

## **UKRAINIAN DIPLOMACY OVER 30 YEARS OF UKRAINE'S INDEPENDENCE**

I send my best wishes to the readers of *Ukraina Dyplomatychna* on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ukraine's Independence.

In the last three decades, a new generation has grown up in Ukraine – people, who had never lived in the Soviet “prison of nations” and now play an active role in the socio-political life of their country. For this new generation Ukraine has always been and will forever be independent. Looking at them, I feel confident that we passed the point of no return. Ukraine has asserted itself as an independent state and any attempt to drag it back into the past will be doomed to fail.

Thirty years is the age of maturity and responsibility, the time when one is to provide for his or her own happiness, security, and success. That is why, upon the initiative of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has formulated the Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine. When the document was adopted at the highest level this summer, for the first time in three decades, our country has obtained a fundamental document, which defines its foreign policy goals and priorities, ensures systematic and coherent work of our diplomatic service, and enables implementation of long-term policies and achievement of ambitious results.

The strategy provides that, in addition to our unwavering focus on NATO and EU membership, Ukraine is to strengthen its national and regional security by forming unions and alliances with friends and like-minded nations. In 2020, we launched the Lublin Triangle with Poland and Lithuania and established the new Quadriga format with Turkey. This year we established the Associated Trio with Georgia and Moldova and initiated the Crimea Platform – a truly unprecedented initiative in both scope and historical significance.

When we tried to imagine our future thirty years ago, we visualized a direct and smooth path, leading straight to democratic, prosperous, peaceful and rule-based Europe. The path, as it turned out, has proved to be rather arduous. We dealt with economic crises, lived through two democratic revolutions, and for the last seven years have been countering the still ongoing Russian aggression. However, Ukraine succeeded in defending itself from domestic and foreign enemies and upholding its right to exist and to choose its European and Euro-Atlantic future. Ukrainians have paid a high price for their country's freedom. But one thing I am certain – the loss of it would have cost us significantly more.

In the last thirty years we have become so used to democracy that we perceive it as something natural and invisible as the air we breathe. Yet, one glimpse at neighboring Russia or Belarus allows understanding what it means to live in countries void of that democratic oxygen. These two negative examples perfuse our hearts with an even greater feeling of profound gratitude to the heroes of the Revolution of Dignity and Ukraine's military, who protect our country's territorial integrity against Russian aggression.

Diplomacy is one of the key pillars of Ukrainian statehood. In the last thirty years our diplomatic corps resolved numerous complex problems and on numerous occasions demonstrated its steadfast readiness to protect Ukrainian citizens and Ukraine's national interests.

The first challenge was to develop the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the *independent* Ukraine. In Soviet times, our small ministry played a nominal role. Yet, its small team of diplomats knew their craft and had substantial professional experience in the international domain. They shared their knowledge with newly appointed diplomats, who joined the Ministry during the early years of Ukraine's independence. As they say, the Ukrainian diplomatic service has been put together "on the move".

Led by Minister Anatolii Zlenko, this team of pioneers was tasked with historic assignments and the most important of them was to achieve Ukraine's international recognition as an independent state. Western analysts, politicians, and government officials were caught by surprise by the new reality as Ukraine (and other fourteen newly independent states) emerged on the remnants of the Soviet empire as new players on the international arena.

Nonetheless, the all-Ukrainian Referendum of December 1, 1991, dispelled all doubts. The world was convinced that Ukrainian people wanted sovereignty. The following cascade of recognitions did not happen on its own. For diplomats it meant colossal work and professional efforts to establish relations and develop effective cooperation with dozens of countries. The same applied to international organizations. From the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic we inherited a permanent representation at the UN, but membership in the Council of Europe, the World Trade Organization, and other institutions took years of meticulous work and reform efforts of the entire country.

This year, Ukraine has lost Anatolii Zlenko, the first head of the independent Ukrainian MFA. He educated so many generations of diplomats and for his entire life was unreservedly committed to Ukraine and its international relations. He laid the foundation of Ukraine's European integration. In memory of Anatolii Zlenko and in honor of his historic role, I decided to establish a new professional recognition at the Ministry – the award pin "For Commitment to the Diplomatic Service" named after Anatolii Zlenko.

