

**Inna OHNIVETS,**  
*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary  
of Ukraine to the Portuguese Republic*

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF UKRAINE-PORTUGAL RELATIONS IN CONDITIONS OF COUNTERING RUSSIAN HYBRID WAR**

– *Your Excellency, despite geographical remoteness, Ukraine and Portugal have strong relations. The Portuguese Republic supports the territorial integrity of our state. What, in your opinion, is the pillar of abiding friendship between the countries?*

– The Portuguese Republic recognised Ukraine as a sovereign state on 7 January 1992, and soon, on 27 January, they established diplomatic relations. In 2022, our countries will celebrate the 30th anniversary of these historic events, which played a foundational role in developing Ukraine–Portugal relations.

Although located far from each other, both countries are interested in cooperation for the sake of peace and security on the European continent and preservation of the well-being of our peoples.

We are grateful to Portugal for supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and our Euro–Atlantic and European integration aspirations. Portugal is a co-sponsor of numerous resolutions in the UN and other international organisations, in which the Russian Federation is recognised as an occupying state and the illegal annexation of Crimea, violations of human rights on invaded territories as well as the militarisation of the Crimean peninsula by Russian occupation forces are condemned.

– *What are the paramount priorities of the embassy's work?*

– The activities of the embassy are aimed at developing political relations between Ukraine and Portugal, expanding the legal framework of our countries' cooperation and trade, economic and humanitarian partnership, as well as deepening cooperation with the large Ukrainian community in Portugal.

The main issues on the embassy's agenda are Portugal's support for Ukraine's European prospect, providing Ukraine with NATO Membership Action Plan, and ensuring the implementation of the Crimean Platform initiative. In the economic sphere, key priorities are the promotion of bilateral trade, attraction of investments into Ukrainian economy, development of cooperation in renewable energy, space industry, and other high-tech areas.

– *Portugal is a state with which Ukraine has set up an active high-level dialogue: Ukrainian and Portuguese presidents, governmental leaders, and members*

*of parliaments have been actively communicating on various issues for decades. Has the positive momentum been preserved against the backdrop of restrictive measures due to the pandemic?*

– Undoubtedly, in recent years, Ukraine has significantly deepened its political dialogue with Portugal. In particular, from 2016 to 2021, eleven official visits took place at the governmental and parliamentary levels.

Despite the restrictive measures introduced to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we are vigorously developing bilateral relations, as indicated by the successful official visit of Dmytro Kuleba, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, to Portugal on 9 September 2020. Within the visit, the minister held talks with Augusto Santos Silva, his Portuguese counterpart, and met with Pedro Siza Vieira, Minister of State for the Economy and Digital Transition, and Sérgio Sousa Pinto, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Portuguese Communities of the Assembly of the Republic. The Roadmap for Ukrainian–Portuguese relations for 2020–2022 was signed during the visit.

There is an active dialogue at the level of heads of state. In particular, on 13 January 2021, Presidents Volodymyr Zelenskyi and Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa had a telephone conversation and discussed important issues on the bilateral agenda, primarily the intensification of trade and economic cooperation and continuation of the highest-level dialogue.

Parliamentary cooperation of our countries also plays a significant role in expanding bilateral cooperation.

In November 2018, Ricardo Bexiga, Chairman of Portugal–Ukraine parliamentary friendship group of the Assembly of the Republic, MP of the Socialist Party, visited Ukraine and took part in events dedicated to the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1932–1933 Holodomor in Ukraine and also made a speech on behalf of the Portuguese Parliament at the special memorial meeting of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine.

In March 2019, a delegation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine paid an official visit to Lisbon to hold a number of meetings with the leadership of the Assembly of the Republic and participate in an international conference organised by the Embassy of Ukraine in Portugal on the de-occupation of Crimea.

In 2019, parliamentary elections were held in Ukraine and Portugal. The parliaments of both countries have created new friendship groups. In the Verkhovna Rada on 20 February 2020, a parliamentary group for interparliamentary relations with Portugal was created under the leadership of Ihor Vasyliiev, MP of the Sluha Narodu party, and on 26 March 2021, a parliamentary Portugal–Ukraine friendship group was created in the Assembly of the Republic, headed by Diogo Leão, MP of the Socialist Party.

Of course, the establishment of close interaction between these parliamentary groups is the key to successful parliamentary cooperation.

– *Economic interests play an important role in bilateral relations between Ukraine and Portugal. Considering the challenging crisis conditions due to the spread of COVID-19, the volume of trade ties has decreased. Your Excellency, what are the prospects for trade relations in the near future? How is the embassy cooperating with representatives of Ukrainian business in Portugal?*

– The majority of countries in the world have suffered significant economic damage because of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of appropriate restrictive measures. Ukraine is no exception. In contrast to 2019, when the bilateral trade turnover between Ukraine and Portugal reached \$376.65 million, it fell by 17 percent in 2020.

