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3rd Training in Kyiv at “Communicating Europe – Making the EU Understandable” Summary on „The institutional labyrinth in the EU: who does what in the EU?“

Lecture given by Dr Vladimír Bilčík, Head of EU Program, Slovak Foreign Policy Association and Politics Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, Kyiv, 15 September 2017

The lecture „EU labyrinth: who does what, how and why?“ was divided into three parts: historical overview of European integration, explanatory outline of EC/EU treaties and a detailed exposé of the roles of EU institutions in decision-making. The lecture was accompanied by a power point presentation that I later passed on to organizers in Kyiv for further distribution to individual participants. The lecture was interactive with frequent questions from participants, resembling a seminar discussion rather than a formal instruction by the lecturer.

We began with a warm-up round of individual introductions by participants who outlined their names and media affiliations as well as expectations from the whole session. Since several participants underlined their wish to understand how the EU operates and what its decision-making may mean for relations with Ukraine, I offered several illustrative examples throughout the lecture session, such as the crucial role of member states in ratifying association agreements, important political role of the EP in neighborhood policy, key function of the Commission in communication and implementation of EU commitments as well as visible role for EU Council Presidency in reaching consensus among member states on sensitive issues, such as visa policy.

I provided the attendees with a basic - albeit upon individual requests also more thorough and specific - explanation of what each EU institution does and how their respective roles fit into a larger picture of political and legislative decision-making. Our discussion focused especially on innovations stemming from the Lisbon Treaty. The participants were keen to learn the difference between the European Council and its permanent President Donald Tusk and the EU Council and its rotating Council Presidency. We spent some time discussing the achievements of the Slovak EU Council Presidency from the latter half of 2016 including the areas of energy security and visa liberalization which had direct bearings on Ukraine. However, we also discussed larger issues of European integration including the current agenda for EU reform in the areas of Eurozone, defense and security policy and single market, including the ongoing challenge of internal EU consolidation and pending enlargements of Eurozone and Schengen as well as full-fledged application of four freedoms.

We also spent some time debating the roles of the European Court of Justice and European Central Bank whereby we explored the consequences of recent EU crisis for emergence of new institutional

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actors in Europe such as the fiscal compact and the European Stability Mechanism. I explained to attendees that policy reform goes hand in hand with institutional changes and one of the big challenges for the EU remains its ability to bring all relevant decision-making actors under a single and more transparent legal roof. I was very pleased with the intensity of interest expressed by the attendees throughout the session, which naturally carried into an informal discussion over lunch.

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