The European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine has been a strategic work area for Ukraine's diplomats and one of the key priorities of Ukraine's Foreign Policy Strategy. It embodies Ukraine's civilizational choice in favor of freedom and democracy. The path to EU and NATO requires comprehensive internal transformations at the governmental and societal levels. We have made significant strides on this journey, changing Ukraine's geopolitical position and making our country an indispensable part of the Western community. In 2008, NATO welcomed Ukraine's aspirations for future membership. In 2014, the Association Agreement with the EU was signed. In 2017, a visa-free regime between Ukraine and EU-member states was achieved and in 2020, Ukraine became the Enhanced Opportunities Partner of NATO.

In 2014 Russia launched its military aggression against our state. Undoubtedly, Russian aggression is the major challenge for independent Ukraine and thus our diplomatic front plays an essential role in defense of our country. Consequently, countering Russian aggression is a top priority in the Foreign Policy Strategy of Ukraine. We consolidated, preserved, and strengthened the broad international coalition in support of Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression. This was once again demonstrated by the firm response that our partners had given in April 2021 to yet another Russian attempt to escalate military situation at Ukraine's Eastern borders and in the temporarily occupied Crimea.

Our heroes, brave women and men in uniform who joined the ranks of the Armed Forces and volunteer battalions to protect Ukraine, have thwarted the aggressor's plans and played a leading role in containing the Russian aggression. Diplomats have been guarding the external front lines, consolidating support of the international community and ensuring it keeps a consistent pressure on Moscow. Diplomatic efforts exerted during the Normandy Four consultation in Minsk allowed to considerably reduce the intensity of fire. In violation of the Paris agreements reached by the leaders of the Normandy Four in December 2019, the Russian side has never ceased fire. However, Ukraine's ardent diplomatic efforts allowed saving hundreds, if not thousands, of lives of the military personnel and civilians.

While Ukraine and the international community were trying their best to put out the flames of bloody fighting in Donbas by diplomatic means, the issue of Russia's occupation of Crimea got sidelined. Unlike Donbas, no diplomatic forum was established to resolve the problem of Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea. This was in congruence with one of the Kremlin's main goals: to divert the international attention from this crime and make the world put up with the fact of the occupation, despite public statements that the attempted annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula would never be recognized.

This year, upon the initiative of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, this mistake was rectified. On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, the eve of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of Ukraine's independence, Kyiv hosted the inaugural summit of the new interna-

tional format, the Crimea Platform, which brought together 46 high-level delegations. All EU and NATO member-states were represented. In other words, the entire democratic world showed its support to Ukraine's efforts to bring Crimea back into the focus of international attention.

The Crimea Platform is going to work continuously and at all possible levels, including the inter-state and diplomatic level, parliamentary level and that of the international expert community. The goal of the platform is to ensure de-occupation of Crimea and its return under the full control of Ukraine. In order to achieve this target, the platform will touch upon the full spectrum of issues caused by the Russian occupation, starting from keeping pressure on the aggressor by enhancing effectiveness of sanctions to countering threats emanating from militarization of Crimea and numerous damage to Crimea's natural resources and its ecosystem. The Crimea Platform participants will also focus on ensuring the freedom of navigation and paying special attention to protecting human rights and ethnic rights of Crimean Tatars, as well as fighting for the release of political prisoners from Russian detention facilities.

The Crimea Platform Summit was the largest international event ever held in Ukraine in the entire history of its independence and, certainly, one of this year's most significant foreign policy highlights. The Crimea Platform has clearly demonstrated that contrary to Russia's claims, the issue of Crimea has not been "closed". The participation of 46 partners in the Crimea Platform Summit in Kyiv convincingly proved that this issue will become truly "closed" on the day of Crimea's return under the Ukrainian national flag. Russia will have to return the seized territories to its legitimate owner and it will be held accountable for all its committed crimes.

The Foreign Policy Strategy envisages an active development of bilateral cooperation with our strategic partners. The United States is Ukraine's number one security partner. President Zelenskyy's visit to the United States in September 2021 opened a new stage in the U.S.-Ukrainian relations that envisages deeper cooperation in security and defense, trade, energy and other areas.

