

Dmytro PONOMARENKO,
*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of Ukraine to the Republic of Korea*

KOREAN EXPERIENCE AND POTENTIAL FOR UKRAINE

– *Mr Ambassador, in 2022–23, the Government of the Republic of Korea provided humanitarian and non-lethal military aid to Ukraine in the amount of USD 230 million. Moreover, at a work meeting with Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the G7 Summit, President Yoon Suk Yeol promised to provide additional non-lethal aid, in particular equipment for demining. Please tell us about the prospects for further humanitarian assistance and the possibility of cooperation in demining Ukrainian territories.*

– We are sincerely grateful to the Korean side for systematic assistance since the beginning of the Russian Federation's full-scale military invasion. From the Government of the Republic of Korea, Ukraine has received considerable aid for its pressing needs, namely medicines, medical and military equipment (protective helmets and body armour), computers, ambulances, pickup trucks, protective gear, generators, excavators, mine detectors, protective equipment for humanitarian demining, etc. In 2023, South Korea also intends to transfer an additional tranche of material and technical assistance, including many ambulances, lorries, special equipment, and generators.

Recently, and especially after the meeting of the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, with the President of the Republic of Korea, Yoon Suk Yeol, during his recent visit to Ukraine, we have observed the increase in the provision of support from the Korean side, in particular, in the field of humanitarian demining.

Recently, official Seoul sent portable mine detectors and 100 sets of protective equipment to Ukraine. By the end of 2023, the Government of the Republic of Korea plans to provide 12 high-class demining machines (MV-4 and MV-10) of the Croatian manufacturer DOK-ING and 100 four-wheel drive pickups for demining units.

As the timely and thorough cleaning of the territories contaminated by explosive devices is extremely important so that the temporarily displaced citizens of Ukraine can safely return to their homes and the process of effective post-war reconstruction can be started, the Embassy systematically cooperates with the relevant government institutions of the Republic of Korea for the broadest possible involvement of the Korean side in the process of humanitarian demining.



25 лютого 2023 року Посол України Дмитро Пономаренко відвідав «Кемп Гамфріс» (Пхьонтек), найбільшу закордонну базу американських військових, і долучився до відеодискусії про цивільно-військові операції в Україні під час війни. У дискусії взяли участь українські військові, Командування об'єднаних сил Південної Кореї та США та Об'єднаний комітет начальників штабів Південної Кореї

On 25 February 2023, Ambassador of Ukraine Dmytro Ponomarenko visited the largest overseas US military base Camp Humphreys (Pyeongtaek) and took part in a video conference between the Ukrainian military, the ROK/US Combined Forces Command and the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Republic of Korea discussing wartime civil-military operations in Ukraine

We are currently working on the participation of South Korean representatives in the International Conference of Donors for Humanitarian Demining in Ukraine, scheduled for 11 and 12 October 2023 in Zagreb (Croatia).

I would like to note that the Republic of Korea, with its experience of the Korean War of 1950–53, has the necessary potential to help Ukraine with an important issue of humanitarian demining. Currently, we see the openness of the Government of the Republic of Korea to cooperation in this direction and its readiness to provide support to our state according to our urgent needs.

– *Some international community representatives are calling on the Republic of Korea to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons. At the same time, in April 2023, Mr Yoon said that it would be difficult for Korea to limit the support to humanitarian and financial only if the situation worsened to such an extent that the international community could not tolerate it. What are the obstacles to changes in this policy, and what are the real prospects of providing Ukraine with serious armaments, at least air defence systems?*

– Currently, the official position of the Government of the Republic of Korea, according to which the direct transfer of lethal weapons to Ukraine, as a state at war, is impossible, remains unchanged.

We understand the concerns of the Korean side, which seeks to avoid the negative consequences of such a step (first of all, the supply of critical technologies and weapons from Russia to the DPRK). At the same time, in the conditions of

the persistent expansion of international military support for Ukraine, South Korea feels pressure from our key partners, which it cannot simply ignore.

For its part, the Ukrainian side is also consistently working on a positive solution to this issue. With the assistance of the Embassy, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine communicates with the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Korea regarding possible ways of assistance. President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy has repeatedly asked his Korean counterpart to consider the possibility of providing Ukraine with defence support for the protection of the civilian population and critical infrastructure facilities.

It's fairly difficult to predict when and which particular decisions will be made, however, I hope that a cooperation format acceptable to both countries will be found soon.

– *Both the Republic of Korea and Ukraine border entities that pose a threat to world peace and security – the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation. What is common and different in the positions of the Republic of Korea and Ukraine? What experience of South Korea would be useful for Ukraine to learn from now and in the future?*

– I often hear reflections about the similarities and differences between our war and the Korean conflict of 1950–53, and I always stress that there is a fundamental difference between the two.

