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HE WAS ANXIOUS ABOUT UKRAINE TILL HIS LAST BREATH

These new memoirs about unforgettable episodes in my long-term diplomatic service, and there were many of such moments, I dedicate to the memory of Ivan Samilenko, a well known public and political figure, the last Head of Government of the Ukrainian National Republic in exile, whose activities abroad lasted for over 70 years.

To some extent, these memoirs are also my personal response to the Resolution of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada of 3 December 2019 No. 325-IX 'On the observation of memorable dates and anniversaries in 2020', which, in the list of famous events, also mentions a centenary since the foundation of the State Centre of the Ukrainian National Republic in exile.

The latter was established on 12 November 1920 in accordance with the Law 'On the provisional Supreme Administration and the procedure of legislation in the Ukrainian National Republic' and since that time it fulfilled the function of a 'spokesman for the Ukrainian nation in its struggle for a sovereign and independent Ukrainian State'.

I consider it also expedient to remind that in August of the current year we marked the 28th anniversary of the day when, at the solemn meeting of Verkhovna Rada on 22 August 1992, Mykola Plavyuk, the last President of the Ukrainian National Republic in exile, in the presence of the Verkhovna Rada Chairman and people's deputies, as well as members of Ukraine's Government, handed over to Leonid Kravchuk, the first President of independent Ukraine, the Declaration and Diploma on the 'renunciation by the State Centre of the Ukrainian National Republic of its authorities and cessation of its activities'.

And on 24 August, on the day of celebrating at the Mariinskyi Palace in Kyiv the first anniversary of the restoration of Ukraine's independence (it was exactly a restoration, but not a proclamation – the author's note) L. M. Kravchuk, while receiving the symbols and regalia of the UNR and its State Centre, stated the following: 'This act should remind everyone that Ukraine's descent, its political and national biography have roots from historical times, which give strength and greatness to our people – from the times of Kyiv Rus, the Cossack-Hetman State and the Ukrainian National Republic'.

Ivan Samilenko took part in both of those historical events. In the Mariinskyi Palace, he, in particular, presented to the President of Ukraine the state seal of the Ukrainian National Republic and a commemorative album-book, which, in addition to photos of the founders and creators of the modern Ukrainian state of the 20th century, also included the photographs of the followers of the idea of the Ukrainian National Republic, who faithfully served the Ukrainian nation abroad.

I made the acquaintance with Ivan Samilenko, a well-known political writer, historian and professor, during my work in New York (USA) as Deputy Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations (1996–98). Despite essential age differences, we established from the very beginning good, I would even say friendly relations, which remained unchanged after my appointment as Consul-General of Ukraine in New York (1998–2000).

In the process of performing my new official responsibilities, I often met Ivan Matviyovych (that was the way how we addressed him according to our tradition), who had experienced a lot of difficult challenges and tests, but all that only strengthened his love for Ukraine.

Isolated, against his own will, from his native land for over 50 years, he arrived in Ukraine from the United States for the first time in 1992 together with his son Oleh and brother Vasyl.

Our friendly relations were preserved during my work as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Federative Republic of Brazil (2001–2006). A few days before the end of my diplomatic mission in this state, I called him to bid farewell. Unfortunately, I found out about the death of his wife Dina, who passed away on 18 June 2006, and that was a very serious loss for Ivan Matviyovych. During our conversation he said that soon his time will also come... “Yuri Vadymovych, – he asked me with a bitter voice, – tell the people in Kyiv that for many years overseas Ivan Samilenko has worked for the sake of Ukraine, however nobody said a good word to me for that”. In some way, I then realized his fair request.

On 3 November of the same year, Ivan Samilenko’s earthly lifetime also completed. I learned about this sad news after my retirement from diplomatic service and when I received the Ukrainian-American newspaper *Svoboda* dated 17 November 2006, which, unfortunately, arrived at my address in Kyiv only in January of 2007. My letter with condolences, entitled *In Memory of a Remarkable Ukrainian* was published in this newspaper on 23 February.

