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REMARKS BY
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AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION
CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN LAW INITIATIVE BREAKFAST
IHO PRESIDENT LEONID KUCHMA

Washington, DC

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Mr. President, your excellencies, friends, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the American Bar Association's Central and East European Law Initiative, I am pleased and privileged to welcome you to this breakfast honoring the President of Ukraine, Dr. Leonid Kuchma.

Ukraine declared its independence in August, 1991. That period is sharp in my memory because I had the occasion at that time to meet with a group of leaders from Ukraine who had come to Moscow to meet with me in my role as the American Ambassador in charge of the United States Delegation to a CSCE meeting on the Human Dimension. It was exciting to listen to them talk about their hopes and prospects for the future as they anticipated building a society based on democratic principles. I encouraged their aspirations as we discussed the Moscow meeting and its emphasis on the rule of law, human dignity and a Europe free from repression.

In July, 1994, Leonid Kuchma was elected the President of Ukraine. He came to his office with training as an engineer, an industrial leader, a Parliamentarian, and a former prime minister. Within a few months, he led his country as it signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in November of that year, making Ukraine at the same time a declared nuclear-free state, committed to transfer and dismantle its nuclear weapons.

Ukraine, with a population of 52 million people, is now an integral part of the effort to achieve stability in its region of Europe. President Kuchma is working to associate his country not only with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), but also with all of Europe's international and regional organizations, including NATO, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

We of the American Bar Association are particularly pleased with that effort and desire to recognize the leadership being displayed by Ukraine and its President because of our awareness that Ukraine understands the need for it to promote and safeguard the rights of its ethnic, national and religious minorities, including its large Russian and Jewish populations. We are committed to the proposition that the rule of law is essential if we are to achieve peace and stability as we enter the 21st century. We are delighted to note that Ukraine and President Kuchma are dedicated to the proposition that they must identify themselves with that commitment as they assert their qualification to be considered responsible members of the international community.

President Kuchma, friends, you will soon hear more about the plans under way by the American Bar Association to formalize its respect for your activities. In the meantime, I invite all of you to proceed with breakfast.