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UKRAINE AND QATAR: PROSPECTS FOR STRENGTHENING MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIP

The Gulf nations are highly important and promising for Ukraine in view of their vast capabilities and potential, particularly as regards economic and investment cooperation. Qatar is one of Ukraine's reliable and extremely ambitious partners in this region. It is a powerful and influential regional actor, a respectable member of leading integration frameworks, which possesses a great amount of strategic natural resources as well as an immense financial and investment potential.

In 2020, Ukraine and the State of Qatar celebrated the 27th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. For this short period, the states have managed to build up real partnership, based upon the principles of trust, friendship, and mutual respect.

I would like to mention that I felt benevolence and respect for our state since the first days after the arrival to Doha in February 2020 to carry out the tasks set by the Ukrainian government to strengthen partnership between Ukraine and Qatar. Indeed, Qatar perceives Ukraine as a friendly state and partner.

From the very beginning of the Russian aggression against our state in 2014, the State of Qatar has taken a firm, principled and unwavering position on the inviolability of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We are sincerely grateful to the Government of Qatar for such support that has repeatedly been articulated in the form of co-sponsorship of Ukrainian initiatives in international organisations on issues pivotal for our state.

The opening of diplomatic missions in Kyiv and Doha during 2012–2013 was an essential impetus to further develop our bilateral relations. Since then, the states have managed to reinvigorate the high-level political dialogue, trade and economic cooperation. Mutual interest in the development of a whole range of bilateral collaboration has been constantly increasing.

From 2011 until 2020, the states have had quite an intensive exchange of high-level visits, as evidenced by three official visits of the heads of state, one official visit of the head of government, and two visits of the ministers for foreign affairs. Portfolio ministers of Ukraine and Qatar have held dozens of bilateral visits. Currently, we are working upon the organisation of an official



Надзвичайний і Повноважний Посол України в Державі Катар Андрій Кузьменко оглядає почесний караул Еміра Катару під час офіційної церемонії вручення Вірчих грамот (Доха, внутрішній двір палацу Еміра, 16 лютого 2020 р.)

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the State of Qatar Andrii Kuzmenko inspects the honorary guard of the Emir of Qatar during the official ceremony of the presentation of Credentials (Doha, courtyard of the Emir's Palace, 16 February 2020)

visit of Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Emir of Qatar, to Ukraine., which will mark an important stage in the development of relations between Ukraine and Qatar.

It goes without saying that a dynamic political dialogue between the authorities of the two states is a great opportunity to strengthen the whole range of mutual relations as well as a significant factor that encourages business groups to enter into dialogue. After all, it is a powerful impetus for both nations to open Ukraine and Qatar as attractive travel destinations.

In recent years, Ukrainian diplomacy has been making great efforts together with Qatari partners to achieve significant results in the development of bilateral relations that the citizens of both states can now feel.

The first things I would like to emphasise are the establishment of regular direct flights between Doha and Kyiv carried out by Qatar Airways, one of the best air companies of the world; liberalisation of air travels between two states; introduction of a visa-free regime for citizens of both states; stable annual growth of rates of the bilateral turnover of commodities; expansion of the legal framework between the two states.



Бесіда Надзвичайного та Повноважного Посла України в Державі Катар Андрія Кузьменка з Еміром Катару шейхом Тамімом бін Хамадом Аль Тані після церемонії вручення Вірчих грамот (Доха, палац Еміра, 16 лютого 2020 р.)

Conversation between Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the State of Qatar Andrii Kuzmenko and Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani after the presentation of Credentials (Doha, Emir's Palace, 16 February 2020)

The establishment of direct air flights and a visa-free regime between Ukraine and Qatar have made our states much closer. It is my pleasure that nowadays the Qatari-Ukrainian relations are actively developing at both the governmental and interpersonal levels. Qatar attracts more and more Ukrainian tourists. To confirm this, I would like to provide some important figures: more than 7,000 Ukrainians visited Qatar in 2017, followed by about 15,000 in 2018 and 22,596 in 2019. Moreover, many highly experienced Ukrainian specialists, namely doctors, engineers, and coaches of various sports, work in Qatar. Many Ukrainians chose to work in Qatar's service industry.

I am glad that an ever increasing number of citizens of the State of Qatar consider Ukraine an attractive destination for leisure and recreation, starting business, and implementing investment projects.

The trade and economic cooperation is an important element of our relations with the State of Qatar.

Although absolute indicators of trade and economic cooperation between Ukraine and Qatar are still far from reflecting our true capacity, I am pleased to note that they demonstrate a stable annual growth. According to the 2019 statistics, total trade between Ukraine and the State of Qatar reached \$90 million, a record-breaking amount over the whole history of diplomatic relations.

In my opinion, the current trade volume between Ukraine and Qatar does not live up to the states' potential, and therefore we continue to work intensively upon strengthening bilateral cooperation. We have promising prospects to advance cooperation, inter alia, in such realms as energy, infrastructure, agriculture, tourism, etc. Such an important mechanism for the development of cooperation as the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic, Trade and Technical Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of the State of Qatar, which was established in 2018, should contribute to this. Its second meeting was planned to be held this year in Kyiv, but due to the current COVID-19 pandemic it was postponed until 2021.



