

Three Revolutions Interview – Markus Poesentrop (MP), Parliamentary Assistant and Head of the Office of MEP Michael Gahler. Interviewer: Adam Reichardt (AR)

AR: Today is February 2nd 2017 and this is an interview with Markus Poesentrop from Michael Gahler's office for the Three Revolutions project. Also I would like to get your agreement that we can use this materials for the purposes of the project...

MP: Yes, it is agreed. Thank you very much. Well my affiliation with Ukraine started in 1999. I was then active in the youth movements of the German Christian Democratic Union, the Junge Union, and already also active in its European level organization – the youth of the European People's Party. I first visited Ukraine as an invited speaker of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and my first travels led me to Sevastopol and Zaporizhia. And that was followed a few years later with other engagements, again as a conference speaker, and I was elected in 2001 as the Secretary General of the Youth of the European People's Party. In 2003 I was made First Vice President of that organization and I held these functions until 2005. Simultaneously, I have been involved in the mother structure – the European People's Party – more specifically in the political bureau. Which nowadays has a different name as the organ of the party, it is called the political assembly. The German Christian Democratic Union usually sends 15 delegates to the meeting of that organization, and 15 substitutes are elected to step in. On behalf of the youth wing of the CDU, I was elected as one of the substitutes and I have been a regular participant of all the meetings of the EPP party at that time.

On behalf of the youth organization of the EPP, I was also sitting in the working group of the EPP that dealt with Central and Eastern Europe and with membership applications of Central and Eastern European political parties wanting to adhere to the EPP. I can say that in those years, I have developed close relationships with the EPP leadership and also the leadership of the parliamentary group in the European Parliament, including the Secretary General of the Parliamentary group of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. As the youth organization we could go in Central and Eastern Europe to many places without attracting any broader public attention. We could do things that the mother party could not have done that easily

– to go unnoticed. Therefore, we were a little bit like scouts for the mother structures. And that has helped us and with all the expertise, knowledge and contacts accumulated during those years to work a little bit during the Ukraine revolutions – the Orange Revolution, I have worked very close, and also the Euromaidan – as you have called it.

AR: And what contacts did you make before the revolutions. Would you say that they were more political or civil society as well?

MP: Interestingly, I would say it is both. The main part is political because the contacts developed via the youth organizations from Ukraine, the political youth organizations that were members in the youth structures of the European Christian Democrats. So, we speak of the formerly so-called “Ukrainian Young Christian Democrats” – the youth organization at that time connected to the Party for Reforms and Order, a part of the “Nasha Ukraina” coalition – an outstanding representative was probably the finance minister [Viktor] Pynzenyk who really got a lot of international praise and reputation for his work. And later, this organization changed. Nowadays it has a different name and it exists almost as a political party, but not in the parliament.

From times before, there was the young Ruch – the youth organization of the Ruch movement. And I think many of its leading members were later working in the new party that President Yushchenko had created – the Our Ukraine party – and then they merged into what is nowadays [Petro] Poroshenko’s Movement, at least most of these people are there now. Several others have left politics out of disappointment because of the infighting in what is called the Orange Camp – personified by President [Viktor] Yushchenko on the one hand, and [Yulia] Tymoshenko on the other. And many of these young activists of the Orange times have continued to work in civil society structures, of various kinds. I do not always remember the names of the organizations and associations because many of them have changed, but I think that what is common is that they were all initiatives which partly lived on projects funded by international partners. They would not have been able to do their voluntary or hobby engagement on their not-so-well paid jobs they had, or even without a job, if this [international assistance] hadn’t existed. But what was common was that they had a critical view of the work of the authorities, especially the government. They

were becoming more and more frustrated and looking for progress, simply seeing that they were withheld in their personal development by the lack of opportunities which the Ukrainian state could offer to them or a framework for this. My understanding of the Euromaidan and especially the civil society structures underpinning the Maidan structure that was created was that many of these organizations were very influential to the extent that the political parties at that time were not able to govern the Maidan just by themselves. This is an essential difference to the Orange Revolution. It was very interesting to see how strong these pro-reform oriented movements had become. Until today, they are the actors for change – pushing and driving the reform process.

