

A SYMPHONY OF DEEP UNDERSTANDING

– *Your Excellency, in your opinion, what is the most sustainable model of coexistence and cooperation in today's world? What are the most promising conceptual directions of French foreign policy?*

– The French people are very much in favour of multilateralism, as one small group of power cannot cope with all the major threats to the planet, particularly environmental, security, and economic challenges we face. We approve of the contribution of international organisations and the UN system directed to finding solutions. It is worth admitting that the need of its reformation is acute, and we are willing to make changes. It is one of the currents of the foreign policy of the US administration, and we are eager to keep this tide. The strength of the European Union consists in its unity. We do not consider, however, that to be totally isolated in the face of the challenges of the period to come is a sensible solution.

Generally, we try to ward our diplomatic efforts in two directions. The first one is to make the EU more consolidated and effective, and the second one is to promote multilateralism and activities of international organisations.

– *France and Ukraine have come a long way in their relations – almost 30 years since Ukraine restored its independence. How would you assess the current level of our relations?*

– Relations between France and Ukraine are noticeably good. There is a deep understanding between our two presidents. The facts that they are of the same age, have numerous solid personal connections, are vigorous, and strive for changes and reforms serve as a predisposition to a strong mutual understanding and even friendship. In diplomacy, friendship is not a usual concept, but this formula is especially meaningful in this context. It is likewise discernible between two first ladies, Ms Macron and Ms Zelenska, as they keep a regular contact, which is quite a valuable asset. Additionally, there is a strong linkage between France and Ukraine at the moment, particularly considering the development of our bilateral economic relations.

– *Speaking about the economic aspects, is France currently taking any measures to find investment opportunities? Is your country interested in expanding its economic presence in Ukraine?*

– French companies seek to develop their operation in Ukraine. Among foreign employers, our commercial brands are the ones involving the largest number of Ukrainians. Mentioning the current state of trade and investments, more than 160 French companies have their subsidiaries here.



27 травня пан Посол зустрівся з Міністром оборони України Андрієм Тараном, щоб обговорити поточну ситуацію на Донбасі та співпрацю Франції й України у сфері оборони

On 27 May, Mr Ambassador met with Andrii Taran, Minister of Defence of Ukraine, to discuss the current situation in Donbas and defence cooperation between France and Ukraine

We have developed some milestone programmes by means of the French treasury. Amongst them there is a contract regarding the handover of 55 helicopters to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, and this programme is a perfect example of the strong economic relationship between France and Ukraine. Deliveries have started in line with the approved timetable. Moreover, the transfer contract of 20 petrol boats has now been officially signed, which aims to reinforce Ukrainian security. Those contracts are backed by and through the loan instruments of the French treasury, providing affordable financial conditions. The second objective we pursue through this instrument is to be more involved in improving the situation in Donbas and, more generally, in Eastern Ukraine.

Together with Oleksii Reznikov, Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine, we have launched a project in Mariupol on developing water treatment facilities. This is important for two reasons: firstly, it considerably improves the daily life in Mariupol; secondly, it is a political signal as we invest into the region, which is grappling with the consequences of the armed conflict. The contact line is quite close; consequently, the project also comprises the political dimension.

As we unfold our activities in the region, we hope to support the idea of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to launch the international investment forum *RE:THINK. Invest in Ukraine* to be held in Mariupol in October to attract more foreign capital, encourage investors to be present in the east of the country, and promote the deepening of economic ties with the West, which is of paramount

importance. The eastern regions definitely cannot be ignored and should benefit from international support. In Luhansk region, we are determined to replicate what we have done in Mariupol and develop water treatment infrastructure and water supply systems in the northern parts of Ukraine.

– *What is the role of the European Union in this process? Still, are there any possible points of convergence in our bilateral interests, which could enhance the relations between France and Ukraine?*

– There is a strong support coming from the European Union to Ukraine. Talking about the financial aspect, we have to keep in mind that France invests 16 percent through its taxpayers according to the proportion of the common union's budget. Thus, the EU is completely financed by none other than its member states, and a huge part of support provided by the organisation goes from the French budget. Our fair share is the second largest after that of Germany. This is important to remember.

