



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Ukrainian Update on Reform Efforts

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 5, 2015

We appreciate Ukraine's regular updates to the Permanent Council on its reform efforts. We applaud Ukraine for the progress they have made on reforms since President Poroshenko and Prime Minister Yatsenyuk took over in 2014. Many difficult reforms remain, especially in strengthening the judiciary's independence and fighting corruption.

We welcome Ukraine's draft constitutional amendment on judicial reform, which is vital to shoring up the judiciary's independence. We applaud the inclusive drafting process, which involved collaborative work with civil society and various political groups – as well as input from the Venice Commission, which rendered a positive opinion on the draft amendments on October 26. We also applaud Ukraine's engagement with the OSCE Project Coordination Unit to help train judges and integrate human rights into law school curriculum.

Now it is time for Ukraine to tackle corruption head on. There must be zero tolerance for oligarchs who evade paying taxes; zero tolerance for bribery and graft. Ukraine laid the groundwork for its fight against corruption when it established the new National Anti-Corruption Bureau. However, the Bureau cannot effectively investigate cases until a chief anti-corruption prosecutor is named. We urge the Ukrainian government to do so immediately. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Security Service of Ukraine have, in the meantime, proceeded with their own anti-corruption investigations. Dozens of senior officials, including judges and high-level staff of customs, tax, and social welfare agencies, were arrested and charged with corruption. Unfortunately, not a single official arrested has been convicted of corruption. The Prosecutor General's Office and the judiciary must follow through on their responsibilities to oversee investigations and try those suspected of corruption.

We commend the Rada's passage, at first reading, of an amendment on decentralization that helps Ukraine fulfill one of its key Minsk commitments, and will empower Ukraine's regions to take ownership over their own budgets and pursue what is most important to people at the local level.

We look forward to further updates on Ukraine's reform, which is a key element of the country's path toward a prosperous and democratic European future.

We commend Ukraine, and the delegation here in Vienna, for such reports on the reform progress, which is both an example of openness and a reminder of Ukraine's potential and commitment to progress.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.