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‘WE ENCOURAGE OUR PARTNERS IN BRUSSELS TO BE AS FLEXIBLE AS POSSIBLE, WHILE NOT LOSING SIGHT OF THEIR COMMITMENTS’

– *Amid the war, in which Ukraine opposes the Russian Federation militarily, the European Union offers us assistance through diplomatic, economic, and political measures. You and your team are actively involved in internal EU processes and debates directly influencing its actions and decisions. How has the Mission’s role changed following 24 February 2022? What severe challenges have you had to overcome in your diplomatic efforts?*

– The full-scale war waged by Russia against Ukraine has entirely reshaped not only the functioning of the Mission but also of the entire European Union.

We have made significant strides on the path towards Ukraine’s EU integration despite the backdrop of Russia’s brutal warfare starting over a year ago. Ukraine lodged its formal membership application a mere four days after the initiation of Russia’s full-scale aggression and then, within a few weeks, replied to over two thousand inquiries posed by the European Commission’s Questionnaire, outlining our progress in aligning with the EU acquis. We attained the status of an EU membership candidate just four months following the application, as endorsed through the decision of the European Council. That decision, approved by the leadership of the 27 EU member states, was further reinforced by the affirmative endorsements of both the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Alongside our preparations for the accession negotiations, the Mission’s efforts focus on the humanitarian, economic, financial, and military aid extended by the EU to Ukraine. Those issues carry critical significance, as beyond their role in preserving our nation’s territorial integrity, they affect the well-being of our citizens. Yet our commitment to those matters doesn’t come at the expense of other ongoing tasks and projects. Concurrently, we’re actively engaged in sectoral integration with the EU, negotiating agreements, and fostering enhanced cooperation with our European partners.

It is important to note that the years 2022–23 stand out for a remarkable intensification in engagements with the EU under the European Peace Facility (EPF), aiming to secure essential material and technical support. That concerted effort has directly contributed to bolstering the combat capabilities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Since the onset of Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, the EU has provided seven financial assistance packages under the EPF, each totalling 500 million euros, to meet the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

In March 2023, the EU Council approved a joint three-track approach to speed up the supply of artillery ammunition to Ukraine and replenish the EU member states' own stockpiles.

As it stands, the mentioned approach involves supplying Ukraine with one million artillery shells (and, if necessary, missiles) over 12 months for the needs of the AFU, including allocating additional resources from the EPF.

In this context, in the spring of 2023, the EU Council made a decision under the EPF framework to allocate one billion euros for the urgent supply of artillery shells and missiles to Ukraine. Additionally, an extra million was allocated for EU member states to collectively procure such munitions to meet the critical needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Thus, the amount of funds allocated to assist Ukraine under the EPF stands at 5.6 billion euros.

Furthermore, in May 2023, the European Commission adopted the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP). The decision was made to implement the third track of the joint approach for expediting the supply of artillery shells to Ukraine. The document aims to enhance the production capacity of the European defence industry, strengthen the EU's ability to ensure timely deliveries of munitions and missiles to Europe, and further the efforts to support Ukraine.

In response to the military assistance request, the EU Foreign Affairs Council initiated the European Union Military Assistance Mission to support Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) under the Common Security and Defence Policy framework.

By the end of 2023, that Mission is expected to have given individual, collective, and specialised training to 30,000 Ukrainian military personnel.

Approximately 25 million euros will be allocated for the humanitarian demining needs in Ukraine under the Foreign Policy Instruments. The EU's assistance will encompass essential equipment for Ukraine's government mine action operators and measures for enhancing the state's capacity to manage the corresponding national programme effectively.

Beyond the military assistance, the EU also provides humanitarian aid. That aid (totalling 685 million euros from the EU's budget and 1.07 billion euros contributed by EU member states) is directed through the EU's local humanitarian partners and UN agencies, the Red Cross, and international NGOs. That support has already reached over 16 million Ukrainians.

All 27 EU member states and five partner countries (Iceland, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, and Türkiye) have offered Ukraine their help through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM). The Mechanism represents the world's most extensive system for providing internationally coordinated

operational aid during emergencies, through which our country has received nearly 90,000 tonnes of support.

Furthermore, the European Union member states and EUCPM participants have given many proposals for supporting Ukraine's energy sector.

For instance, the EU has initiated a programme for replacing incandescent bulbs with energy-efficient LED lamps, providing 35 million units.

According to the European Commission's estimates, over 5.2 million units of various equipment types have been delivered through the EUCPM to bolster the energy sector and address Ukraine's relevant needs.

