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**Extract of REPORT relating to Ukraine**

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*Note: Speeches in English are reported in full whilst speeches in other languages are summarised. President Yanukovich delivered his speech in Ukrainian and answered questions in Russian.*

**3. Address by Mr Viktor Yanukovich, President of Ukraine**

THE PRESIDENT – We now have the honour of hearing an address by Mr Viktor Yanukovich, President of Ukraine. After his address, the President has kindly agreed to take questions from the floor.

We would like to welcome you here, Mr President, and congratulate you on your election, which was considered to be free, fair and democratic by international observers, including those of the Assembly.

We hope that your election will also be the start of a process of overcoming the systemic political crisis and infighting between the different branches of power that have so hindered the development of your country.

We hope that you, your government and the members of the Rada will make all efforts to ensure that the reforms to which Ukraine has committed itself – electoral, constitutional, judiciary and procurator – will now be implemented without further delay.

As parliamentarians, we have noted that many attempts to reform have been stalled in the Rada. We therefore hope that your election will herald new efforts by not only the executive, but the legislative powers to implement the reforms and comply with Ukraine's few remaining accession commitments. Of course, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe are, as always, ready to assist your country in implementing these much-needed reforms.

Mr President, I welcome you again. It is with great pleasure that I give you the floor.

Mr YANUKOVYCH (*President of Ukraine*) said that it had been three years since he had last visited Strasbourg, during which time there had been many changes in Europe and in Ukraine. Despite this, European values had not changed as they were protected by the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe was the conscience of Europe and, while it was not always agreeable to listen to your conscience, it was useful.

The Council of Europe had been tasked with overcoming the worst crisis in human history, the Second World War, as a reaction to the unprecedented atrocities committed in this war. The work of the Council of Europe to ensure democracy, the rule of law and human rights had, since the war, had provided the foundations for a new Europe.

The unity achieved by the Council of Europe through its common values and standards was important. For this reason, it was hard to overestimate the importance of the role of the Council of Europe. The first 60 years of the existence of the Council of Europe had been a success story, but he believed it was capable of finding solutions to current and future problems. To this end, the report on the future of the Council of Europe aimed to continue to ensure the ambitions of the role were balanced by political will and financial resources.

Ukraine would comply with its commitments as part of the Council of Europe before it undertook the presidency in May 2011. Ukraine was conscious that its co-operation with the Council of Europe had ensured that the international community had considered the result of the 2010 election fair.

It was unclear whether the election in Ukraine in 2010 would usher in a new phase of its history or continue the previous political *déjà vu*. Previous administrations had made progress in terms of freedom of citizens, but had not considered the responsibility this freedom conferred on governments. Governments had been hampered by internal disputes and the lack of a strong coalition for reform.

The 2010 Ukrainian election heralded a point of departure for the country. The primary objective following the election was to strengthen democracy in Ukraine. The pluralistic nature of democracy in Ukraine had been shown by the opposition winning the previous three elections; democratic values were deeply engrained. Further progress was, however, necessary. To this end, freedom of the media should be ensured to promote access to information for all and discussion. The freedom of the media would be guaranteed and intrusions on this freedom would be investigated in the correct manner. He would ensure this was done.

On equal opportunities, no compromise could be allowed as this needed more work. Women, for example, were poorly represented in the parliament and government. This situation was improving and the number of examples of good practice could be expected to grow.

Visa free travel within the European Union for Ukrainian citizens was a key issue.

For the first time in the Ukraine it had been possible to form a responsible executive. The government, the coalition in parliament and the President were able to work together effectively. This provided the conditions necessary for internal reform, including reform of the judicial system and the removal of corruption. The judicial system would be reformed to bring it in line with the standards of the Council of Europe, and the presidential initiative had been used to put forward an urgent package of reform to this end. Further legislation would be brought forward on reform of electoral processes and on an overhaul of public administration.

Many in Ukraine, in Europe and in the Chamber itself would doubt his intention to carry out these reforms but he had been elected President to act, not to dream, and would act on his promises. It was in the national interest to move public spending away from unrealistic ideas, to restoring the reputation of Ukraine and to make progress on free trade and freedom of movement.

There was no blanket policy of mistrust in the relationship with Russia. There had been an outcry when an agreement was signed on 21 April, but the Ukrainian Parliament had ratified the agreement, and the outcry had died down. The issue was sometimes stirred up by certain political forces, but pragmatic policies would win out. The relationship with Russia was not about a return to old risks, but about new opportunities. Co-operation between the Ukraine and Russia was in everyone's interest.

The price in the shared gas agreements for Ukraine did not mean the end of Ukrainian enterprise. Europe faced high prices, but Ukraine wanted to restore relations and negotiate the correct the price for Ukraine. Ukraine had finalised agreements with Russia.

The International Monetary Fund would not let a new agreement on lending be signed for two or three years because of the economic situation inherited from the previous government; Ukraine's budget deficit today was higher than that of Greece. Ukraine would seek partners it could work with in an open and transparent way.

