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PARTNERSHIP AND PROSPECTS: HUMANITARIAN DIPLOMACY IN UKRAINE

— *Your Excellency, considering the fruitful cooperation with various Ukrainian ministries and organisations, could you elaborate on the approaches or strategies the Order of Malta has employed to provide continuous humanitarian support to those affected by the war? What kinds of humanitarian projects are most urgently needed in Ukraine right now?*

— The main attributes of the joint efforts of the Sovereign Order of Malta are organisational flexibility, immediate response, and innovative approach. From the first days of the war, we recognised that we were facing a dire and unprecedented situation. Therefore, our response followed two strategic tracks. First of all, we focused on reinforcing the country's internal logistical structures. As a result of this and thanks to the Cooperation Agreement between the Sovereign Order of Malta and Ukraine, which was signed in 2019, we have been able to deliver thousands of tonnes of humanitarian relief and develop many support programmes, especially for the most vulnerable members of the population. At the moment, our attention is especially centred on the dramatic conditions in which many children live and the actions that need to be taken in view of the upcoming winter and the ongoing destruction of energy infrastructure. We are also actively working to provide psychological support to all those who are experiencing the trauma of war.

— *In reviewing the significant achievements of the Sovereign Order of Malta together with the Malteser Relief Service in 2023, it is evident that a wide array of vital projects was successfully implemented. How do you envision building upon these successes in future, given such impactful efforts ranging from distributing hot meals and organising various charitable activities to providing prostheses?*

— To begin with, my government has repeatedly expressed its intention to continue providing humanitarian aid to the Ukrainian population for as long as it remains necessary. We must continue to work with all the structures of the Order in a coordinated and complementary manner to move forward with our projects. I would like to add that since the start of the war, our international humanitarian agency, Malteser International, has also been supporting the Malteser Relief Service in Ukraine to financially and operationally reinforce the Order's efforts in the country. I would also like to underline the capacity of our

field offices to respond to the constantly shifting needs of the people, which translates into the evolution of our projects and the creation of new initiatives where necessary.

— *Your Excellency, reflecting on the significant milestone of 15 years of diplomatic relations and over 30 years of humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, how does the Sovereign Order of Malta envision its role in providing long-term humanitarian support?*

— We have to think about reconstruction, which should not be viewed solely in economic terms. To put it another way, we must first offer people a future to look forward to, and we need to do this now. We must address the issues of housing, integration, employment, etc. We also need to think about the children who have been deprived of any opportunity for socialisation, initially because of the COVID-19 pandemic and later due to the war. In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to announce a new initiative of my government, namely a financial plan to support medium- and long-term programmes in partnerships with local institutions. The goal is to launch projects that can become self-sustaining after the first few years, having developed a more structured and effective strategic perspective.

— *As Ukraine faces the increasing challenge of supporting people with amputations, what collaborative international initiatives do you see as essential for providing lasting support and rehabilitation solutions, leveraging the success of projects like the prosthetics workshop in Lviv?*

— First of all, please allow me to say that I am very glad you mentioned our prosthetics workshop in Lviv, as it has indeed demonstrated remarkable success. Having said that, I agree that this problem needs to be addressed through international cooperation, as it calls for the use of cutting-edge technology and requires very substantial investment, given the sheer number of people who have had their limbs amputated. We are talking about a blend of diplomatic and humanitarian efforts, which, in this case, could involve governments, national and international healthcare agencies, research institutions, professional expertise and physical infrastructure. I would like to announce that, in an effort to achieve maximum synergy on this track, the Embassy of the Sovereign Order of Malta in Ukraine is convening an international conference addressing the potential of humanitarian diplomacy, which is scheduled to take place in Kyiv on 4 July.