On 20 April 2023, Ukraine signed an agreement to join the EUCPM, becoming its 36th participating state. Ukraine's participation in the Mechanism strengthens our country's capacity to prevent and manage national and international emergencies.

I would like to emphasise that this is a mutual benefit process: Ukraine's integration into the EUCPM facilitates the efficient sharing of knowledge gained during the war and contributes to the robust improvement of the European Union's civil protection system.

Moreover, a crucial task during the first months of the full-scale invasion was to inform our international colleagues about the events and the situation in Ukraine, as Russia was actively spreading propaganda and disinformation. Our Mission continues to prepare and distribute the War Bulletin to furnish partners across the globe daily, providing the most up-to-date information from Ukraine, including military and financial news from the Office of the President and the Cabinet of Ministers, etc.

Immersed in relentless and non-stop work, we are always ready to promptly address official requests from Kyiv and stay attuned to relevant developments not just in Ukraine and Europe but across the globe. This pace has become vital amid the full-scale war, where every passing minute carries implications. The EU has also adjusted to this accelerated rhythm, actively establishing mechanisms that enable agile responses to Ukraine's ongoing challenges and needs.

– *Numerous international actors have affirmed their willingness to contribute to Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, with some initiatives already underway even amid the ongoing war. What long-term measures can the European Union take to facilitate our country's recovery?*

– When it comes to the post-war reconstruction, the circle of actors involved extends beyond Ukraine and the EU. The recovery process involves the G7 countries and international financial institutions such as the World Bank. Undoubtedly, the European Union and the European Commission will have a distinctive role in this reconstruction, given that – in the broader sense – the reconstruction process is closely intertwined with economic and social institution reforms and the overall advancement of our European integration.

I would like to highlight that during a joint press conference held in Kyiv in early February 2023, Ursula von der Leyen, the Commission's President, announced the allocation of one billion euros as part of Ukraine's rapid recovery plan.

In June 2023, the European Commission announced the establishment of a specialised financial instrument designed to facilitate Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction efforts for 2024–27. The instrument will integrate into the broader financial framework of the EU during the 2021–27 timeframe.

That instrument will foster macro-financial stability in our country, contributing to its recovery and modernisation as pivotal reforms take shape in preparation for European Union accession. It will support the transition towards a green, digital, and inclusive economy, progressively aligning it with the EU regulations and standards.

During the 2023 Ukraine Recovery Conference in London, Valdis Dombrovskis, the Executive Vice President of the European Commission, along with the Presidents of the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the Managing Director of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), signed agreements totalling over 800 million euros. Those funds are designated to bolster Ukraine's economy, enhance its energy sector, and improve municipal infrastructure.

It is worth mentioning the European Commission, particularly the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), which has established a specialised support group dedicated to Ukraine. Working closely with our state, the group will serve as the secretariat for a cooperative donor platform, streamlining efforts for recovery coordination.

The World Bank recently released a report outlining Ukraine's needs, which forms the foundation for a comprehensive reconstruction plan. The Mission ensures clear-cut coordination between the Ukrainian Government and the European Commission in that process. Ensuring consistency in numerical data is paramount as this initiative demands collective action.

As of now, it is pertinent to discuss the swift restoration of residential housing and energy infrastructure, among other matters. In this context, our analysis involves gauging the anticipated funding levels for Ukraine and developing strategies for the effective leveraging of this resource while considering our institutional capabilities.

Currently, our authorities are working on specific projects with well-defined timelines and cooperating closely with the European Commission.

The recovery process embodies an authentic symbiosis of efforts and resources of Ukraine, the EU, G7 countries, and international financial institutions, which will define our state's economic dynamics and its integration prospects in the international arena.

– *Your Excellency, you have consistently stressed the importance of establishing safeguards to hinder russia’s evasion of EU sanctions. What is the prevailing sentiment within the EU regarding this issue? What factors do you believe are constraining the progress of these efforts?*

– Sanctions hinder russia’s military-industrial complex and economy, as it extremely actively seeks alternative supply channels for arms and critical dual-use items, as well as financial mechanisms to sustain its economy.

Under current circumstances, the primary concerns revolve around ensuring precise coordination of global restrictions, engaging other states in the sanctions coalition, encouraging russia’s traditional partners to adhere to international regulations, and effectively implementing deterrent measures while combating the means of their evasion.

