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DESPITE THE DISTANCE BETWEEN OUR CAPITALS, THERE IS A SINCERE DESIRE TO AID UKRAINIANS

— *Your Excellency, in 2022, you became the Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of Ukraine to the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK). Please describe the distinctive features of the current relations between the two countries.*

— The present period of Ukrainian-Kazakh relations bears the mark of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. Regardless of the traditionally friendly — or even allied — relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, we can confidently state that Astana remains neutral on the matter of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine.

Kazakhstan has been consistent in not recognising Russia's temporary occupation of Ukraine's internationally recognised sovereign territories and has made efforts to prevent the dissemination of pro-Russian narratives, propaganda, and Russian war symbols on its territory.

Kazakhstan and Russia are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation; in 2022, Kazakhstan implemented a ban on the export of dual-use goods.

Kazakhstan has made it abundantly clear that it will not deploy its troops to the Russian regions bordering Ukraine. The Ministry of Defence of the RK has often reiterated that deployment of Kazakh troops to other countries can only ever happen on the basis of a UN Security Council mandate and bicameral approval by the country's Parliament.

Notably, Kazakstan — a member of the Eurasian Economic Union — creates no obstacles for Ukrainian companies operating in its territory. On the contrary, it tends to promote favourable conditions for Ukrainian entrepreneurs to do business in the RK and export their products to the country.

— *How has Kazakhstan's position — especially as it is seen on the key international platforms — and the Kazakh people's attitude to Ukraine and Russia evolved in the context of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine?*

— Nowadays, the Kazakh diplomatic position regarding pro-Ukrainian resolutions manifests in their abstaining from voting on international platforms. Given that Kazakhstan and Russia share many links that are not at all easy to sever under the current reality, their approach largely aligns with Ukraine's interests.

We were pleasantly surprised by general Kazakh population's genuine expression of solidarity and support for Ukraine, for example, on matters of humanitarian aid, and we can feel how the Kazakh society is upholding a peace-loving position, condemning Russia's unjustified aggression against Ukraine.

— *Kazakhstan's private business has been actively participating in initiatives to restore social, energy, and critical infrastructure facilities in Ukrainian cities. In your opinion, what sort of initiatives or programmes might Kazakhstan consider towards further strengthening cooperation with Ukraine on post-war recovery?*

— From the very beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Kazakhs have never stood idly aside. In the first few days of the war, the Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Kazakhstan opened a humanitarian aid collection point on its premises. We managed to organise coordinated efforts of communities in the cities of Aktau, Aktobe, Almaty, Astana, Atyrau, Karaganda, and Pavlodar, which contributed to this charity mission to support Ukraine.

The Kazakh volunteer organisations focused their attention on raising funds, mainly for restoring social facilities, such as schools and kindergartens, setting up shelters, and purchasing essential items. Such donations helped us finish equipping several shelters in preschools in the Chernihiv and Mykolaiv regions. Kazakh entrepreneurs also gave Ukraine the support it required in the energy sphere. Moreover, in the winter of 2022–23, the support of Kazakhstan's private businesses allowed Ukraine's cities to establish heating units known as Yurts of Invincibility, which also helped Ukrainians survive the winter amidst constant Russian attacks on energy infrastructure.

Throughout 2022–24, Ukraine received over 530 tonnes of humanitarian aid thanks to the joint efforts of volunteers and our diplomatic mission. At the government level, Kazakhstan has dispatched \$2.5 million in humanitarian support, which included 45 tonnes of food, medicines, etc. Those supplies were expediently delivered to Ukraine between late February and early March 2022. From that point, they were distributed through charity organisations and foundations.

To name another example of our fruitful cooperation with the Kazakh business circles, we purchased three ambulance vehicles for Ukraine.

Such critical and timely assistance was underlined during the telephone exchange between Ukrainian and Kazakh presidents on 2 February 2024. Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked Kassym-Jomart Tokayev for the humanitarian assistance rendered by Kazakh NGOs and businesses.

Despite the distance between our capitals, the Kazakh people's sincere desire to aid the people of Ukraine is exactly the factor that highlights the tone and quality of the current dialogue between the two countries. The Embassy of Ukraine in Kazakhstan continues to make efforts to maintain a regular flow of humanitarian aid to Ukraine's population. In this, we are counting on

efficient communication between Ukrainian and Kazakh business circles. Implementation of humanitarian projects is the dimension that will provide both countries with an ability to maintain a continuous level of people-to-people interaction.