If relations continued within defined parameters, as in Brussels and Moscow, Ukraine would restore balance in its relationships. A stable and solid partnership with the European Union, Russia and the United States would be provided to broaden democracy in Ukraine in every area. Reform of the economy, the judicial system and the constitution would help to attract financial investment and restore relations with other countries. A strong Ukraine would be beneficial for the world and for the well being of Ukrainians.

THE PRESIDENT – Please take a seat, Mr President.

Thank you very much, Mr Yanukovich, for your most interesting address. Members of the Assembly have expressed a wish to put questions to you.

I remind them that questions must be limited to 30 seconds and no more. Colleagues should ask questions and not make speeches.

The first question is from Mr Frunda, on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

Mr FRUNDA (*Romania*) – I congratulate you, Mr President, on your election. I am deeply sorry about what happened today in Kiev. Politics is about dialogue in parliament, not about fighting in parliament.

One of the richnesses of Ukraine is its national minorities. You have important national communities – Russians, Romanians and Hungarians, to mention only the most numerous. In previous years, national minorities could not be elected to the Rada and to local bodies as representatives of their communities. Their educational rights were reduced. The authorities reduced the number of classes in schools in the mother tongue and did not support or allow use of the mother tongue in the entrance exam to universities. People did not have the right to use their mother language in their relations with local authorities. How do you want to handle this very important problem in the future?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr President, you have the floor to answer that question.

Mr YANUKOVYCH said that it was an important social question. The issue had recently affected various ethnic minorities in Ukraine, whose rights had been violated. Now, the issue was how to restore the rights of the Roma-speaking population: the Romanians, the Hungarians, the Tatars, and others. There needed to be a change in the system of independent testing at universities and the equal opportunities of children of ethnic minorities so that they could take exams in the language they spoke. In the near future, a series of laws implementing European languages would be adopted. They had been ratified by Ukraine, but had not yet been implemented, because of too much politicisation. A range of draft laws had been developed and the Ukrainian Parliament would discuss them soon.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. The next question is from Mrs Čurdová, on behalf of the Socialist Group.

Mrs ČURDOVÁ (*Czech Republic*) – Mr President, first, on behalf of the Socialist Group, I congratulate you on your election as President of Ukraine.

The Council of Europe is based on our common values of democracy and the rule of law. I hope, therefore, that Ukraine will take further steps to promote democratic principles and civil society.

However, democracy is for all citizens, and that means women and men. In the Slavic language, some words, such as “democracy” or “Ukraine”, are in the feminine gender, yet the Government of Ukraine is represented by male ministers only. In that respect, I should like to ask you, Mr President, what steps you intend to take to increase the number of female representatives in the decision-making bodies and institutions of your country, and to ensure that the specific problems of Ukrainian women are solved properly?

Thank you for your reply.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Would you like to answer that question, Mr President?

Mr YANUKOVYCH agreed with Mrs Čurdová's position and comments. It was surprising that a current minister had been unable to invite women as ministers, but that was democracy. His administration included two women who worked very effectively as deputy heads of administration. This helped to ensure a balance between men and women in Ukraine. Gender equality was an important democratic process in any country. In the future, steps would be taken to improve the situation.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. The next question is from Mrs Basseur, on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Mrs BRASSEUR (*Luxembourg*) congratulated Mr Yanukovich on his election. She said the glorification of Stalin and the Soviet interpretation of the Second World War in the Ukraine was supported by the Minister of Education and asked what Mr Yanukovich was doing to put an end to these very worrying developments.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. You have the floor, Mr President.

Mr YANUKOVYCH said it was a wonderful question, but did not accept the premise of the question as the Minister of Education's views coincided with his own, which were that there were radical opinions in society, but that these could not be taken into account.

He was not aware of efforts to build a monument to Stalin, although there had been an example of a bust being built in the garden of an office in Zaporozhie; the mayor of the city had contemplated holding a referendum to resolve the issue. Much of society in Ukraine had removed such monuments and they would not be restored.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. The next question is from Mr Markov on behalf of the European Democrat Group.

Mr MARKOV (*Russian Federation*) congratulated the President on his election and said it was an honest victory. He was concerned with the charter of European languages. He also raised the question of military nationalists and Stalin, who in the previous government had been idealised by ultra-nationalists.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Would you like to answer that question, Mr President?

Mr YANUKOVYCH said the issue was linked to the previous question. It was a radical position that did not have the support of the majority in the Ukraine. There had been a discussion in society, court cases, political declarations and even a declaration of the European Parliament on the issue. A policy that divided the country to the extent that this issue did should not be entertained. Ukraine had set up an initiative studying ideas to develop textbooks for elementary and high schools. After the work was finished, historians and not politicians would make a decision on which textbooks to adopt.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr President. The next question is from Mr Laakso on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Mr LAAKSO (*Finland*) – I congratulate you, Mr President, on behalf of the UEL, on your election. I should first point out that the Finnish Government has a majority of females, and we have a proposal to set up a male protection movement! However, that has nothing to do with my question. As you said, there is a tendency for politicians to try to take on the role of historians, and, unfortunately, we have seen this tendency in our Organisation: we are dealing more and more in the interpretation of history.

