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AMBASSADOR'S WORK: LOVE FOR HOMELAND COMES FIRST

– *You have been heading the Embassy of Ukraine in Israel for 10 years, which is quite unusual for Ukrainian diplomacy. How have you managed to be an irreplaceable specialist for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine for so long? Is such a large stock of experience and contacts helpful in your position in the conditions of unsteady political life in Israel? What are your impressions from heading the diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv?*

– As for me, the position of ambassador encompasses not only a huge amount of work and responsibility, but, above all, love for your homeland and understanding its current needs above all, as does the willingness to do everything you can to achieve crucial results for your country. It is based on these results that the country's President, endowed with the pertinent prerogative, decides on the duration of the tenure of heads of diplomatic missions. I regard my ten years of serving as Ambassador of Ukraine to Israel as a high appreciation of my work, and I am ready to implement the experience gained over the years at any time in another position, when a relevant decision is taken by the head of state.

Mentioning the experience and contacts, I should state that such aspects are indispensable in any responsible position, particularly in Israel. The country is relatively small, the unnecessary formality in communication on professional issues is generally absent, which, in my opinion, is favourable in the working process. My impressions about working as ambassador in this country are nothing but positive. Israel is a unique country in many ways, rich in talented and resourceful people, known for its revolutionary inventions that make the whole world inspired. As we know, the state, surrounded by a hostile environment, has become one of the most developed countries in the world over a relatively short time span. Ukraine has much to learn from this state at different points, especially when it comes to building and developing the country in the face of constant threats to its existence. We can endlessly admire Israel's considerable achievements in innovation and development in agriculture, irrigation technologies, desalination and efficient methods of water usage, revolutionary discoveries in medicine, technological inventions, etc. While serving as Ambassador of Ukraine to Israel, I have tried to direct my impressions and admiration for Israel's achievements to Israel in a constructive way, establishing bilateral cooperation in a manner that would provide Ukrainian specialists in relevant fields with the opportunity to effectively adopt the Israeli experience.

– *What is the current state of bilateral cooperation in the political, economic and humanitarian spheres? What are the main priorities of the embassy in 2020?*

– To date, a constructive and dynamic dialogue between Ukraine and Israel has been established, which reflects the fact that parties have achieved full mutual and fruitful understanding in most areas of bilateral cooperation. The number of bilateral contacts between our countries at almost all levels, including the political leadership of states, parliaments, ministries and agencies, epitomises reciprocal interest in the development of mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation.

The priorities of bilateral political cooperation for 2020 comprise maintaining the high dynamics of political contacts between both countries through high-level visits, carried out in view of the epidemiological situation allows.

The economic relations between Ukraine and Israel are among successful examples of our cooperation. According to statistics, in 2019 the trade volume in goods and services between Ukraine and Israel amounted to \$1,116.3 billion, showing an increase of 8 percent comparing to 2018. At the same time, the positive balance of foreign trade in goods and services with Israel for Ukraine reached about \$600 million in 2019.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has already showed negative reflection on our economic relations. Thus, in the first quarter of 2020, the decline in turnover reached 2.8 percent.

The fight against the pandemic will unequivocally have a significant impact on world trade, including foreign economic relations. Ukraine is willing and interested in supplying goods and services to Israel, which have been traditionally received by the latter from other regions of the world. Our country can significantly expand both the volume and range of goods it exports to Israel, in particular, agricultural products. The above applies to the grain, meat, oil, feed, confectionery supplies, etc., which would in turn significantly increase Israel's food security.

Therefore, considering the economic direction, the main priorities of the Embassy in 2020 are maintaining trade volumes, expanding cooperation on investments and innovations, transition to new organizational forms of cooperation in the field of new technologies, increasing direct investment of Israel in Ukraine's economy, and cooperation in combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Humanitarian cooperation is a significant part of bilateral relations between Ukraine and Israel, given that unique Ukrainian-Israeli people-to-people contacts constitute a special role of Ukrainian-Israeli relations. In recent years, we can observe a significant support and interest of Israelis in Ukraine and Ukrainian culture. The COVID-19 pandemic has actually forced us to suspend the scheduled cultural activities; I hope, however, that the improvement of the epidemiological situation will resume further deepening of cultural and humanitarian ties, which are an important tool for shaping positive image of Ukraine in Israel.



