

## **Article by Commissioner Füle EU-Ukraine**

One of my main objectives as a European Commissioner responsible for the EU's Neighbourhood has been to help to move Ukraine closer to the European Union, building European values and standards in Ukraine, and un-tapping the huge potential of the EU-Ukraine relationship. For me this is a passion, but it is one I share with many in Ukraine, and I know in the European Union too. It has not been an easy time for those of us who hold this passion – everyone knows we have had difficult conversations over the last two years about the state of reforms in Ukraine, and about the commitment to international norms, particularly in justice. These challenges have not gone away.

However, I have never for a moment given up my hope and belief in Ukraine's European future, and my desire to share that belief with citizens in both the EU and Ukraine.

Last year we took a dramatic step towards defining what that future could look like. Ukraine and the EU have, after five years, completed negotiations of an Association Agreement including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. This is one of the most complex and ambitious agreements ever prepared by the EU with a third country: it is unprecedented in terms of the areas it covers and the clarity of the goals which it sets for our partnership.

My aim now is to start to explain to the public what this Agreement will bring and why it is worth fighting for. All our citizens, in Ukraine and in the EU, will soon have the chance to see what is on offer and to make a judgment about it. I hope that the judgment will be positive, of course, but above all I hope it will be well-informed.

So what are the highlights? The new Agreement contains binding, rules-based provisions and cooperation arrangements developed much further than in traditional agreements. We have set detailed timelines for Ukraine to meet EU standards and norms – in energy, in agriculture, in transport and so on, and we will be supporting it with money and with expertise to help Ukraine reach those goals. This Agreement covers all areas of interest – not just political and security aspects, or trade relations, but also justice issues, public health, mobility, consumer rights, and many others. Let's take briefly one example – consumer rights. The new Agreement would mean that consumer rights would be clear, better guaranteed and enforced while information, alerts and controls of product safety would be ensured. And there are many other stories to tell about real changes that will have an impact on people's lives, in transport safety, in reducing air and water pollution, or in improving public health services.

Of course there are important economic benefits too: the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area provides for significant new opportunities for Ukrainian products and services on the EU's huge internal market and opens Ukraine's market to new European investments and trade. Yet it goes much further than classic free trade areas, foreseeing not only the mutual opening of markets for most goods and services, but also addressing competitiveness by helping Ukraine to conform with EU health and hygiene rules and others. The DCFTA, once in force, will provide tariff cuts which will allow the economic operators of both sides to save around 750 millions euros per year on average, increasing competitiveness on both sides. It will help to create a modern, transparent and predictable environment for consumers, investors and

business people in both markets. Predictability, stability, transparency, risk-reduction – this is what counts for the modern investor in the competition for capital. We all know that Ukraine needs more investment to restructure and modernise its economy.

Yet the Agreement means much more than this – it is above all about sharing European values – it is about bringing the full benefits of democracy, better justice and more accountable governance to citizens. This is what I mean when I sometimes refer to building more of the European Union in Ukraine. The citizens will be the ones to benefit thanks to the protective umbrella of high democratic standards and real guarantees for their rights and opportunities that the Agreement offers. It is the Ukrainian citizens who will be at the centre of this project building democracy, unity and prosperity in their country.

This all is worth fighting for. The hard work has been done and this huge Agreement, setting out the goals we can work towards together, is on the table. The challenge ahead of us now is to take the agreement to the stage where we can sign it, and to get through the democratic steps needed to allow its entry into force. This will depend on Ukraine's performance in three areas – on the speed of overall reforms, on the conduct of the elections and on the issue of selective justice, where we still have grave concerns shared by many of Ukraine's citizens, as well as international friends and partners. If we keep our eyes on the prize, we should find the strength to solve these problems. That will be my message in the months ahead.