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## Remarks at the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation Conference

### Remarks

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**Washington, DC**

**December 13, 2013**



Thank you, Roman. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for being here and for your continued support for the U.S.-Ukraine relationship, and thank you for the invitation to speak to you today. I'm still jetlagged from my third trip in five weeks to Ukraine and my days in Kyiv earlier this week.

I don't have to tell this crowd that these are historic and challenging times for the people of Ukraine, the Ukrainian-American relationship, and for people everywhere who care about the future of that great country.

The world is watching the drama that is unfolding in the center of Kyiv.

The Euro-Maidan movement has come to embody the principles and values that are the cornerstones for all free democracies.

What began on November 24<sup>th</sup> as a protest against President Yanukovich's decision to pause on the route to Europe has become much deeper and bigger. After blood was spilled by security forces on November 30<sup>th</sup> the movement also became about justice and civil rights and Ukrainians' desire to have a government that respects them, that listens to them, that protects them, and that provides for them -- a modern democratic government. That was palpable when I made my first visit to the Maidan on December 5<sup>th</sup>.

When Ukrainians say they are European, this is what they mean. And as one very prominent Ukrainian businessman said to me, "The Maidan Movement's greatest achievement is that it has proven that the people of Ukraine will no longer support any president -- this one or a future one -- who does not take them to Europe."

Throughout this period the United States' message has been clear and unequivocal. We stand with the people of Ukraine in their search for justice, human dignity, security, a return to economic health, and for the European future they have chosen and that they deserve.

As you know, and as Roman said, I returned to Ukraine for my third visit in five weeks last Tuesday in support of these very goals, this time conducting parallel, coordinated, high-level diplomacy with EU High Representative Cathy Ashton, with all of the key Ukrainian stakeholders.

Then halfway through our visit in the wee hours of [inaudible] December 10<sup>th</sup>, we witnessed the appalling show of force by government forces who turned riot police, bulldozers and tear gas on the Maidan demonstrators as they sang hymns and prayed for peace. Ukrainians of all ages and backgrounds flooded to the Maidan to protect it.

Secretary Kerry wasted no time in expressing the United States' disgust at this decision of the Ukrainian government and by morning the riot police had been forced to retreat.

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Later that same day, I spent more than two hours with President Yanukovich. It was a tough conversation, but also a realistic one. I made absolutely clear to him on behalf of the United States that what happened December 10<sup>th</sup> and more generally what's been happening in security terms is absolutely impermissible in a European state, in a democratic state.

But I also made clear that the United States believes there is a way out for Ukraine, that it is still possible to save Ukraine's European future, and that that is where we wanted to see the president lead his country.

That was going to require immediate steps to deescalate the security situation and immediate political steps to end the crisis and get Ukraine back into a conversation with Europe and the International Monetary Fund.

As you all know, and as I'm sure you just heard from Anders and other colleagues, Ukraine's economy is in a dire state, having been in recession for more than a year and with less than three months' worth of foreign currency reserves in place. The reforms that the IMF insists on are necessary for the long-term economic health of the country. A new deal with the IMF would also send a positive signal to private markets and would increase foreign direct investment that is so urgently needed in Ukraine. Signing the Association Agreement with the EU would also put Ukraine on the path to strengthening the sort of stable and predictable business environment that investors require. There is no other path that would bring Ukraine back to long-term political stability and economic growth.

We also commend the EU for leaving the door open on the Association Agreement and for continuing to work with the Ukrainian government on a way forward.

The Ukrainian parliament has already passed some 18 separate pieces of required legislation in advance of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. Although that was a missed opportunity, it would be a huge shame to see five years' worth of work and preparation go to waste if the AA is not signed in the near future. So it is time to finish the job.

As Vice President Biden said in remarks last night, President Yanukovich has a choice. He can choose the path that leads to division and isolation or he can take a leap and take immediate tangible steps to diffuse his country's crisis and start a genuine dialogue with the opposition and agree on a path that returns Ukraine to economic and political health.

While these are challenging times in many ways, we also can't lose sight of the fact that this is a time for great optimism as well. You only have to be on the Maidan to feel the energy, to feel the hope of Ukrainians coursing through the center of Kyiv and across the country.

People are engaging because they know they have a stake in the future of their country. We see energy, we see optimism that simply didn't exist in Ukraine 20 years ago. People of all ages, of all classes, of all walks of life are taking ownership of their future and coming out into the streets to demand a European future. They're doing so peacefully, with great courage, and enormous personal restraint.

Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, the United States has supported Ukrainians as they build democratic skills and institutions, as they promote civic participation and good governance, all of which are preconditions for Ukraine to achieve its European aspirations. We've invested over \$5 billion to assist Ukraine in these and other goals that will ensure a secure and prosperous and democratic Ukraine.

Today there are senior officials in the Ukrainian government, in the business community, as well as in the opposition, civil society and religious community who believe in this democratic and European future for their country and they've been working hard to move their country and their president in the right direction.

We urge the government, we urge the president to listen to these voices, to listen to the Ukrainian people, to listen to the Euro-Maidan and take Ukraine forward.

The support of the people in this room is absolutely essential. We thank you for all you are doing. We thank you for your partnership all these years, and we look forward to continuing to stand shoulder to shoulder with you as we take Ukraine into the future that it deserves.

Thank you very much.

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