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UKRAINE AND AUSTRALIA: NEW HORIZONS OF COOPERATION

First and foremost, I would like to thank the esteemed professional publication Diplomatic Ukraine for the opportunity to share my thoughts about the great and unique country, Australia, and tell the readers about the development of relations between this country and Ukraine. The geographical remoteness of Australia from Ukraine and Europe notwithstanding, this country and continent (6th largest in the world) is one of the global and regional leaders with a powerful economy and inexhaustible natural resources. Australia is a member of an elite grouping, the Group of Twenty, and of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). This is the only country in the world whose economy had grown during 28 pre-pandemic years. The world's 13th largest economy, it holds a firm grip on the first place in terms of iron ore mining, second place in meat exports, fourth place in sugar and wine exports, as well as tenth place in grain exports. All in all, Australia is one of the countries most integrated into the world economic system, with its share in global trade incessantly growing. To this should be added Australia's unique environmental conditions as far as up to 70 percent of Australian flora and fauna is endemic, inherent to this continent alone.

Regrettably, Australia had long been a somewhat exotic country for Ukraine, while the considerable geographic gap had complicated interaction in the economic and even political fields. It was not until very recently that the Australian vector gained some momentum in the context of the rising prominence of the Asia-Pacific region in Ukraine's foreign policy – due to, above all, great potential for boosting trade and investments as well developing cooperation in the field of cutting-edge technologies and tourism.

The Embassy of Ukraine in Australia was opened in 2003 by transforming the Consulate-General of Ukraine in Sydney into a diplomatic mission in Canberra. Over almost 20 years, the Ukrainian diplomatic mission has managed to lay the foundation of a good and multifaceted relationship between the countries. Specifically, the level of political dialogue and interaction between Ukraine and Australia, especially in the last seven years, has been characterised by constructive cooperation in addressing modern issues. Above all, Australia consistently supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and the inviolability of its borders and fruitfully cooperates in international organisations, most notably the UN, in



Інавгурація нового складу парламентської групи дружби «Україна – Австралія» за участю Міністерки закордонних справ Австралії Джулі Бішоп, сенаторки Катрини Білик, маршала авіації, керівника австралійської групи розслідування катастрофи МН-17 Ангуса Г'юстона, Постійного представника Австралії в ООН Гері Квінлана та голови Союзу українських організацій Австралії Стефана Романіва

The inauguration of the newly formed parliamentary friendship group Ukraine-Australia with the participation of Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, Catryna Bilyk, Senator of the Australian Parliament, Angus Houston, Air Chief Marshal and leader of the Australian group investigating the downing of MH17, Gary Quinlan, Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, and Stefan Romaniv, Chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations

safeguarding human rights. In dealing with the most essential agenda items in the UN, Ukraine and Australia proceed from similar, and sometimes even identical, positions. Australia endorses resolutions regarding Crimea; besides, it has co-sponsored most of them. Australia is the only country in the Asia-Pacific region to impose sanctions against Russia on a three-year basis. In September last year, it also extended, for the second time, sanctions against natural and legal persons from the Russian Federation. This is partly due to the efforts exerted by the Ukrainian diplomatic mission in Canberra.

Particularly noteworthy is our cooperation within the Joint Investigation Team on the MH17 catastrophe, which claimed the lives of 39 Australians. Our countries are determined to follow through on the probe into this crime and hold liable those who perpetrated the downing of the Malaysia Airlines aircraft.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only become a dramatic challenge for the durability of the economies and social welfare in Australia and Ukraine but has also showcased the solidity of the national character and vibrancy of our countries.

For Australia, just as for the majority of other countries in the world, the coronavirus pandemic has become a real test of effectiveness in carrying out state policies in the economic field. The government's anti-epidemiological restrictions, limits on business activity among Australia's major trading partners, and, accordingly, a decline in the demand for Australian products in foreign markets have led to a marked slowdown in economic development and growing unemployment rates. An additional negative factor that affected the economic situation in Australia in 2020 was a serious exacerbation of the country's showdown

with its main trading partner, the PRC. The Chinese government's trade restrictions and increased customs tariffs on a range of traditional Australian export items to China (coal, barley, wine, beef, timber, etc.) threatened to cause a crisis in the relevant sectors of the Australian economy. All of these factors led to Australia's first recession in 28 years (in the third quarter, the decline in the rate of economic growth stood at seven percent).

That being said, after the first six months of 2021, the country's economy completely recovered and the growth rate of the national economy exceeded the level recorded prior to the pandemic. According to the Reserve Bank of Australia, the country's GDP is expected to grow at 4.75 percent in 2021, making it one of the world's best among the advanced economies. The stability of the economic situation in Australia and the predictability of its further development are reflected in the country's high credit score according to leading agencies, which remains at the highest level (AAA).

