

**Helsinki Commission Hearing on:
Ukraine's Leadership of the OSCE**

Wednesday, May 8, 2013

Opening Statement of Senator Benjamin L. Cardin, Chairman

Today, I am pleased to welcome Foreign Minister Kozhara (*Ko-ZHA-ra*) to share his views with us one-third of the way into Ukraine's 2013 OSCE Chairmanship. A lot of hard work has already been done by your Chairmanship, and we appreciate it.

Mr. Minister, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and process it initiated, with its focus on human rights and fundamental freedoms, played an important role in the achievement of your country's independence. And, as you know, the Helsinki Commission has a long history of support for Ukraine's independence and democratic development. We want Ukraine to succeed. I recall my visits to Ukraine, both to Kyiv in early 2005 shortly following the Orange Revolution, a time of great promise, and again in 2007 for the Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I also had the opportunity visit Chornobyl, site of the worst nuclear power plant disaster in history, which for nearly three decades has had such a profound impact on Ukraine and her neighbors.

Like any Chair-in-Office, Ukraine faces formidable tasks in leading this multilateral organization that operates on the basis of consensus, and includes 57 countries ranging from democracies to dictatorships. A Chair-in-Office must itself display strong democratic credentials if it is to succeed in encouraging compliance with OSCE obligations in other countries. It is incumbent upon Ukraine to lead by example in upholding its OSCE human rights and rule of law commitments. I welcome the recent pardons of former high ranking officials and believe that they are a good first step. I trust that you will build on your promise of further judicial and electoral reforms, and we hope that last week's European Court of Human Rights ruling that the detention of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko before and during her trial was arbitrary and a violation of her rights will provide further impetus for her release.

Mr. Minister, your appearance here allows us to hear your reflections on your achievements and challenges to date, and to how your priorities are being executed and plans for the remainder of your tenure. We all must do what we can to ensure security and economic cooperation, and to safeguard not only democracy's progress, but its preservation. That is why strengthening the implementation of human dimension commitments by all participating States is so important.

I want to thank you for taking on the leadership of the OSCE and wish you continued success in your remaining 8 months. I'm hopeful that Ukraine's chairmanship of this important organization will enrich both Ukraine and the entire OSCE.