However, the negative dynamics was overcome in early 2021. This is confirmed by the statistics of the first half of 2021: Bilateral trade in goods and services between our countries increased by almost 55 percent compared to the same period in 2020 and amounted to \$243.3 million. Moreover, Ukrainian exports to Portugal increased by more than 50 percent, amounting to \$194.2 million, and imports to Ukraine increased by 77 percent and amounted to \$49.2 million. In the first half of 2021, the main items of Ukrainian exports to Portugal traditionally are agricultural products (68.2 percent of total exports).

Analysis of bilateral trade indicates that Ukrainian agricultural products are the main component in the overall structure of exports to Portugal nowadays. Three commodity items – cereals, seeds, and fruit of oil plants and oils of vegetable origin, account for over 60 percent of the total volume.

Further increase in the exports of Ukrainian agricultural products to the EU market, in particular Portugal, is so far constrained by the insignificant volumes of import tariff quotas. The situation will nevertheless change with the gradual abolition of these quotas and reduction of tariff rates by the EU. Yet, the export of Ukrainian agro-industrial products can be increased even today not only to the domestic Portuguese market but also to the markets of the Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa, particularly Angola and Mozambique, with the assistance of the Portuguese side. Besides, we seek to move away from the usual trade of raw materials to make the export of goods with the significant added value an object of special attention.

Today, the most promising area is deemed to be the development of bilateral cooperation based on the implementation of mutually beneficial economic projects in such sectors as aerospace, digital technologies, energy, particularly with the usage of renewable energy sources, etc.

The embassy takes appropriate measures to disseminate information about Ukraine, its production, investment, and tourism potential. For instance, in March 2019, the Forum on Tourism Development between our states was held in Lisbon, which we organised together with the Portugal–Ukraine Chamber of Commerce and the Ukrainian Insider Time travel company. This event was

attended by about 100 representatives of the Ukrainian and Portuguese tourism service and hotel business, transport and logistics companies, regional chambers of commerce and industry of the two countries, and state agencies. Advertising products of Ukrainian and Portuguese companies were presented at the stands.

Another example of the embassy's activities aimed at assisting Ukrainian entrepreneurs in entering the Portuguese market was the holding of a webinar with representatives of the business circles of Portugal and Ukraine. It was organised by the embassy jointly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the Portugal–Ukraine Chamber of Commerce and the Ukrainian IPlace IT company in November 2020. The event became a good platform for unlocking the potential of trade and economic cooperation, particularly, the interested business received useful advice on entering the Portuguese market and adapting its foreign economic activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Practice indicates that the holding of these events contributes to the deepening of bilateral business ties, helps to find effective solutions to the challenges of our time, and intensifies Ukraine–Portugal cooperation in the trade and economic sphere.

– *Today's Portuguese investments in Ukraine amount to \$15.6 million. The Amorim company, world leader in cork products, and the Fapomed company, which produces medical clothing in Ukraine, are considered to be the main investors. Your Excellency, which areas have the greatest investment potential? What opportunities does Ukraine give to Portuguese investors?*

– Our countries are interested in the implementation of joint projects in the field of high technologies, cooperation in space exploration, and participation of Portuguese business in privatisation in Ukraine.

This was confirmed by the meeting of Dmytro Kuleba, the head of Ukrainian MFA, with representatives of the business community of Portugal as part of aforementioned official visit to the Portuguese Republic on 9 September 2020. The event was attended by heads of enterprises either intending to enter the Ukrainian market or already developing bilateral cooperation, namely Jerónimo Martins International Group, Efasec, Corticeira Amorim, Fapomed, Caldeira & Marques Ltd., to list a few.

Among the Portuguese companies, whose products will have potential advantages in the Ukrainian market, one can mention agricultural, textile enterprises, companies producing medicines, dairy products, and equipment for power plants using renewable energy sources.

– *Discrediting Ukraine's international profile is part of Russia's information war against our state. In Portugal, there are some acts of Russian propaganda, for example, the column of the Immortal Regiment or the proposal of the resolution 'Solidarity with the Ukrainian people under the escalation of the Kyiv regime's aggression' by the Portuguese Communist Party. What measures is the embassy taking to counteract such actions?*

– The Embassy of Ukraine in Portugal continuously conducts active outreach work among governmental, parliamentary, expert circles, the Portuguese public, as well as the Ukrainian diaspora there to counter the disinformation spread by Russia and its supporters.

