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OUR MISSION IS TO REACH OUT TO MINDS AND HEARTS

— *Your Excellency, could you please elaborate on the particularities of working with Southeast Asian countries in general and Singapore among them? What challenges do you have to overcome in your professional work?*

— Let me start with the fact that ASEAN is an influential and exceptionally interesting region in terms of historical, political, social and cultural background, which is home to 660 million people. We are dealing with a large and promising market interested in Ukrainian agricultural products and digital solutions. Thus, we have to reach out to their minds and hearts.

The greatest challenge for me as Ambassador to Singapore in the context of the third year of countering russia's aggressive war is to keep the topic of supporting Ukraine in the spotlight of the Singaporean political and business establishment while not forgetting about people-to-people contacts and shaping our state's image in Asia.

The geopolitical landscape is complex. Hence, diplomacy must consider the impact of events in other parts of the world and firmly counter russian propaganda. Moreover, Asian states have their own history of relations with the russian federation, and many of them have experienced wars and periods of occupation. Our task is to deeply impress upon our Asian partners the fact that russia's war against Ukraine is not only a crime against humanity but also an aggressive manifestation of neocolonial policy. The term colonialism has a very negative connotation for many Asian nations, so this makes our position even clearer.

— *Singapore supports Ukraine in the war that russia has unleashed against our country. Ms Ambassador, which areas of Ukrainian-Singaporean relations play the most important role in the context of ongoing russian aggression?*

— Our cooperation is based on mutual respect, shared values and business pragmatism.

Despite being one of the smallest countries in the world with no significant natural resources or territory, Singapore has managed to join the ranks of the world's most prosperous countries and major business centres. The country pursues a pragmatic approach to foreign policy while remaining committed to the norms and principles of international law and the UN Charter, which is reflected in the support of our resolutions at the UN General Assembly.



Амбасадорка Катерина Зеленко з Президентом Сінгапуру Тарманом Шанмугаратнамом та його дружиною Джейн Юміко Іттогі

Ambassador Kateryna Zelenko with President of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratnam and his wife Jane Yumiko Ittogi

We are grateful to the government of Singapore for its decision to impose sanctions against Russia in the early days of the full-scale invasion. Incidentally, it was the second time Singapore took such a measure (having previously imposed sanctions due to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia) and the first time it did so against a state outside the ASEAN region. Such a fact proves that respect for territorial integrity and state sovereignty are not just empty words for Singapore. And this unites us.

Among the countries in the region, Singapore has provided the most extensive volume of humanitarian aid and donations to support Ukraine (nearly \$ 10 million). Few people know that this country is one of the main benefactors of the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital. Thanks to our Singaporean friends, extremely complex neurosurgery and diagnostics are now possible with state-of-the-art equipment.

Of course, we promote business and trade, which, by the way, we managed to double in 2023 due to an increase in food supplies. Singapore is a trade window to Asia: if our business gains a foothold here, it is only a matter of time before we cover the rest of the region.

Another priority area is people-to-people contacts. Since the start of the full-scale war, they have acquired new significance. Today, we can proudly say that the number of Ukraine's friends in this distant Asian country has grown

significantly. Many of them came forward when, from the first days of the Russian invasion, they travelled to the Ukrainian-Polish border to help Ukrainians, cook hot meals, collect warm clothes for children, search for medical supplies, and make video reports on social media, showing the Singaporean public the true face of Russian terror.

— *Could you please tell us about the public diplomacy projects arranged by the Embassy aimed at promoting Ukraine's image in Singapore? What facilitates the introduction of our country's culture to the Singaporeans?*

— Throughout my term, several dozen various public diplomacy projects have been implemented. These include photo exhibitions, fashion shows featuring contemporary-style Ukrainian national clothes, the opening of the Ukrainian bookshelf, music concerts, fairs, readings and thematic events for children. Of course, culinary diplomacy also helps to open up Ukraine as an authentic country with a unique spirit, rich culture and history, powerful agricultural potential and extraordinarily talented people.