14 липня 2020 року Посол України в Державі Ізраїль Геннадій Надолєнко взяв участь у вебінарі «ДРУГА ХВИЛЯ COVID-19. Ізраїль та Україна об'єднують зусилля для розробки стратегічних і технологічних рішень»

On 14 July 2020, Ambassador of Ukraine to the State of Israel Hennadii Nadolenko took part in the webinar *SECOND WAVE OF COVID-19. Israel and Ukraine join forces to develop strategic and technological solutions*

– *When should we expect the ratification of a free trade agreement between Israel and Ukraine? Who or what stands in the way of this process?*

– The importance of the Free Trade Agreement between the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Government of State of Israel signed on 21 January 2019, in Jerusalem cannot be overestimated in the context of the further development of our economic relations.

Entering into force, the agreement aims to facilitate trade in goods our countries are most interested in. In case of Ukraine, this implies trade in grain, fats and oils, base metals, plant products, wood, wood products, and foodstuffs. For Israel, it is trading in precious metals, chemicals, appliances, and machinery.

The fact that the agreement stipulates the possibility of liberalizing trade in services over the next two years is of utmost importance. This directly affects the cooperation in the field of innovation and exchange of high technologies, which, in our opinion, are one of the most promising areas of our cooperation.

It is beyond doubts that the introduction of a free trade regime between Ukraine and Israel will significantly increase the volume of mutual trade. We planned to increase our turnover to \$2 billion in five years.

Ukraine completed domestic procedures for ratification of the agreement in August last year. The delay in the similar action by the Israeli side is related

solely to the domestic political situation in the country over the past year and a half. We were assured that the new Israeli government will ratify the agreement in the near future.

I would like to draw attention to the political significance of this document. It is estimated as one of the cornerstones of the entire complex of our relations. It stipulates that both parties wish to develop and strengthen friendly relations, especially in the areas of economic cooperation and trade, to expand and diversify cooperation in areas of common interest, including ones not covered by this free trade agreement.

It is vital to note that the agreement will not apply to the annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, and certain territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, as was indicated during the document's adoption by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. Instead, for Israel, the scope of this agreement is defined as the territory 'where its customs legislation is recognised'.

The introduction of a free trade regime for goods would not only have a positive impact on trade itself but would also provide important beacons for the development of the whole complex of our economic relations with Israel. The innovations, investments, cybersecurity, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, space programs, banking and finance, construction and public facilities are just some of the promising areas of cooperation between Israel and Ukraine.

– Last year, we found out that Ukraine is going to open an innovation office in Jerusalem. The Israeli side wanted the institution to have diplomatic status and was ready to open a similar office in Kyiv. Would such a step allow existence of a diplomatic mission in Jerusalem without moving the embassy from Tel Aviv? What is the current stage of the implementation of these plans?

– In today's reality, making full use of the investment and innovation potential should be an important stage of economic cooperation between our countries.

As was noted by Dmytro Kuleba, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, solving urgent problems of developing cooperation with Israel in the realm of innovation and investment requires a transition to new forms and methods, so it is important and pertinent for our leaders to implement agreements on the establishment of offices for encouraging innovation and investment in Kyiv and Jerusalem, which will be in charge of the development of technological cooperation, support for startups, and investment in relevant IT industries.

I have repeatedly emphasized that, given the status of Jerusalem, the question of embassy's or consulate's relocation or opening of another diplomatic mission of Ukraine is not being considered. The prospect of offices' creation stipulates further elaboration, taking into account the existing formats of cooperation with Israel. The most appropriate variant, in our opinion, would be the establishment of an office based on public-private partnership with the involvement

of opportunities, including financial, private IT companies that are interested in developing such cooperation. We are also awaiting the measures of our Israeli partners taken to establish a similar Israeli office in Kyiv.

– *In previous years, Israel has been actively helping Ukraine by sending professional psychologists to work with fighters returned from Eastern Ukraine. Is this cooperation in humanitarian sphere currently underway?*

– Israel supports Ukraine. Our cooperation on humanitarian issues and on many levels continues to be implemented.

Thus, in April of this year, Ofer Kerzner, Honorary Consul of Ukraine in the State of Israel, purchased six ventilators and handed them over for Ukrainian hospitals to rescue patients with COVID-19. This humanitarian aid is extremely valuable in overcoming the epidemic in the country.

The Embassy of Ukraine pays considerable attention to common volunteer work with public organizations and the community of Ukrainian descendants.