In Korea, it was a civil conflict between representatives of the same people, during which foreign states supported each side. The war in Ukraine is the result of the unprovoked invasion by the aggressor country. Foreign troops do not fight for Ukrainians. Everything is clear and unambiguous, and any speculation on this topic is inappropriate.

I don't think we will ever agree to the division of our country along some line of demarcation or to freeze the conflict. As the Korean experience shows, such 'temporary cease-fires' can last for decades, which is definitely not acceptable to us.

Given our country's geographical position and the fact that Russia is unlikely to disappear soon, I believe it would be useful for Ukraine to adopt the experience of the Republic of Korea in developing its own military-industrial complex. After all, properly equipped armed forces guarantee peace and security.

The path that the people of South Korea have made over the past 70 years in creating weapons capable of defending against the encroachments of an aggressor is truly impressive. Nowadays, besides guaranteeing the security of the Republic of Korea's borders, state-of-the-art Korean-made weapons are also in considerable demand on the market. The country intends to become the world's fourth-largest exporter of arms and military equipment over the next few years.

It also might have been useful to adopt the Korean practice of developing the modern economy, industrial complex and export potential. The Republic of Korea managed to rise from the ashes of war, with international assistance, of

course. We cannot help but draw inspiration from the experience of such rapid progress – what the world calls the recipe for success of the ‘Asian Tigers’.

– *The private sector, non-governmental institutions and ordinary citizens – Korean society is actively helping Ukraine in the war against the Russian Federation. Your Excellency, how does the Embassy of Ukraine in Seoul interact with non-state actors in the context of supporting our state?*

– We constantly feel the support of private businesses, various non-governmental organisations and citizens of South Korea.

Koreans remember well the devastation their country faced 70 years ago and how the world community assisted them. Perhaps that is why many of them consider it their duty to support the Ukrainian people suffering from Russian aggression. Both individuals and legal entities transfer money to the Embassy’s humanitarian account or, with our assistance, send basic necessities, various machinery and equipment to Ukraine.

To intensify such assistance, the Embassy systematically communicates with major business associations, mass media and cultural organisations of South Korea, informing the public about our state’s primary needs.

Moreover, an illustrative example can be seen in the visit to Ukraine paid by Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of the Republic of Korea Won Hee-ryong on 13–14 September 2023. The Minister, whom the President of South Korea had appointed as the Korean Government’s special commissioner for Ukraine’s recovery, was accompanied by a large delegation of representatives of Korean public and private businesses. They attended a business forum, held meetings in relevant ministries, and signed the intergovernmental Agreement on loans from the Economic Development and Cooperation Fund. And that testifies to South Korean businesses’ keen interest in supporting Ukraine and working with Ukrainian partners.

– *Despite the devastation and destruction caused by the Korean War of 1950–53, the Republic of Korea demonstrated rapid economic development in the second half of the 20th century, known as the ‘Miracle on the Han River’. In your opinion, will Ukraine be able to achieve its own economic miracle after the victory?*

– Indeed, the Republic of Korea put all its best efforts into the post-war recovery, directing all its resources to economic development. The whole world can see the results today.

Over the past 70 years, South Korea, driven by the coordinated actions of the government and, most importantly, the motivation and inexhaustible energy of the hardworking Korean people, has transformed from a war-ravaged agrarian country into a state embracing innovative technologies flourish and growing living standards. This country prioritised industrialisation, the implementation of new forms of production, export orientation, development of education, and now Korean corporations are renowned worldwide.

To achieve its own economic miracle, Ukraine already possesses significant human and natural resources, the necessary experience in both agriculture and industry, a robust scientific and technical base, logistical advantages, etc. Our country is moving towards full membership in the European Union, which will also open up new economic development horizons.

Currently, we are actively studying the relevant experience of our Korean friends, establishing and developing contacts with government, business and expert circles. I am certain that we will be able to apply the acquired skills and knowledge in the post-war period, after the victory over the aggressor.

The Embassy is also looking for potential directions of mutually beneficial cooperation between Ukraine and the Republic of Korea, primarily in the context of attracting Korean investments, Korean business participation in the implementation of infrastructure projects, development of cooperation in energy, engineering, agriculture, metallurgy, IT, etc.

In my opinion, relying on its own strength, as well as the help and experience of foreign partners, Ukraine will undoubtedly build an effective model of economic development.

