

RELEASE IN FULL

Parliamentary Elections in Ukraine

U.S. Secretary of State Clinton and EU High Representative Ashton

It has been twenty-one years since Ukraine gained its independence from the Soviet Union. Since then, Ukrainians have made much progress on reforming and modernizing their country. Ukraine has also become an important partner on a number of pressing global and regional issues, from nuclear non-proliferation to food security and the settlement of protracted conflicts.

Ukraine now stands at an important juncture. Many of its neighbours in Central and Eastern Europe have shown the world what can be accomplished in terms of democratization and economic prosperity. Ukraine has the capacity to do the same. Important steps now have to be taken by the Ukrainian government to fulfill its full potential.

This is especially true when it comes to strengthening democratic institutions to ensure the respect of fundamental freedoms. Ukraine's parliamentary elections at the end of this month will be an important bellwether for the state of these institutions. At the moment, there are some worrying trends, as confirmed by the latest interim report of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission. We are concerned about reports of the use of administrative resources to favor ruling party candidates and the difficulties several media outlets face. Similarly, we are concerned about the continuation of practice of the Central Election Commission holding closed pre-session meetings and the lack of representation of some political parties on district and precinct election commissions. Distribution of material or financial benefits to voters is another issue that should be investigated and halted.

We regret that the convictions of opposition leaders during trials that did not meet international standards are preventing them from standing in parliamentary elections. The Ukrainian Government needs to address these selective prosecutions, including the case of former Prime Minister Tymoshenko and other former senior officials.

The United States and the European Union are doing their part for a free and fair election, supporting election observers and helping to train election officials, encourage voter education, and protect the rights of candidates and voters.

But these are not the EU's elections or America's elections. They are Ukraine's. So this is a moment when Ukraine's leaders should deliver for their citizens. They expect President Yanukovich and his government to address these concerns,

especially to ensure that the right to political participation is upheld and to provide for fair media access for all candidates.

We know it's possible, because Ukrainians have done it before. Just over two years ago, they elected a new president in what many observers consider the country's freest and fairest national election. With that contest, Ukrainians set their own high standard, a standard that should be met in this month's election.

We are also mindful of Ukraine's broader reform agenda. While some progress has been made, we hope the elections will lead to a vigorous and effective effort by the country's leaders to advance important core reforms, including the investment climate and the energy sector. Much is at stake here for Ukraine's future.

The European Union and Ukraine have completed negotiations on an ambitious Association Agreement which will provide for the country's political association and economic integration with the EU, including by establishing a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. It would offer Ukrainian businesses greater access to 500 million consumers in the EU and advance Ukraine on the path toward a modern European democracy. But the European Union will only be able to move forward with such an ambitious agenda if the democratic rights of the Ukrainian people, including freedoms of expression, political participation, association and media, are respected, the rule of law is put on strong footing, and progress is made on the overall reform agenda. It remains deeply in America's interest to see an independent, prosperous and irreversibly democratic Ukraine that is integrated with the European Union.

We want to pursue deeper, mutually beneficial partnerships with Ukraine and will continue working towards a day where Ukraine will fully realize its own full potential and take its place among the modern democracies of Europe.