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## **SOVIET AMBASSADOR WITH UKRAINE IN HIS HEART**

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under the author's editorship.*

Young, full of energy, with an open charismatic smile, speaking a living Ukrainian, that was recognized by even the pickiest Ukrainian writers, Vasyl Drozdenko quickly gained popularity both in Party circles and among the people, first of all in Kyiv.

This could not help but worry other contenders for the Party Olympus. As a result of backroom agreements in March 1971 a decision was lobbied through the Central Committee of the CPSU – to “promote” the promising statesman to diplomatic work as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the USSR to Romania.

In those days that was quite a fall from grace as it meant the end of nomenclature growth with an uncertain perspective of working in a new, complex and specific, furthermore, unfamiliar area.

Nowadays, in publications made by some professional Ukrainian diplomats, who once dreamed of making a career on Smolenskaya, one can find disrespectful remarks addressed to ambassadors-former Party secretaries, allegedly, those political losers quickly forgot about their Ukrainian roots once they had reached Moscow. Their diplomatic abilities are often questioned by some people as well.

This is probably true regarding some Soviet Ambassadors-Ukrainians. But for a true patriot of Ukraine Vasyl Drozdenko the diplomatic path became a new and, unfortunately, the last bright page of his political activity for the good of his Motherland, yet another opportunity to realize his powerful and multifaceted talent.

Former front-line soldier Drozdenko, was sent not to a “Tranquilland”, but to the cutting edge again. After all, due to well-known historical geopolitical events, our relations with Romania - neither then nor now - have never been cloudless.

The Romanian leader of that time, Ceausescu, a dictator and orthodox communist at home, pursued quite an independent as for a Warsaw Pact country foreign policy, called “Special course.” Bilateral relations were further complicated with the repeated attempts of Romanian public figures (mostly in historical literature and press publications) to call into question the post-war borders up to direct pretensions to the territories that now legitimately belong to Ukraine.

Thus, the work of the Embassy in Bucharest has always been intense. Much depended on the personality, political weight and diplomatic abilities of the Ambassador. And that was the moment when Vasyl Drozdenko's best skills acquired during his Party work in Ukraine, were needed: the ability to quickly perceive the most important, to make decisions promptly, and most importantly - interpersonal skills, the ability to establish and maintain contacts, even with political opponents.

This rarely observed talent – the desire and ability to work with people, both with the Embassy staff and Romanian officials as well as with colleagues in the diplomatic corps, as we would say today, to use the human dimension, allowed Vasyl Drozdenko to become an outstanding diplomat. Since, as the first Minister for Foreign Affairs of Independent Ukraine Anatolii Zlenko rightly noted, “diplomacy is the human dimension raised to the absolute”.

This talent was primarily determined by his ability to carry out, as was said at the time, the correct “selection and placement of personnel”. Realizing the complexity of tasks facing the Embassy, Vasyl Drozdenko involved in every way authoritative scientists in the diplomatic work. Thus, thorough analytical materials on complex historical issues were prepared at the Embassy by the famous Moldovan and Russian historian Professor Mikhail Muntian. The young talented economist Aleksandr Nekipelov who worked within the economic section of the Embassy has now become an Academician and Vice-president of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

A creative, proactive atmosphere prevailed in the Embassy. Ambassador Vasyl Drozdenko was not only respected and naturally feared, but also sincerely loved. Many diplomats and technical staff of the Embassy returned to Bucharest two or three times, guided by the wise truth of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - “no matter what country, what matters is the Ambassador”.

Drozdenko's creative approach was manifested in the initiation of new forms and working methods, including advanced training of diplomatic staff. Thus, on his initiative, a “young diplomats school” was set up at the Embassy, where experienced diplomats passed on their experience to a new generation. At the time, the author of these lines also went through this school. Subsequently, the mentioned initiative became widespread - a “young diplomats school” also functioned within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

The achievements of Ambassador Drozdenko were actually used by ambassadors of Independent Ukraine to Romania, in particular by one of the best Ukrainian contemporary diplomats, former First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Oleksandr Chalyy.

Of course, Vasyl Drozdenko was a person of his time and acted in the existing then political coordinate system. However, he was fully aware of all the shortcomings of that system and was sincerely worried about them. Although he spent

many years abroad, Vasyl Drozdenko did not lose constant and close ties with his native Ukraine and tried to do good deeds for it as much as possible.

At his insistence, Aeroflot airlines Moscow-Bucharest flight had a stopover at Kyiv (until recently, there was no direct flight between Ukrainian and Romanian capitals). Leading Ukrainian cultural figures, in particular the soloist of the Kyiv Opera and Ballet Theater, People's Artist of the USSR Yevheniia Myroshnychenko, regularly toured around Romania. Overcoming the resistance of Moscow officials, Vasyl Drozdenko promoted Ukrainians both diplomats and technical staff to work at the Embassy. Some of them are still working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

For twelve long years, until his untimely death on November 30, 1982, Vasyl Drozdenko served as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the USSR to Romania - almost a record even for Soviet times. This fact better than any words proves the high professional level of his diplomatic work. In Romanian political circles, among the public and in the diplomatic corps of Bucharest, where for many years he was the dean and enjoyed undisputed authority, the "Ambassador Drozdenko era" was recalled for many years afterwards.

Despite persistent advices coming from above, Vasyl Ivanovych did not change his Kyiv residence to Moscow. He spent each annual vacation not in Karlovy Vary, but in Kyiv in his favorite sanatorium "Pushcha-Vodytsya".

The obligatory habit during his stay in Kyiv was always a visit to the Ukrainian MFA where he had long and substantive conversations with Minister Georgiy Shevel. The Minister took a keen interest in developments in neighboring Romania, life of the Ukrainian community, Ceausescu's policy and always raised the issue of promotion of Ukrainians to work at the Embassy in Bucharest.

In 1982, Vasyl Drozdenko happily accepted an official invitation to attend the celebration of the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Kyiv, as he had invested so much effort in the development of the city.

He was buried right here, in his beloved Kyiv, in the central alley of the Baykove cemetery.

In my view, Vasyl Drozdenko's diplomatic activity deserves a more in depth study. The time will come when the name of this Soviet but true Ukrainian Diplomat will take its rightful place in the diplomatic history of Ukraine.