It bears mentioning that Australia's economy is extremely integrated into the global economic system, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. The country's top trading partners include China, Japan, the U.S., South Korea, Great Britain, and India. Over the last few years, Australia has seen a surplus in foreign trade. In the fiscal year of 2020, the overall volume of Australia's foreign trade amounted to AUD 873 billion, where exports account for AUD 474 billion. Australia's main export items still include raw materials, such as iron ore, coal, beef, educational and tourist services. The leading items imported to Australia are refined oil products, vehicles, telecommunication equipment, medical equipment, and pharmaceuticals.

An important peculiar feature of governmental policies in the trade and economic field is vigorous work in ensuring access to foreign markets for national manufacturers. Specifically, Australia has currently concluded 15 free trade agreements, giving it access to markets of 24 countries. Work continues on preparing relevant agreements with the European Union and Great Britain.

There should be highlighted several factors which have positively influenced the stabilisation and resumption of the economic growth in the country. The first is the rapid development and introduction of a package of economic stimuli and financial support to national businesses and citizens of the country with a view to stabilising the economic situation in conditions of the pandemic. The overall volume of the governmental financial support package stood at nearly AUD 311 billion and included a whole spectrum of various financial and economic stimuli, both separate financial support programmes for certain segments of the population and funding of large-scale infrastructural projects. Another important factor was an active growth in consumer demand and business activity in the country as a whole, first and foremost, in mining industry and construction, largely fostered by the Reserve Bank's unprecedented reduction in the interest

rate to the level of 0.1 percent as well as growth in internal investment propelled by the country's private sector. What is more, an essential factor of the country's economic rejuvenation was a gradually mounting demand in foreign markets for Australian commodity exports (subsoil assets and agroindustrial products), whose growth rate stood at about three percent as at April 2021. An additional impetus to augmenting Australian exports to foreign markets was given by a minor depreciation of the Australian currency compared to the currencies of its trading partners.

Credit is also due to Australian business, which, at the time when China imposed a range of trade restrictions, was able to promptly reorient itself towards exports to other markets.

Therefore, the current situation incentivises Australian manufacturers to search for new trading partners and creates conducive conditions for expanding cooperation between Ukraine and Australia in the economic sphere.

This is evidenced by a robust growth in the bilateral trade turnover between Ukraine and Australia. In particular, according to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, after the first quarter of 2021, the trade volume in goods between Ukraine and Australia amounted to \$27.7 million. Ukraine's exports to Australia totalled 12.4 million (a growth of 70 percent), whereas Australian imports into Ukraine stood at \$15.3 million (a growth of 417 percent). Ukraine's major export products destined to Australia included metallurgy and mechanical engineering items, such as sea-going/river vessels, plastic items, as well as animal and vegetable fats and oils. In turn, Ukraine imported subsoil assets, mechanical engineering products, pharmaceuticals, optical devices, wool, gemstones, paper, and cardboard.

That said, the volume of bilateral trade in services after the first quarter of 2021 amounted to \$3.1 million, including \$2.5 million in exports (a growth of 35 percent) and \$0.6 million in imports (a growth of 62 percent). Among the categories of services in bilateral trade, one should mention transport, tourist, and telecommunication services.

Regardless of the fact that currently the volume of Australian investments to Ukraine is primarily concentrated in the traditional sectors of economy (industrial products, trade, bank and insurance services), there is great potential for significantly increasing the presence of Australian businesses in the Ukrainian market. In particular, worthy of mention is considerable interest of Australian companies to the privatisation of state enterprises in the mineral, chemical, and mechanical engineering domains of the Ukrainian economy.

The conclusion on 18 January 2021 of a Memorandum of Understanding between the State Space Agency of Ukraine (SSAU) and the Australian company Cosmovision Global Corporation PTY LTD opens up new opportunities for expanding bilateral cooperation in the space field. The memorandum envisions

collaboration between the SSAU and the Australian firm with a view to carrying out a joint project using investment funds – the construction of a launching site on Cape York Peninsula (Queensland). For bringing to the orbit public and commercial spacecraft manufactured by Ukraine, Australia, and other countries, the project will make use of the Ukrainian missile system Zenit-Australia, a modification of Zenit, produced at the State Enterprise “Production Association Yuzhny Machine-Building Plant” (Ukraine). The fulfilment of the memorandum also envisages the signing of an intergovernmental agreement on cooperation between the SSAU and the Australian Space Agency.