The promotion of Ukrainian exports to Central Asian countries, particularly Kazakhstan, benefits from the Nazovni international platform. A quick look at the statistics shows that while in 2022, the Embassy received 21 applications from Ukrainian companies, in 2023, the number increased to 51. We hope we will have even more this year. In the first five months of 2024, our diplomatic mission has already processed 18 applications, which indicates the growing number of entities that wish to start exporting their goods and services to Kazakhstan.

Ukrainian exporters are taking particular interest in such areas as agriculture, the food industry, the light industry, and the processing industry. Ukrainian goods enjoy popularity in the Kazakh market, sometimes proving to be better than other analogous products. Of course, the fact that our exporters possess quality certificates issued in the EU countries gives us a competitive edge. The Embassy always stresses this part in our communication with the Kazakh side. We see great potential in the promotion of Ukrainian IT services in the RK because the country's digital market is growing rapidly, thus opening plenty of opportunities for the developers of such services.

Despite constant Russian attacks, the recovery processes in Ukraine are underway. For instance, a department of the Mykolaiv City Emergency Hospital, destroyed by Russian air strikes, is now back in operation thanks to the support of the Kazakh company BI Group, which had long provided extensive assistance to Ukraine.

Several Ukrainian hospitals managed to persevere and continue operating with the help of the Kusto Group holding company from Kazakhstan. In late 2022, for instance, its entrepreneurs purchased 41 high-power generators and promptly delivered them to Ukraine.

Therefore, Kazakhstan's citizens have also made a contribution to Ukraine's resilience, and Ukrainians will always be grateful for that.

Kazakhstan has significant experience in implementing transportation and logistics projects. Such expertise would, without a doubt, prove useful in rebuilding the capacities of Ukrainian ports, which Russia insistently attempts to destroy. This could allow Ukraine to increase the volume of shipments passing through its territory towards Europe and boost its cooperation with the EU. Additionally, this could turn out to be Kazakhstan's genuine contribution to global food security.

In other words, diversifying routes and supply chains for commodities critical to the stability of the global economy could be Ukraine's and Kazakhstan's shared accomplishment.

— *During the visit of the delegation of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine to the Republic of Kazakhstan in October 2023, you participated in negotiations with Minister of Health of Kazakhstan (2022–24) Azhar Giniyat on the development of international medical partnerships and the rehabilitation of Ukrainian children in Kazakhstan. Please tell us about the development of cooperation in these areas.*

— The Embassy places considerable focus on the development of international medical partnerships, viewing them as an avenue for collaborative solutions to healthcare issues. In October 2023, when the delegation of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, led by the First Deputy Minister of Health of Ukraine, Serhii Dubrov, visited Kazakhstan to participate in the 73rd session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, we managed to agree upon several initiatives. One of the important areas that were outlined is the further development of cooperation with Kazakhstan's businesses and charity organisations to meet humanitarian needs and rebuild medical infrastructure in Ukraine.

Based on the results of these negotiations, we have already launched two special projects. The first is called People of the Future, and it aims to provide psychological support and rehabilitation for Ukrainian children whose parents have sadly died or gone missing during the unprovoked Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The other area is international medical partnerships. It is about cooperation at the level of specific healthcare institutions in Ukraine and Kazakhstan to establish long-term mutually beneficial partnership aiming to bolster technological, professional, scientific, and administrative potential of such entities.

On the way to implementing these plans, we have already sent the Kazakh party a draft framework memorandum and the list of Ukrainian institutions that are open to cooperation. The Embassy is working on increasing the amount of such mutually beneficial projects.

— *What do you believe are the distinctive features of the Embassy's outreach activities, and do you consider public diplomacy to be an important component of bilateral relations?*

— Forming a country's image is not just about politics but also investments, the country's recognisability, and familiarity with its outstanding works of art, cultural figures, and star athletes. Such rapprochement of cultures and aspiration to develop friendly ties underpin any policy and drive the growth of what we know as bilateral relations and their people-to-people aspect.

Our efforts in this dimension focus on engaging effective resources to strengthen Ukraine, attract the international community to bolster its defence capabilities, and open new opportunities for our country, businesses, and Ukrainian citizens.

It is essential to convey messages of truth, shape an authentic picture of what is happening in Ukraine, and explain the meaning and significance of these processes to the world's overall security. Therefore, the Embassy uses all applicable tools of public diplomacy to spread useful sources of information. One such example is the 'Wartime Diplomacy' webpage, a media initiative of the MFA of Ukraine that documents Ukrainian wartime diplomacy during Russia's full-scale aggression, which we have showcased to diplomats, expert circles, and heads of our partner countries' diplomatic missions in the RK.