– *South Korea has demonstrated its readiness to take part in Ukraine's post-war recovery. In particular, the Ministry for Communities, Territories and Infrastructure Development of Ukraine signed a memorandum with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of the Republic of Korea on consolidation of cooperation on reconstruction issues. Mr Ambassador, which areas can attract Korean investors the most? Are there any relevant projects already developed?*

– We witness a continual desire and readiness of South Korea to join Ukraine's post-war recovery.

Recently, as was mentioned above, a historic visit of the Korean leader to Ukraine took place, the first one since the establishment of diplomatic relations. The meeting between Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Yoon Suk Yeol gave a significant push to the search for ways for the Korean side to participate in the recovery of our state.

The memorandum implies intensifying cooperation between both countries' public and private sectors of in urban planning, transport and social infrastructure development, etc.

This document is just an element of a large-scale effort to involve South Korea in the post-war reconstruction of our country. For instance, as I mentioned above, on 13 September 2023, during the visit of Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of the Republic of Korea Won Hee-ryong with the presence of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the parties signed the Agreement between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of the Republic of Korea on loans from the Economic Development Cooperation Fund. This agreement will enable financing and implementation of specific projects.

Initially, within the separate credit agreements, issues related to the supply of necessary equipment to Ukraine or budget support for implementing state-targeted programmes will be worked out. Later, in the post-war period, the Fund will consider projects for the construction of infrastructure facilities.

In addition, I would like to note that in September 2023, during the G20 Summit, President Yoon Suk Yeol announced that the Republic of Korea would extend 2.3 billion US dollars to Ukraine for its post-war recovery. A part of that sum, 300 million US dollars, will be provided to Ukraine in 2024, partly through the mechanisms of international organisations such as the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The remaining 2 billion US dollars will be allocated to Ukraine starting in 2025 in the form of loans from the Fund for Economic Development and Cooperation.

According to our estimates, the Korean side is primarily interested in establishing cooperation in the fields of energy, infrastructure, and industry (in particular, regarding the creation or localisation of modern industrial production on the territory of Ukraine).

– *The Ukrainian community in the Republic of Korea often holds peaceful protests in front of the Russian embassy in Seoul, shares information on fundraising initiatives in support of the Armed Forces, organises public events to raise awareness among foreigners about the war in Ukraine, etc. How does the Embassy cooperate with the diaspora in the Republic of Korea? What difficulties does the Ukrainian community have to overcome, in particular, people who left the territory of Ukraine due to the Russian full-scale war?*

– The Ukrainian community in the Republic of Korea does not currently have a registered organisation of overseas Ukrainians; nonetheless, it is persistently moving forward with this issue. Our community there is small but very proactive. Because of the Russian-Ukrainian war, each of us now carries a heavy and tragic experience. Despite this, Ukrainians are making great efforts so that Korean society hears and understands us.

Due to certain local cultural and legal particularities, our citizens have to overcome a number of obstacles on their way. The inability to speak Korean and lack of financial support from the Republic of Korea does not make their stay in the country easier.

At the same time, this does not stop Ukrainians. They unite and implement humanitarian and volunteer projects, raise funds for charity, hold peaceful rallies and demonstrations, lectures, and interviews, spread information on social media and talk about our culture. The Ukrainian community provided invaluable assistance during the 2023 World Choir Games in Gangneung, where Vohnyk, Ukrainian girls' choir, was a special guest.

The Embassy's cooperation with the community resulted in Ukraine winning third place at the Itaewon Global Village Festival 2022 in Seoul. We also



Заступник Міністра закордонних справ Південної Кореї Пак Йон-мін і Посол України в Південній Кореї Дмитро Пономаренко фотографуються на тлі гуманітарної допомоги, готової до надсилання в Україну, в Міжнародному аеропорту «Інчхон», 9 грудня 2022 року (Yonhap)

Park Yong-min, Korean Deputy Foreign Minister, and Dmytro Ponomarenko, Ukrainian Ambassador to South Korea, pose for photos in front of humanitarian aid items prepared to be flown to Ukraine at Incheon International Airport, 9 December 2022 (Yonhap)

organised a bike ride wearing embroidered shirts, a series of charity concerts on the occasion of the Independence Day of Ukraine in the South Korean capital and other cities, masterclasses on painting pysankas (Easter eggs), decorating cookies for St Nicholas Day, creating traditional amulets, such as motanka dolls and bracelets, as well as vytynankas (art form of papercutting) based on Daria Aloshkina's (Ukrainian artist) sketches. We hold joint film screenings, celebrations of significant and memorable dates, as well as informal meetings.

We also help young people by informing them about scholarships to study in the country.

