

Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine

**Ukraine - The Netherlands:  
European stability via European values**

Leiden Europa Lecture



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Ukraine – The Netherlands:  
European stability via European values

Leiden Europa Lecture delivered by

His Excellency Mr Petro Poroshenko,  
President of Ukraine

At Leiden University on  
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Universiteit  
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## Preface

The Europa Institute, affiliated to Leiden Law School at Leiden University, took the initiative for an annual *Europa Lezing* (Europa Lecture) in 2013, on the occasion of its 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The aim of this event is to contribute to the debate on European integration by inviting prominent European figures and global leaders to present their views on critical developments on our continent. Radosław Sikorski, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, was the first speaker of what is rapidly becoming a tradition at Leiden Law School. Alexander Italianer, then Director General for Competition at the European Commission, continued the series with a lecture focusing on the role of competition at the heart of the European cause.

Only last year, Herman Van Rompuy, then President of the European Council, illustrated the importance of the European Council by looking at two major crises that the European Union has had to face: the eurocrisis and the situation in Ukraine. Sadly, the year 2015 proved no less tumultuous for Europe's Eastern neighbourhood. It is therefore a great honour that at this time in history, the Europa Institute, together with the Embassy of Ukraine in the Netherlands and the Executive Board of the University of Leiden, was able to receive his excellency Mr Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine, to deliver the fourth Europa Lecture.

By reinforcing its ties with Ukraine through the conclusion of an Association Agreement, the European Union has acknowledged that the evolution of Ukraine is critical for the peace and stability of our continent as a whole. As recalled recently by Ukraine specialist at Chatham House, James Sherr: 'What happens there concerns us all in Europe, if not beyond'. And he was merely echoing what Timothy Snyder and Norman Davies had already perceived.

The tragic downing of MH17 was a cruel reminder of that, as was the Chernobyl nuclear disaster before the end of the cold war. What affects Ukraine is not contained to its borders. Our lives on this continent are intertwined. This should be an important consideration in the minds of the Dutch people, as they take to the ballot on April 6, 2016, to cast their vote in the advisory referendum on the act ratifying the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement on behalf of the Netherlands.

Ukraine's importance in European affairs is one of the reasons why Ukraine has been of special interest to the Europa Institute. EU-Ukraine relations have been the focus of research for many years. The Institute has also been active in providing expertise notably in the context of the negotiations on the Association Agreement. As the current President of Ukraine, Mr Poroshenko plays a key role in the present and future of our continent. Elected in the aftermath of the Maidan uprising, which grabbed the world's attention for many months, he soon became President of a country which has seen the integrity of its borders called into question. Mr Poroshenko was also elected on a strong pro-European programme.

In his address, Mr Poroshenko pointed out the high price that is being paid by his country for subscribing to European values. Bearing in mind that the European dream is one of peace and prosperity in our part of the world, we remain concerned, yet hopeful about Ukraine.

Europa Institute, December 2015

Stefaan Van den Bogaert and Christophe Hillion

*Your Magnificence, your Excellencies, dear students and faculty members, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,*

First of all, thank you for inviting me to these historic premises. The title 'European Address' appeals to me for many reasons. Most importantly – because today's Ukraine is all about Europe. We are an integral part of Europe. We fight for European values. We see our Ukrainian future with Europe. Probably it is the last place where people believe in Europe so much. Europe for Ukraine now is a national idea. The European idea and European values for the first time in history unite the country. It is a very important thing to keep the nation united by the European values and European ideas. This happened in a very short period of time. Just two years ago only 36% of Ukrainians supported European integration. We were divided. Now it is 74%. Within two years.

4 The Ukrainian revolution started two years ago under the EU flag. Exactly two years ago. On the 29th of November the then Ukrainian president Yanukovich should have signed the Association Agreement in Vilnius. Many of you took part in preparing the text of the Association Agreement. Millions of Ukrainian prayed, understanding that this was a very important moment in our history. Hundreds of Ukrainians went to Vilnius to support and to apply pressure, to demonstrate how it is important to us. It was a continuation of the Genesis of Europe, going back to the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Because in the year 2013 Moscow wanted to close Ukraine with another wall.

