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to the Republic of Poland (June 2022 – July 2024)*

## **‘UKRAINE’S RECOVERY WILL BECOME OUR COMMON CAUSE’**

— *Following 24 February 2022, Poland has shown unprecedented solidarity and support for Ukraine, providing all possible aid and giving refuge to more than a million Ukrainian citizens. Mr Ambassador, please summarise how Ukrainian-Polish relations are developing and how you foresee their long-term trajectory.*

— Ukraine and Poland are true friends and strategic partners. Our people stand united by the value of freedom. Whenever we stood side by side, we changed history for the better and enjoyed victories. Today, as never before, we must remain united because we face the old common enemy. It once again threatens our freedom and — to put it in no uncertain terms — our very existence.

Following the outbreak of the full-scale Russian invasion, Poland was the first country to receive and shelter millions of Ukrainians forced to flee the war; some of them stayed in Poland, and others dispersed around the world. The people of Poland opened their hearts and homes to Ukrainians and helped Ukraine to persevere. Gratitude and respect for the people of Poland will forever live on in my heart and our nations’ memory.

Having learnt from history, the Poles understand the heavy price to be paid for freedom and independence. Ukraine greatly appreciates Poland’s partnership, which allows us to get results and beat the Russian aggressor on the battlefield. At the same time, Poland is aware that it’s not some charity but an investment in its own security. Unless we win together, we will all be in danger.

Ukraine and Poland have secured highly dynamic political dialogue and cooperation across various sectors at virtually all levels. The depth of this dialogue leaves us optimistic that Ukraine and Poland will remain together as part of the European family of free democratic states. Our Polish partners are aware that the Armed Forces of Ukraine are valiantly defending not only every inch of our homeland but also the values upon which the European Union and the entire civilised world are built.

Ukraine has repeatedly shown the world the resolve of its European choice. The team led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has achieved milestone decisions for our country, and Ukraine is ready to go through all the necessary phases to enter the economic and political bloc, effectively rejoining the European family.



We appreciate Poland's support in rallying the world around strengthening Ukraine's defence capabilities and making critical decisions for Ukraine in the EU and NATO; we are grateful for its participation in military coalitions that support the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the implementation of the Ukrainian Peace Formula. We trust that Poland will always support Ukraine.

— *Mr Ambassador, may we view the current challenges in Ukrainian-Polish relations as temporary? What steps are needed to overcome these difficulties and maintain a strong friendship going forward?*

— It's not uncommon for partners — whether countries or individuals — to experience stages of strained relations every now and then. At this stage, the most important thing is that both sides have the goodwill to normalise their relations or take them to a higher level. I see that our peoples possess such a will and the wisdom to find the right solutions.

The unfortunate situation that has occurred on the Ukrainian-Polish border is an element of a broader European trend of agricultural protests, representing a mere isolated episode in the greater picture of bilateral relations between Ukraine and Poland.

Our willingness to engage in constructive dialogue, our desire to cooperate, and our awareness that at a time of Russian aggression, Ukraine needs an open border to survive led to us finding a wise solution acceptable to both sides.



We should not attempt to extrapolate such situations to the entire scope of Ukrainian-Polish relations, nor should we let such situations influence the overall atmosphere of our relations.

— *Security and defence are two of the most pressing issues on the agenda of European countries due to the growing threat from Russia. How can Ukraine and Poland cooperate on security issues to strengthen mutual military-industrial potential and ensure airspace security?*

— No regime, no war against the global order will ever defeat freedom;

only the loss of unity can bring freedom to its knees.

The 24 February 2022 full-scale invasion marked the continuation of the crime of aggression against Ukraine, against the international order built on international law, which the Russian Federation unleashed in February 2014. That unprovoked and unjustified brazen aggression changed the world. What once seemed impossible is turning into reality, defying all pessimistic expectations. Together with its partners, Ukraine has already shattered many of the myths Russia had been trying to sell as facts.

Ukrainian soldiers are valiantly and sacrificially defending their homeland, and this fight against the Russian aggressor requires resources. Therefore, it is important that Ukraine receives weapons, ammunition, Patriot air defence systems, and modern aircraft as quickly as possible.

