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‘CURRENTLY, OUR MAIN TASK IS TO COUNTER RUSSIAN AGGRESSION’

— *The Portuguese Republic has actively and steadfastly supported Ukraine within the European Union and bilaterally from the first days of the full-scale invasion. What are the main tasks on the agenda for the Ukrainian Embassy in Portugal today?*

— Currently, our main task is to counter Russian aggression. We are focusing on military and humanitarian aid from Portugal and involving its Government and business sectors in Ukraine’s reconstruction processes. Furthermore, protecting the interests of Ukrainian citizens who have sought temporary refuge in Portugal is crucial.

On 28 May 2024, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine, arrived in Portugal on a working visit. During this visit, parties signed a security agreement, marking a significant step in strengthening our defence capabilities and fostering cooperation in security matters. Importantly, this agreement allows us to plan our long-term interaction in this area more systematically and predictably.

Additionally, ensuring continued support from Portugal for Ukraine’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration remains among our priorities.

— *Portugal participates in the Tank, Aircraft, and Maritime Capability Coalitions. How successful have these initiatives been, and what actions should both sides take to enhance cooperation further?*

— Portugal trains Ukrainian technicians and dispatchers within the Aircraft Coalition. Its participation in the Tank Coalition has facilitated the transfer of Leopard tanks to Ukraine. The Portuguese Republic has also dispatched various defence and military supplies to Ukraine, including armoured vehicles, ambulances, mortars, grenade launchers, and other ammunition. Besides, Portugal has joined the Czech Initiative and put €100 million towards purchasing artillery ammunition for Ukraine.

We actively study Portugal’s experience as a maritime nation in the Maritime Capability Coalition, especially its advancements in naval drone technology.

Our ongoing cooperation with Portuguese counterparts focuses on identifying, preparing, and delivering additional weaponry for security and defence forces.

Greater certainty and predictability are essential to enhance this interaction. We need precise plans, actions, and resource allocations to enhance this collaboration. The security cooperation agreement aims to achieve this goal.

— *Portugal consistently advocates for Ukraine's European integration. Moreover, Luís Montenegro, the new Prime Minister, promptly declared a firm stance on our country's EU accession following his inauguration on 2 April 2024. Your Excellency, how is this commitment reflected in practice? What initiatives does Portugal promote within the EU to support Ukraine?*

— Portugal supports us comprehensively in all aspects of European integration, considering Ukraine's accession to the EU equally significant for Europe itself. Portugal also shares views on the urgency of adopting the negotiation framework promptly and convening the first intergovernmental conference to commence accession negotiations formally.

A practical step has been endorsing the decision to extend the duty-free trade with Ukraine.

Portugal's experience could prove valuable to us, particularly in negotiating within the agricultural sector, despite the time that has elapsed since the country joined the EU. Portugal is ready to cooperate in this direction.

— *Despite the war, Ukrainian-Portuguese economic cooperation is recovering due to the active efforts of the Embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, as well as the participation of Ukrainian businesses in fairs and exhibitions in Portugal, among other initiatives. What opportunities exist for the growth of bilateral trade?*

— Deepening Ukrainian-Portuguese economic cooperation is an outstanding direction of our work. The results of 2023 demonstrate a revitalisation in bilateral trade, with trade volume increasing by 49.4% to reach \$293.65 million. Agricultural products remain the primary items of our exports to Portugal.

We are actively developing the Nazovni economic diplomacy platform to expand business relations. Since its launch, we have received 89 applications from Ukrainian exporters seeking to enter the Portuguese market, and we facilitate the search for suppliers in Ukraine for Portuguese companies.

Our interaction with Portuguese business associations is expanding. For instance, we are preparing to sign a memorandum of cooperation between the investment agencies of both countries to foster joint projects. A Memorandum of Understanding has already been signed between the Portuguese Business Association Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine to enhance export opportunities.

It is worth noting that other promising areas are technology and innovation. Ukraine has participated in Europe's largest Web Summit IT conference in Lisbon for several years, showcasing cutting-edge developments.