In my memory, Ivan Samilenko still remains a true patriot of the land where he was born.

We enjoyed mutual respect and exchanged, in a very frank manner, our opinions concerning the development of events in Ukraine and its future. Despite the fact that our assessments and visions sometimes did not concur, Ivan Samilenko did not lose his faith that the best times for independent Ukraine, without which he could not imagine his life, were still ahead.

For me personally, such informal conversations with a person who had not only seen but also experienced so much during his lifetime were not only pleasant but, in many respects, also cognitive.

At his invitation, several times I and my wife visited the cozy house of the Samilenko couple, not far from New York, where we enjoyed a sincere Ukrainian hospitality of his wife Dina Vasylivna, who at our first meeting asked us not to call her 'lady', because she also was born in the land of Ukraine.

As Head of Government of the Ukrainian National Republic in exile Ivan Samilenko was engaged from 19 June 1989 to 24 August 1992. During his nomination to this responsible position he said the following: 'To serve Ukraine and the Ukrainian people is the holiest and most noble thing that can happen in the life of a conscious Ukrainian person. For us, Ukraine is the heart and soul, our spiritual home. The history will prove that the sacrifices of our parents will never perish, because their goal was not to conquer and subjugate other nations or to gain the power for themselves, but to defend their freedom and natural rights of the Ukrainian nation. I belong to this nation. I am proud of its vital energy. To the nation which, although it made mistakes and lapsed, never obeyed and did not abandon its hope, quietly but duly assured healed its wounds, has prepared and prepares itself for a better tomorrow'.

In the book quoted, which Ivan Samilenko presented to me with the words 'for good and memorable remembrance', I have read with great interest his article about the first stage of activities of the State Centre of the UNR in exile (1920–48), in which he, in particular, made an accent on the following: 'Looking back on the arduous and sacrificial path passed by our people in Ukraine and remembering the dedicated service to it of the State Centre of the Ukrainian National Republic abroad, we can proudly say that the Government of the UNR has fulfilled its sacred duty for its people. It preserved the idea of Ukraine's liberation inviolable to the end'.

Ivan Samilenko was anxious about Ukraine till his last breath. Therefore, it is very important that this fact should be duly realized and remembered by our politicians, who, with no adequate reason, consider themselves the 'pillars of society', without drawing proper conclusions from numerous mistakes made by different generations of our government officials and politicians during all years of Ukraine's independence.

On 28 November 1997, when Ivan Samilenko was still alive, Hennadii Udoenko, Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was also President of the 52nd Session of the UN General Assembly that year, sent him the following short message: 'To dear Ivan Matviyovych, with great respect and gratitude for your outstanding contribution to winning and strengthening by Ukraine its independence'.

In my home 'library' I have also a pamphlet – a historical essay written by Ivan Samilenko and issued by the Prosvita publishing house under the title *Socio-Political Background of the Famine Genocide in Ukraine (Communism as the Mortal Enemy of the Village)*, which was the first-hand story about what the author personally 'saw, experienced, and never forgave'. He actively examined the causes and consequences of the artificial famine in Ukraine that was organized in 1932–33 by the Soviet regime. He was also a Chairman of the New York Public Committee to mark the 25th anniversary of another tragedy for the Ukrainian people, a member of the Executive Board of the US Regional Public Committee to honor the memory of millions of victims of that famine, represented the State Centre of the Ukrainian National Republic in exile in the US Congress Commission which investigated the causes of this great famine, and also as academic consultant for this Commission.

I am very grateful to my destiny, which gave me not only as a diplomat but also as a citizen of Ukraine the opportunity to be acquainted with Ivan Samilenko, who was a unique personality.

Such genuine patriots of Ukraine should not be forgotten, because by their devotion to it they deserve not only to be remembered but also commemorated with a 'softly-spoken kindly word'.