

We will do all we can to support Ukraine

by Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

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Restoring peace and stability in conflict-torn Ukraine has been on everyone's mind for over a year now. Safeguarding Ukraine's territorial integrity is a fundamental principle for me. And it is completely unacceptable that borders in today's Europe are changed with the use of military force.

While the implementation of the Minsk Protocol and putting an end to military hostilities understandably tops the Ukrainian government's agenda, lasting stability cannot be secured without a political horizon in sight.

The Ukrainian government will only be able to deliver on its promises by accelerating the reform process.

First and foremost, Ukraine needs a constitution based on the largest possible public and political consensus.

A constitution Ukrainians can identify with and rightfully call their own.

A constitution which takes into account Ukraine's existing political powers and institutions as well as its obligations under international law and its commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights.

The successful constitutional reform process will require broad public consultation with political parties, civil society and the people of Ukraine as a whole. This process must be comprehensive and inclusive.

The task is challenging, but the 47-member Council of Europe as the guardian of human rights, rule of law and democracy on the European Continent, is committed to assisting Ukraine with necessary reforms.

During my visit to Kyiv this week, Foreign Minister Klimkin and I will launch our joint co-operation programme for the next three years. This new Action Plan (2015-2017) is dedicated to supporting and promoting constitutional and judicial reform, decentralisation, fair elections and to help fight corruption.

I welcome the progress achieved so far with the adoption of the new Budget Code for 2015 and its relevant legislation giving local authorities new sources of revenue. However, this dynamic needs to be reinforced, as the window of opportunity is very small, and the decentralisation reform process is very complex.

To facilitate the implementation of the Minsk Agreements, and to ensure that the decentralisation process is fully compatible with the territorial integrity of Ukraine, new powers will need to be devolved to the regions. There are several examples of well-functioning differentiated devolution in other European countries, such as Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom, and I will make sure we put all necessary expertise at the disposal of the Ukrainian authorities.

The adoption of the new Law on the Prosecutor General and the Law on Ensuring the Right to a Fair Trial are positive developments on the path to restoring confidence in and guaranteeing independence of the judiciary. We have also been engaged in a constructive co-operation with the Ukrainian authorities to adjust the lustration law.

However, the reform of the constitution is a prerequisite to bring the Ukrainian legal system fully in line with international and Council of Europe standards. We will do all we can to support Ukraine.