

## **CRISIS: A CASE FOR GETTING STRONGER**

We are living in a world where multifunctionality is becoming one of the major competitive advantages. This particularly relates to diplomats, thus compelling us to enrich our toolkit with an ever growing number of functions until it resembles a Swiss knife.

Nowadays, foreign ministers hold formal meetings from the comfort of their cabinets and print foreign policy messages on face masks, a situation deemed unthinkable just a year ago. That is the reality today. Briefings have gone online. Diplomatic handshaking, once deeply debated by non-verbal communication specialists, has given way to friendly elbow bumping (no scarcity of work for experts, though). Once again, the world has radically changed, making us stand up – once again – to this challenge.

I took over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 2020, precisely when the global lockdown was announced. Hardly had I got accustomed to the new workplace when I signed orders about an all-out mobilisation of our system, wrote appeals to Ukrainian consuls, the real heroes of those days, and sought to find ways for further work amidst the quarantine.

In the face of the coronavirus, Ukraine became confronted with yet another aggression, in addition to the ongoing Russian invasion. The policy of appeasing the aggressor has never yielded results, and it never will. I have urgently initiated the Protection programme to help Ukrainians stranded abroad. In those days, our fundamental values came to the fore, as we are the people who work for people and for the sake of the people. From the early days of the crisis, diplomats began to work selflessly both for the return of our citizens and for targeted assistance on the ground. Our consuls and communicators worked in Kyiv noon and night to keep the ship afloat. For that I am grateful to all and sundry who have made it possible.

Staying afloat, however, is not enough. We need to pick up speed. The consequences of the coronavirus crisis for people and economies are as devastating as the crisis itself, but I am confident that it is within our reach to overcome them and emerge stronger than ever before. We must do this now, in the new disguised reality, without waiting for better weather tomorrow.

### **It's the economy, stupid**

The phrase 'it's the economy, stupid' was coined in 1992 by the American political consultant James Carville, who then was Bill Clinton's campaign

strategist. He used this accurate and concise expression to explain to his fellow colleagues one of the key messages that were to be ennobled and communicated to voters.

In fact, this not quite diplomatically worded principle is well-suited for understanding diplomacy and its overarching tasks. Any foreign policy activity is needed, first of all, to ensure national interests on the world stage, particularly economic, which at times feature especially high on the agenda.

The global lockdown has disrupted long-established supply chains. Customers are counting losses, manufacturers are looking for places to shift production to, and anti-globalists are wearing a smile. Be that as it may, any crisis also opens up new opportunities. Unexpectedly, it is Ukraine that now has a chance to take a leap forward.

The point is that the pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges for the world's food security. Our traditional export items, grains and cereals, have topped economic demands from Chile to India. At a time when traders are even willing to pay extra for a barrel of oil, Ukraine has a real chance to restore historical justice. The people who were tortured by famine 80 years ago may now safeguard global food security.

That is why the issue of the economisation of foreign policy is once again imposing itself forcefully on the agenda. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has long had an Exporters and Investors Council (EIC), but the patient was more dead than alive. We have resuscitated the institution, updated its membership, filled it with practical tools of interaction with Ukrainian business, and reinforced it with additional resources. And indeed, approaches to protecting national economic interests overseas were also redefined. The success of foreign diplomatic missions in the economic field is henceforth determined not by an increasing trade turnover with a country (for which, frankly speaking, the embassy cannot always take credit) but by specific measurable indicators, including the number of eliminated barriers to Ukrainian products entering the market, certificates obtained for selling Ukrainian products, concluded by Ukrainian companies with foreign partners with the assistance of diplomats. The results of this work are reported to me weekly.

We have resumed a real dialogue between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and business. Today, more than 200 entrepreneurs and enterprises are members of the renewed EIC. Their requests and interests are taken into account when preparing visits or negotiations. We have introduced a new system for evaluating diplomats' activities in the economic field and job-specific training courses. When a Ukrainian company enters into a new market, it is not only its owner who benefits. Additional money earned abroad is additional salaries, jobs, and taxes in Ukraine. Therefore, the country's welfare in general grows as well. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs helps to seek new opportunities.

There are many more discoveries ahead. Asia alone is a case in point, a continent which has been critically underestimated for decades and which we are now exploring anew from our own, modern and Ukrainian, and not post-Soviet and Russian, perspective, taking care of our own, not someone else's, interests. Ukraine should enter the postcoronavirus world not as a peripheral pawn on the others' chessboard but as the main hub of renewed trade and a new world order.

Our European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations will only benefit from the growing complexity of the geography of interests and influence of the Ukrainian state.

Ukraine has the deepest and the most ambitious association agreement with the EU in the history of the European Union. It is already making our country very attractive to Asian investors as a place where they can produce products standardised for the European market. For us, this means additional jobs and clout in the region.

### **New Frameworks**

Diplomacy is a constant search for new formats. What is more, diplomacy is also able to restore historical justice in hundreds of years.