Only this time around a different person is in the Kremlin. And Ukrainians have to pay for their choice, unfortunately, with blood. The mood in Europe is different too, unfortunately. Many Europeans are tired and disillusioned. Unfortunately, many think enough is enough, let the Kremlin have what they want. These Europeans call themselves Euro-sceptics. Although in fact they are Euro-cowards.

The future of Europe and the future of the world, including the future of Ukraine, belongs to the brave. We in Ukraine know that, because our brave soldiers and their selflessness are one of the two 'defence lines' that stand today between our homes and the enemy, the aggressor. The other defence line is the sanctions by the West, and its decisiveness to support Ukraine in this very important time of change.

Courage is what Ukraine today is about. Yes, we fight alone against the biggest and militarily strongest superpower in our part of Europe. Yes, it is a fight of David against Goliath. Goliath is strong and infuriated. He wanted to destroy Ukraine, to cut it in half. He wanted to buy Ukraine and buy Ukrainians with oil dollars. But he failed. Ukraine stands its ground – and will be standing as long as it takes.

Crimea and two parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast are today under occupation. But a very important thing: the majority of Ukraine is free. The majority of Ukraine is democratic. And this is our biggest victory. Believe me: this is not a civil war. This is not a conflict inside the country. We do not have any conflict between Ukrainians. On the contrary, we are as united as ever before. This is not a civil war like Russian propaganda wants you to deliver to the Europeans. This is very simple. This is the annexing of Crimea by Russian military force, by Russian aggression, by Russian occupation forces. And this is an aggression against my country, in the east of my country in Donetsk and Lugansk Oblast.

Some say that this war is for land, not for values – and therefore not European business. This is not true, I disagree. The first thing Russian occupants – they were Russians with Russian passports – did in Donetsk was shutting down Baptist churches and beating priests. And then, at the end of the day, they killed them. In June they demonstratively, during a church service, detained and killed 4 young parishioners in Slovyansk. They occupied these territories. And these territories are under

a dark cloud. And this dark cloud is not only the lawlessness of the new ‘authorities’. It is also their intolerance, their racism and their anti-Semitism. One has to be aware of that.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We fight alone – but we are not lonely. All men and women of good will, all people who still know the difference between good and evil – they are completely on our side.

And to those who were fooled by the sophisticated propaganda machine of the enemy I have only one thing to say: it is not Ukrainians under Ukrainian flags who fight against Russia on the Russian land. On the contrary: it is Russians under Russian flags who fight against Ukraine on our Ukrainian land. Everything else is just a spin.

Dear friends,

Many think that once the dust settles in Ukraine – things in Europe will get back to normal. Yet considering the mood in Russia, this seems to be wishful thinking. The Russian aggression in Crimea and Donbas did not just deal a blow to trust and confidence in Europe. It shaped a new European split. It is the split between the nations where presidents get elected and get ‘chosen’. It is the split between those who have free media and those who have state-run propaganda. It is the split between those who respect human rights and those who trample on them. The fact that many in Europe choose to be unaware of this, does not mean it does not exist. It takes one evening with Russian TV on, a couple of talks with consumers of Russian propaganda to realise – the split is there. Moreover, it has been there for a while. We were just too blind to see.

Expansion of democracy has been seen by Russia merely as an encroachment on its turf. European unity, supremacy of values, integrity of borders – these are existential pillars for the

West. But merely a nuisance for Russia. We cannot pretend we don’t see it. It is not a misunderstanding. It is not about Russia and the West being unclear about their plans for Europe, but rather about Russia and the West having opposite plans for Europe. That is for sure. The West wants a circle of trust, very simple; Russia wants a circle of influence. It was not a humiliation from the West that made Russia fearful. It was rather the lack of fear from the West that was Russia’s biggest humiliation.

Dear friends,

Europe has entered a very difficult time, that is true. What do we do about it?

