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Ukraine's President in Berlin

On 30 August President Viktor Yanukovych paid an official visit to Germany, during which he met the most senior government and business representatives. The visit was principally a 'getting to know you' affair. Yanukovych tried to present Ukraine as a stable and predictable state; this is of essential importance for German investors, who over the last few years have been grappling with problems in doing business in Ukraine.

In Berlin, Yanukovych met Chancellor Angela Merkel, President Christian Wulff, and Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle. The discussions' topics included the development of relations between Ukraine and the EU, as well as issues of bilateral economic policy. Merkel drew attention to the need to maintain democratic processes in Ukraine, and also stated that a Ukrainian/German energy forum will take place in the autumn. A meeting with representatives of German business was also held, during which Yanukovych presented the steps Ukraine has taken to improve the investment climate, and announced further reforms.

This visit is part of a Ukrainian diplomatic offensive (in the near future Yanukovych will visit China, France and Great Britain). The choice of Berlin as the first European capital which the Ukrainian president has officially visited demonstrates the importance which Ukrainian government attaches to its cooperation with Germany. Ensuring internal stability will encourage closer economic relations (Germany is currently Ukraine's second biggest trade partner). At the same time, despite a certain limitation in the Ukrainian government's aspirations regarding European integration, it seems unlikely that Germany will take a more favourable position towards Ukraine in disputed political matters (such as introducing visa-free travel). <smat>