Офіційний візит Президента України Володимира Зеленського в Португалію (м. Лісабон), 28 травня 2024 р. (© Софія Шовікова)

28 May 2024, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy on an official visit to Lisbon, Portugal (© Sofia Shovikova)



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28 May 2024, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy on an official visit to Lisbon, Portugal (© Sofia Shovikova)

Opportunities for growing bilateral trade encompass various sectors, ranging from agriculture to industry and energy. These topics are on the agenda for the upcoming Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation meeting, scheduled to take place in Portugal this year.

— *Several states are already contributing to Ukraine's reconstruction efforts, and Portugal is not lagging behind. During the Zhytomyr Region Recovery Forum, the Portuguese delegation engaged Ukrainian counterparts in discussions about prospects in this area. Your Excellency, which sectors are most appealing to Portuguese investors? How is cooperation progressing in Ukraine's rebuilding efforts?*

— The Embassy prioritises cooperation for Ukraine's reconstruction. At the Third Zhytomyr Region Recovery Forum, held on 5 February 2024, representatives from the Portuguese government deliberated on specific joint projects.

For instance, Construção Pública, E.P.E. company signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Zhytomyr City Council to reconstruct a school. The project to rebuild Zhytomyr Lyceum No. 25 is currently underway. Furthermore, collaboration with the AICEP Portugal Global agency aims to involve Portuguese firms in Ukraine's recovery efforts.

Portuguese investors show particular interest in sectors such as engineering, construction, energy, renewable energy sources, environment, manufacturing technologies, agriculture, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, and education.

These opportunities took centre stage at the Ukrainian-Portuguese roundtable organised by the Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Kyiv this February. With Embassy support, the UkraineInvest office and Madoqua Renewables company actively finalised a Memorandum of Understanding for an eco-friendly green methanol plant, attracting investments totalling approximately €800–900 million.

Portuguese companies are active participants in the Ukraine Business Compact platform. Notably, they participated in the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Berlin this June. Cooperation with Portugal underscores the significant potential for further development of economic ties between the two nations.

— *Could you please tell us about the cooperation between Ukraine's and Portugal's sister cities and how they implement regional partnerships?*

— The Embassy is actively implementing existing agreements and initiating new sister city agreements between Ukrainian and Portuguese cities. In 2022, we signed three new agreements: Irpin with Cascais, Bucha with Cascais, and Zhytomyr with Vila Nova de Famalicão. We are preparing to sign new agreements between Sumy and Coimbra, Yuzhne and Lagos, and negotiating several other city pairs.

In practice, these agreements manifest through specific joint projects and initiatives. For example, the cooperation between Kharkiv and Porto, sister cities since 2011, demonstrates the effectiveness of such partnerships. In March

2022, Porto, Vila Nova de Gaia, and Matosinhos city councils created the Somos Todos Ucrânia platform to collect and deliver humanitarian aid and support Ukrainian refugees with housing, employment, and legal and medical services. The mayors of these cities, especially in the early days of Russia's full-scale aggression, were in constant dialogue with Kharkiv, discussing the urgent needs of the town under devastating enemy attacks.

The cooperation between Irpin, Bucha, and Cascais deserves special attention. Cascais directly provided €500,000 to each of these cities to restore kindergartens and educational institutions, completing their reconstruction in 2023. Additionally, from the early days of the war, the town organised an evacuation flight from Ukraine to Portugal, welcomed evacuees, and sent over 250 tons of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Discussions are already underway to launch new joint projects.

These partnerships not only provide essential support during challenging times but also lay the foundation for further cooperation in our cities' reconstruction and development.

— *Public diplomacy plays a crucial role in countering russian information influence in Portugal, strengthening support for Ukraine, and highlighting russia's crimes. Your Excellency, what are the most significant public diplomacy projects organised by the Embassy, and how has the Portuguese public perceived them?*

— The Embassy of Ukraine in Portugal has carried out several notable projects to counter Russian propaganda and bolster support for Ukraine. One of the most noteworthy was the Stand with Ukraine initiative, which united people supporting Ukraine and condemning Russian aggression.

