

New York, 25 September 2012

**Joint Statement by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands (Benelux)
and the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia (Visegrad Group)
on the situation in Ukraine**

Ukraine, as a European country, shares a common history and common values with the countries of the European Union. The EU acknowledged the European aspirations of Ukraine and welcomed its European choice. We recognize and support the wish of Ukraine to establish close cooperation with European institutions. The gradual convergence of Ukraine with the EU in political, economic and legal areas would contribute to further progress in EU-Ukraine relations. In this respect, the Association Agreement along with the provisions of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), which have been negotiated between the EU and Ukraine, define fundamental opportunities for Ukraine to consolidate its democracy and to develop its economy into a market economy.

The last years, Ukraine has made efforts in the area of democratization, positioning itself in the EU neighbourhood policy. However, the past year saw some regressive tendencies as regards Ukraine's democratic achievements. We have been witnessing deterioration of the situation in the areas of the rule of law and human rights as well as of the overall state of democracy. The imprisonment and trials of Yulia Tymoshenko and other politicians of her government proved to be a serious symptom of those negative tendencies. These politically motivated cases clearly illustrate the failings of the judicial system in Ukraine to uphold international standards for fair, transparent and independent trials. We hope that Ukraine's Government will take the necessary steps to make selective justice a thing of the past. Other issues which contribute to the development of a democratic society, such as freedom of and equal access to media or rule of law, remain to be further fostered and strengthened. The lack of progress in these domains remains a serious impediment on the road to democratisation in Ukraine.

It is worth emphasizing that Ukraine's performance, notably in relation to respect for common values and the rule of law, will be of crucial importance for the speed of its political association and economic integration with the EU. The Association Agreement including its DCFTA has the potential to secure deeper long-term future relations with the EU on the basis of increased trade opportunities, approximation to the EU *acquis* and the overall modernization of Ukraine's institutions and governance. Although the EU attaches great importance to deepen its relations with Ukraine, we recall that the visible improvement of the rule of law in Ukraine is essential for the signing of the Association Agreement.

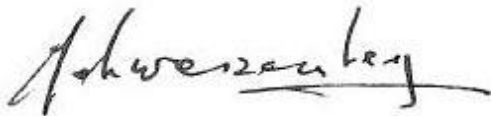
We call on the government of Ukraine to ensure that the upcoming election, conducted next month in October, will be in line with the standards of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, including full cooperation with monitoring missions. Compliance with the standards of OSCE should strengthen the credibility of Ukraine in its forthcoming OSCE presidency. By means of democratic elections in October, Ukrainian leaders will regain political confidence from the citizens and the civil society of their country, and from Europe as a whole.



Radosław Sikorski
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Poland



Didier Reynders
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Kingdom of Belgium



Karel Schwarzenberg
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Czech Republic



Jean Asselborn
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Grand Duchy of Luxemburg



János Martonyi
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Hungary



Uri Rosenthal
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Kingdom of the Netherlands



Miroslav Lajčák
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Slovak Republic