

“Z E”

YEAR

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FOREIGN

POLICY →



“Ze” Year of Ukraine’s Foreign Policy

On August 29, 2019, new members of Ukraine’s parliament of the IX convocation took the oath. According to the results of the snap elections, the faction of the presidential party “Servant of the People” won 254 out of 450 seats in parliament. For the first time in the history of independent Ukraine, a mono-party parliamentary majority was formed. Thus, there was no need to form a parliamentary coalition, and the Coalition Agreement was in fact replaced by a political program of one party.

Already on October 4, the Verkhovna Rada approved the action program of the newly appointed Cabinet of Ministers headed by Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk. Representatives of the presidential party received most of the portfolios in the new government. President Volodymyr Zelensky’s “Ze” team assumed all the executive and legislative power. Thus, October 2019 can be considered the starting point of Ukraine’s new policy.

The “Ukrainian Prism” team, with the support of the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, analyzed what this “Ze” year was like for Ukraine’s foreign policy and international relations. The experts monitored foreign policy progress by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Cabinet of Ministers in their first year (governments of O. Honcharuk and D. Shmygal), analyzed the activities and achievements in ten key areas and formulated recommendations to parliament and government in these spheres.

The analysis of relations with the United States, NATO, neighboring countries and the world, progress in the field of public and economic diplomacy, European integration and the issue of dual citizenship has shown uneven attention and a diminishing role for parliamentary diplomacy. European and Euro-Atlantic integration, as well as issues of public and economic diplomacy, had the greatest involvement of government actors and demonstrated practical results. At the same time, Ukrainian foreign policy still remains relatively Eurocentric and undermines the importance of building relations with the Ukrainian community abroad.

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“ZE” YEAR OF UKRAINE’S FOREIGN POLICY

Analysis of the new political team first year in the Parliament and
the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (September 2019 – October 2020)

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EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU has slowed down as only 37% of the scheduled objectives were completed in 2019 (the Cabinet of Ministers has shown the highest performance of 53%, followed by the Verkhovna Rada, 12%, and other public offices, at 21%).

1

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

The portfolio Verkhovna Rada committee is the Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the European Union. Known in previous convocations as the Committee on European Integration, it changed its name to highlight Ukraine's aspirations to become part of the EU. It oversees:

- Ukraine's participation in international integration processes related to EU activities;
- adaptation of Ukrainian legislation to EU legislation, ensuring its compliance with Ukraine's commitments to the Council of Europe;
- assessment of draft laws' compliance with Ukraine's international legal obligations concerning European integration;
- state policy on European integration;
- inter-parliamentary relations in the framework of Ukraine's cooperation with the EU;
- coordination of programs for EU technical assistance to the Verkhovna Rada and special training programs;
- consent to the binding force of Ukraine's international agreements with the EU and its member states (ratification, accession to an international agreement, adoption of the text of an international agreement), denunciation of such international agreements of Ukraine;
- cross-border and interregional cooperation with EU countries;
- cooperation with EU institutions in countering external aggression against Ukraine, non-military international forms and methods of deterring the aggressor state.

The Committee consists of nine MPs, making it one of the smallest ones in the Verkhovna Rada. It is headed by Former Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze, who represents the European Solidarity party which opposes the single-party majority in the parliament. The first deputy chairman of the Committee is Vadym Halaichuk of the Servant of the People party, and the deputies are MPs representing Opposition Platform-For Life and Servant of the People. The committee also includes former President Petro Poroshenko.

The Committee consists of five subcommittees:

- On cooperation with NATO and the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Security and Defense Policy of the EU, the Eastern Partnership and the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly;
- On economic, sectoral cooperation and the deep and comprehensive free trade area between Ukraine and the EU;
- On the coordination of EU technical assistance programs;
- On regional and cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and the EU member states;
- On the adaptation of Ukrainian legislation to the EU legislation.

During the period from September 2019 to July 2020, the Committee held 42 meetings which addressed 490 issues, including nine on monitoring the implementation of laws and regulations. The Committee analyzed and provided expert opinions on 890 draft laws on compliance with EU law and Ukraine's commitments under the Association Agreement. A new delegation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the EU Parliamentary Assembly–Eastern Neighbourhood and the Ukrainian part of the Parliamentary Association Committee have been formed. More than 500 draft laws are currently under review of the Committee.

The most important draft laws recommended by Committee members for adoption in the Verkhovna Rada enable Ukraine to receive EUR1.2 bn in macro-financial assistance from the EU, EUR400 mln in loans for small and medium enterprises, a loan from the European Investment Bank for the European Transport Network project and repairs of Ukrainian roads, as well as to increase energy efficiency in higher educational establishments.

At the same time, the Committee unanimously approved a negative assessment of Draft Law No 2708 "On Labour" due to its inconsistency with Ukraine's obligations under the Association Agreement. Currently, the Committee head insists on amending a number of draft laws in order to bring them in line with EU legislation (on inland water transport, on the provision of construction products on the market, on improving the regulation of relations in ensuring safety for certain categories of road users, etc.).

The positions of parliamentary political parties mostly mirror their election programs:

- **Servant of the People (Sluha Narodu)** follows the declared course of adopting laws that are necessary for the implementation of the Association Agreement and expanding cooperation with the EU in other areas, however progress is not too fast. At the same time, laws contradicting the Agreement are endorsed;
- **Fatherland (Batkivshchyna)** supports the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in accordance with its program but has not been active in promoting the European integration agenda;
- **European Solidarity (Yevropeyska Solidarnist)** makes efforts aimed at European integration, but there is no systemic activity in accordance with its program to achieve the criteria necessary for applying for EU membership in 2023;
- **Voice (Golos)** supports the European integration movement in accordance with its program which clearly states that the course for EU membership is the foundation of foreign policy;
- **Opposition Platform-For Life (Opozytsiyna Platforma Za Zhyttya)** sticks to its program which does not pay attention to European integration, insisting that it is contrary to the national economic interests of Ukraine.

The Cabinet of Ministers

The program of Prime Minister O. Honcharuk's **Cabinet of Ministers**, approved on 4 October 2019, included a separate section "European and Euro-Atlantic Integration" which, for the first time in history, set the goal for "Ukraine to meet the criteria for EU membership" and corresponding performance indicators. The government headed by D. Shmyhal works without a parliament-approved program, therefore it is impossible to clearly define its criteria and objectives.

During the period under review, the **Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration** in the Cabinet of Ministers changed three times. Until August 2019, it was I. Klymush-Tsintsadze, who was replaced by D. Kuleba after the presidential election. Ex-Foreign Minister V. Prystaiko has been in charge of European integration since March 2020 and O. Stefanishyna took the office since June.

In November 2019, the Verkhovna Rada and the Cabinet of Ministers established a joint **parliament-government platform for European integration** to ensure regular dialogue between the parliament and government on Ukraine's integration into the EU, coordination of joint systemic and effective steps to adapt Ukrainian legislation to that of the EU. The platform provides for the development and adoption of laws regulating the implementation of the Agreement (with due regard for EU law), further sectoral integration of Ukraine into the EU energy and digital markets, stronger customs' cooperation, and deeper cooperation with the EU in the areas of justice, freedom and security.

The road map of the platform's activities contains a list of priority European integration bills for consideration by parliament. In spring 2020, the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration noted that joint work had led to the adoption of more than 30 fundamental European integration laws, taking further the reform process and ensuring results in many areas. In August, the head of the Parliamentary Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the EU called on the parliament leadership to flesh the platform out.

The government has opened public access to the **Pulse of the Agreement**, an online system for monitoring the implementation of the action plan on the Association Agreement, having thus made European integration the most transparent, measurable and accountable government policy in Ukraine. The promotion of European integration in the regions has been stepped up in order to facilitate access to information on new opportunities in cooperation with the EU, involve citizens in educational, scientific, cultural and business projects and EU programs as much as possible. In May 2020, the first, and so far the only, Office for European Integration was opened in Kherson, and there are plans to expand the geography of such offices to other regions by 2024.

As part of the European Green Deal, Ukraine and the EU have agreed to merge “environmental agendas”. A working group has been set up to work out proposals on how our state can become an integral part of the Deal.

The main achievements of the reporting period include the establishment of the High Anti-Corruption Court, the reset of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (access to all necessary registers), restored criminal liability for illicit enrichment, and the adoption of the Electoral Code. The institute of authorized economic operators was introduced, the law on joint transit mode and introduction of the national computerized transit system was adopted, the software for the start of the NCTS (New Computerised Transit System) in Ukraine was rolled out. There have been positive developments in the areas of financial services protection, higher education, intellectual property, public procurement, energy efficiency, agriculture, fisheries, business liberalization and trade in services.

At the same time, progress is unsatisfactory and needs to be accelerated in such areas as statistics and information exchange, public finances, and consumer protection.

Because of coronavirus restrictions on bilateral meetings, communication with EU officials was taken online, in particular the leaders of the Eastern Partnership and the EU held a video conference on 18 June 2020.

Recommendations

At this stage, the Verkhovna Rada and the Cabinet of Ministers need to focus on:

1. identifying by the end of 2020 the list of priorities for Ukraine’s integration into the EU internal market in the framework of the DCFTA implementation, given that the 5-year period from the date of provisional application, which envisages a comprehensive review of its objectives, is about to expire. The package of priorities should be formalized into a new Association Agenda which has not been updated since 2015;
2. accelerating the implementation of current integration priorities in digital economy, trade facilitation, customs cooperation, justice, internal affairs, and technical regulation.

An additional stimulus for achieving more tangible progress in European integration may be given by the introduction of an EU assessment of progress (according to its internal methodology) on practical adherence to common values in Ukraine. It is advisable to ask the European Commission to assess Ukraine’s anti-corruption efforts in the format of an EU Anti-Corruption Report, and the judiciary in accordance with the EU Justice Scoreboard, etc. and use the assessments in implementing relevant reforms in Ukraine which top the political agenda.