First, we reach peace in Ukraine. We presented evidence that Ukraine wants peace. Europe, and the whole global coalition supporting Ukraine, wants peace. And chances are – even some people in Moscow may want it. Peace in Ukraine is the alpha and omega for Ukraine – because it is our chance for survival. For the EU – because a bleeding neighbour means EU’s discomfort. For Russia – because the sanctions by the EU and the United States work. That helped us to keep Russia at the negotiation table.

Second, we should never forget the victims. I mean those who perished under Russia’s hybrid attacks. On July 17, 2014, 298 innocent people were killed from the Netherlands, Australia, Malaysia, Belgium: from many countries in the world. In 18 months, more than 8000 Ukrainians, 2000 Ukrainian soldiers and more than 6000 civilians including women and children, have been killed by Russian aggression. I can never forget the heart-breaking footage from the MH17 crash scene. And we should do all it takes to bring the masterminds and perpetrators of this horrible terrorist act to justice. Within a few hours after this disastrous terrorist attack I called the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, and said that this is the first

time in our history that a terrorist attack that happened in the Ukrainian skies over the occupied territories will not be investigated by Ukrainians because I as a president want transparency and the trust of the whole world. I proposed officially to the nation who suffered the most from this terrorist attack that it leads the international investigation team to demonstrate to the whole world what happened.

Do you remember that within a few hours after this disastrous terrorist attack Russia introduced a few versions? That it was an air-to-air missile. That it was a Ukrainian plane. By the way, after the terrorist attack above the Sinai with a Russian plane, Russia kept silent for several days. No versions. And now, after we demonstrated the first technical results from the investigation team we have firm evidence that it was a Russian missile, that it was a Russian-trained crew and that it happened from the territory controlled by Russia. When our team proposed to the Security Council of the United Nations to launch an international tribunal to imprison the terrorists, the only country who vetoed in isolation without any explanation to launch this tribunal was Russia. This is not just about the MH17 catastrophe, this is a very clear demonstration of different universes: the one in which we Ukrainians and Europeans live, and one in which Russia and the Russian president Putin lives. Different worlds, different values, different universes.

And when we talk about the referendum which will take place next year in the Netherlands, we consider that it is absolutely not about the future membership of Ukraine in the European Union. No, it is about freedom in Ukraine. It is about democracy in Ukraine, a neighbouring country. And, if you want, it is about reform in Ukraine. It is about fighting against corruption in Ukraine. It is about building up an independent judicial system. It is about defending human rights. And finally, it is a final farewell to the communists, not only Ukraine, but also in the rest of Eastern Europe. It is a final farewell to the Soviet Union. Does anyone in the Netherlands support the Soviet

Union? Is anyone against democracy? Is anyone against freedom? This should be an exact and straightforward answer to what it is about.

Third, we should not repeat the mistake made in 2008 when we thought the Russian bear had got what it wanted in Georgia and would go back to its lair. Soft European policy did not stop Russia in 2008. We have very clear evidence. The thing about the bear is: in the long run, it seeks domination, not compromise. Moscow believes that oil dollars can buy Europe's soul. That is what this is about. Can they? Will the West put up with the 'Anschluss' of Crimea? Do we repeat the mistake Europe made in 1938? The results of that mistake are well-known. Will the sanctions be lifted once the Kremlin decides it drew enough of Ukraine's blood for now? Will Europe choose to be blind while Russia takes apart its unity, values and beliefs? The next couple of months and years will give an answer to that question. In the long run, I do believe in Europe – just like Ukrainian young men and women on the front line now. But we have to be strong. We have to be united.

Many European leaders have asked me how to help Ukraine. My answer is very simple: Unity and solidarity. Unity of the EU and solidarity with Ukraine. Firstly we need political support, a united Europe. Then we need advisory support, to help us to implement the reforms which are mentioned in the Association Agreement. When the Dutch people vote on the referendum they should understand what the Association Agreement means. These more than 200 pages are all about reform. Nothing more. When I was asked during my presidential campaign about my reform programme, my answer was very simple: the Association Agreement. Because I, together with my team, wrote it. It is my responsibility to implement it. Because in the previous 24 years Ukraine did nothing to implement reform.

