

Andrii DESHCHYTSIA,

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Republic of Poland

I BELIEVE IN WISDOM OF OUR PEOPLES



For me personally Poland is the «old new history», which is close to my heart. The old history began in 1996, when Poland became the country of my first diplomatic mission abroad. I witnessed the development and strengthening of a new country – a country of «Solidarność» spirit. I was lucky to be in Warsaw at the time of really watershed developments for Poland – accession to NATO in 1999 and to the European Union in 2004. In short – it was a very dynamic mission, full of events and impressions.

The new history began in autumn 2014 and was no less exciting. But this time it thrilled me with transformations, which took place in Poland over the last ten years. It is extremely interesting and impressive to witness «decisions on paper» and then to see the outcome of their implementation. This is exactly what inspires me today in my work – I want my country to follow this difficult yet worth the efforts path. This is because I see myself its benefits here in Poland.

Just a couple of statistics: ten years of Poland's membership in the EU brought about the 50% GDP growth, current household income in Poland is above two – thirds of the average EU index, foreign investments in Poland exceeded Euro 130 bln, investments and allocation of the EU resources resulted in over half a million of new jobs, number of Poles below the poverty line fell by 7 mln. These numbers are really impressive.

I would like to emphasize that resignation from the rapprochement with the EU, which caused the Revolution of Dignity and later the Russian aggression against Ukraine, brought our Ukrainian and Polish people together and strengthened the Ukrainian-Polish bilateral relations at the official level.

I well remember my good colleague Ambassador of Poland to Ukraine Henryk Litwin among hundreds of Ukrainians at Mykhailivska



Посол А. Дещиця у перший день роботи зустрівся з українською громадою Польщі
The Ambassador A. Deshchytzia met with Ukrainian community in Poland on the first working day

Square in Kyiv on 1 December 2013 who wanted to show their resentment with the brutal break-up of the students' protest the night before.

I will always remember Polish flags on Maidan, campaigns to support Ukrainians' fight in Polish media, blue and yellow illuminated Palace of Culture and Science, one of the symbols of Warsaw. I will always remember passionate speeches of Polish parliamentarians on the Maidan scene. All this came from the heart, all this was very sincere.

From the very beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine Poland expressly condemned the actions of the Russian Federation, qualifying them as the act of aggression against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Upon the initiative of President of Poland Bronislaw Komorowski Council of the EU and the North Atlantic Council convened their extraordinary meetings on 3 and 4 March 2014 to discuss the invasion of Russia into Crimea. Poland has consistently stood for the unity of the EU and NATO on the issue of imposing sanctions upon Russia in response of its annexation of Crimea and fueling conflict in the Donbas region. Time and again Poland has by deed, not by word showed solidarity with Ukraine.

Along with crucial political support, Poland is rendering substantial humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. Since 2014 the Polish Government has allocated about USD 5 mln for humanitarian projects in Ukraine. Projects mainly cover material and psychological aid to internally displaced persons. More than 500 Ukrainians injured during Maidan clashes and Anti-terrorist operation (ATO) in Donbas underwent treatment and rehabilitation

in Poland. Almost 2,000 children of internally displaced persons and ATO service members visited different provinces of Poland for rest and recreation.

We are grateful to the Government of Poland for its decision to provide a loan of Euro 100 mln. The loan will be disbursed for border infrastructure development.

I would like to emphasize that Polish non-governmental organizations are doing really a lot to assist Ukraine. Thanks to hundreds of volunteers from Poland, the level of sympathy towards Poles within the Ukrainian public is steadily growing. And this is truly a solid basis for the development of the strategic partnership between our countries in all possible areas.

I am happy to note that regardless of changes in the political landscape either in Ukraine or in Poland we always managed to maintain dynamic political dialogue between our two countries has been always maintained a dynamic political dialogue on high level. The year 2014 saw 27 bilateral visits and meetings, this year – already about 20.

Program of the Ukrainian-Polish Cooperation is in force between the two states. The document sets out priority tasks: enhancing political dialogue, cooperation in the area of Ukraine's European integration, in the field of security and defence, border and interregional cooperation, development of cultural and educational ties and of people-to-people contacts. Signing in August 2015 of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Ukrainian-Polish Youth Exchange Council has become an important part of this bilateral Program.