In particular, I have published 25 articles in the leading Portuguese *Público* newspaper over the past five years, including op-eds on the Crimean Platform, Ukraine's European integration and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, the recognition of the 1932–1933 Holodomor in Ukraine as the genocide of the Ukrainian people. The articles aroused a keen interest in Portuguese society, as evidenced by feedback: 1,512 people shared these articles on social networks and 469 people published comments to them.

In addition, each issue of the renowned *Diplomática. Business & Diplomacy* magazine has included articles of our embassy for several years in a row. In particular, in the last issue no. 36, 2021, an article entitled *The Crimean Platform – International Opposition to the Russian Occupation in Crimea* tells us about the establishment of the Crimean Platform, a new international consultative and communication mechanism aimed at de-occupying Crimea and returning it under Ukrainian control.

Besides, more than 40 video messages in Portuguese were distributed on social networks and 64 interviews were given to the Portuguese media covering various issues of interstate cooperation.

In the *Público* newspaper on 21 June 2020, an anti-Ukrainian provocation took place, represented by the publication of three articles of journalist Ricardo Cabral Fernandes, a Left Bloc activist, who portrayed Ukraine as a field for military training of far-right forces from different countries and a supplier of such forces abroad. In order to refute the anti-Ukrainian allegations, on the same day, my video message in Portuguese was distributed on the web pages of the embassy on YouTube and Facebook, in which, in particular, I underscored that these articles were evidence of a hybrid war that Russia is waging not only against Ukraine but also against all of Europe and an attempt by the Russian Federation as an aggressor country and its supporters in other countries to justify the Kremlin's military aggression against our state.

It is also worth noting that renowned Portuguese journalists and political observers José Milhazes and M. Cadoso spoke in support of Ukraine and criticised these publications on their Facebook accounts, calling the provocative articles a classic example of Russian propaganda.

The influence of the Russian Federation on the Communist Party of Portugal, which is trying to spread disinformation about Ukraine using Kremlin rhetoric, is a cause for concern.

On 26 May 2021, the Commission on Foreign Affairs and Portuguese Communities of the Assembly of the Republic considered two draft resolutions on the

situation in Ukraine, which were submitted by the Socialist and Communist Party of Portugal. Most of the members of the aforementioned commission supported the draft resolution entitled ‘Concern over the international situation on the land and sea borders of Ukraine’ aimed at supporting Ukraine. It was developed by the socialists upon the initiative of the aforementioned MP Diogo Leão, Chairman of the Portugal–Ukraine friendship group. Meanwhile, the scandalous draft resolution of the communists containing falsified information about Ukraine was rejected.

In addition, the Chairman of Portugal–Ukraine friendship group, Diogo Leão, published an article in the Público newspaper on 29 May 2021 on the above-mentioned resolution in support of Ukraine, in which he underlined the extreme importance of spreading the truth about how our country is countering Russian military aggression in Donbas and providing international support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty.

*– Despite the significant number of Ukrainians living in Portugal and the activities of 14 Ukrainian NGOs, at the beginning of 2021, there came up an urgent issue on the representation of the Ukrainian community in the Council for Migration at the High Commission for Migration of Portugal. Your Excellency, what is the situation regarding the representation of Ukrainians in this institution? What role does the embassy play in communication between Portuguese institutions and the Ukrainian diaspora?*

– The embassy has focused its attention on this issue for a long time. Only two out of fourteen Ukrainian NGOs are currently represented in the High Commissioner for Migration of Portugal, namely the Association of Ukrainians in Portugal and the Ukrainian Christian Movement in Portugal.

The Ukrainian electoral collegium, which elected a representative of the Ukrainian community to the Council on Migration for 2021–2023 at the beginning of this year, re-elected Natalia Khmil to this position again. It should be noted that the collegium consisted of three multinational immigrant organisations, including representatives of various ethnicities from Eastern European countries, nationals of the republics of the former USSR. Natalia Khmil is the president of the Amizade Associação de Imigrantes and cooperates with Russian representatives, particularly with the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Portugal, as indicated by photographs published on the official webpages of this institution.

The Embassy of Ukraine in the Portuguese Republic does not recognise Natalia Khmil as the official representative of the Ukrainian community in the Portuguese Council on Migration, does not cooperate with her, as we deem her cooperation with the aggressor country, the Russian Federation, harmful to the image of the Ukrainian community in Portugal.

We have held a number of meetings on this matter with the leadership of the High Commission for Migration, during which special attention was attached to the inadequate representation of Ukrainians at this governmental agency.

