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## **RESTORING COMMUNICATION BRIDGES WITH CHINA**

— *Your Excellency, please summarise the main achievements and possibilities of the work of the Embassy of Ukraine in the PRC.*

— China has become more involved in pursuing ways to stop Russian aggression against Ukraine. The three rounds of shuttle diplomacy undertaken by China's Special Representative Li Hui, two of which led to his visiting Ukraine, revitalised the Ukraine–China political dialogue and charted out plans for its enhancement.

The war against Ukraine interferes with international economic cooperation and trade. China is gradually finding new sources to phase out the commodities it used to export from Ukraine. However, we are trying to restore the pre-war level of our trading turnover while also paying close attention to issues such as increasing the volume of Ukrainian exports and expanding the range of Ukrainian products available in the Chinese market. These matters were discussed in July 2023 in Beijing during the seventh session of the Subcommittee on Trade and Economic Cooperation chaired by Ukrainian and Chinese deputy ministers of economy; it was the first occasion in years for a Ukrainian delegation to visit China.

Our following objectives include restoring a sustainable high-level political dialogue and expanding practical interaction between our countries in various fields and areas.

— *When asked to comment on your appointment, Minister for Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba pointed out that your objective is to 'build us thousands of communication bridges with China.' What progress have you made in forging dialogue at different levels, and what challenges have you faced?*

— China is a vast country and the world's second-largest economy. In 2011, Ukraine and China reached the level of strategic partnership, and our communication needs to reflect this.

Ukraine's and China's respective leaders have had two telephone exchanges, and I believe the time has come for them to meet in person. The most realistic place for this would be a high-level international forum.

There is a long-overdue need for a substantive and thorough meeting of foreign ministers, another session of our Intergovernmental Commission on Cooperation.

Despite the warfighting in Ukraine, we look forward to restoring people-to-people and educational exchanges because they will form a solid basis for the future of Ukrainian-Chinese relations that shall benefit both peoples.

— *How does your professional experience, including your time as Minister of Strategic Industries, help you carry out your current responsibilities in China?*

— I do not consider myself a career diplomat, although I do have relevant education and some previous experience working in the field. For a lengthy period, I was involved in policymaking, served as a Member of Parliament, and chaired central executive bodies. The experience I have acquired always helped me overcome the challenges and tasks I faced in each subsequent demanding role.

— *How would you rate the dynamics of the commercial and industrial aspects of Ukrainian-Chinese relations? What Ukrainian products and technologies might meet demand in China?*

— China was and still is our largest trade partner before Russia began the full-scale invasion of Ukraine's territory. With logistics chains disrupted by Russia's blockade of our ports, which are the main gateways for Ukrainian exports and much of our imports from China, the volume of trade between the two countries plummeted in the first year of the aggression. Nevertheless, thanks to the grain initiative, which lasted until July 2023, and now the facilities of the Ukrainian sea corridor, we have been able to start restoring our export flows, especially of agricultural products and food.

It should be mentioned that Ukraine's current exports are severely undiversified, with the lion's share consisting of grain, crop grist, and vegetable oil; although, before the war, we also extensively exported ores, ferrous metals, and other types of goods. Meanwhile, most of Ukraine's imports from China comprise machinery, equipment, and vehicles, i.e., products with high added value.

Currently, the main obstacles to diversifying our exports are the instability of sea routes and related risks, which seriously limit the possibilities of expanding our trade in industrial non-food goods, and the fact that the Chinese market is saturated with highly competitive domestic and imported products. Increasing the range of food products is challenging due to the multistep process of harmonising phytosanitary and veterinary inspection standards with the Chinese counterparts. The Embassy is currently paying special attention to resolving these problematic issues. We are actively working with China to open the Chinese market to new types of food and agricultural products from Ukraine, thus generating new opportunities for Ukrainian suppliers.

— *Please describe the current level and potential of China's humanitarian aid, especially in the context of the recovery of Ukraine and its regions. What aspects of humanitarian cooperation matter most to our country?*

— When the active phase of the russian-Ukrainian war broke out, the Chinese government sent several tranches of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Several Chinese provincial governments also sent aid to twin cities, including Kyiv and towns in the Odesa region. China has also provided support to our people through its diplomatic missions in European countries bordering Ukraine.