– *Public diplomacy plays a significant role in shaping the image of Ukraine in the Republic of Korea, despite the geographical remoteness and cultural differences between the two states. What are the most prominent projects of cultural diplomacy that have already been carried out?*

– The Embassy considers events promoting Ukraine's image in the Republic of Korea to be of utmost importance. In recent years, several brilliant projects have been implemented. For example, the Bank of Korea Money Museum hosted the Exploring Ukraine through Money: from the Kyiv Rus to the Euro-maidan exhibition to mark the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Ukraine and the Republic of Korea. It was open to Seoul residents and tourists throughout 2022 and is now available online.

The first Ukrainian bookshelf in South Korea was created in the Seoul Metropolitan Library under the patronage of Olena Zelenska, the First Lady of Ukraine.



The National Assembly of the Republic of Korea presented the Laces of Memory exhibition of vytynankas by the Ukrainian artist Daria Aloskina, dedicated to the Holodomor, the genocide committed against Ukraine in 1932–33, and organised masterclasses on carving vytynankas.

The Embassy actively promotes Ukrainian cinematography. The first Ukrainian film festival in South Korea, held as part of the CinemaAidUkraine charity film marathon at the Korean Film Archive, and the Ukrainian pavilion at the 14th Gwangju Biennale were particularly prominent in this context.

We continue to talk about the full-scale war unleashed by Russia and the need to restore peace in Ukraine. Some of the important art events in Seoul that signify strong international support were the Year of Resilience photography exhibition, which opened in 2023, and Ukraine's Resilience International Art Exhibition for Peace at the Yongsan Gallery, launched in June 2023, where Mariia Chornozhukova, the Ukrainian artist in South Korea, presented her artworks.

The visit of Olena Zelenska, the First Lady of Ukraine, to the Republic of Korea in May 2023 gave another push to bilateral cooperation in the field of culture. For instance, the launch of the first Ukrainian-language guide in South Korea is planned this year at the Sejong Centre after its reconstruction.

On 16–22 September 2023, the Week of Ukrainian Culture took place in Pyeongtaek, featuring the Libertè Quartet from Ukraine performing with Korean musicians, a photo exhibition, a lecture on Ukrainian culture, Ukrainian cuisine and traditional souvenir-making workshops, and the opening of the second Ukrainian Bookshelf in Korea at the Baedari Library. A separate presentation focused on the International Marathon of Travelling Exhibitions entitled Peace

Formula in the Children's Art in Ukraine, featuring children's works from the collection of the Lviv Children's Art Gallery charity foundation. The Marathon is supported by the First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska and the Spouses of Ukrainian Diplomats Association.

We are constantly looking for opportunities for new cultural projects, and we have things to attract the interest of Korean society.

– At the beginning of the 21st century, the Republic of Korea prioritised popular culture as a way to promote its image: the Parasite film became the first non-English-language film to win the Best Picture nomination at the Oscar award; K-pop artists perform not only for millions of fans but also in front of world leaders at the rostrum of the UN General Assembly. In your opinion, would a Ukrainian cultural product be able to achieve such success? What practices of South Korea could be helpful for Ukraine in this context?

– Indeed, the Government of the Republic of Korea, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, is focused on actively supporting creative content that is popular worldwide and has a crucial impact on exports in related industries.

Cultural and creative industries in the Republic of Korea are considered important drivers of economic growth. This is not surprising at all because, in 2022 alone, the export of Korean creative content reached almost USD 14 billion. That is why the South Korean government promotes initiatives such as financial assistance and fiscal support for the creation and distribution of content, talent development and promotion of this direction abroad.

In December 2022, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea approved a plan to promote the broadcasting and video industry, which features strategies to increase the industry's revenues to USD 23.5 billion by 2027.

Ukraine is now struggling to preserve its identity, which Russia is trying to destroy so intentionally. Despite all the challenges, we will continue proving that our country can create a high-quality and relevant cultural product.

If we take the presentation of Ukrainian talents in South Korea as an example, then just over the past year and a half, we may recall the tours of the Academic Symphony Orchestra of the Dmytro Hnatiuk Chernivtsi Regional Philharmonic, the Chamber Orchestra of the Ivano-Frankivsk Philharmonic, the Vohnyk girl's choir, etc., which yet again proved that we have many things to be proud of. It also proves that Ukrainian culture is in demand and competitive.

In order to multiply our success, we must reject the kitschy and inauthentic portrayals of Ukrainian culture imposed by the Soviet regime, comprehend and accept our role in the modern world and form a bold image of a country creating and protecting progressive models and meanings.

I am convinced that having reconsidered the priorities in the cultural strategy and adopted the best global practices, we could not only catch up but surpass South Korea's performance in exporting creative content in a few years.