The public organisation Israeli Friends of Ukraine together with the organisation Rotary Club Ukraine has made possible a practical exchange of experience between physicians of both countries and launched the project *Medical Bridge*. As part of this project, Ukrainian doctors had the opportunity to do internships in the best hospitals in Israel.

The Israeli Friends of Ukraine collects humanitarian aid, mainly clothing, medicines, dressings, hygiene materials and baby stuff on the regular basis. Humanitarian aid is stored and packaged at the Ukrainian Cultural Center of the Embassy of Ukraine in Israel and transferred to Ukraine.

Since 2017, the family rehabilitation and recreational camp Wings has been organised annually by Israeli Friends of Ukraine with the assistance from partners. Within the camp, four groups of four families, including children and their mothers, whose husbands died defending the sovereignty and integrity of Ukraine, are resting and rehabilitating. The excursions, seaside leisure, visits to the water park and children's entertainment centers, master classes, children's holidays are organised for members of the camp while the classes with a psychologist are held for mothers.

Charitable events take place regularly at the Ukrainian Cultural Center in Israel in cooperation with public organisations. Last year, some master classes on aromatherapy were held in the camp to raise funds for the specialised orphanage in Mykolaiv.

– *The military and technical sphere is one of the most promising ones in the context of bilateral cooperation. Are there any ongoing projects in this direction?*

– That is true that the issue of military-technical cooperation between Ukraine and Israel consistently circulates in the media. Answering your question, I would note that my answer will be less detailed than I would like it to be due to its sensitivity for both countries. I have always paid considerable atten-

tion to the development of bilateral cooperation on defense issues. This direction has become especially important since 2014, with the beginning of the Russian aggression. The breakthrough does exist, and it is significant. This primarily concerns the creation of feasible opportunities for delivering protection systems for our soldiers and systems of unit management at different levels of government, modernisation of various combat platforms, including aviation ones, to Ukraine. The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine has confirmed its interest in establishing cooperation with Israeli partners. We managed to go beyond the simple supply of final products to Ukraine and upgrade the cooperation strategy in this area to the level of genuine partnership of defense enterprises of both countries. In January 2019, my efforts resulted in signing a memorandum of cooperation between Ukroboronprom and the Israeli corporation Elbit Systems Ltd. This is not our last accomplishment and I entertain the hope for further development of Ukrainian-Israeli relations in the field of defence and security. We have great prospects in this direction.

– *Israel is a state of repatriates. The highest number of them come from the countries of the former Soviet Union. Are nationals from Ukraine involved in the embassy's activities? Is any Russian informational influence and opposition of the 'Russian lobby' visible in Israel? How difficult is it to resist it?*

– According to various estimates, more than 500,000 nationals from Ukraine live in Israel. Many of them have retained family and business ties with Ukraine, so their interest in our country remains high. In addition, there is a range of non-governmental organisations in Israel that cooperate with the Embassy on a permanent basis. These organisations contribute to maintaining the repatriates' ties with Ukraine, conduct art and educational projects, carry out charitable activities, organise political actions in support of Ukraine and promote the dissemination of positive information about our country.

Speaking of opposition to the 'Russian lobby' in Israel, it must be acknowledged that the 'Russian factor' has become more significant for the Jewish state in terms of foreign and security policy in recent years. Israel views Russia as a geopolitical player in the Middle East, and the leaders of both states maintain trusting interpersonal relations. Nevertheless, Israel continues to adhere to a neutral position on the war in Eastern Ukraine and the current state of Ukrainian-Russian relations. Still, the Israeli side has repeatedly stated that it does not recognise the annexation of Crimea.

– *The Ukrainian Cultural Center has been operating in Israel since 2012. What projects is it currently implementing? Are there any obstacles to its functioning?*

– The Ukrainian Cultural Center at the Embassy of Ukraine to the State of Israel (UCC) was founded in 2012. Over these years, the UCC has become a core of Ukrainian cultural life, which plays an important educational role being a center of the promotion of Ukrainian culture in Israel as well.

The center regularly hosts theme-based and creative meetings, concerts, evenings of poetry and music, exhibitions, lectures, educational classes, charitable events, etc.

Events presenting Ukrainian culture and national traditions are of considerable interest to the visitors of the UCC. The event dedicated to International Vyshyvanka Day, in particular, traditionally gathers a great number of guests dressed in Ukrainian national cloth, and during the holiday concert, Ukrainian songs and poems are heard.

