Implementation of the EU association agreement with Ukraine

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Michael GAHLER (EPP, DE) on the implementation of the European Union's Association Agreement with Ukraine.

Four years after the signature by the European Union of the three Association Agreements with Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, which provide in particular for the creation of a deep and comprehensive free trade area, and two years after their full entry into force, this report assesses the degree of implementation of these agreements, while respecting the EU's commitment to its closest Eastern partners and their willingness to deepen their relations with the Union.

The conclusions of the Committee on Foreign Affairs present a positive assessment of the implementation of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, despite a number of shortcomings that the Ukrainian authorities have yet to address.

General environment of reform: Ukraine has made progress towards European integration. The consent of the Ukrainian people for closer relations with the EU remains strong, but a large part of the population are nonetheless dissatisfied with the country's overall development.

The report welcomes Ukraine's reforms in the fields of energy, health, pensions, education, administration, decentralisation, public procurement, defence and security, banking and macroeconomic stabilisation. However, these reforms were accompanied by drastic price increases and a deterioration in access to social protection systems.

Important challenges remain, particularly in areas such as fighting corruption, privatisation and judicial reform. According to Members, Ukraine's reform programme should focus on three main priorities: (i) establishing an effective legal framework to fight corruption, including institutions, financial transparency and audits; (ii) reform for decentralisation; (iii) measures to end oligarchy and privatisation measures.

Condemning the continued Russian aggression in eastern part of Ukraine and the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Members recognised that Ukraine faces challenges of a transformational nature in an environment of warfare and destabilisation attempts. They expressed concern about the highly volatile security situation in the Sea of Azov, which could turn into an open conflict.

Institutional framework in place to implement reforms: the report places particular emphasis on capacity in terms of human resource and expertise to ensure full implementation of relevant legislation and the monitoring thereof. In particular, it proposes to pay particular attention to strengthening the administrative capacity of the Ukrainian Parliament (the Rada) and to intensify efforts to monitor and follow-up the implementation of the Association Agreements, both on the Ukrainian and EU sides.

Among other things, Members call for:

- further progress in deepening a culture of parliamentary dialogue, a crucial step in making the Rada a more effective, transparent and efficient legislator;
- the establishment of a transparent and highly reliable selection process which will enhance the integrity and professionalism of judges and prosecutors, as well as increase the confidence of citizens in the judicial system. Members call for the swift and transparent establishment of the independent High Anti-Corruption Court and for the independence of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) to be safeguarded;
- the speedy adoption of the new electoral code, which should guarantee equal opportunities for representation and eligibility of candidates of all nationalities living in Ukraine;
- the abolition of electronic reporting obligations for non-governmental organisation (NGO) activists and effective and transparent monitoring of declarations by politicians and officials;
- more attention be paid to areas related to the space devoted to civil society in the drafting and implementation of legislation;
- the continuation of the reform in favour of decentralisation and the acceleration of the merger of local and regional authorities in view of the forthcoming general and local elections;
- strengthening the legal basis so that workers can effectively compel their employers by judicial means to respect their right to wages for work done;
- more concerted efforts to implement the Ukrainian human rights strategy, including policies to improve the situation of the Roma minority and other minority groups;
- the ratification of the Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women, as well as the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;
- reforms to guarantee media independence and pluralism to guarantee the safety of media professionals and journalists;
- the establishment of State programmes to prevent hate crimes and other forms of discrimination as part of the implementation of the national human rights strategy;
- the implementation of necessary reforms to attract new investment, in particular foreign direct investment;
- the further reform of the gas and electricity markets so as to fully integrate them into the EU energy market, and to end existing monopolies, as well as the boosting of energy cooperation within the Eastern Partnership for the implementation of the 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement;
- the strengthening of Ukraine-EU cooperation fighting against Russian propaganda, including the country's expected interference in the elections in Ukraine as well as in the EU as a whole.

The report calls for better monitoring of the implementation of reforms, on both the Ukrainian and EU sides, on the basis of coherent and measurable indicators. It invites the Commission and the EEAS to submit more frequent and detailed written reports on the implementation of the agreements to Parliament and the Council.