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ISRAEL-UKRAINE: THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY

– Your Excellency, you have been serving as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Israel to Ukraine since October 23, 2018. In such a short period of time, you have already met with many representatives of Ukraine and discussed issues of a visa-free regime between the countries, military cooperation, tourism, economics, etc. How do you think, what are the most promising areas of bilateral cooperation between our countries, what would you prioritize?

– First, I should note that October was the month when I officially presented my credentials to the President, but I have been in Ukraine since the end of August. Changes in the staffing of Israeli diplomatic missions usually occur in summer. In our foreign service, this process is closely connected to the issues of children and schools. As for your question, I think that first of all the focus should be put on agribusiness, since this field has a huge potential for the development of bilateral cooperation. We need to find out how our countries can cooperate more in the sphere of agriculture, agro-technologies, how to develop a real business, and not only grow some crops. That's the focus that I think should be made. In the last years, we managed to train almost 40,000 Ukrainian farmers, mostly in Kherson and Odesa regions, in agrobusiness. Agriculture should be considered as a business, as a small and medium business that you can develop. This year, we are continuing our activities and I hope there will also be interest from the Ukrainian party. Moreover, I hope that companies will be able to go to Israel to not only find investors, but also establish joint ventures and develop them.

– And what about cooperation in the area of psychological rehabilitation of Ukrainians affected by the conflict in the east of our country? In previous years Israel actively shared its invaluable experience and expertise in this field with Ukraine? What is the current state of cooperation?

– Israel is now more active in the field of physical rehabilitation. We are cooperating with hospitals in Kharkov and Dnipro in order to contribute to the physical rehabilitation of veterans, and civilians alike.

– What was your first impression when you found out about your appointment to Ukraine and have you ever been here before?

– I have never been to Ukraine before. Now I have the feeling that Ukraine is ‘boiling’. It is boiling in the best sense of the word. Ukraine is trying to find its way. I feel it everywhere, on every point. I mean, you can see the progress, the reforms and attempts to reform at all levels. However, it takes huge time to change. And I see this country is ‘boiling’ and preparing for reforms.

– *Mr Ambassador, you strongly emphasize the importance of innovations for progress. Which of the Israeli inventions do you consider the most useful to humankind?*

– The sole fact that we are innovative, because it helps in everything: in medicine, in car industry, in agriculture and in water issue. So, we have to continue to be innovative and I think that’s our gift to the world.

– *Please, tell us about the activities of MASHAV, Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation, in Ukraine. In your opinion, which program is the most important for development and implementation in Ukraine?*

– The first one is the initiative on agribusiness development I mentioned. We are implementing it together with the Ukraine Horticulture Business Development Project. Another important area of work is inclusive education. We have a lot of experience in this and we are sharing this experience with Ukraine. The Ministry of Education has already sent dozens of experts to Israel for training. Thousands of people from all over the world attend these courses in Israel. The first lady is involved in it. It’s a huge project of MASHAV in Ukraine. The third project relates to physical rehabilitation and we have also already discussed it. So, these three fields are the areas of activity of MASHAV Agency.

– *We know many influential women who have changed the world. For example, Golda Meir who was one of the most prominent women in the world, the a native of Kyiv, the first Ambassador to the USSR, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the first female Prime Minister of the State of Israel. How do you think, is there equality between men and women in Israel, how many women have influence in the Government?*

– It is always a process and a point of mentality as well. I think that things are changing very quickly in Israel, and first of all, we see more women in high positions in the army. So, mentality is changing. World becomes smaller and more open. And people are becoming increasingly open to this kind of things. So, women have much more opportunities in the army. We have female fighter pilots. We had female generals. All in all, the situation is changing. The second thing is about influence of women in politics. We see more women coming into politics and holding influential positions like our Minister of Justice, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Social Equality.

– *Do you think that women can offer an absolutely other sight, absolutely other thinking? For example, when there is a small discussion even inside the government, women’s participation guarantees the existence of at least two different viewpoints, doesn’t it?*

– To my mind, the participation of women is a great thing. I would never have been in my position without my wife. She is the one who pushes, the one that I can ask for advice and always get it. I mean that's the way it is.