Another prospective direction is the field of information technologies and telecommunications, where joint projects are already successfully underway. Proof of this was the holding of an investment workshop in Sydney on 12 May 2021 with support from the embassy and upon the initiative of the Australian company LQD Technology, devoted to attracting Australian investments to Ukraine’s IT field. The workshop was attended by Australian officials, academia, business people, experts, and the Ukrainian diaspora. LQD Technology is actively growing in Ukraine by virtue of high-qualified local personnel and a steadily increasing number of orders from powerful foreign companies. The holding of the aforementioned event attested to the continued increased interest from Australian investors, both to launching new projects in the domestic IT field and the possibility of being involved into the already successful ongoing projects with the participation of Ukrainian companies.

An essential factor that can foster the expansion of bilateral cooperation in the trade and economic field will be Ukraine’s accession to Australia’s Generalised System of Preferences, which will enable applying preferential customs tariffs to Ukrainian products exported to the Australian market. Currently, the embassy together with the Ukraine-Australia Business Council and the Ukraine-Australia Chamber of Commerce continue working with the Australian government and the local business community to settle the issue in a positive way.

Talking about the development of bilateral cultural and humanitarian cooperation between our countries, it is worth mentioning the annual basis of events devoted to Independence Day of Ukraine, Unity Day of Ukraine, Heroes of the Revolution of Dignity Day, as well as 1932–33 Holodomor Victims Remembrance Day. The embassy also regularly organises painting competitions dedicated to, for instance, the artistic legacy of Ukrainian writers or Ukrainian traditions. By the way, it was the painting of our Ukrainian schoolgirls from Sydney, Sophia and Stephania Mandzii, that won the International Children’s Fine Art Competition of the Ukrainian diaspora, *My Flag Goes Where I Go*.

In 2020, I took part in the celebration marking the 70th anniversary since the settlement of Ukrainians in Tasmania, which featured a festival of Ukrainian culture and the presentation of a book about the Ukrainian community in Tasmania.

Last year, with support from the embassy, the Sydney-based Ukrainian Youth House held a Ukrainian cinema festival.

The children of Australia's Ukrainian schools joined in the All-Ukrainian dictation of National Unity, the celebration of national and religious holidays, the holding of open lessons on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Ukrainian Revolution, the Revolution of Dignity, and the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation.

In 2020, with assistance from the embassy, the Ukrainian community of Australia published the book *Ukraine Downunder*.

An essential symbol manifesting solidarity with the Ukrainian people was the adoption by the Australian Federal Parliament of a Senate statement on commemorating the victims of the 1932–33 Holodomor in Ukraine.

Besides, I regularly take part in a UATV programme broadcast by the SBS, the Australian state media corporation. We have established effective cooperation with Australia's leading media outlets, including the SBS, the ABC, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Canberra Times*, 9 News, and others, thus efficiently resisting attempts to spread Russian disinformation. Cooperation continues with the Ukrainian media, which not only publish materials about the Ukrainian-Australian cooperation but also serve as a rostrum for comments of representatives of the Ukrainian community.

Young members of the Ukrainian diaspora have taken an active part in the GOCamp programme in Ukraine, an educational volunteer programme for teaching foreign languages to Ukrainian school children. Part of them annually teach English at Ukrainian schools, such as ThinkGlobal Lviv.

The embassy's close involvement has not only raised the profile of events organised by the Ukrainian community but has also set in motion its cooperation with the local authorities. For instance, the joint celebration of the 70th anniversary since the foundation of the Ukrainian Women's Association in Australia in Cowra has allowed scheduling the celebration of Ukraine Days in Cowra for 2020. Due to the pandemic, the project has been postponed. Nonetheless, the participation in the *Pako Festa* multi-cultural festival in Geelong has been far more helpful in boosting support for projects of the Ukrainian community on the part of the local authorities.

Let me stress that cultural diplomacy is one of the key areas of public diplomacy, as defined in the relevant strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. It is cultural diplomacy that gives Ukrainian diplomats an opportunity to promote Ukraine's positive image in the world and make it more attractive and truly interesting for both official authorities and ordinary citizens of receiving states, as well as our colleagues – diplomats from other countries. That is why the embassy always endeavours to do everything it can to represent Ukraine's culture with distinction.



Презентація української вишиванки в Національній галереї
Австралії, Канберра, 2018 рік

A presentation of Ukrainian embroidered shirts at the National
Gallery of Australia in Canberra, 2018

The entire women part of the embassy, including employees, wives of colleagues, and, of course, the powerful Ukrainian community, warmly associates itself with cultural events.

The first show of Ukrainian clothing in Canberra under the motto 'With Ukraine in Heart' took place at the National Gallery of Australia in March 2018. By the way, that was the day when the locals celebrate Harmony Day.

