
POROSHENKO VOWS TO END POLITICAL CRISIS, WINS PROMISE OF VISA-FREE TRAVEL

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Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko tried to reassure the EU on Thursday (17 March) that his country would soon overcome a political crisis that has rattled Western lenders, and he won support for Kyivs cherished goal of visa-free travel in Europe for its citizens.

Ukraines unpopular Prime Minister, Arseny Yatseniuk, survived a parliamentary vote of no-confidence last month. But three parties have quit his coalition and Western creditors who are keeping Ukraines economy afloat are frustrated with the slow pace of reforms.

YATSENYUK DEFIES POROSHENKO, SAYS HIS REPLACEMENT WILL DO NO GOOD

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Aides to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko spoke on Tuesday (1 March) of replacing the countrys premier in the next two weeks, while the incumbent, Arseniy Yatsenyuk said he didnt believe a reboot of the government would work. EurActiv.com reports from Kyiv.

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We have a political crisis in Ukraine and I hope that by the end of the month we will find a solution, President Petro Poroshenko told reporters, alongside European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

There will be no early parliamentary elections and the political coalition will remain, will be responsible, orientated on reforms, Poroshenko said, adding that an EU-Ukraine summit would be held on 19 May.

Western donors, including the EU and the United States, are urging Kyivs leaders to remain unified to pass reforms needed to secure a further \$1.7 billion in aid from the International

Monetary Fund and to do much more to tackle rampant corruption.

Diplomats said Tusk and Juncker had repeated this message to Poroshenko on Thursday, arguing against new elections which would only further delay the reforms. These include combating money laundering and setting up an asset register for public officials to declare their wealth.

Some EU officials said the political bickering in Kyiv meant there was less political support in Brussels for Ukraine than six months ago.

Poroshenko needs to decide whether he is one of the old oligarchs or part of the new guard, said one EU official of the president, one of Ukraines richest men and owner of a sweets empire. I dont think he has made up his mind yet.

Visas

In happier news for Kyiv, Juncker said that the European Commission would formally propose next month exempting Ukrainians from needing visas to visit the EU. The proposal would have to be approved by the EUs 28 national governments and the European Parliament.

The promise of visa-free travel could yet face hurdles as Georgia, Kosovo and Turkey are all seeking the same prize. Some in Europe, notably Germany, are wary about opening the door to millions of non-EU travelers when the continent is facing its worst migration crisis since World War Two.

The step would be the most tangible sign for Ukrainians that their 2014 Western-backed uprising against a pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich, is finally paying dividends.

After Yanukovich fled to Russia, Moscow annexed Ukraines Crimea region and gave support to separatist rebels in mainly Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine in a conflict in which more than 9,000 people have been killed and is still simmering.

Moscow denies sending arms or troops into Ukraine.

Kaynak/Source: