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EU-Ukraine: Dispelling the Myths About the Association Agreement - Stefan Fule

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Speech

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Ukraine

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Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organisers of this conference and the promoters of the 'Our Kids' project for inviting me here today.

When the European Union initiated the Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy in 2009, it came as a result of an increasing realisation that we need a stronger engagement to help anchor stability, democracy and prosperity to partners in our European neighbourhood. We devised a policy which provided powerful tools for transformation, encouraging partners to undertake political association and economic integration with the European Union to the degree they wished to.

Significant progress has been made over the last four years:

- Our political level meetings are more and more frequent (one example are the Informal Partnership Dialogues every six months in one of the EaP capitals);
- By Vilnius we should have established an Eastern Partnership Transport network and identified priority projects;
- Our multilateral dimension has established a dense network of contacts;
- Flagship initiatives have helped bring home the benefits of cooperation with the European Union;
- There has been important progress towards visa liberalisation; and
- Civil Society developments have been a great success.

In November at the Vilnius Summit we hope to be able to deliver on the most far reaching agreements we have ever negotiated with partners, establishing political association and economic integration with the European Union: Association Agreements (AAs), including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTAs). These agreements would represent a qualitative leap forward towards real transformation in our neighbourhood. This on its own would be a fantastic achievement. I call it a game changer. Vilnius will be the first summit which delivers not only words and declarations - and I am not saying there is something wrong with declarations - but also on real deeds, bringing the most effective transformative instrument after enlargement to this part of Europe.

Vilnius can become a summit of delivery if there maining steps are taken in the weeks ahead. All our partners know what is at stake and what remains to be done. Time is of the essence. However, our goal is common and shared:

- **signature of the AA/DCFTA with Ukraine;**
- **initialling of AA/DCFTAs with Moldova and Georgia;**
- **good progress on the mobility agenda;**
- **tangible results in cooperation across key sectors, notably in the transport and education fields.**

These potential achievements seem to have provoked a misreading of our intentions in some quarters. Contrary to what we often hear, our offer to the Eastern partners is not a zero-sum game: Economic reforms should

benefit all sides, allowing for the creation of a zone of prosperity across the continent. We care about our neighbours, but we also care about the neighbours of our neighbours.

Let me be clear on this:

- On the one hand, it is our partners' sovereign right to choose what they want and we stand ready to support their choices against undue interferences;
- On the other hand, this does not mean that we will trade the conditionality and the common values which underpin the Eastern Partnership for the sake of geopolitical games.

Without anchoring values deeply in societies, we will not build sustainable linkages between our states and societies.

A significant package of deliverables at Vilnius will create the right conditions to maintain the dynamism in the next phase. The next two years will be characterised by:

- The implementation of the Association Agreements, including DCFTAs, to seal the irreversibility of political association and economic integration; and
- Implementation of our mobility agenda where the benefits to the citizens of partner countries are worth the significant reform efforts that partner governments have to undertake.

When I talk about mobility, I talk about visa liberalisation.

We are all well aware that this period will not be easy. It will require the same energy and passion that you have put into the negotiation phase, if not more. However, ambitious agendas demand ambitious reforms. The key to further deepening our relations rests in your hands and depends on your determination.

The Eastern Partnership is not a one-size-fits-all framework. Its role is to support those who seek a closer relationship with European Union. The European Union is committed to supporting partners and ensuring that assistance (political, financial, technical) contributes to long-term positive change. The greater the efforts by you - our partners - the greater will the support be from the European Union.

We have been hearing a lot of myths recently about the impact of the AA/DCFTA: passing sovereignty to Brussels, costly exercise - absolute nonsense. We have reached understanding on substantive provisional application, so if there is signature, I hope soon afterwards we will see most of AA/DCFTA applied even before ratification with concrete benefits for exporters, businesses, citizens - from the first days of the provisional application. And it is not that you open up all your space, we will open our to you. For you there will be provisional periods to adjust. It is not true that you will not be in control of the developments, there will be joint coordinating bodies where you will be co-deciding about implementation of the AA/DCFTA. And you will have the tools to take measures. So we are not taking anything from your sovereignty, it will be actually strengthened.

We also need to strengthen engagement with society as a whole and raise awareness of the benefits and opportunities that this process offers, especially regarding approximation to European Union standards. The involvement of all actors is indispensable if we wish to succeed in achieving our shared goals. No government can succeed in such an endeavour without broad support of the people.

Inevitably, the period following the summit in Vilnius will be characterised by greater differentiation due to the different stages in the process at which partners will find themselves. Nonetheless it is imperative that the Eastern Partnership remains a partnership for all six partners.

To conclude:

Ukraine still needs to present determined action and tangible progress in all areas listed in the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council in December 2012 in order to be able to sign the Association Agreement. It also has to work on the outstanding legislation for the completion of the first phase of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, in particular when it comes to the comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and adequate mechanisms for fight against corruption.

Only by making further progress in these and other areas will Ukraine be able to strengthen its leading position in the Eastern Partnership.

I believe that, with the engagement of all sides: authorities, opposition, business circles and civil society, it is perfectly feasible.

There is one thing that in my eyes makes a link between "Our Kids" project and what we try to do with Ukraine through the Association Agreement: it is not business as usual, we want to achieve a change: for the country, for its children and their future.

Thank you for your attention.

Štefan Füle

European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

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