This is exactly what Ukraine has done together with Poland and Lithuania by establishing in the summer of 2020 a new format of regional cooperation, the Lublin Triangle. For many years, we have just knocked on doors asking to let us join some framework or association. It is high time to take the initiative, look at ourselves with our own eyes, and act instead of being acted upon. The Lublin Triangle became the first framework in which Ukraine is an equal co-founder. Our peoples are united by centuries of common history, hundreds of thousands of human bonds, a multitude of economic contracts, and, most importantly, a common view on current challenges and future opportunities of our region. It might perchance be the reason why circuitous wordings, a wonted thing for similar European documents, are nowhere to be found in the joint declaration with Polish and Lithuanian counterparts. Everything is clearly articulated: The countries of the Lublin Triangle are supportive of Ukraine's path to joining the EU and NATO, particularly through providing Ukraine with a Membership Action Plan, and strongly condemn any encroachment on this path by the Russian Federation.

The best is yet to come for our equilateral triangle. We will provide it with substance, strength, and very practical interaction. Still, the reality is already putting it to the test. Right after the election in Belarus, I initiated (with colleagues from Poland and Lithuania gladly agreeing to the proposal) a joint statement of the Lublin Triangle on the events in that country. We condemned the violence and offered to involve us in the dialogue as mediators.

The year of 2020 once again proves that there are no one-shot solutions to complicated diplomatic cases, whereas hard work sooner or later brings results. NATO has accepted Ukraine into the circle of its six closest partners in the world. Our country has gained the status of an enhanced capabilities partner, which comprises deepened cooperation of intelligence agencies, access to all exercises of the North Atlantic Alliance, and further rapprochement of the Armed Forces of Ukraine with NATO armies. The principal conclusion is that Ukraine is able to build consensus in the Alliance even on challenging issues, and granting a new status to our state was exactly one of those. It is my firm belief that we must be on 'matey' terms with NATO, in which case there will be a consensus on the issues of providing the MAP and, eventually, Ukraine's accession to the organisation. In today's world, this is the only effective security union able to safeguard the security of citizens of its member states.

We have long needed a new framework regarding Crimea. The Crimean Platform to be established next year will join our efforts with those of the allies to deoccupy the peninsula.

Sanctions, international courts, statements – all the pieces of the puzzle should be put together into one strategy of clear and consistent action. In the new architecture, Kyiv will play a proactive role of a driver and coordinator.

We will formally invite the Russian Federation to discuss the deoccupation of the peninsula within the framework of the Crimean Platform. It will reject the offer. We will record this and continue to work with partners to establish conditions under which the occupying power will withdraw from the Ukrainian soil.

### **Western Neighbours: Only Forward**

In political terms, Ukraine belongs to Central Europe. Our most natural friends, therefore, are the Baltic countries, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, and Bulgaria.

Close friends are always those with whom you have been through a lot, with whom you have something to remember, with whom you sometimes have misunderstandings. I am sure, however, that Ukraine has no fundamental differences with any of the aforementioned countries that cannot be overcome. We need to heal the pain of the past wherever it stands in the way and move forward. Only forward.

The credibility crisis in relations with Hungary is the toughest to resolve. That is why my first foreign visit after the lifting of the strictest quarantine restrictions was a trip to Budapest. Later, together with my Hungarian counterpart, we paid a visit to Transcarpathia. Our states have already broken the stalemate and, instead of taking radically different perspectives, are beginning to define a common horizon. The search for differences should be replaced

by the search for a unifying force, and a constructive dialogue should cool tempers. The economic and social achievements of Transcarpathia can become a common success story of our two countries. The main thing is to continue the dialogue and build trust, not to play politics for garnering electoral support at home but to act with a view to stabilising relations and living up to our potential. Such an understanding now exists on both sides.

Another important friend and partner of ours is Romania. During a visit to Bucharest, Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu invited me to speak at a closed meeting of Romanian ambassadors, which, in essence, meant an opportunity to present our views to all generals of the Romanian diplomatic frontline, an important sign of respect for our state and its role in the region. As a NATO member, Romania is one of the driving forces behind our rapprochement with the Alliance. Romania fully shares our concerns about the security of the Black Sea region given the temporary occupation and intensive militarisation of Crimea. We therefore look forward to Bucharest's strong role in the Crimean Platform.

In the quest for common ground, we are also shifting the emphasis away from differences in our relations with Slovakia. Since 2016, the violation of Slovak airspace during the takeoff and landing of aircraft at Uzhhorod Airport has blocked the operation of our air hub. The resumption of the work of this airport has become the main benchmark for success in our efforts and has shown that sometimes it is sometimes necessary not to look under your feet but to raise your head and fearlessly construct the prospects of relations in the sky.