– *France has an enormous experience in the decentralization of public administration. How can it be helpful for Ukraine?*

– Undoubtedly, we are ready to share the experience acquired. There are many similarities between Ukraine and France in this realm. We share the same part of the continent, feature almost the same size by covering large areas as well as roughly identical number of people. In this respect, the decentralisation model to which we aspire is quite similar, as France is not inclined to embrace federalism. Its traces are nowhere to be found in our history and culture, and we have never followed that path. Still, we have succeeded in decentralising our state by preserving its unitary system. This model is probably relevant for Ukraine. That is why, before the lockdown, we have tried to make the Ukrainian authorities more acquainted with the concept of French *préfectures* by explaining its role as a representative unit of the state in districts, the way it operates in France, and the way central power interacts with local governments. This is the knowledge we are always willing to share. We should not think that the federalist system, its merits notwithstanding, correlates with lay of the land in Ukraine; rather, it can jeopardise the unity of this country. The similar system has already been fruitfully and efficiently implemented in a range of countries, such as Germany and Switzerland. Still, Ukrainian history is somewhat different.

Exchange of expertise on this matter is already taking place through conferences with experts, where aspects of relevant legislation, rules and ways of implementation within specific time frames are discussed. We are open to be involved in this kind of meetings any time, if need be.

– *Last year, Presidents Emmanuel Macron and Volodymyr Zelenskyy expressed their determination to implement joint initiatives in such spheres as aeronautics, energy, and infrastructure rehabilitation in Donbas. Could you give any details on the projects planned in the foreseeable future?*

– The aforesaid project in Mariupol, which is the main achievement, should be mentioned here. As a matter of fact, we are determined to develop investment in Eastern Ukraine. We are also discussing further cooperation in Luhansk region through the possible implementation of a new water project (rehabilitation of a water treatment plant) and partnerships in the railway sector (renovation of rail roads). We are looking forward to a successful outcome in the negotiations on cooperation in this sphere.

– *On 1 February, President Macron paid his first official visit to Poland. During the meeting with Polish Head of State Andrzej Duda, a range of issues was discussed, including the future of the Weimar Triangle, an unofficial grouping of France, Germany, and Poland. In your opinion, is it worth joining this group for Ukraine and what are the odds considering that in 2014 Ukraine breathed new life into the format, according to Polish media?*

I do believe that it might make sense for Ukraine to join the group in the future. However, we should remember that consistent effort is needed to meet this target, and revitalisation of the activity of the Weimar Triangle should be the first step. Besides, in the light of the recent presidential election in Poland which have resulted in Andrzej Duda's reelection, we are monitoring the further development of the initiative. At any rate, we fully endorse the idea of giving a new impetus to the Weimar Triangle.

– *There has been a continuous heated debate on the recent crash of a Ukrainian Boeing 737 over Tehran. As it subsequently turned out, France is involved in the process of decoding information from the black boxes. What is your take on how it will remain on the agenda and what are the prospects for us to get clear answers to the complex questions?*

– From the very beginning, we expressed the willingness to offer our help in deciphering the black boxes due to the simple fact of having the needed capacity at our disposal. Now we act in compliance with appropriate rules and procedures and communicate with parties involved. France itself is not a stakeholder, since it is known that there were no French citizens aboard. In reality, this is the matter to be discussed directly by Iran and the group of countries which lost the biggest number of their citizens. They are, first and foremost, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Canada. Be that as it may, we are able and ready to provide assistance.

