

# A Certain Message

Eurodeputy Rebecca Harms: “Oligarch’s immediate influence over politics – this is the most acute problem in Ukraine”

Conversation held by  
Zhanna Bezpyatchuk

On November 5 the European Parliament eventually approved the long-awaited and long-suffering resolution on Ukraine the critical nature of which has been given a fairly different appreciation. In the opinion of Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry, it is “balanced” and “welcomes devotion of the Ukrainian leadership to implementation of the euro-integration course.” At the same time, for instance, a German eurodeputy, a member of the Greens, European Free Alliance, Rebecca Harms who is part of the delegation to the UE-Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee in the European Parliament and has for many years been watching developments in Ukraine, thinks “that is more than just a critical resolution.” Apart from the expected passages on the restriction of freedom of speech, SBU intrusion in the politics, local election infringements, the European Parliament has straight-forwardly and without any diplomatic euphemisms pointed to the fact that the problems faced by Ukraine are tied up to the extremely high impact over the politics of the big business. This and other issues were the topics of a talk between the Tyzhden and Rebecca Harms.

**UW: Ms. Deputy, why was the approval of the resolution postponed twice?**

– I can share my personal opinion on this issue. Personally, I was worried that the first draft resolution would be supported only by one part of the European Parliament. Earlier I had experience of working at the European Parliament when they passed resolutions on Ukraine. They had both a positive and negative tonality. In the process of approving such a document it was really important to achieve a single coordinated stand of the whole parliament with regards to the problems that we see in Ukraine. Even-



tually, that became possible on November 25th. The coverage of the approval of this decision by the European Parliament in the Ukrainian media was not clear. First and foremost you have to realize a resolution which had not gained support of all parliamentary groups would not have been worth anything. In addition, this document carries a clear criticism of all of Ukraine’s problem areas. My team of the Greens at the European Free Alliance had supported the resolution. You can familiarize yourself with the draft documentation which we had prepared at each phase for procedural hearings. Each group was to prepare its draft resolution. This is a standard procedure. Later the groups delegate their authorized

representatives for negotiations. If a criticism signal had been sent to Ukrainian authorities only by one-two groups of the European Parliament, that wouldn’t have been taken so seriously.

**UW: Why did the European Parliament use a Joint Motion rather than personal vote procedure for approving the resolution?**

– This is a really weak approach when during a personal vote such a resolution would be supported by all parliamentarians. For instance, it would be supported by 51% or 63% of European deputies. But the idea behind the European Parliament is to send out a strong message which is based on the consen-

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

### Rebecca Harms

A German politician and documentary film director, co-headed the Green faction, European Free Alliance at the European Parliament. Born 7 December 1956. Studied wood restoration and forestry. In 1988-1994 was a member of Venden cinema cooperative, took part in documentary film creation. 1994-2004 – a Landtag deputy for Lower Saxony. Since 2004 – a deputy of the European Parliament.

chanics of the European Parliament. When the vote on the resolution was postponed for the first time some of my friends said that the Greens would never vote together with conservatives. But that is not the fact. The fact is that a resolution is not just a sheet of paper. There have to be a strong majority behind it. In fact, the European Parliament does not affect foreign policies. It is taken seriously only when powerful forces are being consolidated round a certain message.

**UW: The European Parliament was interested in the approval of a well-thought moderately critical rather than a harsh resolution so that not to eventually push Ukrainian authorities away from EU toward Russia?**

– The text of the resolution carries a really concrete criticism on Ukraine’s problems. This is maybe even more than a critical resolution. It carries a clear concern over weakening of democracy, deals with the restrictions of freedom of speech and the media. It is absolutely beyond me who is currently interested in saying that this resolution is not critical enough. More over, we, Europeans, believe that Ukraine and its people are really devoted to democracy. In my opinion, we are offering your country more than any other participant-country of the Eastern Partnership Program. But this also means that we require and expect more from it. I think that Ukraine has made a far larger progress in establishing democracy than other post-Soviet countries.

**UW: The European Parliament has clearly indicated in the resolution that in Ukraine there is a problem of excessive interference of large business with politics. It is a reality we have been living with for many years. Why is it now that the European Parliament has openly attested it?**

– Excessive interference and impact of large business on Ukrainian politics is the issue I have been looking into for many years. In the Ukrainian political make-up and particularly in the government and Parliament, if compared with other European countries, we see a much stronger immediate influence by the oligarchs and big businesses. This is not in line with democratic standards. Let’s take, for instance, tax

reforms in Ukraine. Everyone agrees that there is a need for making everyone pay taxes and have a fair fiscal system in place. However, large businesses do not actually undertake to bear the tax burden. Instead, it is increasing for the average Ukrainian, small businesses. I can explain this only by the fact that oligarch’s impact over drafting of these regulations is really high. It is understood, this is typical not only for the Regions Party but also other Ukrainian parties that I know of. This is the most acute problem for Ukraine. Unless it is changed, I can not see possibilities for Ukraine to take a truly successful road of development. And, for me, personally, it is really important that it would be clearly expressed in the resolution.

**UW: How far powerful is Regions Party’s lobby at the European Parliament?**

– You should ask Progressive Alliance of Socialist and Democrats group-members about that (the Regions Party has struck a collaboration agreement with them. Editor’s note). My vision is, Yulia Tymoshenko Block collaborates with the European People’s Party while socialists have chosen for collaboration the Regions Party for reasons unknown to me. The Regions Party is not a member of the family of the European socialist parties. It enjoys a watchdog status only. After falling apart of the iron curtain, parties from Central and Eastern European countries started establishing contacts with the European party families. Personally, I can not predict, if such collaboration really gives Victor Yanukovich more influence in Brussels. I believe neither Yulia Tymoshenko Block nor the Regions Party has reached a level in their political organization development so that to be ready for membership in the family of the European parties.

**UW: What do European parliamentarians primarily expect from Ukraine in 2011?**

– In 2011 Ukraine will have again to turn to old problems. No one retorts that it will ask for IMF money. But reforms should be implemented in a fair manner. The key is the reform of the judicial system. In addition, it is required a civilized working environment be established in Ukraine for foreign investors. ▀