Poland's support for Ukraine has consistently been above partisan politics. Poland began providing Ukraine with weapons even before the full-scale invasion. Defence cooperation between Ukraine and Poland covers many areas, including the procurement of military equipment and ammunition, cooperation between military industry companies, repair of machinery, demining, supply of artillery ammunition of varying calibres, military training, etc.

Overall, Poland has provided Ukraine with 44 military aid packages since the start of the full-scale war, with the 45<sup>th</sup> package due to be delivered soon.

We have signed nine contracts totalling €749 million with Polish companies. One of them is a record-setting contract for the supply of about 50 Krab 155mm howitzers to Ukraine, with an estimated value of €600 million. Ukraine became the first foreign buyer of the Krab howitzers, which have since proven their worth on the battlefield.

The Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and the Defence Procurement Agency have signed 43 state contracts for supplying weapons, military equipment, and ammunition from other countries through Poland.

On 8 July 2024, in Warsaw, the President of Ukraine and the Prime Minister of Poland signed the Agreement on Security Cooperation, and its content makes it one of our most ambitious documents. It clearly stipulates that bilateral commitments or security guarantees for Ukraine, however expressed, cannot substitute for full NATO membership. Moreover, this Ukrainian-Polish agreement incorporates an array of unique elements, enabling interception of Russian missiles and drones fired over Ukrainian airspace in Poland's direction and the establishment of a Poland-based Ukrainian Legion — a volunteer branch of the Ukrainian Armed Forces composed of Ukrainian citizens living in Poland.

The fulfilment of those provisions will greatly reinforce Ukrainian air defence and enhance Poland's security. It will also enable Ukrainians living abroad to join Ukraine's defence against the Russian invader and return to their families abroad upon fulfilling their civic duty.

— *What aspects of economic cooperation between Ukraine and Poland would you single out as the most successful? What factors currently have the greatest impact on the development of commercial and economic relations between the two countries?*

— Poland is one of Ukraine's largest trading partners. In 2023, trade turnover between Ukraine and Poland totalled \$11,336 million; however, Ukraine maintains a negative trade balance with Poland. In January–April 2024, trade between Ukraine and Poland totalled almost \$3,590 million, a 9.5% decrease from the respective quarter of 2023.

After the start of Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, Poland became the primary logistics hub for the supply of military, technological, and humanitarian aid from foreign partners. The Polish government has ensured the seamless functioning of the newly established logistical routes, which enhance Ukraine's defence capabilities.

Notwithstanding the temporary disagreements between Ukraine and Poland over bilateral agricultural cooperation, the two countries maintain active interaction between their respective ministries and industry associations, thus promoting the search for mutually beneficial solutions to ensure the protection of the interests of Ukrainian and Polish agricultural producers alike.

The Ukrainian-Polish Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation (ICEC) is an effective instrument of Ukrainian-Polish bilateral relations, enabling discussion of the entire spectrum of economic cooperation issues. The Embassy is actively involved in assisting Ukrainian exporters in entering the Polish market through the Nazovni international platform; for example, in 2024, we processed about 100 applications from Ukrainian exporters.



Poland and Polish businesses are interested in working with Ukraine, particularly in helping to rebuild the country. Together, the Polish Ministry of Economic Development and Technology and the Polish Investment and Trade Agency (PAIH) launched a programme to support Polish companies wishing to participate in Ukraine's recovery, and over 3,000 Polish companies have already applied.

In September 2023, the Polish state-owned KUKI Export Credit Insurance Corporation became one of the world's first companies to insure investments in Ukraine against military risks for Polish companies. In the second half of 2024, the Ukraine Facility programme will start rolling out its investment part through authorised state agencies in EU member states. In Poland, such an agency is the National Development Bank — Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK) — which will provide loan guarantees for investment projects in Ukraine. Once the legislation is updated, both Polish and Ukrainian companies are expected to gain access to the EU's Ukraine Facility funds.

