

Speech by Mr Ostap Semerak, First Deputy Chairman of the European Integration of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Dear colleagues!
Dear friends!

We are grateful to the European Parliament (EP) for its solidarity with Ukraine and support of the Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders and European choice, which was confirmed by the EP resolution of 15 January 2015. In this regard we should also mention the EU Council decision from 29 of January as well as the next European Council meeting. Regarding the statement you adopted today, I want to thank for your solidarity and support.

I am grateful to the Latvian colleagues for inviting me to deliver a speech here, in this honorable meeting. The Latvian experience will encourage us to implement the necessary reforms, reach required criteria and thus, make our prospects of the EU integration real.

We also believe the our Baltic partners as strong supporters of Ukraine, with their deep knowledge of the region, will be further focused on strengthening our solidarity in countering the Russian aggression that pose a threat not only to Ukraine but also to the whole Europe.

All of us understand that the reason of the Russian aggression against Ukraine is our European choice and that successful Ukraine is the best answer to terrorists and Putin. That is why we have to reform our country. In this aspect I would like to inform you that our last October elected Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) is by over fifty percent formed by newly elected young people, representing NGOs from Maidan. The Parliament of Ukraine fully supports the President and the Government in conducting reforms. We have adopted the first package of reforms of the new Government that was proposed to the Parliament. It was based on the implementation of the Association Agreement, besides we have adopted the implementation plan.

The priorities of the first package of reforms are:

-decentralization (meaning tax and budget decentralization);

- cutting state expenditures and balancing the incomes;
- bringing the economy out of shadow and combating corruption;
- equal rules for big business and fair taxation system for all businesses in Ukraine;

To conduct the reforms we have to stop the war. We expect that the economic, financial and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine will be increased. We also expect for military and technical cooperation with our country and we believe that it will stabilize the conflict. In this regard I would like to say that those people who are saying in Europe, in the European Union, in the USA that Ukraine cannot be supported by defense weapons probably are not right and neither are the people saying that supplying Ukraine with weapons and military support will prolong the conflict.

Concerning the defense of the Eastern borders of Ukraine. A few months ago we used the financial support from the Eastern partnership program to increase the level of the security of our borders and I want to ask all of us to think about the possibility to reduce spending money on seminars and discussions about the reforms but instead use more money to fulfill the reforms themselves and increase security and other important issues not only for Ukraine, not only for the Eastern partners but also for the European Union and members of the EU.

Speaking about the conflict we should understand that there is no civil war in Ukraine. This is even not an aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. This is the answer of the Russian Federation on the Ukrainian society's choice of western civilization values. This war destroys our infrastructure, kills our people on our territory. In this sense I should say that we should return to Geneva format and we fully understand that Minsk protocol is very important for peaceful regulation but we have to increase the role of the EU in stabilizing this conflict. I want to stress that the Resolutions of the European Parliament and European Commission contain a task to prepare a new concept of the EU information security within two months and I want to stress that Ukraine is also preparing its proposals to commissioner J. Hahn who is responsible for the fulfillment and preparation of this document and I want to call upon all our neighbors to get involved into this work.

Another important point is the humanitarian support of the Ukrainian people. You may know that we have over eight hundred thousand registered internally displaced persons, which is a great problem for us, for our budget and thus we do need the humanitarian support not only from the EU, but from the whole world.

In a run up to Riga Eastern Partnership Summit to be held under the Latvian Presidency, we expect further progress to be reached in relations between the EU and Ukraine. It is very important for us to get the ratification of the Association Agreement as it opens the way for Ukraine to conduct urgent internal reforms. We call upon the national parliaments of the Member States to ratify the Association Agreement as soon as possible.

In our view, apart from technical and financial support within the framework of the Eastern Partnership Initiative the EU should also provide additional incentive to those partner states who have successfully implemented their commitments under the Association Agreements. The European perspective is the best stimulus for conducting reforms.

In terms of international support of reforms we are looking forward to the Conference planned for early 2015 where the comprehensive Plan for Economy Renewal and Growth for 2015-2017 is to be presented.

The issue of visa liberalization is of utmost importance for ordinary citizens in terms of demonstrating immediate benefits of the European integration. We expect that by Riga Summit the decision on introduction of the visa free travel regime for the Ukrainians will have been adopted.

At the end of my speech, I would like to quote Urban Ahlin's words: **"We believe that soon we, your neighbors, will become your part."**