We are also implementing combined cultural and humanitarian projects around our people's heroic resistance to the Russian terror and the price of that fight. On 24 February 2024, during a solidarity event dedicated to the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we organised exhibitions and video presentations created under a large-scale Culture vs War project, for which we invited ambassadors of the EU member states and Ukraine's other strategic partners and international friends. Foreign dignitaries got to familiarise themselves with the exhibition of works of wartime documentary photographers Kostiantyn Liberov and Vlada Liberova. Their emotional and honest photographs have become important documentary evidence of Russia's crimes against the Ukrainian people.

The purposeful implementation of an information campaign on social media allows the Embassy to negate Russia's efforts to disseminate countless fake news articles in Kazakhstan's information space. To do so, we use content from resources involved in recording cases of violation of international humanitarian law on the protection of cultural property in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. Sharing visual posts in a 'Russian invasion: before and after' format, the Embassy conveys up-to-date information about the state of cultural heritage property in different Ukrainian cities, including those in the temporarily occupied Crimea, to the citizens of Kazakhstan. It is important in general, but especially now, as in May 2024, Ukraine celebrated the 70th anniversary of its membership in UNESCO, and it will engage this international platform's great potential to protect the national sites in the UNESCO World Heritage List. I would also like to highlight that some of those sites are located in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Another important area of our activities has to do with implementing humanitarian projects around remembering dates and events that bring our peoples closer. There have actually been many such events and shared pages of history. They include the observation of the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, as over 30 thousand Kazakhs were involved in eliminating its consequences back in the day.

This year, we had a special celebration of Vyshyvanka Day. After all, amidst these trying times, every Ukrainian sees it as the day for unity around our people's timeless relics and spiritual talismans.

— *What is the current trajectory of cooperation between the Embassy and the Ukrainian diaspora in Kazakhstan?*

— Currently, Kazakhstan is home to almost 373 thousand ethnic Ukrainians, who make up the country's fourth largest ethnic group. After the beginning of Russian full-scale aggression against our country, Kazakhstan started receiving refugees from Ukraine. By late 2023, there were over six thousand such Ukrainian citizens in Kazakhstan, including almost five thousand temporarily relocated people and 597 Ukrainians who had obtained temporary protection status.

The first national-cultural association of Ukrainians in Kazakhstan was founded in 1989. Today, there are two such public associations in the country: the Council of Ukrainians of Kazakhstan and the Ukrainians of Kazakhstan Association; in addition, there are 25 Ukrainian ethno-cultural societies. Essentially, each region of the RK has Ukrainian communities that are prominently active in cultural life and awareness-raising work.

In recent years, the Embassy has enhanced cooperation with Ukrainian societies. Unfortunately, after the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, some of those communities ceased their contact with the mission. Some Ukrainian public associations avoid the events of the Embassy, as they are hesitant to engage in displays of pro-Ukrainian activity.

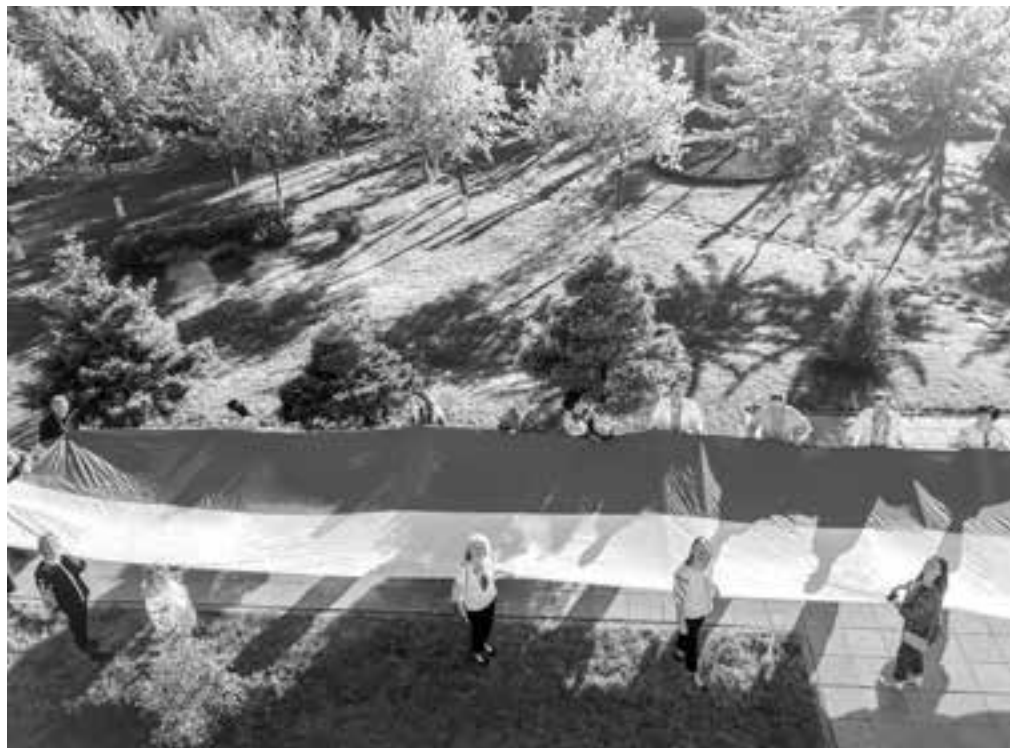
The Embassy continues to interact with all communities and will try to find appropriate approaches to each part of the diaspora. We have put the main emphasis on cultural and educational cooperation with ethnic Ukrainians.

