



Rede von Außenminister Guido Westerwelle anlässlich der Konferenz 'The Way Ahead for the Eastern Partnership' in Kiew/Ukraine am 11. Oktober 2013

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Prime Minister Asarow, Commissioner Füle, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,
I am honored to be here in Kiev today and to address this conference. Seven weeks before the Vilnius Summit we stand at a critical juncture. Today's meeting will address one of the most important strategic questions for our countries and peoples: How will we shape relations between the European Union and its Eastern neighbors? Millions of people will be affected directly by the decisions that lie ahead of us. Therefore, it is symbolic that later today we will start the trilateral Ukrainian-Polish-German project "Our Kids here in Kiev." Ukraine, Poland and Germany share a common European culture. We also share a common, yet at times very painful history. The 20th century was one of horrible crimes, of destructive wars, of painful shifts in populations and borders. The people of Ukraine have suffered immensely. It was a century that saw the highly armed confrontation of East and West. Since then, we have entered a new era. We now have the opportunity to make significant progress towards a Europe truly whole and free. Poland and Germany are natural partners in this endeavor. The Eastern Partnership between the European Union and her neighbors was founded with strong Polish leadership. Obviously, Ukraine is at the heart of this partnership. Germany has supported the transformation process in Ukraine from the very beginning. Germany is one of Ukraine's major trading partners. Both countries are culturally well connected and have a vibrant exchange of civil societies. For many Germans, last year's EURO 2012 football championship provided the first opportunity to travel to Ukraine. They returned with many impressions, with better knowledge and with a new curiosity. Yesterday, I met with president Yanukovich. We discussed our bilateral ties and the promising relationship between Ukraine and the European Union. At the Vilnius Summit, Ukraine has the unique opportunity to open the door to the most comprehensive association agreement the European Union has ever embarked upon. It is a choice for the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian government to commit itself to our shared values. Only a few days ago, the Rada here in Kiev voted in favor of the EU association with an overwhelming majority. Public support for the agreement is strong, also among the opposition and in civil society. We share a strategic interest in signing the negotiated agreement now. I have therefore encouraged the Ukrainian leaders to clear the remaining stumbling blocks on the road to a successful Vilnius summit. We acknowledge the significant progress that Ukraine has achieved. We also acknowledge the many difficult decisions which have already been taken. But some clear expectations remain. They include free and fair elections and sound electoral laws, reforms, particularly in the judicial sphere, and an end to selective justice. Some individual cases have gained significant attention across Europe and we need further progress. The Vilnius Summit can mark the true beginning of a renewed European partnership. The hopes of the people in Ukraine are high. They hope for new job opportunities in modernized and competitive industries, better opportunities for students, better access to a wider variety of quality goods. Concluding this agreement will be a historic investment into the country's future. Success will not come overnight and not without further effort. The EU and her member states offer all the support possible to ensure that this strategic choice will be sustainable for the future. I am deeply convinced that EU association and free trade will help transform this country and our relationship for the better. This is not a one-way street. Europe will be enriched by Ukraine's contributions. It is my firm conviction that our societies will grow closer if students, families and businessmen can travel and meet without undue restrictions. It is a core objective of the Partnership to improve the mobility of citizens. Germany strongly supports the long-term goal of visa-free travel. The Eastern Partnership summit will also witness the initialing of association and free trade agreements with Georgia and Moldova. Relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan will need some more time to enable similar progress. Germany remains strongly committed to strengthen also their ties with the European Union. Belarus is the most complicated member of the partnership. My friend Radoslaw Sikorski and I went to Minsk in late 2010. We Europeans made a sincere offer of. The Belarusian leadership chose a different course. However, the door remains open, provided Belarus ends the ongoing repressions and frees the political prisoners. The future holds opportunities beyond free trade. Our long-term ambition should be a common economic area shared by the EU and her Eastern partners. Such an area could contribute to a common area of security and economic prosperity from Lisbon to Vladivostok. An area that includes the EU, her Eastern partners and Russia. However, this goal can only be achieved if all parties adhere to common principles and values. The right of every country to choose freely whether to be a member of an international organization, of a bilateral or multilateral treaty, is one of the most fundamental principles of Europe's post-Cold War order. There should not be the slightest doubt that this principle also applies to Ukraine and the other Eastern partnership countries. I want to be very clear with regard to some measures taken by Russia recently: No one has the right to impose restrictions on their neighbors' right to self-determination. I am confident that the attractiveness of EU association for Ukraine is not diminished by such pressure but rather increased. Where EU partners experience politically motivated pressure, the EU will demonstrate solidarity and support. We have to stand up against new dividing lines in Europe. Enduring Peace, security and prosperity in wider Europe can only be achieved together with Russia, not against it. The Eastern Partnership is not directed against Russia. The free-trade agreements with the EU are designed to be attractive, but not exclusive. We see this Partnership as an open invitation to invest in a promising common neighborhood and to support stable, democratic societies based on the rule of law and operating in a reliable business climate. This invitation is open to Russia as well. It is in this spirit of cooperation and of transparency that we will continue to engage with all our Eastern neighbors, Russia included. Next month in Vilnius we can open a new chapter in the history of Ukraine and of Europe together. Let us continue to work hard to make it happen.

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