AR: What areas of Ukraine did you have the most contact with? Was it generally Kyiv? More western and central parts of the country?

MP: It is very important to note that when we speak of the Orange Revolution and when we speak of the Euromaidan revolution, my contacts were essentially centered on Kyiv and living in Kyiv. Even if the personalities involved have their home regions in places like Zakarpattia, Uzhhorod, the region of Lviv or also coming from the center, like Dnipropetrovsk – I have even dealt with politicians coming from the occupied areas in Donbas, through my family nowadays there are relatives living in Luhansk – my very close friends in Kyiv have parents who have returned to Luhansk... So, the information was coming from all these regions but of course the events were taking place mostly in Kyiv.

Personally, I had a chance over the years, through cooperation with the Adenauer Foundation, to visit Sevastopol, Zaporizhia, Odesa, Kharkiv, Kyiv often, and also once Donetsk – where I met with the youth organization of the Party of Regions of [former president Viktor] Yanukovich. Through family contacts and private contacts over the years I have been to the Carpathian region, or the Nadvirna region – I have visited Crimea many times and the surrounding areas of Kyiv. With more than 30 visits to Ukraine in my life, some a little longer during the summer months, I have a bit of experience, but during the revolution times – it was centered on the political center of Kyiv.

[10.00]

AR: Let's talk about the Orange Revolution period. At that time were you already in Brussels ...?

MP: No, at that time I was still based in Bonn where I was doing other European political work but not related to foreign relations. It was my hobby, my political engagement in the function as the unpaid Secretary General of the Youth of the EPP and its First Vice President – I had then already a connection with Michael Gahler, who is today my employer in the European Parliament – plus the political parties I mentioned before.

AR: Did you travel to Kyiv during the Orange Revolution period?

MP: I travelled to Kyiv for the repetition of the second round of the presidential election and I think, if I remember well, once when it was the build-up phase. When people were still telling each other – “I have seen an oligarch car, with an orange ribbon on it” – that was really something absolutely new. Or someone calling from their hometown saying, “Everywhere from the trees are hanging orange signs. We are actually not alone”. Or the third very catchy information: “A friend of mine was stopped by the road police today, and they haven't fined him. He was really afraid because he had some Orange material lying on the backseat, the policeman saw it, pointed at it and gave him a thumbs up – letting him go without taking any money.”

AR: It was an optimistic period of time?

MP: Absolutely. It was optimistic. People were becoming encouraged through this sign language that was being developed, a very clever concept. And it was really motivating for all of them, which I think was well expressed in one of the songs of the revolution culminating in the slogan “*Razom nas bahato*,” – together we cannot be overcome or together we are invincible.

AR: Knowing Ukraine from the late 1990s, was it a surprise to you that the Orange Revolution happened? Or you saw it as a natural step?

MP: It was surprising. My involvement had not been as intense up until the Orange Revolution. I had been there three or four, maybe five times. Of course I had felt the dissatisfaction. Corruption was always a topic. Bureaucracy was always a topic. The wish to belong to Europe – the Western orientation was a topic. And it was then surprising how it could so quickly result in a public movement. You had asked me for my own reaction at that time – looking back, doing an analysis of course I can see that the political strategy of the Nasha Ukraina bloc was very clever, building on the first success of the parliamentary election of 2002 – the first time a political opposition in a Central and Eastern European country got a tremendous result of around 25% of the proportional vote, which I think at that time even in the Baltic states was a percentage that was rarely ever reached – and this under the conditions of a post-Soviet country. The movement itself was very much surprised and unprepared for what followed and therefore, I think it was during the summer break after the election when the pro-president forces simply managed to convince in various forms the directly-elected MPs from the single mandate constituencies to join the pro-presidential majority of Kuchma. Basically, the victorious opposition still found itself in the opposition. And then they decided – now we will build up Yushchenko as the candidate for president – and everything followed quite an interesting logic after that. The trigger was – and today some people ask was it an attempt or was it an agreed coup – to poison Yushchenko which created a victim that a movement sometimes needs in order to make the public's emotions culminate and lead to a new dynamic. That was clearly the case. I think after that the dynamic became much stronger and the outrage at what the power would do became even stronger. From then on, the movement grew, week by week.