Previous expert recommendations also mostly remain relevant, in particular:

1. Register the readiness of the parliamentary majority to update the AA/DCFTA and its clear position on projects and initiatives for deeper sectoral integration into the EU;
2. Adopt a law on the principles of state policy on European integration to ensure a systemic approach to the formation of procedural and institutional framework for the implementation of the Agreement, optimize legislative support for European integration, create a special procedure for priority European integration legislative initiatives;
3. Focus efforts on deepening cooperation with members of the European Parliament, including in the course of cooperation of political parties, the work of the Euronest PA, the Association Parliamentary Committee, the network of Friends of Ukraine;
4. Build on the positive experience of holding meetings of the Association Parliamentary Committee between Ukraine and the EU in the regions of Ukraine in order to give European representatives a better picture of how reforms are being implemented in the regions;
5. Ensure that the agendas of friendship groups and inter-parliamentary relations with individual EU member states have plenty of European integration content;
6. Step up efforts in the Euronest PA in terms of joint initiatives of the three partner states that signed the AA with the EU, and in the Ukraine–Georgia–Moldova Tripartite Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in order to form a common agenda at the European level;
7. Hold inter-committee hearings (the Committee on Ukraine’s Integration into the EU and the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation) to improve coordination of Ukraine’s participation in the Eastern Partnership multilateral format, implementation of its 20 deliverables by 2020 and further development;
8. Maintain working contacts with the Ukrainian side of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform and the Ukrainian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, which periodically monitor the implementation of both Ukraine’s commitments under the Association Agreement and 20 deliverables of the Eastern Partnership.

EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

Different tendencies were observed on the Euro-Atlantic track in the first year of the parliament and government activities. On the one hand, we can mention strengthening cooperation with NATO, obtaining of the Enhanced Opportunities Partner status, and so on. On the other hand, there are also lack of institutional capacity of the Verkhovna Rada, lowering of the level of the political interest, and unresolved personnel issues.

2

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

The difficulty of assessing of the Verkhovna Rada's work on the Euro-Atlantic track has two reasons. First, there is no single coordinating committee in this area. Secondly, this area includes both external contacts and a significant amount of domestic legislation that ensures the reform of the security and defense sector, adaptation and approximation to the NATO standards.

Despite the topic priority, enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine and other documents at the strategic level, the Verkhovna Rada does not have a separate committee to oversee the Euro-Atlantic integration issues.

In fact, Ukraine and the NATO cooperation issues **are handled by three committees with no identified leader:**

- Subcommittee on Legislative Support of Implementation of the Strategic Course of the State for Full Membership in the EU and the NATO, enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine, in the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Foreign Policy and Interparliamentary Cooperation;
- Subcommittee on the Implementation of the NATO Values and Standards, International Military Cooperation and Peacekeeping of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on National Security, Defense, and Intelligence;
- Subcommittee on Cooperation with the NATO and the Interparliamentary Conference on the Common Security and Defense Policy of the European Union, the Eastern Partnership, and the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the European Union.

The Ukraine's parliamentary delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly consists of 8 MPs (and 8 substitutes) representing the following parties: Servant of the People" (4 persons), European Solidarity (1 person), Batkivshchyna (1 person), Voice (1 person), Opposition Platform – For Life (1 person). The MPs from the Servant of the People party, the Deputy Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Digital Transformation Yenhen Chernev became the Chairman of the Standing Delegation.

The members of the standing delegation represent the following Verkhovna Rada committees: on interparliamentary cooperation – 1 person, on Digital Transformation – 2 persons, on National Security, Defense, and Intelligence – 1 person, on Law Enforcement – 1 person, on the Ukraine's Integration with the EU – 1 person, on Economic Development – 1 person, on Youth and Sports – 1 person. Such a structure demonstrates complete inconsistency with Ukraine's priorities and main tasks to the NATO-Ukraine Annual National Program and cannot support synergies between the legislative and executive branches.

The Ukrainian part of the Ukraine–NATO Interparliamentary Council consists of 12 MPs and is headed by R. Stefanchuk, the First Deputy Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. The Council held a meeting on 28 January 2020 in Brussels to discuss the spring session of the NATO PA in Kyiv, and the granting Ukraine with status of an Enhanced Opportunities partner¹. In July, the Council met in a video conference format².

The Verkhovna Rada of the eighth convocation paid more political attention to the NATO issues, in contrast to the Verkhovna Rada of the ninth convocation. However, in 2019, in order to address the Euro–Atlantic integration issue and achieve the goal of joining the NATO, the Verkhovna Rada together with the Government created a platform for the parliamentary–governmental cooperation, the roadmap of which includes the development of some important bills specified in the Annual National Program (ANP), in particular, in the Laws “On National Security”, “On the Security Service of Ukraine”, “On Intelligence”, “On State Secrets”, “On Defense Procurement”³.

The adoption of the Law on Defense Procurement (as of 17 July 2020) became an important step on the European integration path. Besides, on 3 December 2019 the Resolution on the Statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine “On the priority steps to ensure Ukraine’s Euro–Atlantic integration — the acquisition of full membership of Ukraine in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization”⁴ was adopted.

While the European Solidarity party, both before and during the elections, clearly stated its commitment for full membership and stressed the need to increase the presence of the NATO warships in the Black Sea due to the Russia’s aggressive actions, the Servant of the People party within the year changed its position from maintaining a normal partnership policy and the possibility of holding a referendum on this issue to joining the Enhanced Opportunity Program.

Some MPs and the Verkhovna Rada’s leadership addressed the NATO issues during their meetings and visits to the NATO member states or meetings with the NATO officials. For example, on 10 December 2019, the Committee on National Security, Defense, and Intelligence met with the NATO’s Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Defense Investment Division Gordon B. Davis Jr.

¹ First Deputy Speaker of the Parliament Ruslan Stefanchuk assured of the invariability of the Ukrainian course for the NATO membership, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 28.01.2020, <https://portal.rada.gov.ua/news/Povidomlennya/187923.html>

² A meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Interparliamentary Council and the Verkhovna Rada took place, 9.07.2020, <https://portal.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/195957.html>

³ A briefing was held on the topic: “Euro-Atlantic integration in the dimension of interaction between the Parliament and the Government”, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 10.10.2019, <https://portal.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/182505.html>

⁴ The Resolution “On the Statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine” On the Priority Steps of Ensuring Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic Integration — Acquisition of Ukraine’s Full Membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization ” was adopted by the Verkhovna Rada, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 3.12.2019, <https://portal.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/185267.html>

On 31 October 2019, in the framework of the NATO North Atlantic Council’s visit to Ukraine, the NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg addressed the Verkhovna Rada for the first time, and had a meeting with the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada D. Rozumkov, during which the readiness to deepen the Ukraine–NATO relations was emphasized⁵.

The Permanent Delegation of the Verkhovna Rada to the NATO PA took part in the meeting of the 65th NATO Parliamentary Assembly in London (in October 2019).

At the same time, the spring session of the NATO PA, which was scheduled for May 22–25, 2020 in Kyiv, was postponed due to the pandemic. Instead, a video meeting between the President of the Assembly, A. Mesterhazy, and the Verkhovna Rada delegation to the NATO PA was held on May 25, the response to the pandemic and Russian aggression in Ukraine became its main issues.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

With the current structure of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the primary attention to the Euro–Atlantic integration of Ukraine is paid by the relevant Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro–Atlantic Integration (and his subordinate Government Office), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Defense.

At the same time, based on the tasks of the ANP, other ministries and agencies, in particular, those in the security and defense sector, are also responsible for carrying out certain tasks.

The action program of the government of O. Honcharuk (as of October 4, 2019) contained clear goals related to both military and political integration of Ukraine into the NATO. In particular, Objective 17.2. “Ukraine meets the principles and criteria necessary for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization”, which, in particular, contained such a proposal: “Annual national programs under the auspices of the NATO–Ukraine Commission are most closely approximate the content and form of the NATO Membership Action Plan and fully implemented”.

At the same time, **the action program of the government of D. Shmygal** (as of June 2020)⁶ sets a strategic course for the European and Euro–Atlantic integration and emphasizes that “the goal of joining the NATO is a stimulus for the domestic political and socio-economic reforms.”

⁵ Ukraine keeps its Euro-Atlantic aspirations unchanged, — Dmytro Razumkov, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 31.10.2019, <https://portal.rada.gov.ua/news/Top-novyna/183699.html>

⁶ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine “On approval of the Program of activities of the Cabinet of Ministers”, 12.06.2020, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/pro-zatverdzhennya-programi-diyalnosti-kabinetu-ministriv-t120620>

Among the long-term priorities of the government's activities they have the "Euro-Atlantic integration", which envisages fulfilling a range of tasks, from deepening cooperation in cybersecurity, building resilience, parliamentary diplomacy to joining the Enlargement Program and transition to the NATO standards, democratic civilian control, etc. The main tasks are assigned to the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration (long-term goals) and the Ministry of Defense, and are completely absent in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs scope.

Concerns about the possible **cancellation of Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration position**, which appeared in the summer of 2019, were a negative signal in terms of adequate understanding of the importance of the coordinating role of this post and the relevant Government Office functionality. The change of the three deputy prime-ministers responsible for this direction during the year (D. Kuleba, V. Prystaiko, O. Stefanishyna) had a negligible impact on the situation, as the continuity of the defined action plan and state policy course was ensured. At the same time, the vacant position of the Head of the Government Office for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration for the whole year has its negative consequences.

Another negative signal is the absence of the **Head of Mission to the NATO** since August 2019. Besides, some experts identify a decrease in the political attention to the NATO issues with the change of the Minister of Defense of Ukraine (from the team of A. Zagorodniuk to A. Taran). Also, the NATO-Ukraine Annual National Program was approved with a delay (on 26 May 2020).

Practical cooperation was mostly focused at the level of the MoD, the General Staff, and some branches of the army at the level of consultations, joint activities, work of foreign advisers in Ukraine, adaptation of relevant standards and procedures.

The visit of the NATO North Atlantic Council representatives headed by the Secretary General J. Stoltenberg to Odessa and Kyiv (on 30–31 October 2019) was an important event. The main emphasis was made on cooperation in the Black Sea region and strengthening of practical cooperation, in particular, on the reforms and sustainability building issues. The joint actions of Ukraine and the NATO in the framework of the SALIS (Strategic Air Transport) cooperation program during the pandemic became an important element of practical cooperation⁷.