Haim Harari, former president of the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, once explained why women's education is so important for the world. Now, you can see that not every woman or girl has the same education as a man. That's the point.

– *In one of the interviews, you have told about your passion for history. Does it help you in your work? Do you think that a diplomat should know history well?*

– Yes, I agree that a diplomat should know history. Does it help a lot? I do not know. But yes, knowing is essential. Napoleon came once to a town in Galicia, which was, in particular, inhabited by Jews. He saw all the Jews sit on the floor and cry. He sent one of his officials to check what the point was. Having come back, the official said they were crying because the temple was destroyed. Napoleon got upset. France proclaimed the freedom of religion. Why did any of his officials or soldiers destroy the temple? Napoleon asked the rabbi to come to him. When the rabbi came, he said, 'I want to apologize. It's not appropriate that somebody destroyed your temple'. The rabbi said, 'Emperor, it was two thousand years ago. We are mourning it because today is the day of remembrance'. Napoleon looked at him and said, 'People who do not remember their past, do not have a future'. I do not know if the story is true or not, if it was about Napoleon or not, it doesn't matter. The thing is that if you do not remember your past, you don't have a future. You are what you are because of your past. With the evil and the good.

– *Thus, a good diplomat should know history, speak foreign languages... What are other skills and competencies important for a good diplomat?*

– Knowing the mentality of the people in the receiving state. Henry Wotton, a 17th-century English diplomat, once said that an ambassador is an honest gentleman sent to lie abroad for the good of his country. I never agreed with this statement. And one day I met Henry Kissinger and asked him about this phrase. He said that Wotton probably intended a pun in the use of the word 'lie', the other sense being, to live out of your country and chill out 'for your country's good'. Nevertheless, you should always know that you are serving your country. You should always know why you are doing what you are doing. Are you doing it because you want to see the world and have fun for yourself or are you doing it for your country and for your people? Being a diplomat means to be a civil soldier of your country. A diplomat must always remember why he or she is doing it.

– *How did you decide to become a diplomat? You were born in France, brought up in Luxemburg and then emigrated to Israel. Did such a cosmopolitan background influence your decision? Does it assist in your daily work?*

– It is not the proper way to say 'decide to become a diplomat'. I always wanted to serve my country, and if you want to serve your country, there are not that

many ways to do it. You can either be a carrier soldier, career diplomat, or be in a NGO and do something for the people. I think it was something that I always felt I can give for my country. As Kennedy put it the other day, 'ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.' What I can give to my country is the possibility to know how to speak, to be able to serve. And that's the reason why I became a diplomat.

Now, about my background. In Israel, we Jews are coming from all over the world. We have Jews coming from Ethiopia, from North Africa, from Iraq, Iran, from Western Europe, Eastern Europe, North America, South America. Everyone brings something with him and everyone has his background. All together, we are what we are.

– *Each state has its own stereotypes. Is there a need to fight them? If so, what can a diplomat do?*

– Stereotypes are the misery of this world. Because people do not want to know the truth and they are only using the stereotypes. So what we began to do is trying to brand Israel, to bring to the world what Israel really is. To show to the world this mixture of ancient history, of family values, of innovation, of spiritual traditions and so on. Yes, diplomat has to fight the stereotypes. Yes, diplomat has to promote and to show his country exactly as it is.

– *Mr Ambassador, please tell us a few words about your life here and about your big family.*

– I will tell you as a diplomat to other diplomats. The sacrifice that the family is doing for your career is unimaginable. To come with you everywhere in the world, to change schools, to change friends, not to be rooted in one place. It's a huge sacrifice that your partner and your children are doing for this, I would say vocation rather than profession. We always have to thank our families for what they are doing for us, because, first of all, a diplomat without their family don't feel their roots. Second, the families remind them why they are doing their job. So, all those involved in diplomacy have to be thankful to their families. As for me, my family is trying to meet together as often as possible. Although I have quite a hectic schedule, we can always meet at holidays, the Jewish holidays. We have something called Shabbat once a week. I'm also trying from time to time to celebrate Shabbat at home in Israel and everyone is coming.

– *Youth and students in Ukraine are becoming increasingly interested in exchange programmes. Are there any such programmes for Ukrainians in Israel?*

– We have many programs in our universities, but unfortunately, we don't have any grants.