So yes, surprise but at the same time – it was clear that normal people and society were not happy with their situation in life.

AR: And after the victory of the Orange Revolution, how closely were you following Ukraine's developments?

MP: Very closely. From the perspective of the EPP, then of course it was important to build contacts. I have tried already after 2002 to convince the European People Party's leadership and the leadership of the parliamentary group to turn their attention to Ukraine and to understand that there are partners that should receive regular attention, visits maybe even support. Interest was very limited at that time. One member of the German national parliament after the Maidan put it to me in the words like, "yeah, I am the only one who can go there now and speak, because all of my colleagues from the foreign affairs committee in the parliament had asked for country responsibilities that follow the CNN logic" – the countries that are broadcast on CNN which at that time was Iraq and the other countries at the center of attention. All other countries did not count.

This is a phenomenon we also had here [in Brussels]. And only with a Maidan and with the tents and a surprising movement did the MEPs started travelling there. When they came back they were the lonely lucky ones in the house who had been there and had their own impression. We then tried to connect the political leaders of the Orange movement with the European People's Party through meetings, and getting acquainted. President Yushchenko then had an interest to first meet with the European Social Democrats – at that time that was the dominant political family in the European Council, last but not least because of the German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. Of course there were also people from the economic circles. I remember representatives from a German bank [illegible] who had already some acquaintances with the Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister for European Integration – Oleh Rybachuk – who had been a close adviser and follower of Yushchenko for some years. In one previous function Rybachuk had been involved with a Black Sea Bank, or Economic Cooperation Bank, or something like that. So he knew several bankers in the West, and these bankers were telling him that you have to go now to meet Schroeder – so go to the Social Democrats. While of course, the objectives of the movement as such, first of all, would have appealed to all democratic political parties. But if you look at who supported the movement – you would find people who stood at the bottom of social market economy; that would rather work for SME structures and not necessarily workers milieu and trade union movements. But of course, we are speaking about the political landscape in Ukraine and the

state of maturity of politics in Ukraine in terms of democratic development, which by far does not match the conditions in Western Europe.

But there was a need to connect them. I would say – just to highlight one problem of this process – it was easy for the people in Brussels to open their doors and let guests from the rest of the world and the rest of Europe into the back rows of their meetings. Then they can say they have partners and they cooperate with them. What these partners would much rather need is the regular visits, people who really know the country – people who not only go to the capital but also to the regions and who are able to give concrete advice and help. They need much closer counseling there. I have always said that it doesn't interest anybody in Brussels who is our partner in the back rows of the hall. But in those countries, on the fringes of Europe, the European partnership of a leading politician or leading political movement can decide elections. And that was a difficult process, and there was a certain competition then going on and I was happy to participate in this process in cooperation with the EPP party leadership and some parliamentarians here. So, I can say that I was closely working with them.

AR: Did the EPP have ties with the Party of Regions? Or am I mistaken?

MP: No, never. It was actually the European Social Democrats. Because, Martin Schultz – who at that time was the leader of the Social Democrats in the European Parliament – concluded a partnership agreement of his parliamentary group here with the Party of Regions under the leadership of then Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov. It is interesting that the Party of Regions at that time had two other partnerships of that kind – one with the Communist Party of China, and one with Putin's party [United Russia]. For Mr Schultz as a group leader, he followed the close advice of one particular advisor who later ran into some difficulties with the European Parliament's administration because after quitting his job, reaching retirement age with the parliamentary group of the European Social Democrats, he was immediately hired as a close advisor of Azarov and the Party of Regions. His wife had been involved in presumably a neutral think tank in which some of the people from the Party of Regions were the shareholders. When

this was uncovered by *Ukrainska Pravda* in a very long piece, it helped retroactively explain some of the developments.

AR: When do you start working here in the European Parliament?