Due to coronavirus restrictions, most of the **2020 events** took place either online or at the level of the Ukrainian Mission to the NATO in Brussels. In particular, on 8 September 2020, as part of the NATO-initiated discussion on strengthening the political dimension of the Alliance (NATO 2030 Reflection Process), the First Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine Emine Dzhaparova took

part in an online discussion with the High Level Expert Group⁸. The first Sustainability-2020 exercises, scheduled for October 2020, were postponed. At the same time, in July, the Deputy Prime Minister O. Stefanishyna⁹ paid her first post-coronavirus visit to Brussels.

Gaining the status of the NATO Enhanced Capabilities Program member on 12 June 2020 became the 2020 biggest achievement. On 1 September 2020, the Decree of the President of Ukraine № 370/2020 approved a new structure of the **Commission for Coordination of Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine**, headed by the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine O. Stefanishyna¹⁰. The Regulations on the Commission¹¹ were approved on 30 October 2019. The Hungary's blockade of the NATO-Ukraine Commission issue remains unresolved.

⁷ Ukrainian aircrafts help the world to fight the coronavirus, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 27.04.2020, <https://nato.mfa.gov.ua/news/ukrayinski-ilitaki-dopomagayut-svitu-borotis-z-koronavirusom>

⁸ Ukraine's and the NATO securities are indivisible. NATO membership is our goal: Emine Dzhaparova during an online discussion with the NATO Expert Group on the future of the Alliance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 8.09.2020. <https://nato.mfa.gov.ua/news/bezpeka-ukrayini-ta-na-to-nepodilni-nasha-meta-chlenstvo-v-nato-emine-dzhaparova-pid-chas-onlajn-diskusiyi-z-grupoyu-ekspertiv-nato-shchodo-majbutnogo-alyansu>

⁹ Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration pays her visit to the NATO headquarters, Ministry of Foreign Affairs 09.07.2020, <https://nato.mfa.gov.ua/news/vice-premyer-ministr-ukrayini-z-pitan-yevropejskoyi-ta-yevroatlantichnoyi-integraciyi-zdi-jsnila-vizit-do-shk-nato>

¹⁰ DECREE OF THE PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE № 370/2020 "The structure of the Commission for the Coordination of Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine", 1.09.2020, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/3702020-34921>

¹¹ DECREE OF THE PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE № 784/2019 "On the Issues of the Commission for Coordination of Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine", 30.10.2019, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/7842019-30117>

Recommendations

1. Regular parliamentary control should be ensured through the parliamentary and/or committee hearings, in particular, on the implementation of the annual national cooperation programs under the auspices of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and on other issues in the agenda of the cooperation between Ukraine and the NATO.
2. At the level of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine delegation to the NATO PA, the issue of expanding cooperation in the Black Sea region, in particular, in building resilience systems and countering hybrid threats, should be raised.
3. To activate the development of a Sustainability Concept for the NATO Partner countries (in particular, in the framework of the EOP).
4. To activate the establishment of a coordinating council of EOP member countries (Enhanced Opportunities Partners — Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, Sweden, Ukraine).
5. To strengthen the cyber component of the protection of the national sovereignty and security, joint operations to identifying, countering, sharing experiences, etc.
6. To analyze the possibilities of SALIS expanding, in particular, the possibility of developing a similar program outside the airspace.
7. To consider the feasibility of creating a system of logistics hubs and operation interoperability in the military forces' support system.
8. To intensify the discussions on the possibility of cooperation in developing a system of crisis response and management to non-military challenges — man-made and military disasters, pandemics, etc.

VOLODYMUR KOPCHAK

CONSOLIDATION OF INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR COUNTERING RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

Consolidation of international support for countering Russian aggression was a focus area for the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the ninth convocation. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has strengthened its own capabilities in this area through the sectors of defense industry and military-technical cooperation. Ukraine's success here directly depends on its readiness not to cross the "red lines" in favor of the Kremlin.

3

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Efforts to consolidate international support in the first year of the ninth convocation of the Verkhovna Rada were traditionally taken at various international platforms, by means of political statements, formal and informal international meetings of MPs, development of relevant bills aimed at strengthening Ukraine's security and defense sector and protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The “turbo mode” mastered by the Verkhovna Rada during the first weeks of its work benefited foreign policy since MPs **formed the specialized committees and permanent parliamentary delegations** to the PACE, OSCE, NATO; bilateral friendship groups (the USA, Canada, Japan, Lithuania, Estonia, etc.). This prevented a slack during the parliamentary transition period and laid the groundwork for further activities. It is important that the inter-factional association *Free Markiv* was established in the Verkhovna Rada to facilitate the release and return to Ukraine of Ukrainian National Guard member V. Markiv, who was unjustly sentenced to 24 years in an Italian prison.

At the same time, the global COVID-19 epidemic has de facto minimized and transformed the usual format of parliamentary diplomacy since March 2020. A significant part of international initiatives (thematic roundtables, etc.) have been cancelled, postponed or moved online.

MPs also established the **Interim Ad Hoc Commission of the Verkhovna Rada on the development and implementation of state policy** on restoring the territorial integrity and ensuring the sovereignty of Ukraine. The Commission ensures interaction between parliamentary committees which are key to consolidating international support, such as the ones on foreign policy and inter-parliamentary cooperation; national security, defense and intelligence; human rights, deoccupation and reintegration of temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk, Luhansk oblasts and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Sevastopol, national minorities and interethnic relations; humanitarian and information policy.

Some of the **official political statements made by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine** during the first year of work, which were enshrined in relevant resolutions, should be singled out:

- *Non-recognition of the legitimacy of the so-called local elections in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine — in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (11 September 2019)*: among other things, it addresses foreign states and international parliamentary organizations which have not condemned the illegal actions of the Russian Federation; calls for preserving and tightening sanctions pressure on the Kremlin with a view to restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders;

- *Priority steps to ensure Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration — Ukraine's full membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (3 December 2019)*: emphasis is made on Ukraine's key role in repelling Russian aggression in the transatlantic dimension and on supporting Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic preferences as a tool for strengthening international security;
- *On the illegal conduct of all-Russian voting on amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation in the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine — the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as the involvement of residents of the temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in voting on illegally issued passports (17 July 2020)*;
- *In connection with the criminal prosecution of Vitaliy Markiv, a senior sergeant of the National Guard of Ukraine, in the Italian Republic (17 January 2020)*: emphasis is made on the inadmissibility of anti-Ukrainian atmosphere at the trial, artificially created narratives that correlate with the traditional set of Russian propaganda as the Kremlin's hybrid influence tool actively used in the EU countries.

In this context, the statement on occupied Crimea and certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (ORDLO), prepared by the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, has a special place. The Verkhovna Rada called on parliaments of foreign states and parliamentary assemblies of international organizations to condemn the ongoing armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and the occupation of certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, political repressions against Ukrainian citizens, and to secure the release of political prisoners — citizens of Ukraine. The address was prepared back in February but due to quarantine restrictions was approved by the constitutional majority of the Verkhovna Rada only on 30 April 2020.

The Verkhovna Rada faced problems in relations with the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**. The refusal to participate in the autumn session of the PACE (30 September — 4 October 2019) seemed a difficult but logical decision on the part of Kyiv amid the “unconditional” return of Russia to the Assembly without complying with its resolutions which were adopted in response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The Ukrainian delegation's “*démarche to démarche*” was supported by a corresponding statement by the Verkhovna Rada in response to the PACE's outright disregard for its own principles and Ukraine's interests. However, the return of the updated Permanent Delegation of the Verkhovna Rada to the PACE to the 2020 winter session is also a justified decision.

Despite another unfriendly step towards Ukraine (the appointment of Russian representative P. Tolstoi as Vice-President), the Assembly adopted a tough resolution on Russia's aggression against Ukraine. First, the PACE recognized Russia as a party to the Minsk agreements.

Among other things, the resolution calls for an end to the illegal annexation of Crimea and the implementation of all resolutions adopted in response to the aggression against Ukraine; it calls on Russia to stop military intervention and support for illegal armed formations in eastern Ukraine; urges Russia to fully cooperate with Dutch prosecutors in bringing to justice those involved in the downing of MH17 Flight, etc.

The 10th meeting of the **EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee** (PAC) took place in Strasbourg on 18–19 December 2019. Its final statement and recommendations based on the results of the meeting contain a separate section *on the security situation, Crimea and energy security*, which, in particular, speaks of strong support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine; condemns Russia's acts of aggression against Ukraine, which has resulted in the temporary illegal occupation, as well as to the blocking of international shipping routes to the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. Special mention should be made of the recommendation to further cooperation between the EU and Ukraine in the field of strategic communication aimed at tackling disinformation campaigns effectively and at enhancing resilience.

Among other things, the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation was actively involved in preparing the 22–25 May regular spring session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Kyiv (which was postponed indefinitely due to quarantine restrictions). On 12 June 2020, the North Atlantic Council recognized Ukraine as NATO's **Enhanced Opportunities Partner**. Ukraine was able to join the partner program as a result of the fruitful work of the parliamentary delegation to the NATO PA, the relevant committees of the Verkhovna Rada, etc.

The adoption of the **Law of Ukraine on defense procurement** on 17 July 2020 is key to consolidating international support for countering Russian aggression. In particular, the law provides for the harmonization of Ukrainian legislation on defense procurement with European norms and accepted practices. The Committee on National Security, Defense and Intelligence also dealt with the issue of reforming the Ukrainian defense industry. The Draft Law on Peculiarities of Reforming State-Owned Defense and Industrial Enterprises (providing for the corporatization of Ukroboronprom), which was developed in active cooperation with European partners, has been registered.