Collaborating closely with the Ukrainian community in Portugal, we organised numerous events, including concerts, exhibitions, and diplomatic addresses, in cooperation with local authorities. In partnership with the UAnimals organisation, we launched the Christmas on Fire project, symbolising ecological tragedy with an unconventional Christmas tree, held the Alarm bells of the ecocide in Ukraine campaign on Christmas Eve, and staged a protest on the anniversary of the Kakhovka tragedy, garnering significant attention to Russia's environmental transgressions.

Throughout 2024, we screened documentary films in Lisbon, Porto, and Madeira that expose Russia's war crimes. These screenings included *20 Days in Mariupol* by Mstyslav Chernov, *The Long Day* by Alan Badoiev, and a private showing of *Bucha*.

It is worth noting the advocacy campaign for the release of captured Ukrainian military band musicians from Mariupol. On 15 June 2024, we implemented the Broken Melody art project with the Cascais City Hall, where the Cascais Symphony Orchestra performed a piece missing part of the orchestra, drawing attention to Ukrainian prisoners of war.



Акція до Дня захисників і захисниць України (м. Лісабон), 1 жовтня 2023 р. (© Софія Шовікова)

Campaign on the Day of Defenders of Ukraine held in Lisbon on 1 October 2023 (© Sofiia Shovikova)

These efforts effectively communicated the realities of the Ukrainian war to a diverse audience.

The weekly Human Chain action at the King Pedro IV Square in Lisbon, initiated by Ukrainian activists Olha Yeremenko and Roman Stelmakh, remains a vital tool for maintaining Ukraine's prominence in Portugal.

On 24 February 2024, numerous Portuguese cities hosted rallies dedicated to the anniversary of the Russian invasion, as well as a photo exhibition on children affected by war, and a march of activists to Lisbon City Hall.

Our projects have garnered positive responses from the Portuguese, enhancing their understanding of the Ukrainian situation and solidifying their support.

— *Portugal hosts a substantial Ukrainian community encompassing fifteen active organisations. The diaspora conducts numerous events to promote our country's image, organises actions in support of Ukraine in the war that Russia has started against us, provides humanitarian aid, etc. What achievements of the Embassy and the diaspora can you share?*

— Interaction with the Ukrainian community in Portugal is one of the main areas of our work. The Embassy closely cooperates with various Ukrainian organisations, both those established long ago and those founded after the start of the full-scale aggression.

We actively work together to organise and conduct various actions supporting Ukraine. We jointly commemorate practically every important date for the

Ukrainian people, such as Independence Day, Day of Defenders, Shevchenko Days, and the remembrance of the Holodomor victims of 1932–33.

Furthermore, the Embassy participates in organising charitable and humanitarian initiatives, including fundraising for humanitarian aid to Ukraine and events promoting Ukrainian culture. For instance, in July 2023, together with the Union of Ukrainians in Portugal, we organised Ukrainian Borscht Day, and another notable event, the Vdoma charity market.

Last year, the Oranta Association for Support of Ukrainians in Portugal organised a significant Ukrainian-Portuguese charity festival, FELIZONDA 2023, in Lagos. The festival promoted Ukrainian music, contemporary art, and folk traditions and raised funds for a rehabilitation centre in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian organisation in Braga has conducted humanitarian aid campaigns for over a year. Their *Ambulância para a Ucrânia* initiative for Ukraine's Independence Day resulted in donating three ambulances to Chernihiv and Bakhmut.

I would also like to highlight the *Amarelo Azul* project for temporarily displaced Ukrainian women, implemented by the Ukrainian hub NGO in Lisbon. This three-month training and mentorship programme helps our women develop business plans and start businesses in Portugal.