To streamline the key bilateral issues we have created ten institutional mechanisms at the level of presidents, parliaments and individual ministries. In January 2015 a new formula of cooperation – the intergovernmental consultations – was established. This efficient format is in place in Poland's dialogue with Germany, France and Spain.

Poland is now Ukraine's leading trade partner in Central and Eastern Europe and Ukraine's fourth largest trade partner in the world. In 2014, the trade turnover between our countries amounted to USD 5.7 bln.

The last two years, however, saw a slowdown in our bilateral trade. The mutual investments have also contracted. The reasons are obvious: war in the East of Ukraine, overall decline in the national industrial production, low prices for traditional commodity groups of the Ukrainian exports on the world markets.

To remedy this situation, we are promoting Ukrainian products on the Polish market, arranging contacts between potential partners, searching for the most promising areas of cooperation and assisting in presenting Ukrainian investment projects in Poland. As we see it, there are really good perspectives for bilateral cooperation in the areas of energy, machine building, transport, agriculture, aircraft industry, information and communication field.

However, one should keep in mind that entering the Polish market requires taking into account specifics of the local consumption. Our Embassy is ready to advise Ukrainian companies on this.

Today we are focusing our efforts on promoting the Ukrainian high-tech products on the Polish market. For instance, currently we see the development of a number of joint space industry projects, as well as joint projects involving the «Antonov» State Company.

I would like to emphasize that the extension of the EU autonomous trade preferences for Ukraine until the end of 2015 might encourage our businesses to increase exports to Poland and create joint ventures to work on the Polish and other European markets.

I positively assess our bilateral cooperation in the energy sector. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to our Polish partners for providing reverse deliveries of gas to Ukraine during the critical months of 2014 and 2015. I believe that this is another manifestation of solidarity with Ukraine.

At this stage, our key large-scale project in the energy sector is the construction of the interconnector gas pipeline, which will bridge the Ukrainian and Polish gas transportation systems. This project will contribute to the diversification of gas supplies, which is one of the ways to strengthen Ukraine's energy security. The interconnector will allow us to receive gas from Germany, as well as liquefied gas from the LNG-terminal in the Polish port of Świnoujście. We will also be able to pump gas into the underground storage facilities in Ukraine and deliver it back to Europe in periods of peak demand.

Our cooperation in the area of defence is primarily focused on the issues of cooperation with NATO, training of Ukrainian officers in the Polish military academies, launching the LITPOLUKRBRIG joint military brigade, as well as on Ukraine's contribution to the V4 EU Battle Group. I would like to emphasize the importance of establishing the joint Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian brigade. We regard this unit as an efficient tool for training our military men according to NATO standards, and also as a perfect way to strengthen mutual trust between the countries involved. 545 Ukrainian soldiers are expected to serve in the brigade (it is the second largest group).

Especially noteworthy is cooperation between the regions of Ukraine and Poland. It should be mentioned that it is exactly with Poland that Ukraine has the most extensive network of interregional cooperation. Almost all regions of Ukraine and provinces of Poland have entered into cooperation agreements. A special body – the Intergovernmental Council for Interregional Cooperation – was set up to coordinate links between the regions. A lot of joint cultural events, youth exchanges, trainings, namely on self-government reform, are taking place in pursuance of agreements between Ukrainian and Polish local authorities. I believe that such intensive people-to-people contacts

are crucial to understand the cultural patterns and the mentality of our nations and in the end bring Ukrainians and Poles closer together.

We have to «fight» against artificially created boundaries to open already existing «doors» between our countries. While the visa regime between Ukraine and the EU is still in place, expanding the area of local border traffic (LBT) between Ukraine and Poland by formula «50+ km» is of essential meaning. This is a common interest of both Ukraine and Poland. Although, as we know, this issue is a prerogative of Brussels.

However, without having the final decision of the European Commission, both sides keep working to further simplify the LBT regime. In December 2014, Ukraine and Poland signed the Second Protocol on Amending the Intergovernmental Agreement on LBT rules between the countries. These amendments, in particular, extend the LBT area to four additional areas in Volynska and Lvivska regions and increase the term of citizens' uninterrupted stay in the LBT area.