Despite the fierce domestic political confrontation over the consolidation of international support for countering Russian aggression, **all parliamentary factions, except for Opposition Platform-For Life**, usually **acted in concert**. The latter de facto acts as an apologist and proxy for Russian interests in Ukraine. The March visit by a group of Opposition Platform-For Life MPs to Moscow and talks with representatives of the Russian State Duma, a blatant meeting between Volodymyr Medvedchuk and Vladimir Putin were a clear example of their destructive position that threatens the national security of the state.

It is necessary to mention an adverse effect of the lack of unity among MPs of the ruling Servant of the People party on negotiations with the Russian Federation. Last but not least, the principled position of a group of its faction MPs in communication with the President of Ukraine's Office prevented Ukraine from crossing a number of "red lines", in particular, on the possibility of resuming water supply to occupied Crimea, establishing an advisory council within the Trilateral Contact Group with participation of "ORDLO representatives", etc.

The consolidation of Ukraine's international support will directly depend on whether the Verkhovna Rada decides to amend the resolution scheduling the next local elections for 2020 (passed on 15 February 2020). The Kremlin has made an ultimatum that the line "*the cessation of the temporary occupation and armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine*" should be removed from the Resolution which lists it as a condition for holding elections on occupied territories. If it makes concessions to the aggressor, Ukraine will find it increasingly difficult to explain to foreign partners the need to further mount pressure on the Kremlin. Especially in a situation when a number of Western partners harbor hope to normalize relations with Russia, while Moscow's key goal is to shed the status of a party to the conflict (de facto the aggressor role).

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

At the level of central executive bodies, this area was quite effectively taken care of by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation and coordination with the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration.

The change of government in March 2020 did not affect relevant efforts. According to experts, O. Stefanishyna's appointment as Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration in June can only strengthen Ukraine's foreign policy front on countering Russian aggression.

It was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that positively stood out by its clearly articulated principled positions, sometimes compensating for the ambiguous statements by the Office of the President of Ukraine, which initiated the discourse on the deoccupation of Crimea and part of Donbas.

On 12 March 2020, the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, headed by O. Reznikov, was separated from the Ministry for Veterans' Affairs, Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons. His appointment as Vice Prime Minister (as well as his inclusion in the National Security and Defense Council) strengthens Kyiv's international position. Indeed, since September 2018, O. Reznikov has been the key and most professional political negotiator from Ukraine in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) on a peaceful settlement of the situation in eastern Ukraine.

On 10 June 2020, Emine Dzhaparova was appointed First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. Institutional strengthening of the Crimean Tatar sector also shores up Ukraine's position on preventing the issue of Crimea's deoccupation from leaving the international agenda and contributes to the consolidation of Ukraine's international support.

The key step towards systematic expansion of opportunities for international support to counter Russian aggression was the establishment of the Ministry for Strategic Industries of Ukraine on 22 July 2020. As soon as in August, the Ukrainian delegation headed by Vice Prime Minister O. Uruskyy paid an official visit to the Republic of Turkey. During the visit, the delegation met President of Turkey R.T. Erdogan, the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Industry and Technology, the Chairman of the Presidency of Defence Industries of Turkey (SSB). The delegation visited the production facilities of leading Turkish aerospace, rocket, electronic and shipbuilding companies. Negotiations at Baykar, Ukraine's key partner in the field of unmanned aerial vehicles, deserve a separate mention. Among other things, the parties discussed prospects for a joint project to create a strike drone system (with Ukrainian turbojet engines) in addition to the ongoing deliveries of Bayraktar TB2 strike drones to Ukraine and equipment of Turkish strike drones Akinci with Ukrainian AI-450 engines. Thus, as far as military-technical cooperation is concerned, in addition to increasing the combat and military-technological potential of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the defense industry, a natural military-political lobby is being formed in a key country for Kyiv in ensuring security in the Black Sea region, deoccupation of Crimea, etc.

In this area, it is also worth mentioning the working meetings and talks held in Kyiv by the Vice Prime Minister on Strategic Industries of Ukraine with the Ambassadors of Great Britain, France, Israel, the delegation of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Iraq (headed by the Minister of Defense); a series of working meetings at the Committee on National Security, Defense and Intelligence, etc.

In terms of consolidating international support, the Cabinet of Ministers focused on humanitarian and infrastructure projects in eastern Ukraine, including:

- continued cooperation with Japan in addressing humanitarian needs, supporting vulnerable population groups, restoring the eastern regions of Ukraine and providing emergency assistance to servicemen by the Ukrainian health care system (USD 4.2 mln);
- cooperation with France on the modernization of the water supply system in Mariupol (soft loan of EUR 64 mln), etc.

Recommendations

1. **Emphasis on adherence to the principle of “nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine” remains critical to parliamentary diplomacy, as does expanding the geography of new potential partners in countering Russian aggression, i.e. going outside the triangle of the USA/Germany-France. It is important to abandon the practice of “preaching to the converted” in explanatory work abroad whereas the emphasis should be made on countries seen as traditional allies or partners of the Russian Federation, as well as on neutral countries.**
2. **Maintaining/mounting the pressure of Western sanctions on Russia is directly dependent on Ukraine's readiness not to cross the “red lines” in favour of the Kremlin. It is important to minimize the destructive influences of the parliamentary faction of Opposition Platform-For Life, as well as individual MPs (MP groups) of other factions, who directly or indirectly act in the interests of the aggressor country, on the processes of peaceful settlement. At the same time, communication between the relevant committees of the Verkhovna Rada, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Office of the President of Ukraine should be improved and stepped up in order to avoid monopolization by one of the institutions.**
3. **Ukraine is very close to rolling out a plan for the deoccupation of territories that is alternative to the Minsk agreements. The advisory and explanatory role of the relevant parliamentary committees of the Verkhovna Rada in preparing Plan B and the formats of its implementation should become decisive. It is especially important to bring home to foreign partners the destructive role of the Kremlin and its responsibility for the failure of the Minsk agreements (if the Minsk is to be dropped).**
4. **Post-Soviet countries, such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan and other countries in Central Asia, which are in the geopolitical orbit of the Kremlin, should become a separate area of work of the relevant parliamentary committees and friendship groups. These countries have been observed to get actively engaged in reviewing the challenges and risks to national security, analysing a wide range of hybrid threats. There is a natural demand to study the Ukrainian experience in counteracting the hybrid aggression of the Russian Federation. Work in this area should be conducted through public and closed expert forums with the active involvement of the non-governmental expert community.**
5. **As for the Vice Prime Minister for Strategic Industries and the relevant Ministry, as well as the Verkhovna Rada Committee on National Security, Defense and Intelligence, it is reasonable to accelerate the corporatization of Ukroboronprom in accordance with existing arrangements with European partners. The change of the concern's management should not affect (or cancel) the launched defense reform.**

RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Bilateral relations between Ukraine and the United States are strategically important for our country in the context of international cooperation and the continuation of the reform process in Ukraine, as well as for increasing the country's defense capabilities, strengthening the operational capacity of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and Ukraine's economy development. Despite its strategic importance and, at the same time, some crisis moments that happened over the past year, the US direction got insufficient attention at the level of the Verkhovna Rada and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

4

The bilateral relations' information narrative of this period, which was the framework for the Ukrainian-American relations, was the impeachment of the incumbent President of the United States as a result of the so-called "telephone scandal"¹². For a long time, it was this narrative that shaped the information perception of Ukraine by the American establishment. At the moment, we can state that in general this narrative became obsolete and does not have further effect on the relations of Ukraine and the United States, though the work on its replacement and creation of a new information space for these relations must continue.

Intensification and expansion of military cooperation, including the provision of lethal weapons, should be considered an important component of bilateral relations between Ukraine and the United States during this period. The lack of initiative and political will to create and promote one's own agenda in cooperation with the American partners is compensated by dealing with counter-proposals from the US representatives. Besides, the lack of adequate information response to emerging misunderstandings became a significant problem.

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

The US direction is assigned to the following committees and groups in the Verkhovna Rada of the ninth convocation:

- Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation (13 MPs);
- Committee on National Security, Defense and Intelligence (9 MPs);
- Parliamentary Group on Inter-Parliamentary Relations with the United States (170 MPs, chaired by D. Arahamia, a representative of the Servant of the People party).

The open sources review shows the extremely low activity of these committees and the group of inter-parliamentary relations in the US direction, which was limited to isolated cases of cooperation¹³.

Despite a significant layer of work that could be worked out over a period of time, especially in the context of the Ukraine's negative information narrative about the impeachment of the US President and related investigations, the reaction was often passive. At the same time, it is at the level of relations with the US inter-parliamentary relations groups in the House of Representatives and the Senate, that work with informal associations of the American experts and officials, would make it possible to minimize political losses from this crisis.

¹² <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/trump-impeachment-inquiry/whistleblower-allegation-server-misuse-raises-alarm-bells-n1059381>

¹³ <https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/184039.html?search=%D0%A1%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%96%20%D0%A8%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%20%D0%90%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8>

Most of the provisions of the political parties' election programs regarding the United States was not implemented in practice. In general, they paid little attention to the bilateral relations development, and emphasis was placed on the multilateral formats.

Thus, the election program of the Servant of the People¹⁴ party states as one of its goals — “launching a program of a *“commercial diplomacy” to promote the Ukrainian goods on the global markets*” — which is relatively connected to Ukraine's activities in the relations with the U.S. The programs of the European Solidarity¹⁵ party as well as Voice¹⁶ party program also do not refer to the development of the bilateral relations, but much emphasis is placed on the need to continue close cooperation with NATO, which in part of the Ukrainian context implies close cooperation with the United States. The Opposition Platform — For Life program¹⁷, in general, represents a counter-Western narrative of the foreign policy, so there is no mention or hint on cooperation with the United States. Against this background, the program of the Batkivshchyna¹⁸ party, which mentions the involvement of the United States and Great Britain in the “Budapest+ negotiations”, should be singled out. It is obvious that such a project has not been implemented yet.

In the absence of an official report from the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, from open sources, it is possible to make the following analysis of activities in the US direction. The issue of direct cooperation with the United States, according to the agenda of the Committee meetings, was directly raised only once — during the meeting on October 9, 2019 (the issue of the Law on Ratification of the Agreement between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of the United States of America)“On tax claims to foreign accounts”).