Our immediate needs include technical and medical supplies, as well as construction materials and consumables needed for reconstruction efforts. In the future, Ukraine will be interested in importing products that will be important for the recovery of the national economy, particularly in the machine-building, construction, and transport industries. In this regard, China, a country with significant construction and industrial resources and its own infrastructure development experience, is our potential partner in rebuilding post-war Ukraine and its economy.

— *What is the prevailing perception of Ukraine in Chinese society, and has it evolved since the beginning of the full-scale invasion? How do the Chinese mass and social media, which are heavily controlled by the state, cover the events in Ukraine, and how does this translate into Chinese attitudes towards Ukrainians?*

— Our country's perception by Chinese citizens is shaped by the prevailing information environment, which, sadly, does not favour us.

The Chinese mass media give a calculated coverage of the events in Ukraine and strictly adhere to their government's line, referring to the russian aggression as the 'Ukrainian crisis' for the third year in a row.

There are undoubtedly many Chinese people who clearly understand what is happening, calling russia out for what it is — an aggressor — and supporting Ukraine.

We are actively reaching out to such people and trying to assist them in receiving up-to-date information about the events in Ukraine.

— *In November 2023, you pointed out that Ukraine's own capabilities to counter russian propaganda in China were 'extremely limited'. What do you think can be done to solve the existing shortcomings in terms of resources, qualified personnel, and communication lines?*

— The main area we ought to focus on in the fight against russian propaganda and disinformation is information itself. After all, the widespread presence of russian media outlets in China and the strict domestic censorship that restricts Chinese citizens' access to most of the world's major information resources make it very difficult to convey objective information about russian terrorism and war crimes.

In view of the remarkably high level of Sino-russian relations and the regular visits of high-ranking russian guests, the Chinese media do not say 'unpleasant' things about China's friend. Therefore, perhaps the only way to combat russian propaganda is to have influential and diversified information outlets in China that will produce targeted content in Mandarin.

Besides the official resources of the Embassy, such sources may include Mandarin-language versions of the websites of leading Ukrainian media outlets and their pages on Chinese social platforms.

Ukraine obviously produces enough specialists capable of working in this direction; the only question is how to organise their work in a sustainable manner. That is something we are actively working on.

— *What are the prospects for the development of Ukrainian public diplomacy in China? Please share the most successful initiatives in this area. What are the main things that must be taken into account when presenting Ukraine to Chinese audiences?*

— The course of public diplomacy in China strongly depends on the level of bilateral political relations between the two countries. After all, both government officials and people involved in culture, media, sports, etc., are cautious about communicating with representatives of our country and mindful of the state of the current Ukrainian-Chinese dialogue.

Under these circumstances, one of Ukraine's most effective ways of conducting public diplomacy is communication through social media, where we can both spread information about the course of events in Ukraine and familiarise Chinese citizens with our culture, history, and scientific and sporting achievements.

Over the course of the first year of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, we worked with a team that helped us with our social media outreach, resulting in a significant increase in the number of followers and views on the Embassy's official Weibo page. At the moment, we are still concentrating our efforts in this particular area.

— *According to our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China does not have an organised Ukrainian diaspora. If so, how does the Embassy maintain contact with Ukrainians permanently residing in the PRC?*

— The Embassy of Ukraine in China is always open to our citizens, and communication with them is not strictly limited to the provision of consular services.

Given our limited resources and the country's particularities, we make every effort to engage with Ukrainians living in China. We organise events to celebrate holidays, provide them with needed assistance, and support various projects initiated by our community.

We also have our own plans, the implementation of which will eventually involve Ukrainians.

— *How do you think China's position on Russia's invasion of Ukraine might possibly change between 2024 and 2025, and what factors may influence it?*

— Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, starting with the outbreak of the war itself, a string of terrible events has taken

place that should have greatly influenced China's attitude towards the conflict and changed it in our favour; however, this did not happen. The Bucha tragedy, the takeover of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, the destruction of the Kakhovka hydroelectric dam, the colossal devastation of infrastructure, the mass abduction of Ukrainian children, the slaughter of civilians — none of these things changed Beijing's position or compelled it to urge Moscow to stop its insane aggression against our country.

That is why I would avoid entertaining unfounded illusions and proceed from the facts, which, regrettably, can hardly be described as optimistic for the Ukrainian side. In the political realm, all the major actors in international relations have long since settled on who is the aggressor and who is the aggressor's victim.