



The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (EUAA): Dutch Government's Leaked « Media Strategy » to Influence Outcome of EU-Ukraine Referendum

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This April 6th the Netherlands will hold a (non-binding) referendum on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (EUAA), as the result of a petition to the government [signed by 427,939 voters](#). Until the results of the referendum are known, the EUAA cannot be ratified by the Dutch government and therefore cannot officially go into effect.

The Dutch government headed by Prime Minister Mark Rutte is firmly in favour of the agreement and from the moment it became clear it would be obliged (by law) to organize the referendum, has urged voters on every possible occasion to vote "Yes".

The communication strategy the Rutte government is to follow in the upcoming weeks [was leaked by Dutch RTL News](#) on Wednesday (18-02-2016). Media experts have formulated guidelines and full statements for government officials to use when addressing voters. Political reporter Roel Geeraedts, who obtained the documents, describes it as "A prime example of State propaganda."

Do's and Don'ts

The strategy has some remarkable aspects. Especially the Do's and Don'ts are insightful (full PDF document in Dutch available for downloading [here](#)).

For example: the term "Association agreement" is deemed too difficult to be understood by the public, officials are instructed to use "cooperative agreement" (in Dutch 'working-together-agreement'): *"This cooperative agreement is in the interest of the Netherlands and Ukraine. It deals with easier trade and a democratic, free Ukraine."* The statement reflects the three main arguments to be used in support of the EUAA: stabilizing/democratizing Ukraine, trade and cooperation.

Ministers are urged not to enter into discussions on wider subjects, such as the EU or failing democracy, and also apparently the political and military components of the EUAA, which are not mentioned anywhere, despite their significance.

According to the document, it should be made clear to the public that the Netherlands is against Ukraine becoming an EU-member.



Dutch PM Mark Rutte

Dutch PM Mark Rutte

The authors of the guideline warn against over-emphasizing security issues regarding Russia or an explicit pro/con Putin stance (they specifically name the President, not the country). They consider it more effective to say we do not accept Russia's engaging in Ukrainian affairs - the media experts emphasize this point specifically - and repeatedly.

They also urge the government not to make the Ukrainian situation appear better than it is, an overly enthusiastic endorsement will lead to skepticism under voters. Thus scare-tactics should be avoided, as this will be counterproductive (apparently Mr. Juncker did not get this memo as he [warned](#) that a Dutch "No" could lead to a "continental crisis").

Another key point of the instruction is that the EUAA is just one of the many cooperation treaties the EU has with over 25 countries throughout the world - nothing to worry about. That the EUAA is different from similar treaties with regard to political and military aspects is not mentioned.

How to sell the Association Agreement to the public

The media experts offer a detailed strategy on what points the government should put forward to sell the EUAA to the public (another PDF in Dutch for downloading [here](#)). Some highlights:

On Ukrainian authorities and ambitions:

- the EUAA is the foundation for the Ukrainian reform programme, with this treaty Ukraine will work on substantial reforms to become a grown-up democracy without corruption
- without the EUAA, Ukrainians won't be able to continue implementing democratic reforms and combating corruption, they will have to do it by themselves, without EU assistance
- the EU won't be able to hold the Ukrainian government to its commitments and it is questionable that the necessary reforms will then be implemented at all, even though the Ukrainian people want this very much [*what touching confidence in the Ukrainian authorities!*] (*this argument is repeated and emphasized throughout both documents!* - A.L.)
- with the help of the EU, Ukraine wants to become a country with a functioning

government, independent judges and respect for human rights, where corruption is addressed and gay rights are respected

- it wants to become a country where companies can freely and easily do business with Dutch companies and where citizens are affluent enough to buy our products
- the ordinary Ukrainian has time and time again chosen in favour of this agreement with the EU: during the Maidan revolution in 2013-2014 and afterwards thousands of people have literally died for it [*never mind that [most casualties were actually opponents of the agreement](#) - A.L.*]
- during the last elections for parliament the pro-European parties received 68,5% of the votes - even in the mostly Russian-speaking East the majority of the people supported these parties [*again, the fact that several opposition parties [had been prohibited](#) and the majority of the people living in Eastern Ukraine either [boycotted](#) the elections or were unable to participate because of the war the Kiev regime wages against them is not mentioned - A.L.*]