In the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the majority of the public diplomacy projects implemented by the Embassy invariably involved fundraising to support Ukrainians. The most successful of these initiatives were the Piece of Art charity festival in spring 2022, which managed to raise over \$ 100,000, and the Superhumans: Limbs of Hope charity event in December 2023, which raised funds for the Superhumans Center with the aim of purchasing prostheses for women who lost their limbs during the war. During the event, famous Ukrainian artists and designers Roksolana Bohutska, Yuliia Mahdych, Oksana Polonets, brands BYURSE, Chernikova, Gunia, Guzema, Valery Kovalska, ZERNO, etc., presented their works.

Another large-scale event was the Ukrainian Culture and Fashion Fest, held in April 2023. It presented products, clothing, and accessories from well-known brands: Elena Reva, Fredynska, Iva Jewellery, L.A.B. by Ternovskaya, MOTYV, OLIZ, Poustovit, VIGY, and Vikele Studio. A significant share of the proceeds was donated to help Ukraine.

Therefore, cultural diplomacy projects are not solely about culture and art but also about helping those affected by the war and assisting Ukrainian creative businesses in entering the Singapore market.

— *Upon the initiative of the Embassy, screening of films about the Russian-Ukrainian war Blindfold and 20 Days in Mariupol took place in Singapore. Your Excellency, how did the public perceive these films? What factors shape Singaporeans' attitudes towards Russia's war against Ukraine?*

— Over the past three years, we have managed to screen almost two dozen Ukrainian films here — ranging from *Bitter Harvest* about the genocide of Ukrainians during the Holodomor to the well-known *Mavka*. The local audience welcomed every Ukrainian film screened in Singapore with interest.

The documentary *20 Days in Mariupol*, which was nominated for the world's top film industry award at the time of its screening, the Oscar, naturally filled the hall to capacity. Moreover, the tickets sold out instantly, so we decided to arrange one more screening. Given the publicity peculiarities of Singapore, the demonstration of a quality Ukrainian filmmaking product, especially one that reveals the truth about Russia's crimes in Ukraine, has become an incredibly effective mechanism.

— *Singapore is one of Ukraine's most important trade and economic partners in the region. Please describe the prospects of Ukrainian goods entering the Singapore market. Besides, what role do investment activities play in bilateral relations?*

— There have been no trade conflicts or particular barriers in economic relations between Ukraine and Singapore. The structure of Ukrainian exports has changed since the outbreak of the war. Currently, agricultural and food products comprise its core. The reason for this is not only the traditional nature of Ukrainian exports but also the specifics of local consumption: Singapore imports 90% of its food supplies.

Over the past five years, the State Service of Ukraine on Food Safety and Consumer Protection and the Embassy have worked jointly to open markets for our exporters of poultry meat and poultry products, including halal poultry and processed poultry products, as well as consumer eggs and pet food. As of the end of 2023, 9 Ukrainian poultry farms were accredited in Singapore to supply consumer eggs, along with 5 production facilities that were allowed to export frozen chicken and poultry products.

Currently, the State Service of Ukraine for Food Safety and Consumer Protection and the Embassy are working to open the Singaporean pork market for Ukrainian producers. This issue is gradually gaining relevance alongside the planned revival of the industry against the backdrop of considering the entry of this product into the EU market.

Last year, bilateral trade with Singapore regained its positive dynamics, with our exports doubling. This was primarily due to new safe logistics routes developed by our exporters.

In general, the capacity of the Singapore food market for Ukrainian producers is quite large. Ukraine can fully satisfy Singapore's needs by supplying honey, cereals, sunflower seeds, soybeans, sugar, yeast, starch, confectionery, spirits, juices, beer, etc.

The realisation of Ukraine's export potential in the Singapore food market will remain promising, not least due to favourable re-export opportunities from Singapore, which accounts for 55% of total Singaporean exports.

The Embassy and the Nazovni International Platform under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine provide our exporters with necessary assistance in

finding partners, and I would like to encourage Ukrainian companies to participate more actively in trade fairs in Singapore, bearing in mind that importers from neighbouring countries of the region also attend these exhibitions.

At the same time, it is essential to remember that foreign investments, including pre-war inflows, also support and develop Ukraine's export capabilities. Investment activity is not only about attracting investment but also about encouraging investors to reinvest.

