

We Support Ukrainians' Quest for European Path

By [Bernard Kouchner](#)

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The future of Ukraine depends most of all on the Ukrainians themselves. They defended their democracy and future 10 years ago during the Orange Revolution and are standing up for those values again today. As Europeans grow disenchanted with the idea of a common Europe, people in Ukraine are fighting for that idea and for their country's place in Europe. Defending Ukraine from the authoritarian temptations of its corrupt leaders is in the interests of the democratic world.

We cannot afford to turn our back on Ukraine. The new authoritarians in Kiev should know that there will be a high price to pay for their repressive policies and for abandoning the European aspirations of the people. It is not too late for us to change things for the better and prevent Ukraine from becoming a dictatorship.

Passivity in the face of the authoritarian turn in Ukraine and the country's reintegration into a newly expanding Russian imperial sphere of interests pose a threat to the European Union's

integrity. It is a threat not just to the moral integrity of the union but possibly to its internal institutional integrity as well. Alongside the diplomatic and economic measures taken by individual states and the entire EU, independent democratic initiatives should make efforts to defend victims of repression, support civil society and strengthen independent media.

The quality of any democracy depends to a great extent on what its citizens know about their country and the world. In Ukraine, the picture of the world is shaped by the authorities, who control most of the mass media, and Russian television channels faithful to President Vladimir Putin. For the sake of democracy, we must support and strengthen independent and pluralistic media in Ukraine.

We must help strengthen civil society, especially the new initiatives that have arisen around the Maidan. No matter what the authorities say, the people fighting to keep their country's future open are not foreign agents. The only ones deserving that name are those pursuing a policy of mass repression to quash Ukraine's hopes of becoming a European democracy.

Bernard Kouchner is a former French foreign minister. Ana Palacio is a former Spanish foreign minister and former vice president and general counsel of the World Bank Group. Gesine Schwan is president of the Humboldt-Viadrina School of Governance in Germany. This comment was co-signed by 80 other public figures.

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