In addition, the embassy constantly reminds Ukrainian NGOs in Portugal about the need to register with the High Commission. Thus, the solution to this issue, above all, depends on the activity of Ukrainian NGOs, which must show their own initiative and submit respective applications. The embassy is ready to comprehensively expedite this process.

– *In 2017, Portugal became one of the countries that recognised the 1932–1933 Holodomor as genocide against the Ukrainian people. What measures is the embassy taking to promote Ukrainian history in Portugal?*

– Holding international conferences and cultural events in Portugal contributes best to the dissemination of knowledge about Ukraine, its history, culture, as well as strengthens the international image of Ukraine.

The embassy organised a series of events in memory of the 1932–1933 Holodomor victims to deliver truthful information about this tragic page in the history of Ukraine to the Portuguese-speaking public. In 2016, a thematic photo exhibition was presented in the former royal residence in the Palace of Mafra. In 2017 and 2018, the University of Lisbon hosted two international conferences on this cruel historic episode. In 2019, at the initiative of Catarina Lopes, a student at St Peter's International School, the embassy held a respective colloquium and a documentary exhibition at the International College in Palmela, Setubal region.

Over the last five years, the embassy together with Ukrainian organisations has ensured the holding of cultural events of various formats and themes, for instance, Days of Ukrainian Culture and Days of Ukrainian Cinema in Portugal, cultural and artistic projects titled 'Cultural Code. Tradition and Modernity' (with a presentation of Trypillia culture); 'Under the Pinzel's star. Baroque art and costumes of the era', photo exhibitions honouring the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, etc.

In 2019, the chamber ensemble of the Kyiv National Academic Operetta Theatre put on a brilliant gala concert called *The Night of Ukrainian Operetta in Lisbon* at the Teatro Politeama in Lisbon. The performance of the Ukrainian singer Ruslana before the final of Eurovision 2018 in the main square of the Portuguese capital was unforgettable.

The unveiling of the Taras Shevchenko monument made by the Portuguese sculptor Helder de Carvalho on the Plaza Italia in Lisbon in September 2019 was a historic event. In March 2020, the embassy and the Association of Residents and Entrepreneurs of the Park of Nations district of Lisbon jointly organised a poetry evening dedicated to the memory of Taras Shevchenko with the performance of Kobzar's works in Ukrainian and Portuguese.

– *Portugal holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU in the early half of 2021 with the slogan 'Time to Reach: Fair, Green, and Digital Recovery'. Your Excellency, how would you assess this process and its results? Was the issue of Ukraine's European integration considered back then?*

– Portugal headed the Council of the EU in a difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Europe and, in particular, in Portugal itself. This situation significantly influenced the format of the institution's official events.

Despite all the difficulties regarding restrictive measures introduced in the EU, Portugal has successfully implemented the goals envisaged for the period of its presidency. The Portuguese programme focused on three major aspects: promoting economic recovery of the EU oriented towards the transition to progressive climate norms and digital technologies; establishing a European framework for social rights as a key element in the successful implementation of a just and inclusive climate and digital transition; strengthening the strategic autonomy of Europe, open to the world.

On 7–8 May 2021, Porto hosted the EU Social Summit within whose framework a high-level conference and an informal meeting of the European Council were held. The Porto Social Commitment and the Porto Declaration were signed, according to which the European social rights policy is recognised as a basic element of recovery.

The second chapter of the Roadmap of Ukrainian–Portuguese relations for 2020–2022 tells that cooperation between Ukraine and Portugal will also be aimed at the gradual integration of Ukraine into the European Union.

In addition, the embassy and Portuguese partners are currently working on the issue of signing a declaration on the European prospect at the highest level. I would like to remind you that during the aforementioned telephone conversation between the leaders of the countries, the President of Portugal said that Ukraine is Europe and that he supports our European integration aspirations.

– *Portugal is vigorously developing its energy industry, planning to switch to renewables and achieve carbon neutrality in the coming decades. Your Excellency, from your standpoint, can Ukraine apply the experience of Portugal in the sphere of eco-friendly energy?*

– Portugal is already the European leader in the use of alternative energy sources satisfying 24 percent of the country's total demand. Experts estimate that the projects that have been launched in recent years have allowed Portugal to attract about €23 billion in investments in this area.

On 4 March 2020, the European Commission officially presented a draft European Climate Law aimed at achieving Europe's carbon (climate) neutrality and net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The law provides for the achievement of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Member states are to take appropriate measures at EU and national levels to achieve this goal. These are rather ambitious plans.