The meeting of the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada D. Razumkov with the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs Philip T. Reeker¹⁹ addressed the bilateral cooperation key issues and, in general, was an example of a proper approach to interagency cooperation.

Given that a number of key issues for Ukraine, such as military and technical assistance, adequate funding²⁰, support for the anti-Russian sanctions regime, and international condemnation of aggressive and illegal actions of the Russian Federation, are being addressed through the US Congress line, the inter-parliamentary relations can give the corresponding positive results.

¹⁴ <https://sluga-narodu.com/program>

¹⁵ <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2019/showdoc2pf7171=335pid409=27.doc>

¹⁶ <https://goloszmin.org/program/europe>

¹⁷ <https://zagittya.com.ua/ua/page/programma.html>

¹⁸ <https://ba.org.ua/programm/>

¹⁹ <https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Top-novyna/185370.html>

²⁰ <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/s4049>

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

The Government of Ukraine Action Plan, approved on 4 October 2019, can be indirectly correlated with the sphere of the bilateral cooperation with the United States in the following sections:

- Activities of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine: Objective 15.2 and Objective 17.2, which relate to the reforms and transformations, are required for NATO membership.
- Activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine: Objectives 16.1–16.3 (in fact, all the tasks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can be considered in the American context).

Accordingly, Objectives 15.2 and 17.2 are a part of a larger narrative of the security cooperation between Ukraine and the United States.

In this case, some progress was reached through the enhanced security cooperation (in particular, through a great number of joint exercises and Ukraine's accession to the NATO's Enhanced Capabilities Program). At the same time, this direction is only fleetingly US-connected, and the real bilateral cooperation in the security area was an initiative of the American side.

The declared tasks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rather form a general narrative for the partner countries relations' development (as an example, the effectiveness of Objective 16.4: “Increasing exports and investment inflows”), so it is difficult to distinguish a truly US vector of work at large.

In a certain period, an important step of the executive branch was the prompt appointment of a new ambassador of Ukraine to the United States, which took place during a rather turbulent period of the bilateral relations, as well as the selection of a candidate.

The Government of Ukraine Action Plan, presented on 12 June 2020 contains a more clear definition of the American issues. In particular, it can be found in the following paragraphs:

- Activities of the Ministry of Finance: Objective 6.2. Efficient tax system, which is rather a narrow task related to a bilateral agreement to improve compliance with the tax rules²¹;
- Activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Objective 17.1. Countering the Russian Federation aggression by political and diplomatic means and Objective 17.2. Deepening of cooperation with key international partners, including the EU and the US.

²¹ https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/840_005-17#Text

The clear definition of de facto priorities in the cooperation with the United States, as well as the revival of contacts at the level of the Cabinet of Ministers with the American partners both at the embassy level²² and at the level of interagency cooperation²³ were positive steps in relations. Such contacts should serve as a basis for further expansion of the potential areas for cooperation, but the conditions of the existing restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the US presidential election should be taken into account.

Recommendations

Given the above mentioned, we recommend to focus future activities on the following issues:

1. Cooperation of the Verkhovna Rada with the Congress to strengthen bipartisan support for the Ukrainian positions through the widest possible cooperation, including single-point cooperation, with the representatives of the inter-parliamentary relations groups in the Senate and the House of Representatives;
2. Support and encourage (at the formal and informal levels) for the new US lawmakers initiatives to quiet the aggressive policies of the Russian Federation.
3. To reflect in the Verkhovna Rada deputies' communications with their foreign colleagues their readiness for a constructive dialogue during the election campaign and with the newly elected administration, to reflect the falsity of any accusations in the alleged interference of Ukraine in the elections;
4. Apply the human resources potential of the inter-parliamentary cooperation group of the Verkhovna Rada to intensify dialogue in all the areas and, at the same time, to work out a mechanism for its more effective use to avoid tasks and functions duplication and, accordingly, share responsibilities. To strengthen work with informal associations of legislators, diplomats, and experts (for example, Friends of Ukraine Network²⁴).

²² <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/premyer-ministr-denis-shmigal-proviv-zustrich-z-predstavnikami-posolstva-ssha-ta-usaid>

²³ <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/denis-shmigal-zustrivsvya-iz-zastupnikom-derzhsekretarya-ssha-stivenom-bigenom>

²⁴ <https://usukraine.org/friends-ukraine-network/>

SERGIY GERASYMCHUK

NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY

Whereas the program of O. Honcharuk's government only indirectly mentioned cooperation with neighboring countries, the government of D. Shmyhal demonstrated greater interest in this area. Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine D. Kuleba has largely focused on working with neighboring countries in problematic spheres. The Verkhovna Rada of the ninth convocation also paid attention to relations with neighboring countries and their regional associations. However, the pandemic has significantly limited the development of proper bilateral and multilateral interparliamentary contacts.

5

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

It is the **Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation**²⁵ which mostly oversees neighborhood relations and policy (as well as foreign policy in general) in the Verkhovna Rada of the ninth convocation. However, the Committee does not have subdivisions/subcommittees which would directly address relations with neighboring states. However, this is compensated by additional tracks – tools of parliamentary assemblies and inter-parliamentary cooperation groups. In cases of emergencies in neighboring states, MPs express their position by issuing statements supported by resolutions, expressing the position of the Verkhovna Rada as a whole.

In the regional dimension, effective tools for inter-parliamentary cooperation with neighboring states include:

- **the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly**²⁶. The 12th session of the Parliamentary Assembly was held in November 2019. At a meeting of the Committee on Trade and Economic Affairs, MPs from Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova discussed²⁷ prospects for and opportunities of a GUAM free trade area, the development of a transport corridor and ways to improve logistics between GUAM member states, customs cooperation, prospects for energy cooperation, including the possibility of alternative supplies of hydrocarbons via the territory of GUAM member states. On 24 July 2020, the Bureau of the GUAM Parliamentary Assembly held a meeting with participation of the heads of delegations to the GUAM PA and Secretariat, who discussed²⁸ the escalation of hostilities in member states, the coronavirus pandemic, and issues of deeper cooperation. It is noteworthy that the activity at the parliamentary level was also accompanied by more intensive intergovernmental contacts;
- **the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Parliament of Georgia, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine**²⁹. Its activity peaked in 2018, but the Assembly did not hold any meetings during the ninth convocation of the Ukrainian parliament;
- **the Parliamentary Assembly of Ukraine and the Republic of Poland**³⁰. The last meeting of the Assembly was held in March 2019. Representatives of the Ukrainian parliament of the ninth convocation were to take part in the meeting on 23–25 March 2020 but it was postponed³¹;

- **the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, and the Seim and the Senate of the Republic of Poland**³². The last meeting of the Assembly took place in Kyiv in June 2019³³ before the Ukrainian parliament of the current convocation took to work. No meetings have taken place since then;
- **the Inter-Parliamentary Commission on Cooperation between the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus**³⁴ exists only on paper.

Deputy groups for inter-parliamentary relations³⁵ are a separate instrument of cooperation between the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the parliaments of neighboring states.

- The group for inter-parliamentary relations **with Poland**, including 107 members, is the largest among similar neighborhood groups. It is co-chaired by M. Kniazhytskyi (European Solidarity faction member, previously a media manager) and A. Kovalov (Servant of the People faction member, previously Glavred-Media Holding director-general).
- The group for inter-parliamentary relations **with Hungary** consists of 46 members. It is co-chaired by V. Lunchenko (Servant of the People faction member, who headed the Zakarpattia Oblast State Administration from March to September 2014) and N. Shufrych (Opposition Platform-For Life faction member, an MP of several convocations).
- The group for inter-parliamentary relations **with Romania** has 36 members. It is co-chaired by S. Babak (Servant of the People faction member, previously a deputy director of the state scientific institution Centre for Problems of Marine Geology, Geoecology and Sedimentary Ore Formation of the National Academy Sciences of Ukraine) and L. Buimister (Servant of the People faction member, previously a member of the Hungary-based Dunaferri Metallurgical Plant supervisory board).
- The group for inter-parliamentary relations **with Slovakia** consists of 14 members. It is headed by A. Kostyukh (Servant of the People faction member, previously a communications expert at the Security Police Directorate in Zakarpattia Oblast).
- The group for inter-parliamentary relations **with Bulgaria** consists of 12 MPs. It is co-chaired by O. Kopylenko (Servant of the People faction member, until 2019 the director of the Legislation Institute of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine) and T. Plachkova (Opposition Platform-For Life faction member, a lawyer, a native of Bolgrad District of Odesa Oblast).
- The group for inter-parliamentary relations **with Moldova**, which includes 11 MPs, is the smallest of such groups. It is headed by M. Radutskyi (Servant of the People faction member, previously the president of the Boris clinic in Kyiv).
- In some cases, the group was not established at all as was the case with the group for inter-parliamentary relations with the Republic of Belarus³⁶.

25 http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/site2/p_komity%253Fpidid%253D3010

26 http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/mpz2/organizations.perm_delegation%253Fdelegation%253D427

27 <http://www.golos.com.ua/article/324544>

28 <https://guam-organization.org/vneochednoe-zasedanie-bjuro-parlamentskoj-assamblei-guam/>

29 http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/mpz2/organizations.asamblea_members%253Fasamblea%253D930

30 http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/mpz2/organizations.asamblea_members%253Fasamblea%253D259

31 <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/2894239-zasidanna-parlamentskoi-asamblei-ukraini-i-polsi-perenesli.html>

32 http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/mpz2/organizations.asamblea_members%253Fasamblea%253D574

33 <http://www.golos.com.ua/article/318099>

34 http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/mpz2/organizations.inter_commission_members%253Finter_commission%253D573

35 http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/mpz2/organizations.dep_groups

36 http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/mpz2/organizations.dep_group_members%253Fgrp%253D12

Thus, most groups for inter-parliamentary relations with neighboring states are headed by representatives of the Servant of the People faction (except for the Polish one which is co-chaired by a representative of European Solidarity. The groups of friendship with Hungary and Bulgaria are co-chaired by representatives of Opposition Platform–For Life. This situation reflects not only the party composition of parliament but also the declared election campaign priorities.

