest international standards.

The EU Advisory Mission supports the Ukrainian authorities in the reform of the civilian security sector. Ireland has provided three members to the Mission and we are proud of the valuable contribution they are playing in helping to build trust between the security forces and the public.

A strong and independent civil society is integral to vibrant democracy. Ireland raised concerns at the decision to extend the asset declaration system to include NGOs and journalists engaged in anti-corruption activities with Foreign Minister Klimkin in May. Ireland welcomes the decision of the Government to review this aspect of the Law on Corruption Prevention.

All reform programmes demand long-term political commitment and resolve. They also require the goodwill and forbearance of those who will be the ultimate beneficiaries of change – the citizens. For this reason, Ireland encourages the Government to follow through on its plans to diversify the economy, progress health and pension reforms and bring real improvements to the everyday lives of its citizens.

Systemic change cannot be achieved overnight. There is still more to do. Momentum must be maintained, and indeed accelerated, under the Reform Action Plan for 2017-2020. Most importantly, the Government must avoid taking any retrograde measures or steps.

Ireland stands with our international partners in strongly supporting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine and assures the people of Ukraine of our continued support as they undertake this challenging but necessary journey, towards political, economic and societal transformation.