We have to be faithful to the things that have made Europe a success: freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, solidarity, compassion – and, last but not least, courage in the face of historic challenges. There is no stronger power in the world than the power of the idea. And it was the European idea that, in fact, made our continent so powerful – the idea of freedom and individual liberties being more valuable than the geopolitical interests of big players. It helped my nation to stop the aggressor. It helped my nation to free two thirds of the Lugansk and Donetsk region from the occupants.

This idea sprouted and bore fruit within today's EU borders. But ideas have a life of their own. They reach out to the souls and appeal to the minds beyond borders. Embodied in the Association Agreement, this idea took root in Ukraine – and brought about one of the biggest transformations of our time. The association with the EU is our chance to become a better nation. Let me repeat: a chance to become a better nation. No more, but no less. It is not about geopolitical power games. It is about reforms. It is about uprooting corruption. It is about defending minorities and respecting every human being.

As you probably understand, we care a great deal about the upcoming referendum in your country. Let me remind the Dutch people of only one thing. This is the only time in Europe's history when a nation pays with its own blood for a chance to be with Europe. Please remember that. Never in history has a nation paid so much for choosing a European path. So, how can anyone with a sane mind claim this should be the only time to deny this chance? I hope the Dutch people will choose wisely.

I remember the wave of European enlargement eleven years ago, in the year 2004. There was a lot of speculation, pros and cons. But what happened next? One analysis by experts revealed that from 2004 onwards the Dutch people have received a tangible profit of 650 euro per year each. A nice

enlargement bonus, is it not? I recall this history to show that in times of change there are always those who think of possibilities and those who hinder progress. A famous Chinese proverb reads: when the wind of change blows, some build walls, others build windmills. I strongly believe that the Netherlands will build windmills. You in the Netherlands, I am absolutely sure, understand this best: the Association Agreement with Ukraine will produce new opportunities to use, not to waste.

A new market with immense prospects will be opened up for Dutch producers for our common good, with your support of course. I just finished a meeting with Dutch businesses. The biggest Dutch companies, who want to be in Ukraine, who want to invest, who want to use the unique opportunities to be present in a market of 45 million people. And to use the competitive privileges. Now, Dutch producers are the second biggest investors in Ukraine. But yesterday your Prime Minister Mark Rutte and today your businessmen promised me that the Dutch will beat the Germans to come first. To take an example: the Russian share in the Ukrainian turnover fell from 35% two years ago to as low as 15% these days. This part of the market is free. You are welcome. We are waiting for you. We do not need visas for the Dutch people. We do not have any limits on the Dutch people. You are most welcome. It's high time.

Dear friends,

We understand that it is a difficult time – not only for us. Today's Europe is under triple pressure: terrorism, the problem of the refugees and Russia's aggressive policy. You should understand that by helping Ukraine you invest in your own security. This is very simple. Solving these problems will come at a price. But this price cannot be Europe's soul. This price cannot be Europe's values. We strongly believe in the Netherlands. We strongly believe in Europe. As Ukraine is not giving up on its European choice – Ukraine must become Europe's choice too. Clearly, staunchly, unequivocally.



United we stand. Divided we fall. This is about Ukraine and the Netherlands today.

Thank you!

PETRO POROSHENKO



Petro Poroshenko is the fifth President of Ukraine. He was elected President of Ukraine at the presidential elections on May 25, 2014 and took office on June 7, 2014.

Poroshenko was a member of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) from 1998-2002, 2002-2005, 2006-2007 and in 2012. In 2005 he served as Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine. From 2007 until 2012, Poroshenko headed the Council of Ukraine's National Bank. He was Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2009 to 2010, and Minister of Trade and Economic Development in 2012.

Poroshenko holds a degree in International Economic Relations from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and a post-graduate degree in Juridical Sciences with a thesis on the 'Legal Regulation of Managing State Corporate Rights in Ukraine'.

He was awarded the State Prize of Ukraine in science and technology, as well as the P. Orlyk international prize. He is holder of the Order of Merit of Ukraine, the Order of the Republic (Moldova), the Order of the White Eagle (Poland) and the Grand Cross Order of Civil Merit of the Kingdom of Spain. He received the Global Citizen Award of the Atlantic Council in 2014.



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