In particular, we can note the consistent policy of the **Servant of the People** party as its election program mentioned support for the plans of President of Ukraine V. Zelensky to reset relations with country's closest neighbors in the west, and it is representatives of this political force who head the majority of groups for inter-parliamentary cooperation with neighboring states. It is also worth mentioning **European Solidarity**, which singled out relations with Poland during its election campaign. A representative of this political force is a co-chair of the corresponding group.

However, there is a lack of MPs with international experience among the group leaders. This is typical of the current composition of the Verkhovna Rada as a whole. The geographic principle of electing the heads of groups from the regions bordering on the states of friendship groups has been preserved. Such an approach is not always justified because it does not guarantee an MP's insight into the specifics of Ukraine's relations with neighbouring countries. For example, in the Verkhovna Rada of the previous convocation, MPs from the border regions in inter-parliamentary cooperation groups were often **guided by their own business interests rather than interests of Ukraine**³⁷.

What is more, the effectiveness of both inter-parliamentary structures and friendship groups is significantly limited by the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing restrictions.

On 15 September 2020, the Verkhovna Rada adopted perhaps its boldest statement in relation to neighboring states in response to the situation after the presidential election in the neighboring state. The statement³⁸ reads that the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine does not consider the presidential election in Belarus to be either free or fair. The election took place in the complete absence of real competition between candidates, free media, and authoritative observers from international organizations such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe. All this gives the Verkhovna Rada the reason to believe that the officially announced results of the election of the President of the Republic of Belarus do not reflect the real will of Belarusian citizens. The Verkhovna Rada also condemned the use of excessive force and brutality by Belarusian law-enforcement agencies. On the eve of this, representatives of the European Solidarity, Voice, Servant of the People and Batkivshchyna factions spoke³⁹ in support of the freedom of choice of the Belarusian people.

³⁷ <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2019/08/8/7099406/>

³⁸ <https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/197495.html>

³⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/BobrovskaMP/posts/178172993785818>

It is noteworthy that the position of Opposition Platform–For Life was consistent in this context. During the election campaign, representatives of this political force singled out Belarus among other neighboring countries and showed support for President of Belarus A. Lukashenko. Despite the recent events in Belarus and contrary to the statements of all other parliamentary factions, this commitment on the part of Opposition Platform–For Life has remained unchanged.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

In their activities with regard to neighboring states, D. Shmyhal's government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were guided by the goals set in the **Cabinet of Ministers' Action Program** (there were no⁴⁰ direct mentions of neighbors in O. Honcharuk's Government Program). In particular, the need to resolve problematic issues in bilateral relations between Ukraine and the neighboring EU member states on the basis of national interests and generally accepted principles and norms of international law.

The **GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (ODED)** has enjoyed higher attention in the framework of relations with neighboring countries. In December 2019, the Prime Minister of Ukraine O. Honcharuk participated in a joint event of the heads of government of the member states. The participants in the meeting declared⁴¹ the need to create tools for the functioning of a free trade area, implement the concept of the GUAM transport corridor, and step up free trade between our countries through mutual liberalization of the services market. Work on this is ongoing.

In 2020, bilateral contacts with neighboring countries intensified with the direct participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ukraine and **Hungary** stepped up contacts. In June, the two countries' ministers of foreign affairs exchanged visits, and the work of the Joint Ukrainian–Hungarian Intergovernmental Economic Commission was unblocked⁴². However, the tensions⁴³ between the states persist and a meeting between the leaders of the states, Prime Minister V. Orban and President V. Zelensky, has been postponed.

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine D. Kuleba's visit to **Poland** in July 2020 proved to be fruitful. The creation of the Lublin Triangle, as an international interaction format, was announced⁴⁴ at the meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania

⁴⁰ <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/471-2020-%2525D0%2525BF%2523Text#Text>

⁴¹ <http://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/stvorennya-zoni-vilnoyi-torgivli-guam-ye-nashim-bezumovnim-prioritetom-oleksij-goncharuk>

⁴² <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/dmitro-kuleba-i-peter-sijarto-vpershe-za-majzhe-sim-rokiv-proveli-u-kiyevi-zasidannya-ukrayinsko-ugorskoyi-ekonomichnoyi-komisiji>

⁴³ https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&prev=_t&sl=uk&tl=en&u=https://zn.ua/ukr/POLITICS/komisija-ukrajina-nato-u-mzs-uhorshchini-zvinuvatili-v-porushenni-domovlenosti.html

⁴⁴ <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/kuleba-chaputovich-i-linkyavichyus-zapochatkuvali-lyublinskij-trikutnik-novij-format-ukrayini-polshchi-ta-litvi>

during this visit. This format is a logical continuation of cooperation within the framework of the Poland–Lithuania–Ukraine Parliamentary Assembly, as well as the joint military unit, the Lithuanian–Polish–Ukrainian Brigade.

An agreement was reached with **Slovakia** in August to resume the operation of Uzhhorod Airport. A draft bilateral agreement on regular flights is being prepared. The documents are scheduled⁴⁵ to be signed during the visit of President V. Zelensky to Bratislava this autumn.

Also in August, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine held talks with his counterpart from the **Republic of Moldova**. During the meeting in Kyiv, the parties discussed⁴⁶ cooperation in security, European integration, regional and international cooperation.

D. Kuleba's visit to **Romania** in September resulted in the reviving of dialogue⁴⁷ on economic cooperation, increase in trade and investment, the resumption of the Joint Ukrainian–Romanian Intergovernmental Commission for Economic Cooperation, and the establishment of the Ukrainian–Romanian working group on energy. The parties paid special attention to the protection of ethnic minorities' rights.

Also in September, D. Kuleba held talks with the Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the **Republic of Bulgaria** E. Zakhariyeva, who was on a visit to Ukraine. The parties discussed⁴⁸ the development of economic cooperation, business contacts, trade and investment between Ukraine and Bulgaria; agreed to hold a Ukrainian–Bulgarian business forum and a meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation.

In the meantime, relations with **Belarus** have deteriorated significantly. According to D. Kuleba⁴⁹, *“all contacts with the Belarusian side have been put on hold” and will resume “only when [...] these contacts will not carry any reputational, political or moral losses for Ukraine”*. This situation has been caused by a number of events that took place amid the presidential election in Belarus and the corresponding protests (Minsk's extradition of Wagner PMC members to Russia, groundless accusations against Ukraine of taking hostile steps against Belarus, and distrust expressed by Belarusian society in the presidential election results). Mr. Kuleba also called⁵⁰ on the UN Human Rights Council to monitor the situation in Belarus and warned Russia against further destabilizing the region.

Recommendations

In general, the **Ukrainian authorities appear to have listened to recommendations made last year** on strengthening partnerships with Warsaw and Bucharest, improving relations with Budapest, developing cooperation with Bratislava and taking precautions in relations with Minsk.

1. At the same time, the need to hold parliamentary hearings on the development of Ukrainian neighbourhood policy, which would include special reports on departmental strategic assessments of relations with neighbouring countries and proposals for their further development from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, the Ministry of Regional Development, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Defence, the External Intelligence Service, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Security Service of Ukraine. They should be used to develop recommendations for forming a strategy for Ukraine's modern neighbourhood policy.
2. Also, as soon as the epidemiological situation allows, in order to strengthen the work of the Ukraine–Poland–Lithuania and Ukraine–Georgia–Moldova inter-parliamentary assemblies, Kyiv should initiate meetings of the above-mentioned inter-parliamentary assemblies in an extended composition, which would involve representatives of Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Great Britain, the USA and Canada.

⁴⁵ https://lb.ua/news/2020/07/15/461929_ukraina_i_slovachchina_voseni.html

⁴⁶ <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3075403-bezpeka-ta-evrointegracia-kuleba-rozpocav-peremovini-z-glavou-mzs-moldovi.html>

⁴⁷ https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&prev=_t&sl=uk&tl=en&u=https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/dmitro-kuleba-ukrayina-ta-rumuniya-stvo-ryuyut-robochu-grupu-z-energetiki-zadlya-vtilennya-ambitnih-proektiv

⁴⁸ <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/dmitro-kuleba-ta-yekaterina-zahariyeva-domovilisya-pro-nizku-zahodiv-dlya-rozvitku-torgivli-ta-investicij-mizh-krayinami>

⁴⁹ <https://www.dw.com/uk/kuleba-ukraina-zamorozyla-vsi-kontakty-z-bilorussiu/a-54724616>

⁵⁰ <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/dmitro-kuleba-zaklikav-radu-oon-z-prav-lyudini-do-monitoringu-situaciyi-u-bilorusi-ta-zasterig-rosiyu-vid-podalshoyi-destabilizaciyi-regionu>

ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

In its first year, the new government showed no breakthroughs neither in promoting Ukrainian exports nor in attracting investment. The new parliament focused its lawmaking on the previously established European integration track, but the government initiatives did not reflect a strategic vision for the development of relations with the key regions within Ukraine's economic interest. Major changes included institutional strengthening and economic diplomacy reset at the MFA, support to Ukrainian companies in the distribution of their commercial proposals and contacts with potential partners, and intensification of government communication on trade and investment issues.



The Verkhovna Rada

The 9th Verkhovna Rada (VRU) has four committees particularly in charge of economic diplomacy: Foreign Policy and Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (Subcommittee for International Economic Relations and Effective Use of International Aid); Economic Development Committee (Subcommittee for Government and Business Interaction and Investment); Ukraine EU Integration Committee (Subcommittee for Economic, Sectoral Cooperation and DCFTA); Finance, Tax and Customs Policy Committee (Subcommittees for Customs; Tariff and Non-Tariff Regulation; and for Legal Support for Customs Agencies). Most of their members are first-time MPs with no experience in politics. Though subcommittees demonstrate a good level of professionalism as most of their members have university degrees and extensive professional expertise.

37 out of 69 **VRU groups for parliamentary ties** with other countries cover the markets that Ukraine's Export Strategy is focused on. While VRU groups for parliamentary ties with other countries have been barely active, trade, economic and investment cooperation has been among the priorities in their meetings with representatives of Malaysia and Indonesia.

