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EUROPEAN EXPERTS ABOUT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION ON UKRAINE

The Gorshenin Institute has asked experts about the key positive and negative aspects of the resolution on Ukraine adopted by the European Parliament.

MEP, Member of the Delegation to the EU-Ukraine PCC Marek Siwiec noted that he had voted in favour of this resolution. 'It is always important to bear in mind that a glass is always half empty and half full. In this respect the European Parliament has pointed out in this resolution the weaknesses of Ukrainian democracy. However, MEPs do not condemn changes that the EU's neighbor has undergone during past few years'. Marek Siwiec also explained why the resolution was adopted after the summit, and not before: 'In most cases, the European Parliament adopts a resolution as a result of certain events. The most important is to avoid the impression that the EP wants to influence internal situation of a country. Adopting this document during previous plenary session in Strasbourg, could give such a feeling.' When commenting on the wishes stipulated in the resolution as for finalizing the negotiations for establishment of the Free Trade Area between Ukraine and the EU by mid 2011, Marek Siwiec mentioned that there is no deadline as such. 'However, the resolution encourages Ukraine to finalize the talks on FTA', - he said.

Director of the European Centre for International Political Economy Fredrik Erixon thinks that the resolution is fairly balanced and it sets out a good case for deeper EU-Ukraine relations. 'I had preferred to see stronger language on the possibility of Ukrainian accession to the EU in future. I also would have liked to see a greater focus generally in Europe on the economic reform needs in Ukraine and how Europe could help Ukraine to speed up economic reforms and spearhead the IMF-demanded reforms. But the resolution reaffirms advancements on the Association Agreement and endorses a quick move to conclude the FTA negotiations. It also calls for speeding up negotiations over visas. It is also good for Ukraine that the EU is active on matters concerning flawed electoral laws and practices, and deteriorating media freedoms in Ukraine. A Europe that is silent on worrying developments over media freedoms would not be a true friend to Ukraine, just an unprincipled and opportunity-seeking partner that could not be trusted to accommodate the long-term interest of Ukraine', said the expert. Fredrik Erixon shared his opinion that the European Parliament is really worried about media freedoms and the overall conditions for political pluralism in Ukraine. 'Ukraine still has a long way to go before it could qualify for full membership in the EU, and there has been too many incidents lately in Ukraine over the status and integrity of political and media pluralism for the European Parliament not to raise the concerns. For the moment the EP has decided to continue endorsing the trade and association agreement track, and generally see such agreement as helpful to the development of political and media freedoms in Ukraine. That can change, however, if conditions continue to deteriorate. It is not unlikely, let alone unthinkable, that the European Parliament will want to disrupt trade and association agreement negotiations of things get worse', thinks the expert. According to him, Ukraine will not seriously consider a customs union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan anytime soon. 'There are WTO-technical problems that I think will prevent such action. I am also convinced that Brussels knows that the first priority of Ukraine is to go for deeper trade relations with the EU. But there is a growing awareness that "time is of essence" and that a free trade area could be very helpful to Ukraine (and the EU) and thus merits endorsement regardless of the larger political considerations', he said..

Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee Pawel Kowal mentioned that the resolution seems like a well-balanced compromise between the political factions in the European Parliament. 'On the one hand we have some critique of the last local elections, which as I mentioned in my report did not create a new, positive standard and we clearly see that the European Parliament is not particularly happy with recent problems with the media. But we find in resolution also some constructive statements - concerning especially the developments in economical and visa issues pointed during the EU-Ukraine Summit in Brussels', said the expert. At the same time, Pawel Kowal noted that

adopting the resolution before the EU-Ukraine summit would have clearly created a situation in which its results could be worse for Ukraine. 'As we know, the previous resolution tabled by the European People's Party was very critical for the Ukrainian government even before the local elections. That is why some MEPs wanted to postpone the voting on the resolution in order to fully evaluate the process of voting. We were trying to give Ukraine a chance which it clearly deserved. The problem is that Ukraine did not fully take this chance', he thinks. The expert mentioned that it was not easy for the European Parliament to make the resolution on Ukraine balanced. 'The 31 October local elections were a step back on the way towards the European integration - let's make it clear. The European Parliament is concerned with the issue of TVi and TV5 stations, some signs of intimidation of journalists and doubts about the media coverage during the election campaign. The fact that Batkivshchyna was actually deprived of the right to take part in the elections in three oblasts was the Parliament's main concern. This situation can create a problem for the Ukraine in the future. I feel that this was the last time when the Parliament acted in a well-balanced manner. We expect Kyiv to continue political and economical reforms, what is in the interest of each Ukrainian citizen. Ukrainian government simply cannot let itself to commit mistakes, especially now', he thinks. Pawel Kowal shared his opinion that Ukraine has made a substantial economic progress towards the customs union with the European Union. At the same time, he thinks that the possibility of making a similar deal with Russia is not high. 'We should remember that Ukraine is a part of WTO and Russia is not. I am not also sure that Russia would be really interested in such union because it would create a situation in which they would have to abolish the export duties on gas and oil for Ukraine. The losses for the Russian budget could be greater than incomes. And I am sure that president Yanukovich would not agree to the Belarusian version of the customs union - with limited set of goods. He is too much European in his thinking than many observers think. On the other hand Ukraine may not be interested in strengthening the competition between its and Russian metalurgy enterprises. If the government thinks it is good for Ukraine, than European Union will not mind, as long it is guided by principles of democracy', said Pawel Kowal.