– *It bears mentioning the activities of the Institut Français and the Embassy of France in Ukraine in the field of cultural diplomacy. Without a shadow of a doubt, this embodies one of the most vibrant examples of the foreign country's cultural diplomacy in Ukraine. How does the embassy operate under conditions of the pandemic? Are there any cultural activities currently organised?*

– It goes without saying that cultural diplomacy is an invaluable aspect of my professional activity and that of the embassy. In Ukraine, we have quite an

impressive cultural network of cooperation with Institut Français, which is very well known among Ukrainians. We rely on the network of the Alliances françaises situated in the major cities of Ukraine, namely Rivne, Lviv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Dnipro, and Zaporizhzhia. In all of these cities, we are spreading culture and promoting the French language within their districts. The French Spring festival, which is usually accompanied with wonderful street performances as part of a vibrant programme, is among the main events representing our country.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we had first to postpone and then cancel the festival, which was supposed to start in April this year. Anyway, we are going to launch new cultural activities this autumn, which was agreed upon with Minister of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine Oleksandr Tkachenko during our meeting. We strongly believe that the French Spring 2021 will be exceptionally vibrant and memorable.

– *What are the main objectives of cultural diplomacy? Are they related to economic, political aspects or the matters of recognition?*

– To my mind, the major purpose is to underline the fact that both French and Ukrainian peoples are Europeans sharing the same values and mindset. It is important to see our cultures interact and we are eager to prompt this process. I would like to highlight the importance of learning French for Ukrainians, as it is regaining the status of a basic EU language after the completion of Brexit. Furthermore, the three capitals of the European Union – Brussels, Luxemburg, and Strasbourg – are French-speaking cities, which further reinforces its importance. Besides, the French language gives access to the International Organisation of La Francophonie. The French speaking population around the world amounts to 700 million, and its diversity amazes considering that French-speaking countries are presented all over the planet and on five continents. I would say that in France it is a tradition to emphasize culture, which is quite an important part of my job here.

– *Which Ukrainian cities impressed you the most? Do you have any favorite locations in Kyiv?*

– Ukrainian cities are quite diverse in their culture and history, and it is a must for an ambassador to travel a lot and visit different parts of the country. Frankly speaking, I cannot give preference to only one city because all of them are thrilling in their own way. Lviv is the one that particularly captured me by its marvelousness. Odesa and its cosmopolitan flavour left a special impression as did other major cities I had a chance to visit. They are Dnipro, Kharkiv, Zhytomyr, Bila Tserkva, Rivne, Poltava, and Zaporizhzhia. The last but not the least is the incredibly courageous city of Mariupol, with which we have developed a special connection. Therefore, I will definitely continue traveling, especially in order to be connected with cities that are important regional players.



11 вересня пан Посол у присутності першої леді Олени Зеленської вручив лист Міністра закордонних справ Франції Жан-Іва Ле Дріана для Дмитра Кулеби, засвідчуючи приєднання України до «Партнерства Біарріц» – глобальної коаліції з підтримання гендерної рівності

On 11 September, Mr Ambassador, in the presence of First Lady Olena Zelenska, handed the letter of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, to Dmytro Kuleba, sealing Ukraine's adhesion to the *Biarritz Partnership*, a global coalition in favour of gender equality

To explore the natural wealth of Ukraine, some logistical challenges should be resolved. This process has been already launched: the renovation of the route between Zaporizhzhia and Mariupol is a case in point. There is a high potential all across the country; however, there is a lot to be improved particularly in the tourism domain.

– *Did you have an opportunity to choose Ukraine as your diplomatic duty station?*
– Over the 30 years of my work on different diplomatic positions, I have stayed in various countries of the European Union, including Poland and Bulgaria, enjoying the chance to learn more about them and establish solid political ties. Although I did not ask for it, the offer to work in Ukraine meant a lot to me due to my considerable experience in European affairs. I have devoted half of my career to European matters by working in Paris and Brussels. Therefore, it is essential for me to take up such a responsible post in Ukraine, a highly ambitious country with regard to its Euro-Atlantic integration. I am absolutely delighted to be stationed on duty in Ukraine at this pivotal moment. Speaking about Kyiv, this city is definitely fantastic. It has its own specificity of life, and I love walking along Khreshchatyk and Mariinskyi Park once in a while. I also enjoy taking a daily walk to my office passing through Maidan Nezalezhnosti. The capital of Ukraine is a peaceful city with a multitude of restaurants and cheerful people, which is a pleasant sight to behold.