Apart from that, the 9th VRU has established a **special Temporary commission for investor protection**.

Nearly 3% or 67 of the draft laws registered in the 9th VRU were on economic diplomacy. Out of these, the VRU passed 24, the President signed 23, and 13 were rejected. This brings the productivity of the VRU in this area to 55%.

Ukrainian delegations to the Parliamentary Assemblies of various international organizations contributed to economic diplomacy. On November 8, 2019, the VRU delegation discussed infrastructure development options for a more competitive business in Central and Eastern Europe at the Central European Initiative Parliamentary Assembly of the Central European Initiative. The security dimension of economic diplomacy dominated at the Ukraine-Poland Parliamentary Assembly meeting. However, Ukrainian MPs left the Trio 2030 investment opportunities that were mentioned at the 8th session of the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly unattended.

Trade and investment prospects were looked at as part of the VRU Speaker's visit to Lithuania.

MPs **sponsored a number of bills** that strengthen Ukraine's economic standing in the world, including on applying the EU practices in customs procedures, harmonizing Ukraine's customs legislation on intellectual property protection with the EU standards and practices; harmonizing Ukraine's standardization system with the EU model; and establishing transparent rules and simplified conditions for doing business. Importantly, most accomplishments are specifically on the eurointegration track.

But these accomplishments were not enough to keep up with the pace of implementation of the Ukraine–EU Association Agreement, especially on the DCFTA. While the Parliament and Government set up a joint platform for efficient coordination and support of a constructive dialog, Ukraine was late on more than half of its customs commitments. The VRU made zero progress on financial cooperation and countering fraud. A quarter of commitments on technical barriers in trade are in the risk zone. The 10th meeting of the Ukraine–EU Parliamentary Association Committee discussed opportunities for speeding up the conclusion of the Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Goods (ACAA) and the Open Skies Agreement, but no practical steps followed.

The VRU did not manage to walk away from the legislature that runs against eurointegration. It passed bill No3739 on Amending the Law on Public Procurements in the first reading, which contradicts Ukraine’s international commitments, including on non-discrimination in public procurements under the Association Agreement with the EU.

Party positions

Servant of the People pledge to launch a program of commercial diplomacy to promote Ukraine-made goods in global markets resulted in legislative initiatives that would help improve the image of some made-in-Ukraine goods and services in the mid-term prospect. It includes requirements on harmonizing quality standards for construction materials with those of the EU, modernizing the textile industry, government support for the companies working in deep wood processing, and incentivizing the development of IT. On international economy, Sluha Narody MPs leaned towards industrial protectionism.

The pro-Russian stance of the **Opposition Platform–For Life** resulted in numerous statements, including internationally in Davos and at the French Senate, about doubts on further harmonization of Ukraine’s legislation with the EU’s *acquis communautaire*. From its perspective, the DCFTA section of the Association Agreement is “enslaving” for Ukraine and should be revised. The party sees the current policy of relations with international financial organizations, primarily the International Monetary Fund, as a threat to Ukraine’s economic security and sovereignty. Its intentions to protect Ukraine’s economic and investment interests were limited to an alternative bill on state support of investment projects with an accent on incentives for Ukrainian investors.

In its many statements, **Batkivshchyna Patry** (Fatherland) called for a profound change of Ukraine’s international policy based on economic nationalism. It defined the terms of Ukraine’s Memorandum with the IMF as incompatible with Ukraine’s economic independence. This position looked inconsistent when compared to its election pledges to work to “open all

doors for... lending to the Ukrainian business on European terms”. Batkivshchyna’s legislative work reflected a focus on improving Ukraine’s investment climate under the eurointegration framework. Batkivshchyna MPs initiated draft laws to support traditional production industries, including dairy and grape production, although their election platform spoke about innovative economic projects and the development of aircraft and spaceship construction and tourism to strengthen Ukraine’s presence in the international economy.

The leaders of **European Solidarity** continued to support a profound update of the Association Agreement, blaming the monomajority for producing draft laws that violate or fail to take into account AA provisions. The ES’s election idea was to complete the reform of the customs service as outlined in the Association Agreement, but most of its MPs in parliament abstained in the vote on draft laws in this sphere sponsored by MPs from another faction. The ES viewed the IMF and EU programs as incentives for structural reforms and as deterrents against mistakes by the government. ES MPs were among the most proactive politicians pushing for Ukraine’s economic interests abroad.

Despite its election pledge to develop and diversify Ukrainian exports to make the country less dependent on Russia, **Golos** (Voice) did not have this among its priorities in the VRU. As promised, its MPs supported draft laws that simplified trade and strengthened cooperation with the customs services of the neighbor EU member-states. Its MPs were supportive of continued cooperation with the IMF but pointed to the futility of financial assistance without consistent and effective work of the Government’s economic bloc.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

A long list of functions on foreign economic policy, from international cooperation to the promotion of exporters’ interests and specific investment projects, remained in the portfolio of the **Ministry for Development of Economy, Trade and Agriculture**.

To strengthen the economic section of foreign policy, the **MFA** established the Department for Economic Diplomacy with a more extensive scope of functions compared to its predecessor, the Department for Economic Cooperation. In response to the growing number of requests for support from exporters, the MFA reset the Council of Exporters and Investors, strengthened the staff of the central apparatus and diplomatic offices abroad, and launched online briefings with Ukrainian businesses and ambassadors.

The reformatting of institutional support for Ukrainian exports was an important innovation. The Cabinet of Ministers (CMU) transferred the management of the Export Promotion Office from the Ministry for Development of Economy, Trade and Agriculture to the CMU Secretariat.

Further plans include the establishment of a unified institution on the basis of the Office that will be in charge of building a comprehensive support eco-system for SMEs.

The program of the **Cabinet of Ministers led by Oleksiy Honcharuk** had several vectors for protecting and promoting the interests of Ukrainian exporters. On one hand, the Ministry for Development of Economy, Trade and Agriculture had to ensure better terms for accessing foreign markets for the actors involved in international economic activities. The Ministry of Finance committed to making the rules of customs controls favorable for prudent exporters. The MFA was in charge of full support for Ukrainian business abroad.

However, hardly any interaction among state institutions was visible in the public domain. The International Trade Council did not publish its plan of activities for 2020 and there was no information on the activities of its working groups in 2019–2020.

In its **meetings, the Government** mostly discussed tax aspects in bilateral relations. It announced but never presented support programs for the industry and export-oriented sectors. A comprehensive and strategic vision of trade interaction with Russia was lacking. The Cabinet of Ministers offered individual initiatives, such as the termination of the Agreement on Mutual Establishment of Trade Missions between the Governments of Ukraine and Russia, the imposition of special tariffs on the goods of Russian origin, and the termination of the international agreements made within the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Joint efforts by the government economic bloc resulted in a number of accomplishments in terms of **lowering barriers** for Ukrainian exports:

- restored trade preferences for Ukrainian goods in the US Generalized System of Preferences;
- increased quotas for Ukrainian exporters of poultry and restored the exports of poultry products from Ukraine to the EU;
- lowered the anti-dumping tariff for Ukrainian steel sheets and abolished anti-dumping measures for Ukraine-made car tires in the Brazilian market;
- created additional opportunities for the exports of Ukrainian poultry meat products, pork and eggs to the Singapore market;
- opened access for Ukrainian honey to the Chinese market;
- fulfilled a number of commitments under the Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Goods Roadmap (ACAA).

The MFA conducted a series of meetings, video conferences and telephone conversations with the Persian Gulf and ASEAN countries, China and Japan to help exporters with the **Asian market**.

It initiated talks on **preferential trade agreements** with Egypt, Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia. The talks with Turkey had an opposite effect to what Ukraine expected: rather than signing a free trade agreement, it hitched up import tariffs on 115 goods, hitting Ukrainian exporters of confectionery, chocolate and flour goods.

In order to restore its position on the traditional markets of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Ukraine held talks with representatives of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Georgia and Turkmenistan.

To implement provisions of the Regional Convention on pan-Euro-Mediterranean rules of origin, the Protocol on the free trade agreement that dates back to January 9, 1995 was ratified between the Governments of Ukraine and Georgia. However, the potential of preferential rules for cooperation is lost without expanding the format of cooperation, for example, within the **Organization for Democracy and Economic Development-GUAM**. In 2020, another round of expert consultations took place on an alternative GUAM agreement, but without any effect so far.

The foundation of the **Lublin Triangle**, a new cooperation platform for Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania to develop trade and investment, improve access to regional infrastructure and improve its quality, was an important development on the EU vector.

Generally, Ukraine **did not intensify activities with the EU countries** despite the official backup for proper operation of bilateral agencies on trade and economic cooperation. The Joint Intergovernmental Ukrainian-Hungarian Commission for Economic Cooperation met for the first time after seven years. Though the break in meetings with the respective intergovernmental agencies of other EU countries continues: since 2018 with Germany, Spain, France and the Czech Republic; since 2017 with Poland; since 2015 with Italy, and since 2013 with Slovakia.

Despite the activities mentioned above and the attendance of global, regional and industry economic fora by Ukrainian officials, the aspirations to increase and deepen trade and investment with strategic partners mostly remain at the stage of unwritten agreements. In discussions of investment cooperation, a vision of priority investment projects and talks about specific investment proposals were lacking. The visit of Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs to Spain proved the most productive. A number of important documents were signed during that visit, including on the development of cooperation in agriculture, cooperation and mutual assistance in customs issues.