Our government keeps creating investment incentives based on the best international practices, particularly by amending the Law of Ukraine 'On State Support of Investment Projects with Significant Investments in Ukraine'. I believe that thanks to this policy, a significant number of Singaporean investors have not left Ukraine and are still investing in the country. These are such companies as Food Empire (instant drinks, Zolotonosha, Cherkasy region), Wilmar International (oilseed processing plants, Pivdenne, Kharkiv region, and Chumak trade mark food products), Olam International (agro-industrial products, Bila Tserkva, Kyiv region), Flextronics (manufacturer of products for the electronics industry, Mukachevo, Zakarpattia region).

The revival of the well-known Ukrainian brand Chumak is a case in point. Due to the temporary occupation of Kakhovka town, Chumak shut down its food production facilities. In order to restore the brand's manufacturing and export potential, Wilmar temporarily relocated operations to facilities in the west of Ukraine while maintaining the recipe and quality.

— *In January 2024, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy discussed the Peace Formula with his Singaporean counterpart Tharman Shanmugaratnam and invited him to join its implementation. In your opinion, in what ways can Singapore help Ukraine, and how can we encourage the Republic to take part in the initiative?*

— First of all, I would like to point out that Singapore has been supporting Ukraine since the very beginning of the full-scale invasion, both at the state level and through private initiatives taken by citizens of this multinational country and the local Ukrainian community. The Singapore government has already allocated several humanitarian support packages to support Ukraine's needs. In particular, just before the meeting of the presidents, 22 ambulances were sent from Singapore to help save the lives of Ukrainians.

The Republic of Singapore is an active and experienced advocate for strict adherence to the principles of the UN Charter and international law by all members of the international community. Since 2014, Singapore has consistently voiced its strong condemnation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine (which it regards as an absolute violation and a dangerous precedent) in the international arena and supported relevant resolutions at the UN and other international organisations.

Singapore shares the vision of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, the withdrawal of the occupying forces from our country and the restoration of its territorial integrity and sovereignty within internationally recognised borders. This approach is the basis of the Peace Formula proposed by the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Of course, its implementation and the involvement of the broadest possible range of countries, including those from the Southeast Asian region, is a complex and challenging task. Ukrainian diplomacy has to break through the glass ceilings that have been looming over for decades. Singapore is aware that achieving the Millennium Development Goals will not be entirely possible in the face of further international destabilisation, which also echoes in Southeast Asia. The repercussions include disrupted supply chains, logistical complications, rising prices, and slower post-pandemic recovery. We constantly emphasise that every dollar that replenishes Russia's budget will help the aggressor country not only to finance its humanitarian and war crimes in Ukraine but also to prolong this war and deepen its global impact.

We respect the position of our Singaporean friends in maintaining their independence in foreign policy and choosing a course consonant with their national interests. After all, we are defending the same right of our state, albeit we have to do so on the battlefield. At the same time, we believe that this is the part of the world where the wisdom and experience of multilateral diplomacy can be directed towards the fastest possible achievement of the common goal of restoring a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. In today's global world, we have a shared responsibility to future generations to ensure that they inherit a truly secure world.

— *Singapore hosts many annual science exhibitions, technology festivals, and congresses, where Ukrainians, among others, present their initiatives. How would you assess the role of expert diplomacy in promoting Ukrainian projects and fostering bilateral relations between Singapore and Ukraine?*

— Regardless of the war's impact on Ukrainians' lives, resilience, combined with the desire to develop and contribute to global technological progress, still remains our hallmark. Our motto is 'We must do our part', and Ukrainian scientists and researchers are no exception.

Indeed, Singapore is one of the leaders in developing many modern scientific areas that have emerged from pressing problems and challenges for an island city-state with a relatively large population. These include the creation of modern ecosystems, in particular in the context of providing quality drinking water to the population (in Singapore, people can drink tap water), the transition from energy storage and saving systems to regeneration systems in smart homes, the disposal of waste and materials that are most difficult to recycle, modern healthcare, public transport, and proper nutrition despite the lack



Зустріч заступниці Голови ВРУ Олени Кондратюк зі спікером Парламенту Сінгапуру Тан Чуан-Джином

Meeting of the Deputy Chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Olena Kondratiuk with the Speaker of the Parliament of Singapore Tan Chuan-Jin

of agriculture. A number of government agencies, research institutes, and university research laboratories are working on these issues in Singapore.