MP: I started working here at the beginning of 2005. That coincided with the main point of the Orange Revolution. We had just seen Yushchenko become elected as head of state and I was there in Kyiv when it happened, in his campaign headquarters and followed him to the Maidan. It was great memories.

AR: Were you involved at all in the negotiations of the Association Agreement?

MP: I was involved only as the advisor to my member of the European Parliament who is a member of the foreign affairs committee. In the years 2007-2009 he was one of the vice chairs of the foreign affairs committee. He himself by training is a German diplomat and, similar to me, has always been involved in the party political cooperation between German Christian Democrats, European Christian Democrats and European partners. So we had a close interest in all of this. I still remember how this process was started with the EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner – Commissioner for the external cooperation of the EU and by Yulia Tymoshenko's government, with Vice Prime Minister Hrihorii Nemyrya, who is actually a close friend over the years.

To be precise, we were not involved in the negotiations because this was executive business. We had accompanied this in the parliament with resolutions and sometimes receiving guests from Ukraine in the foreign affairs committee and debating points with them. But naturally the involvement of parliamentarians in the negotiation phase of the association agreement was at that time relatively limited. It has changed now with the public debate around the TTIP trade agreement, simply because public interest has grown. Before no one had ever taken notice before.

AR: What was your reaction when Yanukovich came back to power in 2010? And then the further negotiations with the EU on the Association Agreement and the DCFTA. Did you

have hope and faith that this could still lead to a positive direction? Or were you skeptical even before the Euromaidan and the announcement that he wouldn't sign?

MP: I was hopeful that this would lead to a positive result. I simply thought that it is for the country an enormous asset. The European vector – as we had to call this during Kuchma times and Yanukovych times – simply stood as a symbol for modernization of the country. I think nowadays in liberal societies – well, under current circumstances we have to say at least as long as this was the trend of development – democracy, rule of law, market economy and freedom for individual is a logical trend of development that the population of the country normally seeks. At that time we had not yet the phenomenon of an illiberal democracy as some people try to call it now. Therefore, I thought that this would be a necessary development and I could feel from the ordinary people in Ukraine how much they wanted this. Also, the Yanukovych government had strongly worked in this direction. I had heard here negotiators from the European Commission praising their Ukrainian counterparts as being prepared up to the detail with very well-thought-out policy proposals and clear determination to realize this association agreement. One of the persons who had been involved in the previous partnership agreement with Ukraine and the EU had said: “There’s no comparison to that time. We now have competent partners with excellent cooperation”.

Here in the Parliament, we followed this – well, some of us. The house was divided at that time, there were some who wanted to see... Well, I should go back one step before, in order to explain this. There was a fatigue in Europe and maybe internationally, after the infighting of the Orange forces. Like there was in the Ukrainian population. Three times – be it through presidential or parliamentary elections – the parties of the Orange Revolution got a chance and a mandate to do better, but they always failed, unfortunately. Especially here in Western Europe, and I think the US, there was a prevailing feeling that if Yanukovych makes it to the presidency he will also inherit, with a strong position of his party in the Ukrainian parliament, the full power in his hands and he could make decisive policies for the. A lot of people reacted with relief and said, now we can finally take things forward with them. Of course they were deceived by Yanukovych’s change in image and behavior which was not honest. I was one of the people, and some of the

parliamentarians of our political family, and politicians from our member states, who did not believe in this change. Yanukovych started learning and speaking Ukrainian. He changed his intonation of his speeches. He almost looked like somebody who had really softened and learned the Western viewpoint. Nowadays, we know who the American advisor was that helped him in all of this [reference to Paul Manafort]. Most recently, he played a role in the Trump campaign and is said to have had very close ties to Moscow – that is all not very surprising.