The issue of evading sanctions holds paramount significance, given the adoption of eleven packages that have truly posed significant challenges to the russian economy. Russia attempts to bypass restrictions by procuring European goods through third-party states. The analysis of trade dynamics between the EU and certain Central Asian states or, for example, Türkiye reveals a steep increase in the procurement of particular equipment – an increase even the experts find perplexing. The procured goods include household appliances and electronic devices, which could be repurposed for military use. Hence, export control is an issue that warrants the discussion on limits on exporting such equipment to the russian federation, which must take place not just within the EU but also in the context of coordination with partners from the EU, G7, etc.

There are several possible avenues for achieving this. One pertains to implementing the administrative procedures whereby authorities monitor exports, thus establishing an extensive export control system. Presently, that mechanism is implemented in the defence sector and for dual-use goods; however, it should be extended to encompass the broadest possible range of items and commodities that have the potential to reach russia.

There is also an option to engage businesses in assuming greater responsibility. Some countries are already taking steps in this direction instead of waiting for sanctions. This means that companies supplying equipment to third countries (especially those that are likely or definitely involved in helping russia circumvent sanctions) will have to enter into formal declarations and commitments with their partners, ensuring that the supplied goods are not redirected to russia but are solely used within the recipient country. The framework can further encompass the activities of credit and financial institutions. If companies or banks conducting financial transactions violate the rules, state authorities shall have the right to hold them accountable. Therefore, we encourage our partners in Brussels to be as flexible as possible, while not losing sight of their commitments.

– Since the onset of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, the EU member states have offered temporary shelter to numerous refugees. The European Union has spared no effort in ensuring decent living conditions for those in need. What measures does the EU take at the supranational level to address the challenges that continue to affect the temporarily displaced Ukrainians?

– Ensuring secure and proper conditions for Ukrainian refugees within the EU is one of the most critical tasks. Given the scale of Russian aggression and the necessity to assist a tremendous number of people, EU member states have taken a series of measures to ensure the protection and comfort of Ukrainians. The European Union actively supports our citizens by establishing social housing programmes, facilitating employment opportunities, and bolstering educational and medical institutions.

Following the Temporary Protection Directive adopted by the EU Council, the scope of protection to third-country citizens (without prior application for asylum or refugee status) can be up to three years. Temporary Protection was initiated in March 2022 and may be extended until March 2025. The European Commission is already working on a draft decision for this purpose, which is expected to be approved by the EU member states in September 2023. The Commission acknowledges the matter's sensitivity and seeks to accelerate the process as much as possible. Our Mission, on its part, is actively working on extending temporary protection for Ukrainians.

Additionally, we cooperate with the Solidarity Platform to promptly address the issues affecting Ukrainians in the EU countries. According to the European Commission's reports, during the first year of implementing the Temporary Protection Directive, the active engagement and participation of the Ukrainian Government and Ukrainian embassies and consulates in EU countries in the meetings under the Platform swiftly emerged as a distinguishing feature of the rapid response to the crisis when compared to similar crises in the past. Such fruitful cooperation has helped the European Commission and EU member states address the deficiencies in the Directive's implementation.

Current priorities revolve around creating conditions for the return of our citizens to Ukraine and ensuring their successful reintegration. To this end, the EU is working with the Ukrainian Government and social welfare organisations. It is imperative to lay the groundwork for repatriation by developing resettlement, reintegration, and housing and employment assistance programmes. Additionally, it is essential to support creating a stable economic and social environment in Ukraine to expand opportunities for employment, education, and personal development within the country.

For its part, the European Union takes supranational-level actions, cooperating with member states' governments, developing joint programmes and initiatives, etc. Diplomatic efforts are focused on the refugees' integration into society and protecting their needs and rights within the EU territory.

It is worth highlighting that the European Parliament supports Ukrainians in Brussels. Following the beginning of the full-scale war, President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola allocated a part of the institution's premises to the Ukrainian community. That act of solidarity brought about the creation of the Ukrainian Civil Society Hub, which remains operational today.

The main objective of the hub is to comprehensively unite the efforts of civil society, the diaspora, media, experts, Ukrainian state institutions, and EU institutions to accelerate our country's victory in the war against the Russian aggressor. All of that is done through a wide range of events: roundtable discussions, conferences, exhibitions, and film screenings aimed at drawing the attention of the politicians and the broader public to the ongoing events in Ukraine and the richness of its culture.