You know, Mr President, that under the rapporteurship of President Çavuşoğlu, there is now a Council of Europe report on the great famine. What is your personal opinion of the great famine question? As I mentioned, I do not like the fact that we are deciding this issue by voting. What is the correct interpretation of history? President Çavuşoğlu's report is very balanced. Should we vote, and what is the truth of the history?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr President you have the floor.

Mr YANUKOVYCH said that the territories of these countries were well known. The great famine of the 1930s had affected the Volga region, Belarus and Kazakhstan as well as Ukraine. It had been a consequence of the policies of the Stalinist regime, and all countries had been affected. To recognise Holodomor as genocide in respect of one or another people would be incorrect and unfair. It had been a shared tragedy between all members of the Soviet Union.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr President. The next question is from Mr Braun.

Mr BRAUN (*Hungary*) – Over the past decade, the Hungarian minority in Ukraine had the opportunity to establish a functioning Hungarian language school system in Transcarpathia. Unfortunately, Ukrainian education measures introduced in the past few years have generated a tendency that is to the detriment of the situation of the Hungarian minority. The latest Ukrainian education regulation, which came into force this year, could have a positive impact on the future of the national minorities. We would like to hear Your Excellency's views on what further steps your government plans to take to reduce the negative effects of the education decrees of the previous Ukrainian Government.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr President, you have the floor.

Mr YANUKOVYCH said that he had always been opposed to policies detrimental to the languages of minority ethnic groups. His government would pass a number of laws, one of which would pass the European language charter into Ukrainian law.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr President. The next question is from Mr Vareikis.

Mr VAREIKIS (*Lithuania*) – Mr President, you said several times that you are implementing the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. That is okay, but I have a question about a small but unique ethnic group who live in your country: the Crimean Tatars. Language itself is not enough – that ethnicity is disappearing. What is your programme for enabling that ethnic group, with its unique European heritage, to survive in your country?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Would you like to answer that question, Mr President?

Mr YANUKOVYCH said that he agreed that Ukrainian government policy on the Tatars had long been inadequate. In future, a national programme would be developed. A new agency would be set up to see that Ukrainian policy towards the Tatars was reformed. He saw that his colleague, Mr Mustafa Jemiliev, was present in the Chamber and he looked forward to working with him on this. Both parties should be able to work together to build confidence.

THE PRESIDENT – The next question is Mr Zingeris.

Mr ZINGERIS (*Lithuania*) – I congratulate you, Mr President, on the recent elections. They were fair, and they were the outcome of your country's democratic development over the past five years. My question is about today's events in your parliament. You have said that they were "heated up", but you are the President of all Ukraine, not just the eastern side, so are you sure that these scenes will not become an everyday occurrence during your presidency?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Would you like to answer that question, Mr President?

Mr YANUKOVYCH said that it was the Ukrainian people who would decide the outcome of all future elections. Local elections would be held in 2011. For any Ukrainian politician, the desire to unite Ukraine would always come first, higher than any personal or political ambition. It was impossible to agree with the priorities of those who placed their own advancement ahead of the improvement of society. It was a great achievement for Ukraine that he had been able to plan and present a budget so soon after having been elected, especially given that he had been in opposition since 2004.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. The next question is from Mr Gross.

Mr GROSS (*Switzerland*) – My question is along the same lines. Winning elections might be easier than uniting the country. Integration is also a democratic duty, and the winner must reach out to the other side. You cannot wait until the next elections. What will you do to unite the country and convince those who today disagree with you? Throwing eggs is not an argument, but you have to understand those who have thrown eggs, because you need to integrate them into your country. What are you willing to do over the coming weeks to integrate people, rather than continuing with the current divisions?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr Yanukovych, you have the floor.

Mr YANUKOVYCH said that he did not distinguish between the wishes of a teacher, doctor or anyone in east or west Ukraine. Every Ukrainian wanted a stable country under the rule of law with human rights for all. The economy would be made to work for the benefit of everyone.

Ukraine would soon celebrate 20 years of independence. Previous governments had lied to the population with pleasant-sounding slogans, but he would aggressively pursue the process of European integration and seek to be a reliable partner, always meeting his commitments and obligations. An element of conflict would always persist because divisions between some peoples were so deeply entrenched. It was, however, his strongly held belief that people could live peacefully in accordance with the principles practiced by their ancestors. The use of force to the contrary of such efforts was futile.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you very much. The next question is from Mrs Gautier, a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Mrs GAUTIER (*France*) asked whether Ukraine intended to join Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in a customs union or whether it would reach a free trade agreement with the European Union.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr President, you have the floor.

Mr YANUKOVYCH said that Ukraine had made its choice, entering the World Trade Organization several years ago, and was now integrated into the WTO. For that reason, joining a customs union was impossible, because the economic principles and rules of the WTO would not allow it. The development of a free trade agreement with the European Union was in the national interests of Ukraine and was supported by the European Union.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. I must now conclude the questions to Mr Yanukovich. Mr President, on behalf of the Assembly, I thank you most warmly for your address and for the answers you have given to questions.