

Brussels, 2 March 2006

Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner to visit Ukraine 2-3 March

European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, will visit Ukraine on 2-3 March to meet President Yushchenko, Prime Minister Yekhanurov and Energy Minister Plachkov. She will also take part in the EU Troika ministerial meeting with Ukraine on 3rd March. Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner will welcome the progress in political and economic reforms over the past year, and the strengthening of EU-Ukraine relations since the adoption of the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan in February 2005. She will stress the importance of free and fair parliamentary elections, which will be a key element in opening new prospects for EU-Ukraine relations including for an enhanced agreement and urge further reform efforts. The Commissioner's visit signals the European Commission's continued support for Ukraine's transition, and its hope that Ukraine will firmly continue on the path of reforms after the elections.

On the eve of her visit, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner made the following remarks:

"Ukraine has made remarkable progress in democratic and economic reform since the Orange Revolution. During the last year, the country has demonstrated a clear commitment to move closer to the EU. It is very important that the positive momentum in our relationship continues".

"I welcome President Yushchenko's efforts to ensure democratic standards in the forthcoming parliamentary elections – because the conduct of these polls will be key to determining whether we can take the next steps to deepening our relationship".

"We hope that the new government will decide to consolidate our joint achievements and firmly continue the path of reform."

At the Troika meeting on 3 March, Foreign Ministers will exchange information on internal developments in Ukraine and in the EU, take stock of achievements obtained so far in EU-Ukraine relations, and discuss plans for further developing co-operation during 2006. They will also exchange views on international issues, including energy matters, as well as relations with Russia, Moldova and Belarus.

Particular achievements in the EU-Ukraine relationship since approval of the joint Action Plan a year ago, include the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Energy Co-operation, the opening of negotiations on visa facilitation in parallel to negotiations on a readmission agreement, as well as granting Market Economy Status to Ukraine and the establishment of an EU Border Assistance Mission on the border between Ukraine and Moldova, including on the Transnistrian segment.

The EU is committed to begin early consultations on an enhanced agreement between the EU and Ukraine, once the political priorities of the Action Plan have been addressed. The democratic conduct of the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Ukraine on 26 March is a key element in this regard. The EU is also committed to negotiating the establishment of a free trade area as part of an enhanced agreement, once Ukraine has joined the WTO.

For more information:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/ukraine/intro/index.htm