Currently, the Embassy focuses on several areas of scientific cooperation, given the interest of Ukrainian research and production groups. One of these is the provision of quality drinking water to Ukrainian cities amidst the environmental disaster caused by the Russian aggressors. Last December, the Mykolaiv Water Hub project office presented the initiative in Singapore, focusing on finding partners for its implementation. We hope that its promotion in Singapore will continue during the Singapore International Water Week, which will take place in mid-June this year.

I am also convinced that Ukrainian scientists and engineers will soon be interested in the achievements of their Singaporean colleagues in areas such as the digitalisation of port activities, 3D printing and construction of smart homes, waste disposal, and the creation of new materials, which are of particular importance in the context of social and economic recovery plans in Ukraine.

In turn, the contribution of Ukrainian specialists is highly valued in Singapore. Last year, for example, we facilitated the participation of several groups of Ukrainian doctors in international congresses on reconstructive microsurgery, cardiology, and anaesthesiology. I am always proud to see renowned international experts from around the world holding their breath during a presentation by Ukrainian doctors. Their foreign colleagues are well aware of the masterful work our surgeons can skilfully perform under shelling, blackouts or just close to the battlefield.

— *On 29 February 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine presented the document 'Ukraine — ASEAN: vision of cooperation'. Considering the provisions and proposals set out in the vision, how do you assess the prospects for cooperation between Ukraine and the ASEAN states?*

— We are grateful to Singapore for its favourable position on Ukraine's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, as well as for establishing and developing political and inter-parliamentary dialogue. We expect the same support for Ukraine's acquisition of the Sectoral Dialogue Partner status in ASEAN.



Зустріч першого заступника Голови ВРУ Олександра Корнієнка зі спікером Законодавчої Ради Брунею Абдулом Рахманом Тайбом

First Deputy Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada Oleksandr Kornienko meets with Speaker of the Legislative Council of Brunei Abdul Rahman Taib

The Ukrainian side has identified seven priority areas for cooperation with ASEAN. Almost half of these have a clear economic focus, and two others relate to recovery, particularly economic potential, after the war or environmental disaster. These include trade, agriculture, energy, humanitarian demining, and disaster response.

For Singapore, the economic component is also an area of focus in the context of ASEAN. It entails economic integration within the Association, including developing the digital and green economy, as well as strengthening ASEAN's resilience and food security in times of crisis.

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the visions of Ukraine and Singapore converge in this area.

There are also developments in cultural interaction and people-to-people contacts. A comprehensive approach to ASEAN and the implementation of regional projects will contribute to the effectiveness and scaling up of results in this area, which is especially important today to understand not only our rich cultural diversity but also what truly unites us.

Furthermore, bilateral contacts at various levels with both the Singaporean side and ASEAN specialised institutions show that the field of digitalisation and cyber diplomacy is of mutual interest and particularly promising. Ukraine, without exaggeration, has something to impress even such industry leaders as Singapore.

— *Singapore is a high-tech country that focuses on information technology, cybersecurity and digitalisation. What valuable experience in this field could Ukraine borrow? What can official Kyiv offer on its part?*

— Today, Ukraine is considered one of the world's IT hubs, a digital incubator of human resources for this industry, which is also a significant part of Ukraine's GDP. As cybersecurity has become a strategic issue for our country, we have already started promoting a cyber dialogue between Ukraine and the SEA region, in particular Singapore. The parties noted the prospects of such a dialogue during the participation of Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Anton Demokhin in the events of Singapore International Cyber Week 2023.

The Embassy has further plans to promote Ukrainian services in IT and financial technologies, including through global companies founded by Ukrainians. An excellent start of this work was the participation of Ukrainian companies in the Singapore FinTech Festival in November 2023, where a joint Ukrainian pavilion was set up with the Embassy's involvement. It was the first time that Ukrainian and Ukrainian-founded global fintech companies, such as Founders Network, Global CxO, ProcessMIX, SoftServe, SoloWay Technologies, Yanok AI and 4ire Group, were represented with their products at an event of this scale within a national platform.