Церемонія підписання пакету двосторонніх документів під час офіційного візиту п'ятого Президента України Петра Порошенка до Катару (19–20 березня 2018 р.). На фото: обмін між главами МЗС України та Катару альтернативами міжурядової Угоди про взаємне скасування візових вимог

Signing ceremony of a package of bilateral instruments during the official visit of the fifth President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko to Qatar (19–20 March 2018). Photo: Foreign Ministers of Ukraine and Qatar exchange signed copies of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Mutual Abolition of Visa Requirements

According to our plans, 2020 should have become the year replete with different ambitious bilateral events. However, new realities caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic have upset the appletart. Taking into account the epidemiological situation in both states, we had to postpone many events and meetings. Nonetheless, we hope to overcome the pandemic, which has become a true challenge for the whole world, as soon as possible.

In this respect, special mention should be made of the assistance provided by the State of Qatar to Ukraine during the pandemic. In May 2020, Ukraine received almost 9 tons of humanitarian cargo from our Qatari partners that has helped Ukrainian doctors at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic.

A famous proverb says that a friend in need is a friend indeed. This move on the part of the State of Qatar is a manifestation of true friendship and commitment to the spirit of partnership and mutual aid.

Moreover, our Qatari friends provided considerable assistance in organizing the evacuation of Ukrainian citizens from both Qatar and some very distant corners of the world during the global pandemic. And for that I would also like to express my sincere gratitude.

Returning to the prospects of trade between the two states, I would like to mention agriculture as one of the most important realms of Ukrainian-Qatari economic cooperation that could be a driving force for the development of the whole complex of bilateral relations.

Ukraine as one of the leading world agricultural exporters has much to offer to the State of Qatar that pays much attention to its food security.

We constantly work upon increasing Ukrainian exports to Qatar. In the meantime, the high competition in the relatively small domestic Qatari market makes achievements in this realm highly contingent on a proactive position of Ukrainian producers and exporters.

The entry to Qatari market is possible only if our Ukrainian companies work hard. Preparing high-quality presentations of Ukrainian products, participating in specialised exhibitions, determining the best possible logistics to Qatar are extremely crucial. In its turn, the diplomatic service of Ukraine is always ready to provide further multifaceted assistance in promoting the interests of Ukrainian exporters in foreign markets.

The cooperation with Qatar in the energy sector may play a pivotal role in diversifying energy supply and ensuring Ukraine's energy security as the State of Qatar is the world's biggest producer and exporter of liquefied natural gas. Recently, both countries have been actively contributing to a substantive expert review of the possibilities to start supplying Qatari liquefied natural gas to Ukraine. This matter is particularly relevant, on the one hand, against the background of Qatar's strategy to significantly increase its export capacity and find new markets for its liquefied natural gas, and on the other hand, in the context of Russia's hybrid war against our state, the instrument of which is, among other things, energy supply.

The cooperation in infrastructure, wind and solar energy, where Ukraine possesses significant production, scientific and technical potential, may also be interesting.

Qatar implements ambitious and large-scale domestic projects, particularly in the context of preparations for hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup and in the framework of the national development strategy *National Vision 2030*.

Qatar is planning to spend more than \$200 billion to fulfill these projects before 2030.

In view of this, promising areas for expanding Ukrainian exports to Qatar are the export of construction materials and services, including the construction and furnishment of hotels, sports facilities and roads by Ukrainian companies.

We are constantly working to facilitate the participation of Ukrainian enterprises in projects on infrastructure objects construction in the State of Qatar. In the meantime, it is necessary to understand that international competition in this realm is extremely high.

On the other hand, Qatari investors are taking much interest in Ukraine's infrastructure.

The participation and subsequent victory of the Qatari company QTerminals in the Olvia Seaport (Mykolaiv) concession tender is a bright example. The results of the competition were announced at the beginning of 2020. As early as

20 August 2020, a respective concession agreement was signed. Qatari investors are going to invest UAH 3.4 billion in the next five years to develop the Ukrainian port and its infrastructure. It will be one of the biggest foreign direct investments in the port sector of Ukraine since 1991. This result would not have been possible without regular activities on facilitating investment cooperation between Ukraine and the State of Qatar, which is an important area of bilateral relations.

As I have mentioned, Qatar possesses strong financial and investment potential. Specifically, Qatar Investment Authority, the major state investment fund, is among the top ten biggest sovereign investment funds of the world in terms of assets.

The necessary preconditions for the real reinvigoration of bilateral cooperation with Qatari partners in the field of investments have already been created. To this end, we have established a respective legal and regulatory framework. For instance, in 2019 the Agreement between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of the State of Qatar on Facilitation and Mutual Protection of Investment and the Treaty between the Government of Ukraine and Government of the State of Qatar on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Tax Evasion in Respect of Taxes on Income came into force.

Among the promising areas to engage Qatari investors are the privatisation of industrial, infrastructure, tourist, and recreation objects of Ukraine, joint implementation of investment projects in agriculture, energy, shipbuilding, aircraft construction, modernisation of seaports, etc.

Indeed, we have many other spheres for interaction and are currently working upon their development. These are culture, education, science, sports, tourism, military and technical cooperation, security.

The development of interstate relations is a complex and durable process. It is not only about politics; rather, it is a daily painstaking work aimed at solving very practical issues.

The State of Qatar is a very interesting and promising state for Ukraine that demonstrates a real readiness to intensify cooperation with our country. Thus, we have many plans for the further development of our relations.

Let us continue working hard and moving forward to strengthening friendship and partnership for eventually building a better future!