So there was a relief in European institutions and a great willingness to cooperate with Yanukovych. And then people were totally surprised when the fallout on the regime change came, with the hardening of the security services with the change, in my opinion illegal change, of the constitution and of course with the crackdown on opposition leaders and even partners working in Kyiv. We had a case at one point, the head of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Kyiv who had travelled to a lecture in the Adenauer office in Senegal, travelling back via Paris to Kyiv was denied access to the country. He was told he would be extradited the same day and was kept, locked in a room – not a cell – but rather a waiting room at the airport, together with other people to be deported to Central Asia. My boss and I on that Saturday afternoon, we were quite instrumental in taking his messages further, we informed Chancellor Merkel who was at a G8 or G20 meeting in the US. We informed the cabinet of the European Parliament President [Jerzy] Buzek and it was quite an honor for us to know that in the late evening, when the Deputy Germany Ambassador, after a long conversation with the head of the Secret Services in Ukraine, had let him free. The Secret Service boss was said to have asked that the Europeans back off – they really got on his nerves. We took that as a compliment. So they were totally surprised with these things. And there were a few building blocks that took place, until they realized what Yanukovych really was like.

Still at that time, it was our hope to take forward the negotiations and to reach a conclusion of the Association Agreement with the DCFTA in order to tie Ukraine to a Western path of development and to the EU. This was in the interest of the Ukrainian people. And of course, comes the factor of Yulia Tymoshenko, but you will probably come back to that.

32:33

AR: Exactly, let's talk about the time leading right up to the moment when Yanukovych announced that they would not sign the Association Agreement. Was there surprise here? How was the reaction in Brussels?

MP: I would say that there were small circles that had seen the risks in the days and weeks before. I did not belong to these circles. I had heard the rumors, but I did not know the details of the developing situation. But myself, and many of us – and I think the general public – were taken by surprise that he did not sign, that he would falter under the pressure from Putin. We had heard Yanukovych's demand before hand – “The Russians are offering me this amount of money and the EU is not offering me the same” – but we didn't take it seriously. I know from the circles closer to the negotiations, that they had indeed in the Commission and the capitals a certain calculation on how much they could offer him. And there were politicians here that demanded that we improve our offer, that we try to rake up more money we could offer him in order to – from today's perspective – prevent him from having to accept the Russian offer. But that was probably a minority. And of course, the EU itself did not want to be blackmailed. Chancellor Merkel did not want to be blackmailed. And it was appalling to see in the end that this was like a bazaar. So, yes I was surprised.

AR: And Yulia Tymoshenko, or her release, was probably considered to be removed from the negotiations – would you say that it was so?

MP: Yes, there was a demand – even from our political family, which was the political family of Yulia Tymoshenko – in order to save the negotiations, to reach a positive result. Yulia Tymoshenko herself had written a letter from her prison, from the hospital where she was kept, asking European leaders to conclude the agreement at any cost and not consider her case as a stumbling block. Of course, the EU had always said that this was an important condition and I think that in the later developments of the Euromaidan, many Ukrainians had said it was an important symbol for them. Even if they do not agree with her on everything, even if they did not

prefer her as a leader, she stands for something. Later on, during the Euromaidan, we saw her photo on this large *Yolka* on the Maidan square. It was never removed during all those weeks, which shows that the public at least had accepted, maybe even understood her as being such an icon of change, which was really necessary. And without the West's or EU's clear position on this, Yanukovych would have taken this as a *carte blanche* for even more repressions.

AR: And after the Euromaidan broke out and the protests started, what was your role? I understand you helped coordinate visits from Brussels.

MP: Yes, I prepared visits for my MEP to go there, I have always prepared him with fresh information on a daily basis with what was happening in Ukraine so that he could go into the political debates here in the house and the foreign affairs committee and within the European People's Party. Also informing the public at home which took an enormous interest in what was going on. And motivating them to go more often and support the change. Another point of activity of mine which had developed over the years, is that I offered Ukrainian politicians who came to visit here, be it in the framework of a meeting of the European People's Party, be it in the framework of being invited as a speaker to the foreign affairs committee or to formats of our political group – that I could help them arrange other meetings, either in the parliament or in other European institutions. Sometimes they were taking the desk in our office and using our telephones and computers and working from there. For example, the day when the shooting took place [on the Maidan], Hrihoriy Nemyrya was here and I helped him. He came from the Maidan the night before with his very thick winter jacket, which many people had bought at that time – already Moncler jackets, something that was not such a fashionable brand in Western Europe at that time, it has since become now. In Ukraine, they already had it, because they needed it – with the cold nights on the Maidan. He came with all this and he wanted to do another round of informing political leaders in the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers of the recent developments. We had perfected this to such an exercise that within just an hour and 45 minutes, we could call on five leaders from different political groups in the parliament and meet them and brief them. He was sitting opposite me, looking at the computer screen, totally stupefied by the events in Kyiv. He had never expected that they would go this far. Then we even reflected for a