That was a flamboyant gala show, which impressed not only the invited guests but also the usual visitors of the gallery, who happened to be there. Every set of clothing was accompanied by a tale from our history and our traditions, as well as a demonstration of interesting elements, such as *kalach* (wedding bread), *paska* (Easter cake), *pysanky* (decorated eggs), *zhaivoronky* (larks, traditional biscuits), and *motanky* (rag dolls), which were then presented to each guest.

That first show became an unforgettable event also because both Australians and those arriving from other countries – and even Ukrainians – well-versed in the history of national clothing discovered unknown details and unique regional peculiarities of how embroideries and various accessories are made. What is more, it prompted a presentation of certain family heirlooms owned by members of the Ukrainian community in Australia – the 'trailblazers', who arrived here in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Thus, they have much to be proud of.

The Ukrainian community is one of the most vivid and influential associations in the multicultural Australian society, which, despite its harmonious integration, has managed to preserve, multiply, and enrich Australia's multinational culture with Ukrainian traditions.

Given our successful debut, we held a second holiday of Ukrainian culture at the National Gallery of Australia in the following year under a touching motto 'From Mother's Treasury', this time featuring folk ensemble musicians and genuine masters of traditional Ukrainian pastry.

Such festivals were scheduled to be held each year in different cities of Australia where Ukrainian communities could represent genuine treasures of family legacy, preserved by Ukrainians living in the Green Continent.

As far as it is in Australia that the celebration of World Vyshyvanka Day traditionally begins, we do our utmost to ensure that it is held successfully.

Unfortunately, these plans were changed because of the pandemic and the events planned for 2020 were cancelled. Sometimes, however, restrictions can open up new opportunities. For example, the first Ukrainian magazine in Australia titled *Vilna Dumka*, founded as far back as 1949, announced the My Embroidery photo contest.

The need for celebration online has only expanded the geography of the project, uniting Ukrainians from different cities in Australia, Belgium, Jordan, Slovenia, Poland, and Ukraine, and the photo contest has not only become official but has also been enriched with fresh ideas.

Considering the highly responsible approach towards strict quarantine requirements in Australia, limited communication has become a serious challenge for everyone.

At the initiative of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations and with the support of our embassy, the Virtual Art Exhibition was created, the title of honorary patroness of which was offered to the wife of the ambassador.

The result exceeded the boldest expectations. We managed to unite despite the difficult conditions of isolation. Thanks to this great initiative, it was possible to discover many new talents, learn about other types of creativity, and find friends with whom there had been no chance to meet earlier. Ironical as it may seem, it was during the time of isolation when we more often communicated with old friends and new ones, whom we met online within the project.

It is gratifying that not only Ukrainians from Australia took part in it but also those from Belgium, Canada, the U.S., etc. Therefore, the project, which united more than 1,000 Ukrainians, may fairly be considered not only all-Australian but international.

Moreover, after the weakening of quarantine restrictions, the project was not concluded but moved to a qualitatively new level. Thus, interesting and bright projects will be successfully developed on the new Virtual Exhibition of Post-Lockdown Arts platform.

There was even an idea to create an art school online, where those willing can try their hand at photography, embroidery, drawing, egg painting, cooking, etc. As part of the project, the ambassador's wife was among the authors of masterclasses.

Currently, we are preparing for the publication of a catalogue of works that were presented at the exhibition last year.

Once the ban on holding public events was cancelled, the Embassy of Ukraine in Australia, together with the Ukrainian community of Sydney and the Museum of the Ukrainian Orthodox Centre, held the Festival of Bread in Canberra in April 2021. The presentation of the sacred product for Ukrainians began with a story about the Trypillia culture and an overview of the ancient history of Ukraine. The presentation of the main traditions in the annual Ukrainian life circle was accompanied by the demonstration and tasting of all ceremonial breads: spring zhaivoronok, paska, kalyta (round Christmas flatbread), korovai (traditional wedding bread).

Such a celebration was held in Australia for the first time, so for many of those present it became a real discovery of Ukraine, the knowledge of which we are disseminating throughout the world.

In just a few days, information about the Festival of Bread and photos on social networks scored almost 100,000 views. Australians, our colleagues from other countries of the world, as well as Ukrainians and Ukrainian organisations in India, the U.S., Canada, Kazakhstan, Israel, Russia, Italy, and Ukraine addressed to us many words of gratitude. Therefore, soft power can sometimes become quite mighty.

In conclusion, we see a positive trend in the growth of interaction between Ukraine and Australia. The Green Continent is getting closer to Ukraine. Many new horizons for further bilateral cooperation are still lying ahead.