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Yanukovych signs transition deal with Ukraine opposition

Deal foresees an end to violence and early presidential election by December.

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BY TOBY VOGEL

President Viktor Yanukovych of Ukraine and the three main opposition leaders have signed a deal brokered by Russia and the European Union to end violence and prepare a political transition.

The deal was reached early this morning after a night of tense talks, but it took most of today (21 February) to set out the specifics and to convince the opposition to sign on to it.

Vitaly Klitschko, Oleh Tyahnybok and Arseniy Yatsenyuk signed on behalf of the opposition, which has been camping out on Kiev’s main square since November.

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At one point today, Radoslaw Sikorski, Poland’s foreign minister and one of three EU envoys, was overheard telling protest leaders: “If you don’t support this, you’ll have martial law, you’ll have the army. You will all be dead.”

Under the deal, the 2004 constitution was to be reinstated within 48 hours; this happened in the afternoon, when the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine’s parliament, endorsed the 2004 constitution with a sweeping majority. This is to lead within ten days to a national-unity government of the current ruling party and opposition.

Protesters are to withdraw from their camps, and the government refrains from imposing a state of emergency. Protesters have 24 hours from the 2004 constitution being reinstated to surrender illegal weapons. Constitutional reform to balance the powers of president, government and parliament are to start immediately and conclude by September. As soon as the new constitution is adopted, but at the latest by December, a new president is to be elected, under new electoral laws.

The deal also foresees an investigation into the violence that has cost dozens of lives, primarily of protesters. Many were killed yesterday, when special forces snipers opened fire on protesters. The investigation is to be monitored by the authorities, the opposition and the Council of Europe. Sikorski witnessed the agreement on behalf of the EU, together with foreign ministers Frank-Walter Steinmeier of Germany and Laurent Fabius of France, although Fabius had to leave Kiev early this morning.

Vladimir Lukin signed the agreement as a witness on behalf of President of Russia Vladimir Putin – Yanukovych’s main backer.

“The foreign ministers of France, Germany and Poland welcome the signing of the agreement on the settlement of the crisis in Ukraine, commend the parties for their courage and commitment to the agreement and call for an immediate end to all violence and confrontation in Ukraine,” the three EU ministers said in a statement.

Carl Bildt, Sweden’s foreign minister, said even after the deal it was still “important that those responsible for killings and human rights violations in Ukraine are brought to justice”. Various EU foreign ministers had yesterday called for an end to impunity in Ukraine.

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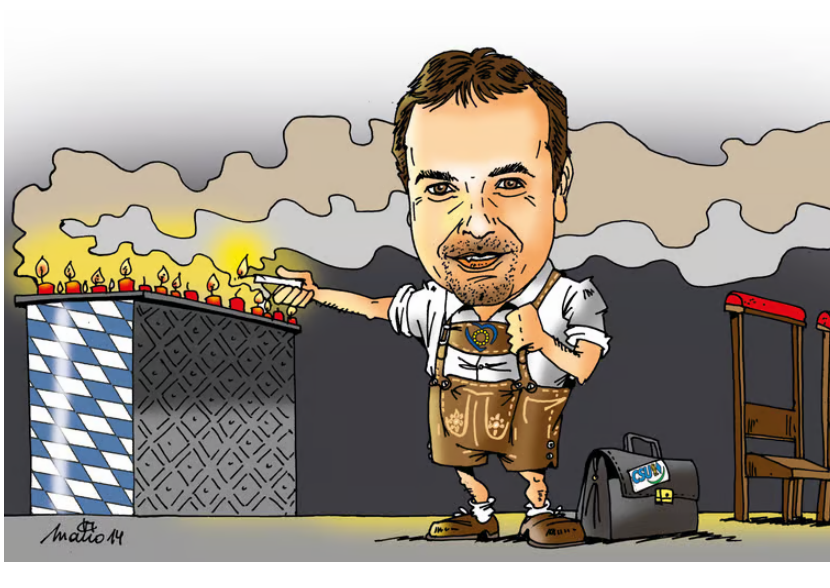
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