



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



Kyiv, 19 December 2011
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**Statement by Herman Van Rompuy
President of the European Council,
after his meeting with Ukrainian Civil Society representatives**

Thank you for your warm welcome. It is a great pleasure to be able to join you. This event is a very important part of our programme here in Kiev today, and in the ongoing and broadly based dialogue between the EU and Ukraine. I look forward to exchanging views on the current EU-Ukraine relations.

I also appreciate the fact that this event is partly a result of the Eastern Partnership. The commitment to strengthen the involvement of the Eastern partnership Civil Society Forum, and its national Platforms as this one in Ukraine, is one of the corner stones in advancing the Eastern partnership. This was, as you know, once again underlined at the Warsaw summit in September.

Let me start by reiterating that Ukraine is a partner of strategic importance for the EU. Our commitment to developing the relationship between the EU and Ukraine is firm. Let there be no doubt.

Since last year there has been developments in the EU-Ukraine relations - both positive and some that have given us reason for strong concern.

On the positive note, we today publically announced that negotiations on the Association Agreement have been finalised. It was difficult work, but your government's declared European choice and dedication has made it possible to conclude the talks with success. This is a giant step for our relations.

It is also of decisive importance for Ukraine's progress towards modernisation, prosperity, and the realisation of your European ambition.

P R E S S

Dirk De Backer - Spokesperson of the President - (+32 (0)2 281 9768 - +32 (0)497 59 99 19
Jesús Carmona - Deputy Spokesperson of the President - (+32 (0)2 281 9548 / 5150 - +32 (0)475 65 32 15
press.president@consilium.europa.eu <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/>

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In this regard, I want to pay tribute to the many civil society representatives who have kept up the pressure on both sides to complete the negotiation process. This is an issue on which civil society in Ukraine has effectively spoken with one voice.

We want to take steps to sign and ratify the Association Agreement as soon as we can, but this will depend on political circumstances.

In this regard, a number of recent domestic developments in Ukraine have led to a difficult atmosphere between the European Union and Ukraine.

The quality and perspectives of our relations are also being tested and evaluated on the basis of these. The support of European public opinion to Ukraine's political association and economic integration to the EU is an important asset, closely related to this field. And these concerns may make the ratification and signing of the Association Agreement more difficult.

The perceived deterioration of the quality of democracy and rule of law in Ukraine has a direct impact in our Member-States, in our public at large, and in the European Parliament.

Our strong concern is primarily related to the politically-motivated justice in Ukraine. The Timoshenko trial is the most striking example. However, a comprehensive justice reform in line with international standards is also absolutely key.

Other shortcomings related to ensuring fundamental freedoms in Ukraine, with particular attention to media freedom and freedom of assembly are also adding to our strong concern. The interference between political considerations and the application of criminal law is widely noted in European public opinion.

The respect for these principles, enshrined in the Eastern Partnership and at the core of the Association Agreement, is decisive for the pace and depth of rapprochement with the EU. But it is also fundamental to Ukraine's future development as a competitive, dynamic and innovative society. The pace and depth of rapprochement with the EU is closely associated with this.

In this context, the parliamentary elections to be held next year, will be a litmus test. The conduct of these elections will have to meet the commitments of the OSCE, including the ensuring of a level playing field for all possible candidates.

We do, however, take note of the adoption by the Ukrainian Parliament of a new Law on Election of the People's Deputies. We encourage you to continue close cooperation with the Venice Commission.

Mr Chairman, ladies and Gentlemen, we share the common interest of a closer EU-Ukraine relationship, not just between governments but also between our people. Our visit to Kiev, including our summit earlier today, is proof of this.

But for this to happen. And in order not to bring the entry into force of the Association Agreement into question, there will need to be concrete results in delivering reform that are broadly supported, and stand by the test of time.

This will require a major effort from Ukraine. It is first and foremost up to the Ukrainian government and authorities.

However, the involvement and support for reform of Civil Society, in this case of your involvement, is indispensable in making this happen. This was also something I underlined at the summit. That is why I am encouraged to be here today. Your strong engagement for Ukraine's European choice is impressive.

Mr/Mrs Chairman, I am looking forward very much to hearing comments and questions and I will end my remarks at this point with a reminder that civil society is a key partner for the EU in Ukraine, and that our Agreement foresees an important role which I know you will be ready to fill.