Ukraine is actively developing its strategic partnership with the United Kingdom. On 1 January 2021, the UK-Ukraine Political, Free Trade and Strategic Partnership Agreement came into force, bringing relations between the two countries to an entirely new level.

In the last year and a half, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine has fundamentally re-organized its instruments of assisting Ukrainian businesses in entering foreign markets. I am confident that diplomats play a crucial role in export promotion and strengthening Ukraine's economy. A powerful country is the one that opens new opportunities for its companies and protects their interests at international markets. That is why we have significantly strengthened the economic work of Ukraine's diplomatic missions and introduced new crite-

ria for assessing effectiveness of our diplomatic efforts in promoting trade and investments. We have turned the MFA's Council of Exporters and Investors into a truly engaged and active body that creates new economic opportunities for Ukrainian business entities. Ukrainian enterprises have found a reliable partner in Ukraine's Foreign Ministry, as figures so clearly demonstrate. MFA's Council of Exporters and Investors is currently made of more than 350 companies, professional communities, and associations, as compared to around 100 members just a year ago. Entrepreneurs join those who truly support them.

It is not only about changing the methods and culture of our dealing with Ukrainian exporters and foreign investors, but also about expanding the geography of trade and investment by opening new markets in Asia, South America, and Africa.

At a time when Russia is waging a global information war, the MFA has dramatically modernized and reinforced its information, country branding and cultural cooperation policies. For the first time we developed and adopted two policy documents – the Communication Strategy and the Public Diplomacy Strategy, which provided for better structure and consistency of our activities.

Together with the Ukrainian Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we have created the official website Ukraine.ua, which became a major channel for providing information about our country to international audiences. The website already has English, German, French, Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic language versions.

We are also successfully implementing the initiative of the First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska and introducing Ukrainian-language audio guides in museums around the world. When we demonstrate respect to Ukrainian language and culture abroad, we demonstrate our respect to ourselves and make others respect Ukraine.

We pay special attention to the fight against disinformation and development of international cooperation in this area. This year, upon the initiative of Ukraine, the UN has hosted its first ever-special event titled “Making fact-checking a global practice: towards a common approach to countering disinformation & misinformation”.

Protecting the rights and interests of Ukrainians abroad is a constant and invariable priority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one of the main priorities of Ukraine's Foreign Policy Strategy.

This year, Ukraine has proved in numerous practical ways that it does not leave its citizens without help, whenever they find themselves in trouble abroad. In May this year, Ukraine carried out a successful international humanitarian operation, evacuating 109 Ukrainians, 13 Moldovans, and 4 Bulgarians from the Gaza Strip after the security situation over there became direr. In late August, 2021 Ukraine amazed the entire world once again, when we successfully

evacuated our own and foreign citizens from Afghanistan after the Taliban regime regained power. It was perhaps one of the most complex rescue missions among all previously implemented, but we managed to save over 650 people from insecurity and chaos at the Kabul International Airport.

The Russian aggression has forced us to protect not only our citizens abroad but also Ukrainians residing in the temporarily occupied territories. This pressing issue was also addressed at the Crimea Platform Summit. In 2021, we launched the project “Izolyatsiya: Must Speak”, which draws attention of the international community to cases of illegal arrest and torture at Izolyatsiya – the former art center in Donetsk, which was turned into a prison, as well as other detention facilities in the occupied territories of Donbas.

For two years now, the world has been almost paralyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which put additional pressure on the work of Ukraine’s diplomatic missions abroad. Amid the difficult conditions of lockdowns and closed borders, in the spring of 2020 we helped more than 250,000 citizens to return home. Now we provide our citizens with real-time information on the terms of entry, exit or transit for each country. For this purpose, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a unique digital tool – an interactive world map that is regularly updated. We are actively introducing convenient digital instruments to make MFA’s services more accessible to citizens.

We are digitizing and modernizing the entire administrative work of our diplomatic service in order to transform the MFA into a modern foreign policy agency that works in accordance with the highest international standards. I am convinced that our joint, persistent and systematic efforts will help us achieve this and other ambitious goals!