

**Oleksandr BALANUTSA,**  
*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine  
to the State of Kuwait;*

**Olha SEHEDA,**  
*Third Secretary on Cultural and Media Issues  
at the Embassy of Ukraine in the State of Kuwait*

## **EVOLUTION OF KUWAIT'S POSITION ON SUPPORTING UKRAINE THROUGHOUT 500+ DAYS OF RESISTANCE**

On the morning of 24 February 2022, the ambassadors of the EU and G7 states to Kuwait had the first-ever meeting at the Embassy of Ukraine to express solidarity and offer assistance. Since then, not a single day has gone by without joint diplomatic efforts to strengthen support for our state by the official Kuwaiti government. It led to ceremonies of raising the State Flag of Ukraine over the residences of foreign embassies in Kuwait (primarily the British one, which was the first among the UK's diplomatic missions worldwide to launch such an action), as well as charity evenings and concerts, the Week of Ukraine, and numerous information campaigns in the Kuwaiti media. Concurrently, meetings on Ukraine's agenda lasted for many hours behind closed doors of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, and often as a *démarche* with the support of European, American, and Asian counterparts.

The advocacy of the foreign diplomatic corps has played a significant role in Kuwait's consistent support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity at the United Nations, the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and other levels. Through the UN bodies, official Kuwait has allocated USD 4 million worth of financial assistance to support displaced Ukrainians and sent over 70 tonnes of humanitarian aid. The emirate's top officials also show solidarity with Ukrainians; for instance, Rima Al-Sabah, the wife of the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, co-organised the annual Kuwait-America Foundation Gala Dinner in the United States in 2023, raising over USD 1 million for the needs of refugees, including Ukrainians. Yet, every such achievement is fraught with risks, as the Embassy has repeatedly had to step out of diplomatic protocol. It took a great deal of energy, mostly spent on developing a strategy and tactics for different scenarios.

In 1990–91, Kuwaitis experienced an existential challenge similar to that of Ukraine; ergo, they understand the nature of Russia's terrorist war, which style

and methods largely follow the pattern of Saddam Hussein. Kuwaitis often repeat a well-known Arab saying that the truth flows smoothly while lies stumble. In the digital age, Ukrainians are compelled to be the voice of truth to the international community, to prove that they are not initiators but victims of the armed conflict, and to debunk Russian myths and fakes about Ukrainians. Therefore, the most complicated challenge in Kuwait is to explain the nature and aims of Russia's war against Ukraine. Via social and sometimes traditional media, Russian propaganda is successfully broadcasting messages about 'someone else's war' that is not a matter of concern, the cunning of duplicitous America and Europe, NATO's fight against Russia, which is inexplicably taking place on the territory of Ukraine, etc. According to opinion polls, many Arabs (not only in Kuwait) perceive the Russian-Ukrainian war as a local conflict between a mother country and a colony, which has deep historical roots and therefore makes any intervention impossible.

The most brutal stage of the struggle for survival, which Ukrainians entered in 2022, is sporadically represented in the Arabic-language information field. The lack of specialists in Arabic, adequate materials about Ukraine in Arabic and relevant communication channels (social media, radio, TV, etc.) was evident. We could count on one hand the Ukrainian Arabists who could promptly analyse, translate, comment, and report to the Arab press. That is why the Embassy did not commence information activities in February 2022 by announcing a list of assistance needed by Ukrainians to defeat evil as soon as possible but explain-



Презентація українського мистецтва в благодійному фонді «Аль-Новайр». 12 вересня 2022 року

Presentation of Ukrainian art at the Al Nowair Charitable Foundation. 12 September 2022



Концерт Євгена Хмари в кувейтському культурному центрі «Ярмук». 19 вересня 2022 року

Concert by Yevhen Khmara at the Yarmouk Cultural Centre in Kuwait. 19 September 2022

ing the Ukrainian right to exist without regard to russian interests. The durable information vacuum in respect of our country in the Arab media forced us to explain the absurdity of russian fabrications about the ‘civil’ war in Ukraine since 2014, the ‘NATO biological weapons labs’ there, etc.

Due to the prevalence of discrete, false, and distorted perceptions of Ukraine in the Arab states because of powerful russian propaganda, they adopted a ‘neutral’ position on the ongoing liberation war of Ukraine. Such a cautious and equidistant position implies the same level of relations with Ukraine and russia in favour of particular economic interests and saving face in the international arena (the UN Secretary-General in 2014 recognised the former Emir of Kuwait as a humanitarian leader). Many experts believe that one of Ukraine’s top diplomatic priorities is to maintain the true neutrality of that declared position. It is important to prevent the expansion of economic cooperation between Arab countries and russia, assistance to russia in circumventing sanctions, and supplying dual-use items to the terrorist state, etc.

Active work in this area has borne fruit. The indifference to the existential struggle of Ukrainians, reflected in the crooked mirror of russian propaganda, that was intrinsic to political, business, media, artistic, and other circles in Kuwait, has been replaced by an awareness of the crime committed by russia and more vigorous support for Ukraine in both moral and material terms. Such evolution in attitudes has also been influenced by the collapse of global food se-

curity because of the 'hunger games' begun by Russia (the Gulf subregion is close to countries that are highly dependent on imported grain, and problems with its supply threaten to create social and economic turmoil with consequences for neighbouring states). However, there is an increasingly clear trend of declining attention to Ukraine, either due to 'fatigue', or the accumulation of more urgent domestic problems, or the successful balancing of risks and benefits that have emerged after the tangible shake-up of the international chessboard.

The manoeuvres for getting out of such dangerous diplomatic drift are apparent to many experts: more articles on Ukraine in the Arabic information space, more interactions at the political and diplomatic level, more cooperation at the expert and practical level to overcome common challenges (security, economic, humanitarian, environmental, etc.). Since the start of the full-scale invasion, the Embassy has published almost a hundred articles in the Kuwaiti media about the Russian aggression, and in total, Ukrainian diplomats have given more than five hundred comments on Ukraine's struggle for Arab TV and radio programmes. In April 2023, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kuwaiti-Ukrainian diplomatic relations, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba paid an official visit to the emirate for talks with his counterpart Salem Al-Sabah. The foreign ministers discussed diplomatic efforts to stop Russian aggression and restore peace and agreed to intensify direct interactions between the countries' business circles and stimulate trade.

The Embassy is actively looking for projects that can highlight the areas of common interest between Ukraine and Kuwait. In this context, it is important to train a constellation of proficient Ukrainian Arabists who would go beyond track one diplomacy. The first step is to update the training materials for Ukrainian Arabists and create up-to-date textbooks. The staff of our Embassy is working on one such publication. The *Diplomacy of War* is going to become the first Arabic textbook for diplomats in Ukraine in print and interactive electronic format. It is based on the statements of Ukraine's MFA after 24 February 2022 and is intended for students-Arabists, diplomats, representatives of media, translators, teachers, and tutors of Arabic, as well as those interested in Arabic and seeking to improve their translation skills.

As Russia's next attempt to destroy Ukraine may take a long time, and Ukrainians have proven their ability to resist, no one knows what reality the world will wake up to tomorrow, given that the escalation has edged up to nuclear sabre-rattling. Kuwait's position on support for Ukraine is subject to change, so ensuring the sustainability of the ongoing diplomatic activities is essential. Their scope may seem incomparable with the available resources (not only diplomatic), but now we have perhaps the only chance to do the impossible and finally throw off the historical yoke laid upon us by the enemy under the modern name of the Russian Federation. Only those who follow the path will reach the goal.