



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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**Statement by President Herman Van Rompuy following his
meeting with Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk**

First of all, let me thank the Prime Minister for his invitation to visit Ukraine today and for his hospitality in these difficult days. I look forward to continuing our talks with President Turchynov.

Allow me to summarise the key messages that I bring to the Prime Minister, the President and the Ukrainian people.

The European Union is firmly committed to Ukraine's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We will not recognise the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. Likewise, we do not recognise the so-called "referenda" of yesterday. They are illegal, illegitimate and not credible. They are a way to stir up division among Ukraine's communities.

Violence must stop. The rule of law must be ensured. Human rights must be respected. And political demands must be pursued by political and not armed means. The only elections we will recognise are the presidential elections on the 25th of May.

What Ukraine needs is a genuine national dialogue on how the different components of the Ukrainian society see their destiny and organisation in a democratic, peaceful and prosperous state. Therefore, I commend the Prime Minister for his call for an inclusive national dialogue through round-table talks. I call on all democratic forces and civil society to participate. And I call on all the signatories of the Geneva Joint Statement of 17 April to actively contribute to its success.

P R E S S

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From my own experience I know that a genuine national dialogue is a process, requiring political will and trust. The Prime Minister's initiative should therefore be seen and recognised as a first and important confidence-building measure and an important outreach in the run-up to the presidential elections on 25th of May.

The holding of free and fair elections on 25th of May will be an important step to overcome the crisis. I urge all political actors to fully support the process. There must be no outside interference. In this context, I take note of President Putin's recent declaration regarding the presidential elections. The European Union will strongly support the OSCE's and ODIHR's monitoring role.

The Geneva Joint Statement on initial concrete steps to de-escalate tensions and restore security must be implemented. I salute the steps taken so far by Ukraine to this end. In our view, the Russian Federation has so far not lived up to its Geneva commitments. It is urgent that Russia call upon the armed separatists to lay down their weapons and to vacate the buildings they illegally occupy.

Implementation of the Geneva understanding is the best chance we have to make progress. The OSCE has an important role to play in this Ukrainian-owned process.

In the absence of de-escalation, the EU has imposed sanctions in the form of visa bans and asset freezes. And today the EU foreign ministers have agreed to further step up the sanctions against people and entities. The EU has agreed that further steps by Russia to destabilise the situation in Ukraine would lead to additional far reaching consequences for relations in a broad range of economic areas. Preparatory work on this is under way. We are ready to take further decision, if needed.

The European Union will also continue its firm support for the much needed political, economic and security sector reforms in Ukraine. The fight against corruption is absolutely key.

We will contribute with very significant financial support. Furthermore, the European Union has allowed Ukraine to benefit immediately and unilaterally from the substantial market access advantages offered in the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement. Beyond financial support, Ukraine needs to reform and modernise its economy. The potential for growth is huge - also from closer relations with the European Union. Allow me to recall that Poland and Ukraine had similar GDPs in 1990. 20 years later, the Polish GDP is three times larger - three times!

Politically, the European Union has also strengthened its support. On 21st of March the EU and Ukraine took a very important step in deepening our relations by signing the political chapters of the Association Agreement. The EU is committed to move swiftly to the signature and provisional application of the remaining provisions.

To conclude. As most European nations, Ukraine is a complex country, forged through centuries of history. I want it to remain strong and united in a reformed and modern state, respecting the different sensitivities, cultures and languages, and living in peace with its neighbours. It will not be the first time that Ukraine and its people overcome huge challenges. The European Union will stand by Ukraine's side. Thank you.