Cultural relations play an important role in binding together and unifying the Ukrainian and Polish people. We are to show that Ukrainians are talented and educated people with a reach history extending back over a thousand of years. We do want Polish people to associate Ukraine not only with guest workers, Chornobyl or war. So we try to be active and help arranging different events that promote cultural heritage and modern Ukrainian art. Among the most spectacular I would mention the Days of Parajanov in Poland, the exhibition of the Ukrainian artists Ivan Marchuk and Matvii Vaisberg, the «Mist» festival. Also, I would like to express my gratitude to the Ukrainians in Poland, who actively promote our cultural heritage and traditions. «Lemkowska Watra», «Ekolomyja» are their significant contribution to the preservation of the Ukrainian identity in Poland.

Talking about the Ukrainian culture and identity, it strikes me how powerful is the younger generation in promoting the national culture. As of today, more than 24,000 young Ukrainians are studying in the Polish universities. I often have a chance to communicate with them. These are very promising young people. I am happy to note that by their diligence they are creating a positive image of Ukraine in Poland. It is important that these young people are acquiring the European education, that they see the benefits of the European integration in practice, establish numerous contacts and find new friends in Poland. It is exactly on such personal level that friendly relations are continuously strengthening between the nations.

Poland remains our reliable partner on the international arena. «Poland is Ukraine's advocate in the EU» has become a well-known expression. But apart of the EU, Poland actively supports us within other international organizations. Although in promoting Ukraine's interests our Polish partners focus their work mainly on the European capitals.

Poland has always supported our European aspirations. Together with Sweden Poland was the co-author of the Eastern Partnership project, which allowed paying particular attention of the European Neighbourhood Policy to the East of Europe, including Ukraine. Our Polish colleagues made every effort to convince other EU Member States that it was crucial to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in Vilnius in November 2013. The Polish side advocated signing of the political part of the Association Agreement in March 2014 as an expression of solidarity with Ukraine amidst the Russian aggression.

Today Poland's support of Ukraine continues to be strong and consequent. Within the EU the Polish side shares and defends Ukraine's key expectations of Brussels: the EU financial assistance in the implementation of the Association Agreement, lifting visa regime and granting Ukraine the prospect of the EU membership.

At the same time, Poland's successful experience of transformation is perhaps the most valuable assistance to Ukraine. Given the similarity of economic potential, territory, population of the two countries, as well as the mentality of Ukrainians and Poles, Poland is rightly considered to be a model for the successful development of Ukraine.

And here one can note some important practical achievements. For example, Poland's experience of anti-corruption policy was taken aboard while drafting relevant legislation in Ukraine. Being aware of Poland's successfully implemented decentralization reform in 1990 and 1998, we asked the Polish colleagues to share their valuable experience. The Polish experts started their advisory mission since March 2014. January 2015 saw the official establishment of the Polish-Ukrainian Advisory Group on Local Self-Government Reform in Ukraine. The experts contributed to drafting the amendments to the Constitution on decentralization of power. In early 2015 the Polish Government appointed its Commissioner to coordinate support for reforms in Ukraine.

In my opinion, further historical reconciliation between our nations should become a key element of the Ukrainian-Polish cooperation. History should not divide us. We as well cannot allow historical issues to become a subject of political manipulations. We cannot allow them to «feed» the third parties, not interested in a strong Ukrainian-Polish partnership.

Our Governments need to bend every effort to turn these painful pages of our history according to «we forgive and we beg forgiveness» principle and develop our common European democratic future without reciprocal reproaches and accusations. By the way, Ukrainian and Polish Presidents have repeatedly called for that.

I am confident that having in place the steady political will and common Christian values we will be able to successfully navigate the road of reconciliation. Just as it was the case with Poland and Germany, or Germany and France.



To sum up, the current bilateral relations between Ukraine and Poland could be most explicitly described by such notions as common interests, mutual understanding, solidarity and support. This is a set of essential criteria for turning good-neighbourly relations into relations of strategic partnership, or even of strategic friendship.

Today I become increasingly convinced that both Ukrainian and Polish nations share the same moral values — values of freedom. And it is my belief that shared values are the strongest foundation for friendly and sincere relations between the two countries.