



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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**Remarks by President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
following the extraordinary meeting of
EU Heads of State or Government on Ukraine**

These last days have seen perhaps the most serious challenge to security on our continent since the Balkan Wars. This is why I called this extraordinary meeting of the Union's heads of state or government.

We started today with a meeting with Prime Minister Yatseniuk of Ukraine. He gave a powerful, sobering account of the situation in his country; and we had a long exchange.

It was the first such meeting of EU leaders with a non-member state country during my mandate. This in itself speaks of the seriousness we attach to the situation. The aim of this summit today was two-fold.

First, on Russia – the impact of its recent actions, and our relationship. Second, on Ukraine – and how we can best stand by the country in this fateful moment. Leaders agreed on a joint statement on the situation, which we will publish shortly. Let me summarise the main points.

First, we strongly condemn Russia's unprovoked violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call on Russia to immediately withdraw its armed forces; and allow immediate access for international monitors. We consider the decision by Crimea's Supreme Council to hold a referendum as contrary to the Ukrainian constitution and therefore illegal.

P R E S S

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We have important relations with both Russia and Ukraine and stand ready to engage with both, bilaterally as a Union and also in broader multilateral initiatives. The European Union will participate in the Contact Group. We want a solution in full respect of international law and the territorial integrity of countries. The situation must de-escalate – and failure by Russia to do so will have serious consequences on our bilateral relationship.

We have a three-step approach. First, we have today decided to take actions including those envisaged by the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 3rd of March, notably to suspend bilateral talks with the Russian Federation on visa matters as well as talks with the Russian Federation on the New Agreement. We support the decision of the European Members of the G8 and the EU institutions to suspend their participation in G8 Summit preparations until further notice.

The solution to the crisis should be found through negotiations between the Governments of Ukraine and the Russian Federation, including through potential multilateral mechanisms. Such negotiations need to start within the next few days and produce results within a limited timeframe. In the absence of such results the European Union will decide on additional measures, such as travel bans, asset freezes and the cancellation of the EU-Russia summit. The Commission and the EEAS will take forward preparatory work on these measures.

Any further steps by the Russian Federation to destabilise the situation in Ukraine would lead to additional and far reaching consequences for relations in a broad range of economic areas between the European Union and its Member States, on the one hand, and the Russian Federation, on the other hand.

The new Ukrainian government's response so far has been remarkably measured, and we commended the Prime minister in that respect – as well as the people of Ukraine for their courage and resilience these last months and weeks.

We stand by Ukraine, and reiterated the European commitment to signing the Association Agreement. Today we decided that as a matter of priority we will sign very shortly the political chapters. This means: before the Ukrainian elections of 25 May.

We also commit to provide Ukraine with strong financial backing. The immediate priority in this field is restoring macro-economic stability. President Barroso will I am sure say more about the EU assistance package – I will just say we asked ministers to start work immediately.

We intend to adopt special trade measures to allow Ukraine to benefit substantially soon from the advantages of the Free Trade Area. We remain committed to the visa liberalisation process, to encouraging contacts between the citizens of the EU and of Ukraine. We stand ready to assist also on energy security. Finally, we welcome our foreign ministers' decision to freeze and recover misappropriated (or stolen) State assets.

From Ukraine's side, efforts must continue towards free and fair elections, constitutional reform and the investigation of all acts of violence. The way forward must be one of inclusiveness towards all regions, people and minorities. Fighting corruption and launching wider structural reforms will all be essential.

Also in our statement today, as regards Moldova and Georgia: we confirm our aim to sign the Association Agreements initialled in Vilnius last November no later than at the end of August. These are the main elements of our statement.

Let me conclude by saying that today all leaders affirmed that as European Union, we have a special responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity on our continent , and we are ready to take that responsibility. Acts of aggression cannot be without consequences.

These past days there has been intense coordination among leaders (and their ministers), not least on contacts with Russia. At the end of the day, dialogue is the only way out.

The European Council is following very closely the events and will meet if needed.

The majority of the people of Ukraine made a decisive choice in favour of our European values. It was a civilisation choice. They refused to live any longer in the Yanukovich era of lies, bribes, manipulation, blackmail and poverty.

Europe must and will support them on the courageous road they have chosen towards a better future.