Singapore's prestigious universities also do not ignore young Ukrainian talents in this and other related fields. This year, with the assistance of the Embassy, one of the world's top-rated higher education institutions — Nanyang Technological University — selected three Ukrainian students for a prestigious two-month research scholarship under the Singapore Global Connect Fellowship Programme.

— *From the very first days of the full-scale invasion, Singapore joined the imposition of sanctions against Russia, introducing export controls on strategic goods and financial measures. How is the compliance with the restrictions currently monitored? Is it possible to extend the sanctions?*

— I would like to assure you that compliance with the restrictions and sanctions imposed by Singapore is under constant control of the Embassy. The Singaporean authorities are aware of their importance in the context of international counteraction to the aggressor state. Any facts revealed by the Ukrainian side are brought to the attention of the Singapore government and are subject to verification and, if necessary, appropriate action.

However, I would like to note that Singapore remains the only country in the region that has imposed a set of sanctions against Russia, even though they reduce the state's revenues from the export and re-export of sanctioned goods. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine continues to promote the issue of expanding Singapore's sanctions and restrictions, but we need to do so in a balanced manner.

Apart from that, we are seeking the support of our partners to place Russia on the Call for Action list of the FATF — an organisation that counters money laundering and terrorist financing. The FATF has suspended Russia's membership in the organisation, and the European Parliament has identified it as a state sponsor of terrorism. However, in light of Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine, the FATF should recognise the damage that Russia has caused to the global financial system, as well as the risks it continues to pose, and place it on the so-called blacklist.

— *Along with Singapore, you are accredited to Brunei Darussalam. Ms Ambassador, please describe the current state of affairs and prospects for relations with this country.*

— Brunei Darussalam has a unique cultural and historical heritage. It is one of the few absolute monarchies in the world, and the Bolkiah dynasty has been in power since the 14th century. Brunei Darussalam is governed by the state's constitution and the state ideology of the Malay Islamic monarchy, which is one of the fundamental components of the country's national identity, combining elements of Malay culture, the norms of Islam (Brunei's state religion) and the political framework of the monarchical system.

Brunei Darussalam is the least populated state in ASEAN, and in terms of land area, it only exceeds Singapore. However, Brunei is rich in energy resources (oil and gas), which are its main export products.

The combination of these factors determines the priority areas of foreign policy: developing cooperation with ASEAN member states and dialogue partners, maintaining friendly relations with the permanent members of the UN Security Council and the world's major economies, and expanding cooperation with countries of the Muslim world.

One of the key components of our common interests is preserving the international rules-based order. This was reflected in Brunei's support for the main Ukrainian resolutions in the UN General Assembly following the outbreak of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. In February 2022, Brunei also issued a statement condemning 'any violation of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of any country'.

Political dialogue between Ukraine and Brunei intensified against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale aggression, resulting in a series of contacts at the level of the leadership of the foreign ministries of both countries in 2022–23. Also, in 2022, the first contact occurred at the leadership level of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Legislative Council of Brunei (an analogue of the parliamentary body in absolutist Brunei).

Beyond the classic (political) dimension of bilateral dialogue, Ukraine and Brunei have a significant number of promising areas for developing sectoral dialogue.

Historically, Ukrainian-Bruneian trade has been sporadic. For its part, the Embassy has initiated a review of the trade vectors that might interest Brunei. We look forward to the conclusions of our Bruneian colleagues to help expand the business cooperation potential.

One of the promising areas is the establishment of research and education cooperation. Brunei's national development programme, Brunei Vision 2035, stipulates that by 2035, the country's population should be educated and highly qualified in accordance with the highest international standards, as well as have the necessary skills to master advanced high-tech professions, which should ensure a decent quality of life and dynamic economic development.

Ukraine's education and research sectors are particularly interesting to Brunei, especially for achieving the relevant goals. Consultations are currently underway between certain institutions, and we hope to share good news in this regard soon.

In addition, Ukraine has unique experience and procedural knowledge in a number of specific areas that may be of interest to both Brunei and ASEAN in general and, hence, may contribute to the development of cooperation in the form of a sectoral dialogue partnership between Ukraine and the Organisation. I am convinced that once a priority area for such cooperation is agreed upon, Brunei will support it, as it did with Ukraine's accession to the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in 2021 as an observer and our country's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 2022.

Interview dated 15 May 2024