Ukraine is interested in establishing joint Ukrainian-Polish ventures in its territory focusing on construction, production of medical goods, as well as goods that can be manufactured in Ukraine (to cut down on border crossing time, given the availability of qualified personnel, etc.).

In addition, it is essential to arrange trade missions for Polish companies to Ukrainian regions where they might see further prospects. This could turn out

to be a good and viable tool that we must use for both sides' benefit. In 2024, we held several trade missions: in February — on demining, in May — for the medical field (Rehabilitation and Prosthetics), and in June — the Forum for the Rebuilding of Ukraine held in Kyiv, which was attended by representatives of Polish companies interested in setting up their business in Ukraine, as well as those already operating in the Ukrainian market.

Poland and Ukraine closely cooperate in developing transport infrastructure, e.g., constructing and modernising roads and railways. In this respect, an important role in implementing infrastructure projects rests with the practical execution of projects under the concessional loan agreement between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of the Republic of Poland. I hope to see further constructive work towards developing joint border crossing points, expanding the capacity of existing border crossing points on the Ukrainian-Polish border, and expanding border infrastructure along the mutual border. In this context, it is vital to implement the Intergovernmental Agreement on Exercising Control at Joint Border Crossing Points and Cooperation of Controlling Authorities, the draft of which was submitted to the European Commission in March 2024.

Another potential priority area for our future cooperation could be the restoration and construction of new infrastructure facilities, reconstruction of Ukrainian airports, and implementation of a high-speed railway project.

— *Since joining the EU in 2004, Poland has contributed to the improvement and deepening of the relations between the EU and Ukraine. From the beginning of 2025, Poland will assume the six-month Presidency of the Council of the EU. What priorities is the country pursuing for this term, and what will Warsaw's Presidency mean for Ukraine?*

— That is indeed the case. Poland has always supported the idea of Ukraine's membership in the EU. Like us, our Polish friends understand very well that EU enlargement means enlargement of the area of security and stability. That is the primary motive for supporting Ukraine's advancement towards EU membership.

In general, Europeans remember very well that each wave of enlargement brought benefits to the EU — not just in terms of security but also for strictly pragmatic reasons. The same is true in our case: the membership of Ukraine and other candidate countries will lead to an increase in EU GDP, higher employment and investment rates, a larger single market, stronger competition within the EU, and a boost in foreign trade. In other words, nothing but benefits!

I think that Europeans also have an understanding of Ukraine's exceptional contribution to the strengthening of the European Union. Just consider our army: one of the largest and most effective in the world. It is the only army with real experience in countering the aggression of a state with vastly superior resources. I should also mention Ukraine's impressive leap forward towards modern military technology. Having its own technologies and production facilities

to ensure protection against a potential enemy is a very serious advantage for Europe. Another thing to consider is the EU's digital market — Ukraine's digitalisation track record is definitely among the world's best. Moreover, Ukraine is already seen as one of the future renewable energy production centres.

The Ukrainian market is exceptionally attractive, even for Polish farmers. I am sure that Ukraine's membership in the EU will make the European agricultural industry all the more efficient and competitive. Together, we will significantly bolster global food security.

As for Poland's Presidency of the Council of the EU during the first half of next year, the agenda of that Presidency actually centres on EU enlargement, including the inclusion of Ukraine in the EU and Ukraine's recovery. I am confident Poland's EU Presidency will bring us six months of productive negotiations. The process of Ukraine's integration into the EU has already become inevitable: one day, Ukraine will definitely become a member of the integrated European family.

On the other hand, we also expect the Polish Presidency to clearly recognise that the critical task for today is, first and foremost, to strengthen Ukraine's defence capabilities. It is absolutely clear that for the country's meaningful development, effective pre-accession negotiations, sustainable transformations in Ukraine, and, finally, EU membership, we need to secure victory over the enemy, a just peace, and comprehensive security. Therefore, we hope the Polish Presidency will concentrate on providing Ukraine with all the necessary weapons.