Ukraine with its aspirations to EU membership is interested in aggressively introducing technologies to achieve the long-term goal of climate neutrality. It is quite a wide-ranging issue; therefore, the Ukrainian government intends to support businesses in the decarbonisation processes. Not only should Ukrainian

entrepreneurs foresee all the risks on the path towards the aforementioned goal but also use experience already acquired in this area by other states, particularly Portugal. For example, with the aim of the practical implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between Ukraine and Portugal in the field of energy efficiency, the Ukrainian Clear Energy company, the Directorate-General of Energy and Geology of Portugal, and the Portuguese Renewable Energy Association started cooperation on bilateral investment projects in the territories of both countries.

Besides, negotiations are underway between the Ukrainian Clear Energy company and the Portuguese FPT Energia e Ambiente company on fulfilling two projects, particularly the construction of an enterprise for the production of bioethanol and ecological waste processing.

– *Portugal has provided assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine and has taken two wounded Ukrainian soldiers for treatment. Your Excellency, please tell us whether Portugal is planning some other projects in the humanitarian sphere.*

– From 16 March to 26 May 2017, these soldiers were at the Portuguese Armed Forces Hospital. They underwent some quality operations to restore damaged nerves of the upper and lower limbs.

Last year, an agreement was reached on the treatment and rehabilitation of three Ukrainian servicemen in military hospitals in Lisbon and Porto. Due to a significant deterioration of the epidemiological situation in the winter of 2020 and in the spring of this year, the arrival of Ukrainian wounded military personnel to Portugal was however postponed to the latter half of 2021. Portugal is still to determine the final date.

– *You are a member of the Association of Women Ambassadors in Portugal (AWA). Please tell us more about this organisation and joint initiatives of its members.*

– I am indeed honoured to be an AWA member. This organisation was created in 2014 at the initiative of Leena Salim Moazzam, Ambassador of Pakistan to Portugal. The association's logo was soon approved. Soon, the organisation gained popularity among the diplomatic corps of Lisbon.

Every year, under the patronage of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of Portugal, AWA holds various events, including annual conferences dedicated to gender equality. Members of the association join the human rights campaign, which is held annually on 25 November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Since March 2020, given the restrictive measures regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the association's activities have been carried out online. Specifically, a number of online events have been held on the position of women during the pandemic. At the same time, the epidemiological situation in Portugal is gradually improving due to the successful vaccination of citizens. Thus, I hope that AWA will resume offline activities this autumn.

– *Your Excellency, what are the challenges facing the embassy during the period of restrictions related to the pandemic?*

– Due to the quarantine restrictions and remote work of most Portuguese institutions, it was more complicated to hold meetings and public events during 2020–2021.

The embassy, however, has rapidly adapted to new conditions, established new communication channels, transferred communication in all areas into an online format and promptly responded to the challenges of this period.

For instance, a large number of Ukrainian citizens in Portugal were in a precarious situation due to the sudden introduction of quarantine measures as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. In March – May 2020, 1,027 citizens turned to the embassy with a request to facilitate a rapid return to Ukraine and urgent restoration of travel documents.

A round-the-clock watch was organised for the officials of the embassy to give advice on alternative ways of returning to Ukraine, conditions of stay in Portugal, and the possibility of receiving assistance from local state agencies. On Facebook, the “Defence / Portuguese Republic” group was created to promptly handle urgent issues of the Ukrainian citizens who could not leave Portugal and required consular support due to the quarantine restrictions.

In cooperation with SkyUp Airlines, the embassy organised six repatriation flights returning 795 people to Ukraine. The staff of the embassy were providing consular support to various categories of citizens of Ukraine, including members of the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Antarctic expeditions, members of Ukrainian sports delegations from para triathlon, triathlon, rowing, badminton, carting, air crew members, doctors returning to Ukraine, etc.

The resolution of these issues has shown a high level of readiness of the embassy to work in crisis situations.

– *What are the prospects for bilateral relations between Ukraine and Portugal?*

– To fulfil the agreements reached by the leaders of Ukraine and Portugal during a telephone conversation on 13 January 2021, the embassy is preparing the official visit of the President of Portugal Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa to Ukraine at the invitation of his counterpart the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

In addition, political consultations of the foreign ministries of Ukraine and Portugal and politico-military consultations of the defence ministries of our countries will take place in autumn. This year, visits at the interparliamentary level are intended as well. In the autumn of 2021, it is planned to hold the third meeting of the Ukrainian–Portuguese Intergovernmental Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation in Kyiv.

The momentum of bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and Portugal is growing, which indicates the interest of our countries in further deepening mutually beneficial bilateral relations. They are based on the unification around European democratic values as well as Portugal’s all-round support of Ukraine’s course towards joining the EU and NATO.