

As prepared for delivery

Introductory speech for special debate on the situation Ukraine – 14/2/14

PA President Ranko Krivokapic

Mr. Secretary General, Parliamentarians, Distinguished Guests:

In early December of last year, I traveled to Kyiv for the OSCE Ministerial Council and a meeting of our Parliamentary Assembly's Bureau. Many of you who are in this room today were there as well. We thanked our hosts for their hard work during their Chairmanship of the OSCE and ministers adopted several important decisions and declarations that were inspired by the action of our Assembly. Yet during those days in Kyiv, it was the crisis in the country that dominated much of our thoughts, casting its shadow over the meetings.

More than two months later, four civilians have been killed in clashes, some are missing, and scores of protesters and police, alike, have been injured. President Yanukovich and opposition leaders have met with leaders from both East and West of Kyiv, organizations including the OSCE have offered help to resolve the crisis, troubling legal changes have been adopted and then cancelled, and tens of thousands of Ukraine's citizens continue massing on Maidan. In recent days, there have also been disturbing reports of protesters tortured, abductions, and hired and worrisome allegations that foreign state and non-state violent actors are at work. I find these reports shocking and deplorable.

The world has followed these dramatic and fast-moving events, and the Parliamentary Assembly has done so closely as well. In December I also met with the speaker of the Verkhovna Rada,

Volodymyr Rybak, among other Ukrainian officials, and I urged the country to stay the course of democracy. We have also tried to hear the voice of the protesters – the vast majority of them peaceful – who feel that they are in a nearly existential fight for their country. The Assembly has spoken out consistently and constructively since then, urging Ukraine to live up to its OSCE commitments to safeguard freedom of assembly and speech and protect journalists, including when Ukraine chaired the OSCE last year. We've called for the deaths and violence to be fully investigated. We've steadfastly encouraged dialogue. And we've urged all sides in the standoff to work through democratic channels. We've also offered more direct help through mediation – an offer than remains on the table.

The impasse in Ukraine seems to be far from over. The potential remains for renewed escalation and violence. Should positions become increasingly entrenched, the sense of desperation may increase as well. We must work to preserve the territorial integrity of Ukraine. We must support Ukraine in meeting its OSCE commitments, in particular in the human dimension – which is at great risk in recent years.

It is high time for us, the Parliamentarians of the OSCE, to discuss the many facets of this situation together, and work toward promoting a peaceful and democratic resolution. Elected representatives from Vancouver to Vladivostok sit in this room, and we therefore have a unique opportunity to consider tough questions and search for answers on this, a crisis in one country with significant international ramifications.

Let us be open and honest: While the PA has been consistent and principled in its response to the situation, there are also stark differences of opinion among member states that should be aired and considered. Some of our parliamentarians have been among the officials who have joined and rallied the protesters on Maidan. Other countries represented in this room have decried those actions as foreign interference, while they are themselves accused of exerting pressure on Ukraine. Some of us may back recent calls for sanctions against those who have committed or authorized violence against protesters. Others may prefer to pursue a different course. Now, let us consider how our Assembly **as a whole** can work best in the days and weeks ahead to support an end to the crisis that respects the will of all Ukrainians.

Let us consider what message we may want to send on this situation in our Annual Declaration, and what actions we should encourage our foreign ministers to take. This, as you know, is one of our most important functions as an Assembly. Let us execute it wisely.

Today, let us also hear how the situation in Ukraine is being viewed in our home countries and what reverberations are being felt.

I take this opportunity to recognize representatives of Ukrainian civil society who are in the room today to observe this debate. A dialogue involving all political forces, including civil society, is much needed in Ukraine at this time.

And of course, let us use this opportunity to hear directly from our Ukrainian colleagues – parliamentarians who represent a broad cross-section of the country’s political landscape, and whose perspectives will be vital to this debate.

I look forward to a frank and constructive discussion.