moment, if we could organize a bulletproof vest for him or some for him to take home. But the advice from the Security Services in the parliament was that this might prove difficult, as it could be considered a good for the export of which you would need a license. Since it could be considered an arm or an armament.

Also, over the years, I had people like this, who I was running with back and forth in the House.

AR: Do you think it was useful for the Ukrainians to have the MEPs come to the Maidan?

MP: Yes, I definitely think so. Of course the Euromaidan had such an impressive life of its own, with the University of Maidan, and other things that it was self-supportive. But the symbol of international support and of being seen in Europe and supported by Europe was very important. My boss came back after having spoken in front of 50,000 people and that was an incredible experience for him. And they were really absorbing the messages of the people who were coming. They were also getting impatient. They wanted to see clearer and more reactions. But the situation was as it stood. The MEPs that came were the ones who were well-informed, and who knew Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitali Klitschko, Tymoshenko and her people, Poroshenko as well. And taking into account that he had joined as a Minister for Economy in the Yanukovych government, with an excuse we all found a bit unfortunate. And these leaders were here very often, seeking advice. And people like Elmar Brok, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski and my boss, to a more limited extent – they have all been instrumental in connecting them to other people like Donald Tusk, Angela Merkel, Wilfried Martens, still head of the European People's Party, and others.

AR: Was there any resistance in Brussels for these kinds of contacts?

MP: At the time of the Euromaidan?

AR: Yes.

MP: No. These were the preferred contacts. Of course, it was becoming more and more difficult for the grouping of the European Social Democrats to justify their partnership with the Party of Regions, with Yanukovych and the government. Before the Euromaidan broke out, we had seen attempts of the Yanukovych – and I say now on purpose – regime to justify the persecution of Tymoshenko to the extent that we had at least two visits by the Ukrainian Deputy Prosecutor General – I will remember his name in a moment. He was coming to the European Parliament and was trying to explain to MEPs why Tymoshenko was persecuted. This always took place in the form of meetings organized by the group of the European Social Democrats. Because of the partnership of which they had. I remember one meeting we had behind closed doors where I participated on behalf of the EPP group and Elmar Brok who would have been the person invited. And the guy came with a set of more than 20 PowerPoint pages which he wanted to give as a presentation. He talked about page 1 or page 2 for 45 minutes – and then the leader of the meeting, the Vice Chairman of the European Social Democrats, cut him off since the meeting time was over. After that, the international representative of Tymoshenko was allowed into the room, assisted by Tymoshenko's lawyer, who were briefly commenting on what they supposed the Deputy Prosecutor General had said and it was quite a tough exchange.

On another occasion it was a more open meeting because the Danish Helsinki Group for Human Rights had produced legal studies examining the cases not only of Tymoshenko but also Lutsenko and one of the judges of the Ukrainian Supreme Court who had been under pressure for some time. They analyzed to what extent these were violations of the Ukrainian Criminal Code and of course the human rights standards by which Ukraine is obliged under the Charter of the Council of Europe. And then we had one meeting which this Deputy Prosecutor General had to face the analysts from the Danish Helsinki Group in a public meeting. The MEPs gave him a really clear statement afterwards on what they thought of their positions and the underpinning arguments. So yes, in the run up to the Euromaidan there was quite a resistance because the Social Democrats tried to portray the Azarov government and the Yanukovych presidency as not being so bad after all. It was then the president of this house, Mr Schultz, because of his good relations with Azarov proposed a mission by former Polish President [Aleksander] Kwaśniewski and former European Parliament President Pat Cox from the liberal democratic family, an Irish man, to come and visit