The Embassy supports the operation of Ukrainian cultural centres, Sunday schools / Ukrainian language classes, choral and dance collectives, children's and adult choirs, ensembles, etc., across different regions of Kazakhstan (cities of Aktau, Almaty, Astana, Atyrau, Karaganda, Pavlodar, Uralsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk). We assist them in all sorts of ways, i.e., visit those regions, talk to Ukrainians, hear all of them out, and take into account the conditions and circumstances of life of our citizens.

— *What kinds of projects does the Embassy carry out to promote culture and education among the Ukrainian community in Kazakhstan?*

— In the last two years, the Embassy has been actively visiting different regions and organising meetings with the diaspora. These days, events of ethnic Ukrainians in Aktau, Almaty, Astana, Atyrau, Karaganda, and Pavlodar also involve our citizens who were forced to go to Kazakhstan because of Russian armed aggression on Ukraine.

In March 2024, different regions of the RK successfully celebrated the Month of Kobzar. It is worth mentioning that the figure of Taras Shevchenko is not only special for Ukrainians but for the people of Kazakhstan, too. His memory connects us. Monuments to Taras Shevchenko are carefully preserved and serve as venues for various events. As part of a set of 2024 events dedicated to the



210th anniversary of the poet's birth, diplomats of the Embassy visited the Taras Shevchenko Museum in the town of Shevchenko-Fort.

The Ukrainian House at the Embassy is a venue of regular Saturday gatherings for children and adults. It is a true community centre for the Ukrainians of Kazakhstan, where they organise events dedicated to outstanding figures of politics, art, literature, and culture, as well as our country's memorial days. The doors of the Ukrainian House are open for all Ukrainians, no exception.

I must note that even amidst the war, the first quarter of 2024 saw five communities of Ukrainian national-cultural centres of Almaty, Astana, and Almaty, Karaganda, and Mangystau regions receive aid from the government of Ukraine for organisation of events on promotion of Ukrainian language, culture, and traditions, cultural and artistic initiatives, exhibitions, as well as cleaning of burial sites of prominent Ukrainians and proper maintenance of monuments, memorial plaques, and signs. This kind of work goes uninterrupted.

We are actively working on a project to help Ukrainian Sunday schools in Kazakhstan. We are enhancing our cooperation with school-gymnasium No. 47 in Astana, which offers optional Ukrainian language and literature classes from the 1st to 11th grades. We have scheduled meetings with the leaders of Ukrainian communities; we also plan to organise joint events about the Holodomors in Ukraine and Kazakhstan and continue constructive dialogue with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

The 2010 Agreement on Cooperation in Education and Science between our governments, under which students from Ukraine and Kazakhstan have equal opportunities to study in the other country's top universities, remains an effective tool of interaction in education.

To sum up the work of the Embassy on all tracks, I would like to highlight our objective. Here, in Kazakhstan, we understand our purpose as having to make sure that the image of Ukraine (which is globally seen as a symbol of the resilience of warrior people who are asserting their dignity and statehood) becomes a symbol of victory of democracy over totalitarianism, victory of peace over terror.

Ukraine is not alone in its fight against illegal invasion and the international community believes in our victory and is willing to continue helping us achieve it.

Today, we already have important instruments for strengthening our contacts in Kazakhstan and the broader Central Asia, including the Ukrainian Peace Formula and Grain From Ukraine humanitarian programme launched by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. I have compelling grounds to hope that we will improve our dialogue because we have enough strength and determination for joint steps and mutually beneficial projects.

We are grateful to our Kazakh partners, who, despite the geographic distance between our capitals, display interest in further development of cooperation at a time when Ukraine and its people face their greatest challenges.

Interview dated 18 May 2024