

Idris Kadyrkulov,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of the Kyrgyz Republic to Ukraine

KYRGYZ-UKRAINIAN CULTURAL AND HUMANITARIAN RELATIONS

The shared historical trajectory shaped during the Soviet era has become the soil on which modern cultural ties between the Kyrgyz Republic and Ukraine have grown. After gaining independence, both countries, while asserting their own identities, sought ways to maintain and develop collaboration. The principal document that formalised these intentions was the Agreement between the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Cooperation in the Field of Culture and the Humanitarian Sphere of 23 February 1993, which underscores the strategic importance of cultural dialogue.

The Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in Ukraine plays a central role in developing Kyrgyz-Ukrainian cultural and humanitarian relations. Founded within the framework of diplomatic relations, which were established on 19 September 1992, it coordinates bilateral initiatives. The Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic is not merely a diplomatic institution but also a genuine cultural agent that initiates and co-organises events aimed at presenting the Kyrgyz cultural heritage in Ukraine. Conferences, events, exhibitions, and literary gatherings promote traditional Kyrgyz culture while adapting it to the Ukrainian context.

By regularly organising such remarkable events, the diplomatic mission showcases the richness of Kyrgyz culture, while paying equal attention, respect and support to initiatives related to Ukrainian topics.

Specifically, in 2024, to mark the 210th anniversary of Taras Shevchenko's birth, the Embassy organised a reading of the 'Testament' by the Great Kobzar, delivered in the native languages of members of the diplomatic corps accredited to Ukraine. On that day, diplomats recited his works in 13 different languages.

On 27 February 2025, on the occasion of the International Mother Language Day and the 180th anniversary of Taras Shevchenko's 'Testament', a second round of poetic readings of the celebrated work was held through the joint efforts of the Embassy and People's Deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Vladlen Nekliudov. This time, representatives of the diplomatic corps recited the poem in 32 languages. The event's highlight was the setting of a national record of Ukraine for the largest multilingual recitation of Shevchenko's 'Testament' by heads of diplomatic missions.

A truly unique event in Ukraine's cultural sphere and in international philately was the issuance of the national postage stamp dedicated to the 210th anniversary of the Great Kobzar's birth. In March 2024, the stamp sheet titled T. Shevchenko Unites Nations by artists Serhii and Oleksandr Kharuk was presented. It was issued by the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine and produced by the national postal operator, Ukrposhta JSC. This philatelic edition became the first official Ukrainian state postage stamp with international status dedicated to Shevchenko. The sheet includes six stamps featuring reproductions of Shevchenko's paintings: *Self-Portrait*, *Kyrgyz Boy*, *Kyrgyz Woman*, and *Daytime Halt of an Expedition in the Steppe*.

In addition, in 2024, with the support of Ukrposhta JSC, the Embassy released a postage stamp commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic. The design depicts a snow leopard declared the national symbol of the Kyrgyz Republic by decree of President Sadyr Zhaparov in 2023.

Undoubtedly, one of the strongest bridges between nations is literature. The Ukrainian translations of works by Chinghiz Aitmatov, the great Kyrgyz writer, humanist, and diplomat, help readers in Ukraine discover the very core of Kyrgyz culture. His writings combine realism with mythology and explore the timeless themes of good and evil, love and hatred. Aitmatov's works have been translated into over 180 languages, and in the Kyrgyz Republic, his significant legacy is comparable to that of Taras Shevchenko in Ukraine.

In 2023, to mark the 95th anniversary of Chinghiz Aitmatov's birth, a nationwide drawing competition for children based on the writer's works was held in Ukraine. Despite the wartime situation, over 1,500 children from all regions of the country took part. The competition

results were announced on 22 November 2024 in Kyiv, at the National Library of Ukraine for Children. A total of 114 finalists were awarded special gifts and prizes, and an illustrated anthology featuring their drawings was published. This book is being distributed not only to libraries in Ukraine and the Kyrgyz Republic but also across EU countries. As part of the event, Professor Mykola Vaskiv was awarded a medal from the International Organisation of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY), while several scholars and public figures received medals from the Chinghiz Aitmatov Foundation for their contribution to the development of Turkic-language literature and the translation of numerous authors, including Aitmatov.



In 2021, a similar competition titled *Kyrgyzstan: Infinitely Unique* took place to mark the 30th anniversary of the Kyrgyz Republic's independence, involving more than 2,000 works created by children.

The Embassy facilitated the translation and publication of selected works by Chinghiz Aitmatov, along with *The Legend of Manas*, *Semetey* and *Seytek and Er Töshtük (Kyrgyz folk epic)*. Notably, the *Epic of Manas*, regarded as a golden treasure trove of folk wisdom, has been inscribed on the List of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity and included in the Guinness World Records as the longest epic in the world.



On 23 May 2024, a scientific and practical conference titled *Manas* — Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was held in Kyiv with the active support of the GDIP. The event brought together Ukrainian and Kyrgyz Turkologists, who, joined by the Acting Minister of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, Rostyslav Karandiev, discussed the significance of the *Epic of Manas* for world culture. The highlight of the event was the presentation of the newly translated and published Ukrainian edition of *Er Töshtük* (Kyrgyz folk epic), copies of which are now available in libraries across Ukraine.

Alongside Kyrgyz cultural initiatives in Ukraine, Ukrainian cultural centres in the Kyrgyz Republic are equally worthy of attention. One notable example is the Berehynia Ukrainian Society of the Kyrgyz Republic (Berehynia USKR), which was founded on 13 June 1993 in Bishkek. Under the leadership of Volodymyr Narozia, who has headed the society since its establishment, the Berehynia USKR plays a leading role in preserving Ukrainian cultural heritage and fostering friendly relations between Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. As head of the USKR, Volodymyr Narozia has made an invaluable contribution to Kyrgyz-Ukrainian cultural and humanitarian cooperation. He translated major Kyrgyz pieces into Ukrainian, including the *Epic of Manas*, *Er Töshtük*, and Chinghiz Aitmatov's later writings. His contribution to promoting Ukrainian literature in Kyrgyzstan is no less significant: Ukrainian literary works translated by Volodymyr Narozia are regularly distributed across the country and resonate with local readers.

In 1999, the Berehynia USKR founded the first Ukrainian Studies Centre in Kyrgyzstan, which has since served as a hub for learning the Ukrainian language, history, and culture. The centre collaborates with local institutions and holds events for Ukraine Days.

The Berehynia Ukrainian Society is not only about education. Its artistic ensembles, namely Barvinok, Zacharivnia Pisia, Chervona Kalyna, Kalyna, and Voices of Ukraine, carry the Ukrainian spirit to the most remote corners of Kyrgyzstan.

Honouring the memory of Taras Shevchenko, respected as *aqyn Taraz* in the Kyrgyz Republic, holds a special place in the activities of the Berehynia USKR. The society published a book titled *Taras Shevchenko in Kyrgyzstan*, which contains academic, journalistic and literary materials about the Ukrainian poet created by Kyrgyz researchers and writers. This contributed to the popularisation of the Great Kobzar in Kyrgyzstan.

Interestingly, since 12 January 1998, a Ukrainian-language *Berehynia* radio programme has been aired on the National Radio Channel of Kyrgyzstan and is also available online.

Berehynia USKR is a member of the Assembly of Peoples of Kyrgyzstan, the Ukrainian World Coordination Council, and the Ukrainian World Congress, and is also a founding member of the Kyrgyzstan–Ukraine Friendship Society.

Kyrgyz-Ukrainian cultural and humanitarian relations, like a solid bridge, are upheld by the efforts of both countries' Embassies, political leaders, and public figures. Thanks to their tireless work, the dialogue between the countries remains strong, and mutual respect and interest in each other's cultures continue to deepen.

Ukraine is held in sincere respect in the Kyrgyz Republic. A visible symbol of this can be found in the capital city of Bishkek, where central streets are named after Taras Shevchenko and the city of Kyiv. They serve as a reminder: although separated by thousands of kilometres, the Kyrgyz Republic and Ukraine walk side by side, united by shared cultural values.

Kyrgyz-Ukrainian cultural and humanitarian relations demonstrate a unique combination of historical heritage and contemporary aspirations. Despite geographical distance, the two nations find common ground in the cultural and humanitarian sphere. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when many ties between former republics were lost, the Kyrgyz Republic and Ukraine managed to preserve and develop cultural dialogue. This process is reflected in the organisation of joint events and the exchange of spiritual values, which contribute to the preservation of national identity in both countries while also enriching them through mutual engagement.