the court trials and examine and help to explain this and find out what was going on, as mediators. That helped to a certain extent. Also, sometimes impacting the conditions of the arrest of Tymoshenko. Of course there was the big support from Angela Merkel who had sent her personal doctor from Berlin as a medical commission examining her there. When the Euromaidan broke out was when we could see the Social Democrats were also getting doubts and in the end, coming back to your original question – no. During the Euromaidan times, there wasn't much resistance. Later, after the shooting, it was absolutely clear that there was now big support for the real revolution that then took place – it was a Friday or Saturday when all the quick decisions were made in the Verkhovna Rada, the organs of the state were renewed at light speed.

AR: How does it look from the MEP standpoint today or from the European Parliament standpoint today? With all the changes that took place, such as the annexation of Crimea, war in Donbas, the slow reform efforts in Ukraine. Is there still strong attention...?

MP: There is attention, yes. Of course, it is not as large anymore as it was during the revolution times. Politics follows the economy of the media. But we have here the circles that are very knowledgeable of Ukraine and they are following it with great attention. I would say, speaking on behalf of the entire European Parliament, that we are conscious – the people of Marine Le Pen do not see it this way, and probably several people in the European United Left, Communists, Socialists of any kind, would not agree with what I am going to say now. I think that in all other political groups, there is a consensus on the following points. [Russian President Vladimir] Putin wants to deny the brother country, Ukraine, development according to Western Values: rule of law, democracy, market economy, liberty and freedom for the people to realize their opportunities and to develop a kind of little welfare for themselves. They are afraid of this because it would make the Russians ask why they are denied such developments, and that would erode the power base. Therefore, Ukraine is now operating under enormously difficult circumstances. But outside of the occupied areas of Donbas, what is happening now with the country is probably the best that could happen to it. The very close cooperation with the EU, really shadowing, like bodyguards, every move of this government. Or civil servants sitting in Kyiv, in the government, and having the counterparts on our sides paying such regular visits. The country desk for Ukraine in the

European Commission before hand was two people. And now there is a special staff of 50 people, for which they have reactivated civil servants from retirement, with language knowledge, knowledge of the country and they have brought other people together. Some tell us that they are in Kyiv every other week, monitoring the reforms. So there is a lot happening which is not reaching public attention which is absolutely useful, helping the country modernize and bringing it closer to the EU.

Still, there is an oligarchy in Ukraine. The wealthy people who are involved in politics and who have controlled, and still control, a big part of politics which cannot be wiped out so quickly within a few years because they are too powerful. They have resources and their allegiances among people active in politics. And they will always try to buy in and have some people participate in legislating in order to create the loophole or back door which helps the businessman to safeguard a certain amount of his business interest. And the reform camp, from civil society – those pro-European reformers or reform-optimists – they are fighting against this. Poroshenko is part of the problem and part of the solution. Therefore, it is difficult. A lot of his decisions have been to slow things down. Maybe later it will be easier to judge whether these are necessary prices, that he paid or had to paid in the interest of allowing the country on this reform path or whether it was deliberately serving his own economic interests. We cannot forget that he somehow wanted to separate himself from his economic interest and we know very well how many places in Russia and Crimea he has economic interests. And these are factors to take into account. We want to see more ambition in the reforms and earlier results. Most importantly, on the crackdown of corruption. I know from the Minister of Environment from Ukraine that he changed some practice and he got threats to his life on his cellphone from a hidden cellphone number. He had this examined, and the advice given to him was – it is from a certain person, connected to an oligarch and political leader who is well protected. Nothing could be done.

So, we have to find a way to support these people. We have to keep these topics in the public attention and most ideally we keep up the sanctions on Russia. Without sanctions, Putin would be encouraged to go further. The recent outbreak of greater violence in Ukraine is an attempt to test [US President Donald] Trump and the EU's resolve after the change of government in the US.

And unfortunately the reaction is only coming from Europe so far. That is insufficient and that will encourage Putin to only go further.

I hope that was helpful.

AR: Yes, thank you very much.

[END]