With the participation of the community, special attention is paid to the celebration of state and national holidays. The UCC systematically holds festive and commemorative events on the occasion of Unity Day, Dignity and Freedom Day, Victory Day, Constitution Day, State Flag Day, Independence Day of Ukraine, events dedicated to the anniversary and remembrance of the Chornobyl tragedy, the Holodomor in Ukraine in 1932–33, and other important dates.

In 2015, the Photoclub at the Ukrainian Cultural Center in the State of Israel was established. Its members organise regular meetings, as well as photo exhibitions of their works at the Center.

In 2018, the Odesa Roerich House-Museum, with the assistance of the Ukrainian Cultural Center, published the brochure *Heritage of Ukraine* where the prominent personalities, important events and significant dates in the history of Ukraine are highlighted. As there are no educational institutions teaching Ukrainian in Israel, we plan to organise Ukrainian language and literature classes at the Ukrainian Cultural Center. Therefore, the task ahead is to find financial support for the implementation of such courses and as well as qualified teachers of the Ukrainian language.

I wish to point out that this is only a short list of activities held in UCC. The full account of the work of our cultural center for the period of eight years needs a separate book.

– *Given the large number of repatriates from Ukraine, we can not help asking whether they maintain contacts with their former homeland? Are Israelis eager to know more about Ukraine?*

– The majority of members of the Ukrainian community came to Israel in the 1990s.

Close cooperation with the Ukrainian diaspora and public organisations of Ukrainian natives remains among priorities of the embassy contributing to the preservation of Ukrainian cultural traditions.

Together with public organisations, the embassy regularly organises events to celebrate holidays, anniversaries, and patriotic events.

In June 2019, for instance, the Ukrainian community together with diplomats of the Embassy of Ukraine and local activists held an international action *United by the flag* – #LiberateCrimea in Tel Aviv.

The public organisation Israeli Friends of Ukraine annually holds a festival-fair of Ukrainian culture called *Ethno-Khutir*. The funds raised during the festival are allocated to the family rehabilitation and recreational camp Wings.

In April 2019, with the assistance of the embassy, the premiere of the musical and theatrical performance *Clear Sky is Shining with Stars* of the Shahar Theater, which operates under the auspices of the Israeli Association of Immigrants from Ukraine, took place.

In December last year, the folk arts center Tapuach BeDvash held the 3rd International Ukrainian Song Contest and the 9th International Festival of Ukrainian Culture in Israel. Performers from Ukraine and Israel take part in the Festival on a yearly basis.

Such events attract more and more visitors every year, which indicates a growing interest in Ukrainian culture and traditions in Israel.

– Ukrainians frequently complain about strict checks and a high level of refusals when entering the territory of Israel (in 2018 the number reached almost 5% of all persons who tried to enter). It is officially claimed to be connected with the high number of illegal migrants arriving from Ukraine. Is this really such a serious problem for Israel? Has the Embassy of Ukraine any leverage that would mitigate or abandon this discriminatory practice completely?

– The so-called problem of ‘non-admission’ of Ukrainian citizens exists since 2014, when about 2,000 Ukrainian citizens were denied entry to Israel during the year.

In the following years, this practice has led to a steady increase in refusal of border crossing for Ukrainian citizens and caused widespread dissatisfaction with such actions of the Israeli Immigration Service.

Obviously, this situation did not remain unnoticed by our embassy. A series of meetings with the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the State of Israel was held by me and the consuls of the embassy to resolve this issue. The necessity of resolving this issue has also been constantly raised during meetings of the Presidents as well as Heads of Government of our states.

The parties have taken a number of practical steps to address the problem of ‘non-admission’ and curb the number of cases of illegal employment of Ukrainian citizens in Israel. Thus, an intergovernmental Agreement on Temporary Employment of Ukrainian workers in certain sectors of the labor market of the State of Israel and its Implementing Protocol were concluded. Currently, the authorised institutions of Ukraine and Israel are considering the possibility of extending the agreement to other categories of workers, including tourism.

Furthermore, the embassy has worked closely with relevant units of the Immigration Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Israel to eliminate inconveniences for Ukrainian citizens during additional surveys at Ben Gurion

Airport including the reduction of waiting time for such an interview, providing food, drinking water, leisure facilities, etc.

I am deeply convinced that by joint efforts we will be able to remove this issue from the agenda of Ukrainian-Israeli relations.

