

Mark Rutte, Minister-President, the Netherlands

Bert Koenders, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands

Ankie Broekers-Knol, President of the Senate, the Netherlands

Khadija Arib, Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Netherlands

Donald Tusk, President, European Council

Federica Mogherini, Vice-President of the European Commission, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Jean-Claude Juncker, President, European Commission

Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

Martin Schulz, President, European Parliament

Ministers of Foreign Affairs, EU Member States

12 April 2016

**Steering Committee Statement
on the Result of the Non-binding Referendum in the Netherlands
on the Ratification of the Association Agreement with Ukraine**

The continuation of the reform process in Ukraine is a key element in strengthening Europe's common security based on democracy, the rule of law and a free market economy in both the member states as well as in Europe's Eastern neighbours. The Association Agreements (AA) which have been signed and ratified with Ukraine, as well as with Georgia and Moldova by all the 28 EU countries provide an essential framework for these reforms which work for the mutual benefit of the Ukrainian people and the Member States of the European Union. All stand to gain from the establishment of a free trade area and a sphere of democracy and rule of law with Ukraine and other countries that signed the Association Agreements.

The result of the referendum saw a mere one fifth of the Dutch electorate voting to reject ratification of the AA with Ukraine and an overwhelming majority failed to vote at all. This shows that the issue is far from agreed in Dutch society. Accordingly, while the Dutch government and the States General must respect the result of the referendum, the Steering Committee calls on them to conduct a determined search for ways to salvage the main elements of the AA.

This includes the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) part which provisionally came into force with Ukraine on January 1 2016 and can only be suspended with the agreement of all of the other EU member states. Support for the Ukrainian people on their path of pro-western reforms, which underpin their independence and future prosperity must continue.

The importance of the continuation of these reforms cannot be overstated. Their success will provide a key example to those states in Eastern Europe like Russia, which continue to cling to authoritarian models of government and are actively attempting to block reforms in the region. At a time of growing international tension the decision to reject ratification taken in the referendum by a minority of voters was ill advised in the least.

Evidently, the pro-ratification arguments were not sufficiently deployed in the period before the referendum. This is a task, to which the Dutch authorities and politicians must return. We also appeal to Dutch civil society to help mobilise Dutch opinion in favour of pro-European reforms.

The unfortunate result of the 6 April referendum also shows that the case for reform in Eastern Europe needs to be made more effectively to public opinion in other member states. This is a weakness which must be addressed. This is also a task for the Civil Society Forum which must reach out more to civil society organisations in the member states, which are currently underrepresented in the CSF.

The referendum result show that much work must still be done if the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood Policy is to be protected from challenges by Eurosceptic minorities as has happened in the Netherlands.

Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum