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I FELL IN LOVE WITH UKRAINE AT FIRST SIGHT

– *Your Excellency! Could you tell us please what fields of cooperation between our countries you consider to be of priority today?*

– Obviously the main way of cooperation is investment. My position completely coincides in this with that of President Poroshenko. He has repeated many times that Ukraine needs to become attractive for foreigners to invest. Still the situation in Ukraine up to now hasn't been an attractive one as the country has lacked legal security. Here I would like to recall the data research obtained by Transparency International, the International organization that measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption in 177 countries. According to their calculations Ukraine was ranked 144. Thus, Ukraine scored only 26 points out of 100 possible. The lower the score, the closer a country is to the corrupt abyss. It is the same level as the Central African Republic. On the other hand if you look at the education index of United Nations, Ukraine is number 29 in the world, which means it is one step ahead of the United Kingdom. I think there is no country in the world where so well-prepared and knowledgeable people have to suffer that high level of corruption. The Orange revolution to my mind started because people could not stand that much corruption any longer. EuroMaidan in the end is about the same only now there is a clear plan about how to proceed, a plan that can be summarized in the Association Agreement with the UE.

Law abidance and the matter of extirpating corruption are going to be what determines successful cooperation with other countries, particularly with Spain. As an example, the financial and judicial security of Australia attracts so many Spanish companies that even if, in geographical terms, it is rather remote from Spain, these companies have captured a good chunk of the Australian market. Ukraine is on its way to change. Our country actively participates in twinning programs with Ukraine, aimed at implementation of the elements of governance needed to adapt national legislation of Ukraine to EU norms and standards.



I also consider cultural cooperation between our countries to be of paramount importance. One of Latin America's most prominent writers and essayists, Mario Vargas Llosa, Nobel Prize for Literature, is coming to Ukraine soon. It is very important that famous people, that have a worldwide audience, come to Ukraine and can witness what is really going on in this country and then express their opinion. It is the reason why our Embassy also invites prominent Spanish journalists to come to Ukraine for an encounter with Ukrainian journalists on December the 4th. Recently we had one of the most popular Spanish writers, Fernando Sánchez Dragy, delivering a lecture to the students of Shevchenko University.

– *What is the level of trade and economic cooperation? Are there any intergovernmental commissions established for our friendly relations to become more pragmatic?*

– Commercial exchanges between our countries in 2013 were about 1500 million euro, which is not bad, but it is very, very, far from what it could be and should be. The lack of financial and judicial security is what restrains companies to invest.

As I have already investing is very important in trade cooperation. It is very important to attract the attention of some very prominent company that can open the trail for others to follow. A good example is a big Spanish ship-building company, Navantia, concluding a huge contract

with the Australian Navy, thus showing Australian market trustworthy. This boosted greatly the cooperation and trade between our countries. (Sorry if I keep making references to Australia, but it was my previous post and I think is a good example to show that even enormous distances are not an obstacle when the right conditions are there).

Tourism can be mentioned here as another way of mutual exchange. Last year we gave close to 120 000 visas. And I'm proud to say that Ukrainian Week magazine chose our consulate to be the best performer last year. About 80 000 people work in Spain. Ukrainian people are considered to be reliable and hard-working. The image of the Ukrainians in Spain is very high. Also the charm and beauty of Ukrainian women is a real factor to be considered: there is a non negligible amount of marriages and love stories between Spanish men and Ukrainian women that I see practically every day.

Then there is another important exchange. Since the Chernobyl disaster we are bringing every year 3.000 Ukrainian kids to Spain. They go to Spanish families for summer holidays.

We can envisage enormous ways of cooperation. But legal transparency is what Ukraine needs most. We have to understand that we are in the threshold of a new Ukraine. The problem is that Ukraine has a neighbor that seems determined apparently to use all the means not to allow Ukraine to achieve the reforms it needs and craves. But let us remember the referendum of independence in the 1991: both Gorbachev and Yeltsin really thought that people that stood for independence were a minority. Even the most optimistic among those supporting the independence expected a 70% vote in favor of independence. And, as you know, the vote for independence was 91% with 84% participation. People from the very beginning knew what they wanted. The problem is that the country's capabilities had been kidnapped by a bunch of corrupt politicians. So what I mean is that, as I have already said, we have to look at the situation we live now as the beginning of a new Ukraine and a beginning of new relations with European Union and with Spain as well.

– *What is the official position of the Spanish Government regarding the Russian aggression in Ukraine? What is the opinion of people concerning the stated situation?*

– From the very beginning we condemn the invasion of Crimea. Once and again, in every international forum, we have supported and will support the independence and the territorial integrity of Ukraine. We stay adamant and we will never accept any sort of curtail of the territory of Ukraine.

– *What is the opinion of Spanish people concerning the stated situation?*

– The majority of Spanish people support Ukraine. Sometimes you come across people misled by Russian propaganda. Recently we had a

very nasty episode in one of the Universities in Madrid. They had an act in support of Russia and during the demonstration of some people waving the Ukrainian flag protesting against this were beaten. But as you know this happens all over the world. There are extreme «left» groups that apparently support Russia. There are some in Spain as well but they represent a marginal part of public opinion. The main problem for Ukraine is the misinformation that goes out of Russia. People then start saying that there are fascists and Nazis in Kiev. It's ridiculous. I don't think you can consider parties like of Pravyi Sector — let alone Svoboda — Nazis, but, in any case, to realize that there is nothing imposed in Ukraine one have just to look at the results of elections.

— *What are the prior steps you consider Ukraine should take at the European integration path?*

— Probably the most important thing is to fight corruption in the judiciary. And that is very difficult because there is an apparent contradiction as the judiciary should be an independent branch of power while, in order to erase corruption, one needs to reform it. Keep on reforming, keep on fighting corruption and gradually approach the European Union standards.

— *Tell us a few words about yourself. We know that since 1984 you are in the diplomatic service. Could you recall when and how has started your diplomatic path?*

— I have been to more than hundred countries in the course of my life. Diplomatic career means staying a lot abroad, I have lived in eight countries. I remember my time in New-York for instance or when I was sent to Hungary and served there from 1987 to 1990, I was in Berlin when the «wall» fell down. Then I was in Hong-Kong when it went back to China. I have served in Japan, in Switzerland. The diplomatic career has given me the possibility to witness history. And to be now here in Ukraine is a privilege for me because we are living in the turning point of the history not only of Ukraine but of Europe and the world, we should be aware of that.

— *What country impressed you most of all?*

— I always say that there are many countries that I like very much but that, if I were to spend all my life in one country I would prefer to live in one the following three: Spain, Italy or USA, each for its different reasons. I haven't had the possibility — up to now — to serve in Italy but I would love to. The most vivid impressions that I evoke looking back at my past diplomatic career are those of my serving in New-York. I love that city. Very important period in my life was when I was the Director-general in Spain for North America, Asia and the Pacific. It is more than half of the world. And that allowed me to make very interesting trips to Washington, to Tokyo, Beijing and to many different capitals. Japan is another country

that I really love. I spent four years in Tokyo. In Japan there are many things that I think we should take after. From the professional point of view my trip to Ukraine is probably the most important posting abroad.

– *Tell me please top three people the Spanish are proud of?*

– I would tell you for sure the icons of art are Miguel de Cervantes, who is the greatest author in Spain, Diego Velázquez, who is probably the best painter and the third one is difficult to distinguish. Maybe Italians would be upset but I dare mention also Christopher Columbus as one of the top three as I have recently come across information that seem to prove the fact that he was born in Galicia, the northern part of Spain, while Italians assert he comes from Genoa. I mention here Christopher Columbus in the sense that one cannot understand Spain without America. The whole history of Spain is a part of Europe and the Mediterranean because we are inheritors of Greece and Rome. All the Middle Ages Spain was fighting the moors, chasing them the Arabs out of Spain. And the year the fight with the moors was finished was the year Christopher Columbus discovered America. And a big contribution of Spain to the Renaissance is duplicating the world. The whole world was on one side of the earth, and suddenly, through Spain, a whole new continent appeared! When you travel across Latin America and the United States, you can feel the presence of Spain there. Columbus is an embodiment of big epopee of the discovery of America – the transatlantic experience.

– *Ukraine and Spain have friendly relations and in this connection I would like tell us a few words of support to our nation.*

– I fell in love with your country. In French you use «coup de foudre» or «flechazo» in Spanish. It was like love at first sight. I fell in love with Ukraine in one very precise moment. It was the morning of December 1 last year. 800,000 people have appeared on Maidan. It was a wonderful mix of indignation and serenity. Ukraine is a very civilized country. People were determined to fight but they were not aggressive. There were no broken windows. For example, Zara shop which is the large Spanish store which is located in Khreschatyk Street had no problems, despite the fact that it was near the epicenter of events. They did not have to interrupt their business because of demonstrations. I remember the time when winter came and some people wondered how people on Maidan would stand the frost but I replied then to them that I thought it would be much harder for Yanukovych to resist the Maidan than for people to live the winter through.

I remember my calling to Madrid one night and saying that despite the fact that it was -32 degrees, people had not moved from the Maidan but they used snow to make barricades stronger. So even in 32 degree frost, no one could capture the Maidan.

Your people keep me optimistic about your country. Look at Japan — without meaningful natural resources it is one of the richest countries because of their people.

I remember two days after I came to Ukraine, it was on October 27, I attended a meeting of Ukrainian and Spanish journalists organized by our Embassy. And one of the Ukrainian journalists asked the audience of about 300 people, students in general: «How many of you have been in the European Union?» And almost all raised their hands, then: «How many of you have been in Russia?». And again, almost all raised their hands. He then asked: «How many of you want Ukraine to become a country like the countries of EU?» And almost all raised their hands, and then he asked: «How many of you want to see Ukraine a country like Russia is?» And only one person raised his hand. I do not know if it was just a joke, or the boy raised his hand only to attract the attention of girls present in the hall. All that I mean is that the minds of young students are the future of Ukraine. And they know exactly what future they want to see in Ukraine.

Interview prepared by **Inna Khomenska** and **Galyna Yaromenko**