Участь Амбасадорки Марини Михайленко в жіночому фестивалі «Woman's wave» (м. Лісабон), 19 листопада 2023 р. (© Софія Шовікова)

19 November 2023, Ambassador Maryna Mykhailenko participates in the Woman's Wave women's festival in Lisbon (© Sofia Shovikova)

These efforts increase the recognition of our country, draw attention to its needs, and contribute to strengthening support from Portuguese society.

— *It is known that Portugal has hosted tens of thousands of Ukrainians who had to seek temporary protection due to Russian aggression since 24 February 2022. Please tell us about the current situation of Ukrainians who have received temporary protection in Portugal, as well as the challenges they face.*

— In the first days of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, thousands of Ukrainians arrived in Portugal. Over two years, almost 60,000 of our compatriots received temporary protection here.

The figures are remarkable, considering that Portugal has a population of just over 10 million people and has not set any quotas for refugees from Ukraine.

Businesses, Portuguese philanthropists, ordinary citizens, foreign and Ukrainian volunteer organisations, and our community have spearheaded numerous initiatives at the state, municipal, and district levels.

Portugal has developed a large-scale programme entitled Portugal for Ukraine, which provides a simplified procedure for obtaining protection and legalisation in the country, as well as access to public healthcare, education, the labour market, etc. Each Portuguese municipality implemented its support programmes at its level and in areas with a significant Ukrainian population.

There were evacuation flights, centres and lodgings for the temporary accommodation of displaced persons from Ukraine, tons of humanitarian aid, financial assistance for the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the restoration of specific objects in Ukraine, and numerous charity events, actions, and concerts in support of our state.

Today, we observe good adaptation and integration of Ukrainians into Portuguese society. The majority resolved their issues with documents over the two years as they travelled abroad for the first time. For Ukrainians who still have problems, we promptly inform the Portuguese competent authorities, who demonstrate openness to interaction with the Embassy. A small number of our compatriots decided to return to their families in Ukraine, while others settled their lives abroad. Of course, as soon as possible, we will facilitate the return of Ukrainians home.

Overall, our citizens face no obstacles here — they live, work, and enjoy all rights on par with local citizens and foreigners residing in Portugal.

— *Ukraine seeks associate observer status in the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, which includes three states within your accreditation: Portugal, Cabo Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe. What further measures should Ukraine take to enhance relations with Portuguese-speaking countries? Which areas of cooperation are priorities?*

— The Embassy is actively working to secure this status for Ukraine. On 11 December 2023, we submitted our application to the Executive Secretariat of

the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLC), which is currently under review. We are developing a partnership plan that will form the basis for a decision at the next CPLC summit in Guinea-Bissau in 2025.

This international organisation provides another platform for developing relations between Ukraine and Portuguese-speaking countries. Interaction with it opens new opportunities for communication, strengthening cooperation, and promoting Ukraine's position. The number of Ukrainians learning Portuguese is growing: at least two universities in Kyiv offer Portuguese as a primary foreign language. The growing number of our compatriots who have found temporary protection in Portugal also contributes to this process.

The Embassy is expanding dialogue not only with Portugal but also with Cabo Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe. Recently, we have significantly intensified political dialogue with Cabo Verde. Notably, we organised the first-ever high-level telephone conversation, a meeting between the First Deputy Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the President of the National Assembly of Cabo Verde, and a phone call between the foreign ministers.

During a transit stop in Cabo Verde on 9 December 2023, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine, met with José Ulisses Correia e Silva, Prime Minister of Cabo Verde. It was the first meeting of such a high level in the history of bilateral relations. Subsequently, on 8 April 2024, the President of Ukraine spoke at the International Conference on Democracy in Cabo Verde. On 7 May 2024, he had a phone conversation with the Prime Minister of this country. Cabo Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe confirmed their participation in the Peace Summit in Switzerland in June 2024.

To further strengthen relations with Portuguese-speaking countries, the Embassy of Ukraine in the Portuguese Republic plans to develop cooperation in the following areas: food security, education, energy, culture, and tourism. These areas have great potential for mutual enrichment and creating new opportunities for both parties.

Interview dated 13 June 2024