— *There are currently hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens living in Poland, having found temporary refuge there amidst the Russian war against Ukraine. Your Excellency, please tell us about the activity of Ukrainian associations in Poland, their engagement with the Embassy, and any collaborative efforts to improve relations between Ukrainians and Poles.*

— The Embassy closely cooperates with Ukrainian NGOs in Poland. We help fund projects within the framework of the Ukrainian MFA Programme, i.e., teaching the Ukrainian language and other subjects in the Ukrainian language at schools and NGOs. The Embassy helps organise the Ukrainian community's traditional annual cultural events, such as the Lemko Vatra, Podlaska Jesień, Ukraine in the Centre of Lublin, etc.

However, this is not the only focus of our cooperation. Together with NGOs, we organise joint public events with the primary goal of popularising Ukraine in the world and consolidating the international community's efforts to support Ukraine in its fight against the Russian invaders: book presentations, book fairs, film screenings, meet-and-greets with opinion leaders, exhibitions, etc.

By using viable tools of public diplomacy, we can actively engage Poles in our culture and showcase ourselves more to the local audience so that they get to

better recognise us, our values, and our traditions. Such measures contribute to solidarity and developing people-to-people contacts between our peoples.

— *The present Polish-Ukrainian relations are based on a long history and close intertwining of cultures. Please tell us how the Embassy uses public diplomacy tools, including cultural diplomacy, to further the rapprochement between the two peoples.*

— When organising public events, the Embassy constantly searches for common themes that Ukraine and Poland share, highlighting the successes of our long-shared history, as when we are together, we are stronger and victorious. Examples of this are numerous: the 1920 joint victory over the Russian Bolsheviks achieved by the UPR Army and the Polish Army, which stopped the invaders' offensive in Europe, our peoples' combined resistance against the yoke of the Russian empire during the January 1863 uprising, etc.

Poland has also become a real island of safety and opportunity for Ukrainian artists, museums, and galleries, where they can pursue their potential, develop, and showcase themselves, which is why we are very grateful to Polish institutions and cultural figures. Poland has provided us with unprecedented cultural development opportunities, helping to protect our cultural heritage, which is indisputably an important part of the pan-European culture, from Russian barbarism.

State agencies have created special grants and programmes for Ukrainians and Ukrainian institutions that encourage them to keep moving forward and produce works of art related to Ukrainian-Polish themes. Naturally, this will contribute to the future development of Ukrainian-Polish relations.







— *How would you describe the situation related to the education of Ukrainian children in Poland? What difficulties do Ukrainian children face in Poland? What changes will Poland be introducing for Ukrainian schoolchildren on 1 September 2024?*

— Due to Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, the Embassy keeps taking measures in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education of Poland to create the conditions necessary to satisfy the educational needs of a large number of children from Ukraine who had been forced to find refuge in the Republic of Poland.

To date, Poland has provided free school enrolment to more than 170,000 preschool and school-age children who arrived in the country after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022.

At the same time, some children also continue studying in the Ukrainian education system via online classes. Ukrainian educational hubs are actively developing as daily schools under Ukrainian NGOs, which also allow children to stay connected to the Ukrainian education system. Currently, there are at least 10 such educational centres in Poland. The Embassy actively supports such schools by providing financial assistance, textbooks, etc.

On 1 September 2024, the Polish government will introduce mandatory education in Polish schools for Ukrainian citizens in the territory of the Republic of Poland. An exception will be made for Ukrainian final-year secondary school students who study online and will take the Ukrainian matriculation exam in 2025. This is important because, as we know, there is a certain category of children who may fall outside both the Ukrainian and Polish education systems. At the same time, it is equally important for us that our children in Poland receive Ukrainian education.

We are currently intensely working to implement the bilateral agreements between our ministries of education reached as a result of joint consultations between the governments of Ukraine and Poland on 28 March 2024 in Warsaw. Specifically, we are talking about introducing Ukrainian education elements for Ukrainian children in the Polish curriculum. That will give those pupils more opportunities to simultaneously explore foreign learning and keep in touch with Ukraine, studying and appreciating their people's spiritual heritage.

I strongly believe that in order to recover, Ukraine will need its sons and daughters, allies and visionaries, and the best international experience, knowledge, and skills. Ukraine's recovery will become our common cause.

*Interview dated 10 July 2024*