On Ukraine's EU-membership:

- the EUAA is not a first step to Ukraine becoming an EU-member [*it mentions specifically that the Netherlands opposes a Ukraine EU-membership with reference to its VETO right - A.L.*]
- this is just an agreement with a neighbour, the EUAA is a good way to cooperate with Ukraine without it leading to its EU-membership [*ergo to keep Ukraine outside the EU, vote "Yes" - A.L.*]
- the EUAA does not give Ukrainians visa-free entry into the EU
- visa regulations are being discussed, but not in the context of the EUAA and this concerns tourist-visa only, not Ukrainians' right to live and work in the EU



A propaganda cartoon showing advantages of associating with the EU for the Ukrainians

On money and commitments:

- the EUAA will not cost us extra money, the EU and IMF are already providing Ukraine with financial aid outside of this agreement
- the EUAA does not oblige EU members to financially support Ukraine

On Russia and Putin:

- when the EUAA is not ratified and entered into force, this will greatly please President Putin [*again the President is mentioned personally*], this means that

Ukraine has not been able to decide its own fate *[interesting logic]*

- the EUAA allows for good relations with Russia, it makes demands regarding the treatment of minorities
- Russia has no right to interfere with the positive development of the Ukrainian people, for example by invading Ukraine *[!]*; the EUAA does not deal with this conflict, this is discussed within the Minsk treaty framework
- President Putin tried to stop the EUAA to keep Ukraine within his sphere of influence and under his control
- we would like to cooperate with Russia, too, they also profit from a stable Ukraine - unfortunately they are not interested in this *[this is an outright lie, see [here](#) or [here](#) for just some examples - A.L.]*

On the referendum and its outcome:

- the Dutch government will actively campaign for a “Yes”
- with a turnout of less than 30% or a “Yes” outcome the government will ratify the EUAA; with a “No” outcome the government will discuss the matter with parliament
[earlier Dutch FM Bert Koenders [informed](#) parliament that in this case the government will send a proposal to the Parliament and the Senate to decide; the Dutch Parliament has [indicated](#) it will respect the outcome of the referendum - A.L.]



“Musicians of the Maidan” are entitled to take part in Yes campaign by the Dutch government

- elements of the EUAA that have already come into effect per 01-01-2016 won’t be stopped automatically because of a “No” by the Dutch; however, they were implemented with the expectation that the EUAA will be ratified by all EU members, a “No” would therefore require new negotiations *[the message the Dutch is to send out is that we expect it won’t happen - A.L.]*
- the Dutch government has requested the OSCE to send observers, but they have declined because it is not usual for them to send observers to referenda *[apparently no other observers were asked; it is unclear whether they would be welcome - A.L.]*
- the EUAA was agreed between democratically elected leaders from democratic countries with Ukraine *[no mention of the fact that the political provisions of the*

treaty were signed on 21 March 2014 by interim "President" Oleksandr Turchynov, who was installed after a violent and [foreign-sponsored coup d'état](#) - A.L.]

- the Dutch authorities do not expect the outcome of the referendum to interfere with the investigation into the MH17 tragedy: "It is and will remain the common goal of the Netherlands and Ukraine to find and bring to trial the perpetrators of this cowardly act"
- as according to Dutch law foreign financing of Dutch organisations is allowed, it is Ok that George Soros [*yes, he is mentioned in the document* - A.L.] is engaged in the media campaign in the Netherlands and [makes no secret of it](#).

The team

Rutte's government has identified ([link to a PDF in Dutch](#)) a kaleidoscope of parties that can help promote the "Yes" campaign: political parties (Labour, Progressive-Liberals, Greens and conservative Christians), politicians (a.o. EU Commissioner Frans Timmermans and Amsterdam mayor Eberhard van der Laan), EU officials Juncker, Mogherini, Hahn, Füle and Tusk, international organisations (IMF, World bank, OSCE, NATO), civil society (Greenpeace, LGBT community, Unions [*with a question mark*] and the Maidan cluster), companies and famous Ukrainians living in the Netherlands.

PM Rutte [has reacted](#) to the leak of his media strategy, trying to dismiss the incident by joking: "It's disheartening. Really nothing can remain secret." The government still expects the Dutch people to support them on the EUAA. Most opinion polls up-to-now indicate they won't.

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