After taking up the position of Minister for Foreign Affairs, I started the weekly Twitter column #TheWarGrindsOn. Every Sunday, I informed the international audience about the Russian aggression, the fallen and wounded defenders of Ukraine. Thankfully, at the end of July we managed to achieve a more stable ceasefire. I am really glad indeed that this column is now put on pause and hope that at some point I will have grounds to forget about it altogether.

There is still a lot to be done on the path to peace. We will continue to insist on the return of our territories and our people on our terms. As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I am interested in the outcome of these efforts, not in the headlines in the process. The end of the war as seen from Ukraine is still among the priorities of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. We have launched a diplomatic offensive, whose essence is to reject the passive role of the victim of aggression and to constantly impose our initiative. As uphill a battle as it may be, it continues and yields positive, albeit slow, results. Among them there is the return from captivity of more than 140 citizens of Ukraine as well as a lasting ceasefire, which in a few months, I believe, has already saved the life and limb of many of our military men and women.

## **Breaking Barriers**

Turbulence is a stability test of all elements of the system and their synergy. The coronavirus crisis in the crash-test mode has arranged such an examination for the diplomatic system, with all its merits and flaws.

When agreeing to take up the position, I was aware that our ministry needed changes, new goals and approaches, implementation of business processes, staff renewal, etc. (a full list of transformations would be as long as this foreword). Change is always a complex process that has both supporters and opponents, which is perfectly normal. In a very short time, we have implemented projects that our predecessors were unable to realise for years – for example, we have established an electronic queue in all foreign diplomatic missions. After the first six months of working, I became firmly convinced of the benefits of the changes I had initiated. They increase efficiency and bulk up our muscles. We are already in a much better shape and will become even stronger in future.

One of the main tasks of Ukrainian diplomacy is to make the world more accessible to Ukraine, whilst also bringing Ukraine closer to the world. Put otherwise, this means breaking barriers, especially civilisational ones. The major principle that my colleagues and I have used as the basis of the renewed Ministry of Foreign Affairs is humanocentrism. And with it comes the movement for equal-opportunity diplomacy.

Throughout my diplomatic career, I have heard people saying that human beings are the principal value of the system. At the same time, I saw that the system remained reluctant to become a comfortable environment for people. The approach we have offered to all colleagues is simple: The state creates comfortable working conditions for you, and you serve the Ukrainian people honestly and diligently.

If we are to overcome Soviet traumas and break away from the Soviet past weighing so heavily down on many of us, nothing can help us to cope with the task better than humanocentrism, for it is this philosophy that is the complete opposite of Soviet collectivism and the blatant scorn for the value of a human life and a human being per se. Nothing distinguishes the collective West from the so-called post-Soviet space better than the attitude of the state to a person. Therefore, on our specific diplomatic frontline humanocentrism concerns everything, from righting wrongs that, for example, forced colleagues to pay for luggage during official missions to replacing the terrible atavistic word ‘system’ with the correct modern term ‘community’.

Ironically enough, we need to break the barrier between a diplomat and the diplomatic system. One of my first decisions was to put into practice the long-standing idea of involving the deputies of the lowest-ranking employees in meetings, who are, in fact, buried in paperwork, prepare dossiers for telephone conversations, and whatnot. It is impossible to stay motivated at work if you cannot even see the results of your efforts, after all.



Alas, there are still other barriers in our country. Discriminatory and anti-European, they should have no room in the modern state. I take much pride in the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has officially announced its intention to become the first completely barrier-free public authority. Simply put, it is not the stairs that lead to the European Union but the ramp. Everyone has the right to climb the career ramps, regardless of physical characteristics, including gender. I advocate equality for women and men in the diplomatic service, equal opportunities, and increased representation of women in senior posts and delegations. Pursuant to one of my recent orders, there will no longer be delegations comprised of men alone in negotiations.

The main barriers are in the minds, as are the changes. Another function of diplomacy, which we unexpectedly found in our inexhaustible Swiss knife, was trendsetting.

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The tough year of 2020. War, pandemic, crisis. But that is what makes difficult years so important: Any crisis is a motive to become stronger. Hence, this is not only a year of difficulties but also that of uniting around common values; changes for the better despite challenging circumstances; thorough work that yields results – the ceasefire, the new status in relations with NATO, and the strategic partnership with Great Britain. This is the year of new ambitions: the formation of the Lublin Triangle in the region, the guarantor of food security in the world. This is the year of discovering a new geography, especially in Asia; generating new opportunities to enter foreign markets for Ukrainian companies; consolidating positions and conquering new heights. It is the year of overcoming difficulties and obstacles: from introducing barrier-free and equal-opportunity diplomacy in the ministry to healing the wounds of Ukrainian-Hungarian relations.

For the world, 2020 has obviously been a time of unexpected and unpredictable challenges. For diplomats, however, unexpected and unpredictable challenges are just a job.

My hope is that at some point we will recall 2020 as the year when we found the strength to brake barriers and remove obstacles, the year when reality tried to format us, but we instead chose the right format of relations with it.