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Chargé d'Affaires of the Republic of Cyprus to Ukraine
(January 2022 – August 2022)*

‘HONOUR TO SHARE THIS HISTORICAL MOMENT WITH YOU’

I assumed my duties in Ukraine in February 2021, and my first year in office was rich in impressions of the country's beauty and the extraordinary talent of its people. Little did I know then, what fundamental transformations the evolutionary process of the receiving country would undergo in one year and how it would affect those witnessing that process in the field.

In January 2022, as the then head of the embassy, acting in the capacity of Chargé d'Affaires [on 9 August 2022, newly appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus to Ukraine Michalis Zacharioglou took office], I was following the worrying developments of events, scrupulously separating the facts and official declarations from interpretations and estimations. The realisation of the apocalyptic scenario, which I never wanted to believe in and that was yet signalled from so many different sources, found my two children and me in our private apartment in Kyiv. The shock from the awareness that a full-scale invasion into Ukraine has started, one that had no justification and grounds even military ones, almost immediately changed into genuine admiration for the Ukrainian people for their heroic spirit and courage. Neither my children nor I have left the territory of Ukraine since then. On 28 February, I evacuated our citizens from Kyiv to Porubne, the border crossing point to Romania; our route ran parallel to the zone of active military action. It is an unforgettable experience, and I will always be grateful to the Ukrainian officers at the security checkpoints, who in times of terrible distress and danger, did their best in protecting and helping our convoy pass freely and assisted in removing the fortified barriers for our bus and vehicle to proceed.

Having completed the evacuation operation in Chernivtsi, I have stayed in the city of Ivano-Frankivsk for two months. There I learned what true solidarity stands for while living in a Ukrainian family of genuine tradition keepers, so characteristic of the people in the West of Ukraine. It was my first real in-depth acquaintance with Ukrainian originality, one I will always lean to come back to.

I returned to Kyiv on 25 April and reopened the Embassy. I was grateful to my Ukrainian colleagues who immediately returned to their duties at the Embassy and helped me extend further my country's unreserved support to Ukraine lasting since the first days of the full-scale invasion. Cypriots like no one else feel

the pain of the tragic situation in Ukraine, as we have our own experience of military invasion and occupation of more than a third of our territory by Turkey. We do not hesitate to strongly and unequivocally condemn Russia's invasion and provocative actions against Ukraine.

Cyprus has joined the EU consensus on imposing seven thematic packages of sectoral sanctions and restrictive measures against Russia, despite the direct impact on our economy. Furthermore, we have approved the provision of supplies and military equipment to the Ukrainian army through the European Peace Facility. Another tangible evidence of Cyprus's solidarity is the volume of humanitarian aid that has been gathered mainly through the individual contributions of citizens, which constitutes the largest humanitarian assistance we have ever dispatched. We have welcomed Ukrainians seeking refuge in our island, and we continue to intensify cooperation within the existing bilateral mechanisms of exchange and support: direct financing of universities, admitting Ukrainian children to Cypriot summer camps for recovery, and engaging in other humanitarian projects.

We shall continue demonstrating our solidarity with Ukraine in deeds during this tragic and yet glorified time when the whole world is witnessing the continuous heroic struggle and resistance of the Ukrainian people in countering Russian aggression. It is an honour for me to share this historic moment with you and to be present on your land. Glory to Ukraine! Slava Ukraini!