— *Your Excellency, in autumn 2023, you accomplished significant milestones, including the signing of two memorandums of cooperation with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church archdioceses in Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk. Building on these collaborations, how do you envision further strengthening partnerships with religious institutions to enhance humanitarian efforts in Ukraine?*

— Our first step is to extend the partnership agreements to other religious communities. The importance of religious institutions, especially during crises,

stems not only from their values and principles but also from the networks they often have in a given region. These networks can be instrumental in facilitating humanitarian action, especially when it comes to identifying people in need, distributing humanitarian supplies, and accessing the most vulnerable areas. Moreover, religious institutions exercise a kind of diplomatic practice known as ‘religious diplomacy’ that could make a decisive contribution to the debate on choosing the right path to peace. That is why I believe that increasing our engagement with churches could be fruitful in several ways and bring about solutions to a variety of problems.

— *In light of the disruptions to education caused by the war, especially for children in war-affected areas, what initiatives do you think are crucial to prevent a lost generation and facilitate their successful return to schooling and social integration?*

— Children are undoubtedly among the most vulnerable groups in the population. It is hard to imagine the consequences such a prolonged and brutal war will have on them — not only in terms of education but also their mental development as well. It is one of the most critical issues. I might even argue that it is the central one because a country without a younger generation is a country without a future. That is why we must do whatever we can to sensitise the international community to this issue, and doing so requires large investments and long-term programmes. The path ahead is not easy. The data coming from the UN agency is not reassuring. Sadly, there are fewer and fewer international funds allocated to such efforts. However, the Order of Malta is at the forefront of this field and runs several programmes. I would like to cite many examples of our projects, including the wonderful state-of-the-art Svitlytsia centre we have set up in Ivano-Frankivsk, where children from the war zone are cared for by our experienced psychologists and volunteers. It is a well-equipped facility where children can socialise with one another and engage in a variety of activities, from acting to handicrafts, from music to drawing. I personally visited this centre, and I must say that I was impressed by the energy and cheerfulness that these children had rekindled in such a short time. Sadly, I cannot but acknowledge that there are many other cases where such rehabilitation is proceeding slowly and unsteadily.

— *Your Excellency, considering the complex challenges of psychological rehabilitation post-war, what strategies do you believe are most effective in providing ongoing support to individuals, particularly young people, reintegrating into their families and communities after experiencing trauma on the front lines or in captivity?*

— The Order of Malta is also highly involved in addressing this sensitive issue. I would like to mention our group of psychologists who work at the Feofaniia Hospital, the Halychyna Rehabilitation Centre, and everyone who supports former prisoners of war and IDPs. I believe that all strategies in this domain must rest on the high level of professionalism of psychologists, cooperation of government agencies, and involvement of local communities. Regarding the first

aspect, we should acknowledge that Ukrainian psychologists are currently making excellent use of their accumulated experience and are regarded as some of the world's greatest experts in this field. The second aspect is the most sensitive one. We must do all we can to ensure that after the war is over, Ukraine does not repeat the tragic phenomenon of young people traumatised by war being forgotten.

— *Your Excellency, reflecting on your extensive experience in humanitarian aid and your recent collaborations with diplomatic missions, how do you foresee the role of international cooperation evolving in supporting Ukraine during its post-war recovery phase?*

— In this respect, allow me to offer a message of certain optimism. Throughout this war, the Embassy of the Order of Malta in Ukraine has done a great deal to maintain open communication channels with all diplomatic missions, UN agencies, Ukrainian churches, governmental and private institutions, and many other entities active in the humanitarian domain. In the vast majority of instances, I have always sought positive interactions in terms of cooperation and understanding, which evokes hope for the recovery process that has already begun in some areas. The strategies must focus on what we are already partly familiar with and have experience with, namely information sharing, a high degree of expertise in each sector of intervention, maximum efficiency in the use of resources, reduction of bureaucratic delays, coordination, creation of synergies, and rapid response. Going back to the first question, let me add that it is also important to have the courage to face challenges with an innovative mindset. Sometimes, it is necessary to step outside the box and be able to recognise the sheer complexity of the situations we encounter each time.

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