– *On 14 January 2020, the Director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance met with the Ambassador of Israel to Ukraine. During the meeting, the Head of the diplomatic mission suggested the creation of a Ukrainian-Israeli commission of historians, which would study the highly contentious topics of the historical past. Is the implementation of this initiative successful?*

– It is known that the revival and preservation of the national memory of the Ukrainian people is among the priorities of state policy of Ukraine. Still, the stereotypes of the past and prejudiced assessment in the perception of certain historical facts of Ukrainian-Jewish relations remain preserved in Israeli society to date. One of the tools for the parties to rethink negative stereotypes is initiation and implementation of the dialogue and discussions among historians and experts. The work in this area requires a balanced approach as well as relevant skills. Our work in this direction have only begun.

– *How familiar is the topic of the Holodomor in Israel and is the local society ready to discuss it? In your opinion, why are the victims of the Holocaust themselves unwilling to recognize the Holodomor as genocide?*

– The issue of the Holodomor is well known in Israel, and the Embassy, together with the local community, is working steadily to this end. Unfortunately, the State of Israel has not officially recognised the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people so far. The Israeli side justifies its position by saying that the Holodomor, unlike the Holocaust, cannot be considered an extermination of the population along ethnic lines.

I am convinced, however, that our determination on this matter will finally help us to achieve the recognition, which means so much for us.

– *In an interview with the media outlet RBC-Ukraine, Mr Lyon, the Ambassador of Israel to Ukraine, mentioned the rise of anti-Semitism in our country. What is the stance of the Embassy of Ukraine on this issue?*

– Any forms of intolerance and anti-Semitism are strongly condemned in Ukraine, and the authorities at all levels strive to combat them.

This mere fact has been repeatedly acknowledged by influential international and non-governmental organisations as well as the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs in Israel. This assessment coincides with the data of the Jewish community of Ukraine and national human rights NGOs.

In January this year, for example, the United Jewish Community of Ukraine (UJCU) published a report entitled *Anti-Semitism in Ukraine – 2019*, which presented the results of the ongoing monitoring of cases of anti-Semitism in Ukraine in the previous year.

In its report, UJCU noted that the body was answerable for recording and monitoring direct cases of anti-Semitism in 2019 as well as examination of facts and incidents, which were extensively discussed in public, some of them were not confirmed.

In 2019, there were 66 cases of direct anti-Semitism in Ukraine, while 90 cases were recorded in 2018, according to the UJCU report. Thus, the level of anti-Semitism decreased by 27 percent in 2019 comparing to previous year.

It should be noted that the decrease of the rate of anti-Semitism in Ukraine in 2019 took place against the backdrop of a significant increase in the manifestations of this disgraceful phenomenon in Western Europe and the United States.

According to the UJCU, in 2019 the level of domestic anti-Semitism decreased, with a slight increase in the number of acts of anti-Semitic vandalism was identified.

The fact that Ukraine's law enforcement agencies have become more responsive and alert to cases of anti-Semitism was stated in the report as well.

It is vital to emphasise that in 2019 the recorded cases of vandalism were not only anti-Semitic in their nature, but also targeted against Ukrainian history.

Equally, Ukrainian law enforcement agencies have substantial grounds for concluding that a significant number of such acts were provocative and often-times had a foreign origin and funding.

The data of a study conducted by the American think tank Pew Research Center in 2018, which confirmed that Ukraine is the most tolerant country in Europe and one of the most tolerant globally in its attitude toward Jews, is also worth mentioning: Only 5 percent of Ukrainians would not like to see Jews as their fellow citizens, which is the lowest figure in Europe.

Thus, it remains unclear to what data Ambassador J. Lion refers when stating about the rise of anti-Semitism in Ukraine. Based on the data of authoritative international and non-governmental organisations, we can unequivocally state about a substantial decrease of this ignominious phenomenon in Ukrainian society.

– *Are there any stereotypes about Ukraine and Ukrainians in Israel?*

– Never are stereotypes nonexistent, especially given the diversity of Israeli society and the fact that many Israelis preserve family, friendly and business ties with Ukraine. Still, most Israelis perceive Ukrainians as friendly and hard-working people, who are always willing to help.

– *Have you developed any new habits or hobbies over the ten years of living in Israel? How do you normally deal with stress and fatigue?*

– The Holy Land probably has a positive impact on everyone who sets foot on it. I would say the habits I have acquired over the time of working in this country fit into a healthy lifestyle, sports and swimming are on the list. Besides, I have acquired skills of flying a light aircraft, which makes me elated now.