One of the areas of activity of the Ukrainian Civil Society Hub is to support Ukrainians in Belgium who were forced to flee the war. The hub organises various events, including information sessions on temporary protection, French language courses, and diverse activities for children, such as clay modelling and photography courses.

– *Given the rising geopolitical tensions and growing reliance on digital technologies, cyberspace has become an arena of strategic competition, threatening the security of all international actors. Is the European Union discussing the mechanisms for detecting and mitigating cyberattacks?*

– Today, Ukraine stands at the forefront of countering Russia's aggression, not only on the traditional battlefield but also in the digital domain. Countering Russian cyber aggression and cyberattacks has enabled Ukraine to amass a unique and invaluable experience, which we actively share with our EU partners, particularly when it comes to the effective measures to prevent cyberattacks, the development of a cyber defence system, and close cooperation among cybersecurity actors in the country (especially given the escalation of international cybercrimes caused by Russia's active actions).

Ukraine is expanding its cybersecurity network, taking into account emerging challenges. The digital landscape is constantly evolving as Russian hackers continuously seek ways to breach information systems, which demands quick responses. Our country's experience is extremely valuable to EU member states as they also face cyberattacks from Russian cybercriminals.

Our primary tools include effective measures to prevent digital attacks, bolster cyber resilience, and cooperate with partners. It's worth noting that preparations are underway for the third cyber dialogue round between Ukraine and the EU.

– *When do you think Ukraine and the EU will start negotiations regarding membership?*

– Ukraine has made a colossal path within a very condensed timeframe, likely setting a world record. In European institutions, it is said that we are 'moving at

the speed of light'. Our country attained candidate status just four months after submitting the application. That had never happened in the entire history of the EU. Yet what is exceptionally important is that Ukraine received recognition as a member of the European Union – a warm welcome into the European family. In other words, it was a deliberate and rational decision by the EU states.

The foremost priority is to complete the political reforms required to commence EU accession negotiations, which means to address the seven recommendations of the European Commission.

The European Commission's June 2023 interim assessment of Ukraine's progress in implementing those requirements has highlighted significant advancements in important areas of Ukrainian reforms, such as the rule of law, anti-corruption and anti-money laundering efforts, and deoligarchisation. A series of steps has been outlined that need to be completed before the European Commission's report in October as part of the 2023 enlargement package. The document holds crucial importance in the transition to the negotiation process for Ukraine's EU membership; hence, we remain hopeful that a positive report and the political unity of EU member states will lead to an important decision regarding negotiations with Ukraine by the end of 2023.

Today, our work is proactive. We must be fully prepared to quickly and effectively move along the path of adapting Ukrainian legislation to achieve full membership. The Ukrainian government is finalising the initial self-screening of implementation of each piece of the EU acquis based on the analytical report presented by Ursula von der Leyen, the Commission President, on 2 February 2023, in Kyiv. By year-end, we must develop a national programme for adopting the EU acquis, guided by the results of the self-screening process.

The Mission of Ukraine to the EU is actively involved in enhancing trade relations with the EU, which have become increasingly important in supporting and promoting Ukrainian businesses amidst Russia's full-scale invasion.

The EU Council has extended temporary trade liberalisation with Ukraine, encompassing the removal of all tariffs, quotas, and trade protective measures regarding Ukrainian exports until June 2024. This measure will assist our country in maintaining stable market relations with the EU and supporting our economy despite Russia's military aggression.

As of 24 February 2022, ground transportation links with EU countries have become extremely important for Ukraine's import and export operations. The Solidarity Lanes transport project was initiated to tackle the economic effects of the invasion. The programme focuses on enhancing transportation links between Ukraine and the EU, including the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) expansion and the construction of European railways.

Enhancing the transport corridor capacities along Ukraine's western border will accelerate the integration of the Ukrainian market into the EU's single

market, a matter of predominant importance for the country's reconstruction. The long-term goal is to develop a network of European railways within Ukraine, connecting major population centres and emerging industrial and economic hubs with EU countries. In turn, it will improve goods and passenger transport logistics between Ukraine and the European Union.

Ukraine and the EU are actively advancing the Solidarity Lanes project, forging alternative land routes for food exports in the wake of Russia's blockade of Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea. The measures include identifying new border crossings, streamlined customs procedures, logistical support, prioritising the exports of Ukrainian agricultural products, and establishing storage facilities within the EU.

It is also essential to make the most of the potential of Ukraine's candidacy in practice; hence, we are currently focusing on integrating Ukraine into the EU's internal market and sectors even before the membership negotiations.

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