Recommendations

1. It is important for the government and the parliament to develop a joint strategy of communication on international economy with the key regions in Ukraine's economic interest, including the EU, the Commonwealth of Independent States and Asia, and to comply with it. A detailed discussion of the promising investment areas calls for drawing a priority list of national projects for state support. The talks should also focus on coordination of a mechanism for urgent interaction with partner-states to coordinate actions in case of bilateral trade restrictions as a result of pandemics or other emergencies.
2. It is important to reset the International Trade Council to improve the efficiency of central executive authorities and other agencies and organizations engaged in support to exports. Rather than splitting into working groups, the Council should work on specific areas by putting the respective issues on its agenda and engaging experts on these issues. The CMU Secretariat should be appointed the Council coordinator to balance out the positions of the ministries in it.
3. Verkhovna Rada should develop a clear strategy of economic relations with Russia and the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine that serves Ukraine's economic interests and priorities and specifies the necessary restrictions. The MFA and the Ministry for Development of Economy, Trade and Agriculture should consider possibilities and benefits of alternative economic agreements within the CIS, for example, within the GUAM, and a synchronized exit from the overlapping CIS agreements.
4. It is important to map out European integration priorities in the activities of the parliament and government, and to develop positions on expanding trade, economic and investment relations with the EU. Proactive and systemic work should take place at all levels of economic diplomacy:
 5. with the EU institutions to revise the Association Agreement in Ukraine's interests;
 6. in regional and subregional formats, using Trio 2030 investment opportunities within the Eastern Partnership, signing the Protocol on the country of origin among GUAM states, and engaging in joint investment projects within the Lublin Triangle;
 7. resume the meetings of intergovernmental trade and economic missions with EU member-states based on the expectations of Ukrainian businesses and potential areas of trade and investment growth.

DMYTRO KOVAL, BOHDAN BERNATSKYY

PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY

One of Ukraine's foreign policy instruments is its inter-parliamentary performance in the frames of various international organizations or institutions (including OSCE, the Council of Europe, NATO etc), as well as in the frames of bilateral inter-parliamentary relations.



Ukrainian MPs are members (or observers) in the following international organizations (or international institutions/initiatives): Inter-Parliamentary Union; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE); OSCE Parliamentary Assembly; Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Organization (PABSEC); Parliamentary Dimension of Central European Initiative (PD CEI); GUAM Parliamentary Assembly (GUAM PA); EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly/ Eastern Neighbors (Euronest PA); European Parliament (EP); NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA).

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the 9th convocation has changed the name for the parliamentary committee responsible for inter-parliamentary communication. Instead of the old name for this committee, Committee on Foreign Affairs, a new name was introduced — **Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation**, which better reflects its functional responsibilities. As of September 2020 the Committee included 14 MPs that represent the following political parties: Servant of the People, All-Ukrainian Union Fatherland (Batkivschyna), Opposition Platform for Life, Voice (Golos) and European Solidarity.

The committee is composed of 7 subcommittees, including a specialized one for inter-parliamentary relations, a subcommittee on inter-parliamentary cooperation issues and bilateral and multilateral relations headed by Servant of the People MP Yelyzaveta Yasko. Its authority includes implying foreign relations in the frames of international organizations, implementing the state's foreign policy on becoming a NATO member, cooperating with parliaments of foreign states and parliamentary bodies of international organizations.

On July, 1, 2020 a document was approved on **2020 inter-parliamentary cooperation priorities** (its draft had been prepared by a relevant subcommittee). This is the first time since Ukraine's independence that the Committee has formed the vision of its work for the year. Such a late approval of this document (six months after the start of the year) can be explained by the work the subcommittee was doing on familiarizing with the state of affairs regarding the inter-parliamentary connections before.

This document defines **six priorities for inter-parliamentary cooperation**:

1. Assistance in creating and developing new economic ties (investing in Ukraine, joint enterprises etc.);
2. Political support and security cooperation (consolidation of political and diplomatic pressure on the aggressor state, prolonging sanctions against Russia etc.)
3. Promoting Ukraine's image abroad and cultural cooperation;
4. Opening "new" directions for cooperation (with countries located not in Europe or North America, in the sphere of "new economy");
5. Pro-active position on international platforms, in particular parliamentary assemblies, international organizations, as well as in bilateral relations aiming to defend the national interests of Ukraine, putting an end to Russian's military aggression against

- Ukraine, deoccupying the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, several districts of Donetsk and Luhansk region under the conditions of keeping the sovereignty of Ukraine and its foreign policy targets of EU and NATO membership;
6. Raising awareness of Ukraine and increasing the number of "Ukrainian friends" in the national parliaments of partner states and international organizations.

Moreover, on 22 June 2020, following those propositions made by the subcommittee, **the Statement on Parliamentary Groups** of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine for inter-parliamentary relations with foreign states was **updated**. These June changes provided for several **crucial corrections compared to the previous version** of the Statement:

1. the number of "friendship groups" single MP can be a member of was reduced from 7 to 4;
2. new rules were introduced on gender balance for heads of "friendship groups" as well as demands on co-heading such groups by MPs from different factions (these rules will only be applicable to new groups — already existing ones do not have to be reviewed);
3. the rule, according to which the head of the Subcommittee cannot be a head for the "friendship group", was eliminated;
4. online meetings for groups with inter-parliamentary connections were introduced;
5. the procedure of launching such groups was somewhat changed.

Bilateral inter-parliamentary cooperation

As of September 2020, there are **69 groups on inter-parliamentary relations** in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Most of them are headed or at least co-headed by a representative of the Servant of the People party. Only 7 groups do not have a Servant of the People representative among their heads or co-heads — those are "friendship groups" with Bulgaria, Greece, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Serbia and Hungary, while the heads or co-heads of 34 groups are exclusively MPs from Servant of the People. The process of appointing the members of the groups at the first stage was not consistent and efficient, but by late 2019 it got more balanced, however, it did little to activate many of the declared groups.

A large, however proportional, number of heads and co-heads of "friendship groups" that represent Servant of the People in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine somewhat undermines the idea of forming groups on inter-parliamentary relations while taking into account the lack of experience when it comes to cooperation with specific countries, speaking their languages and understanding political and economic environment in those countries. The majority of such heads did not have the experience of high-level cooperation with relevant states, whose inter-parliamentary relations they are now supposed to coordinate. Due to the forced pause in international relations because of lockdown restrictions, it is not possible to completely evaluate the work of "friendship groups", however, it is already possible to say that the

initiative of the members of “friendship groups” on taking measures and communicating with their foreign colleagues is now on a low level.

Financing 2020 friendship groups’ activities by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine was planned at the level enough to cover 10 visits to Ukraine and 10 visits outside Ukraine. Mostly due to the coronavirus epidemic and, therefore, lockdown restrictions that made it more complicated to travel between countries, only 3 visits did take place. Moreover, due to coronavirus difficulties mostly parliamentary assembly meetings did not take place as well, including NATO PA in Kyiv.

The first registered “friendship group” in the new parliament convocation was the “friendship group” with **Estonia** that was launched in September 2019. The rest of “friendship groups” were created in July 2020 (Ethiopia, Peru and Serbia). Most “friendship groups” were registered in November and December 2019 (correspondingly 20 each month). The number of MPs in “friendship groups” varies. For instance, “friendship group” with the Republic of Albania consists of 5 MPs, while “friendship group” with the Republic of Italy includes 82 MPs, and with the USA – 170. Already at the beginning of the process of forming friendship groups a question arose regarding creating a friendship group with Belarus. This idea did not come true and taking into account recent events in Belarus following the controversial presidential elections, it will not be a priority in the nearest future.

From late 2019 till September 2020 there were over ten meetings (in different formats) among the Verkhovna Rada MPs and their vis-à-vis from the parliaments of other states or relevant representatives of foreign embassies:

On 24 September 2019 one of the first meetings in the “friendship group” format with **Japan** took place where MPs shared their experience on security issues, nuclear energy and natural resources issues as well as agreed on technology exchange for using natural resources.

On 3–6 November 2019 a visit of a deputy group to **Estonia** was arranged. There the group had several meetings and agreements to continue coordinating work on developing parliamentarism in both countries and share the experience.

On 6 December 2019 a meeting was organized with the delegation of the Committee of the European Parliament for foreign affairs.

On 6 February 2020 a meeting of the VRU PMs group for inter-parliamentary relations with **Greece** took place involving the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Greece in Ukraine. The participants discussed issues related to the future visit of Ukrainian MPs to Greece in order to launch the mechanism of inter-parliamentary cooperation together with Greek colleagues. The Ukrainian side, among other things, raised the issue of 168 Ukrainians held captive in Greek prisons.

On 21 February 2020 a meeting took place involving MPs – members of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine’s group for inter-parliamentary relations with the representatives of the **Dutch** delegation headed by the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ukraine. Both parties agreed on deepening and improving parliamentary cooperation in digital economy, environmental protection, water consumption, climate change issues, management of natural resources, waste systems, healthcare and specifically highlighted the importance of sharing experience in reforming these spheres.

On 5 March 2020 a meeting of the group for inter-parliamentary relations with the **Republic of Bulgaria** took place with the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria in Ukraine present.

On 28 May 2020 a meeting of the deputy group with the representatives of the parliament of the **Kingdom of Belgium** took place. In the course of the recent meeting such issues were discussed as the Russian aggression in the east of Ukraine and in the Crimea, the security of the Black Sea region, assisting Ukraine in the frames of both bilateral cooperation and EU format, as well as joint initiatives regarding consulting support for holding local electoral campaigns within the context of Ukraine’s coming elections etc.

On 20 June, 2020 a meeting in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine took place between a group for inter-parliamentary relations with **the Republic of Indonesia** and the representatives of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Ukraine. As mentioned in the course of the meeting, Indonesia is interested in developing cooperation with Ukraine in such fields as IT, trade, sport, culture, tourism and investing. The participants underlined that currently several investment projects are being implemented, the number of Ukrainian tourists visiting Indonesia is increasing and cooperation in medicine and education is growing.

On 1 July 2020 the members of deputy groups for inter-parliamentary relations with the **Swiss Confederation** held a meeting with the representatives of the Swiss Embassy in Ukraine and discussed the current state of bilateral relations between Switzerland and Ukraine, economic cooperation and investments.

On 28 July 2020 Ukraine’s Ambassador Yevgen Mykytenko had a meeting with the head of the parliamentary friendship group **Egypt-Ukraine** where the issue of inter-parliamentary cooperation including the exchange of delegation visits was discussed.

On 16 September 2020 co-heads of the group for inter-parliamentary relations with **the State of Israel** took part in the online conference of Knesset Speaker Yariv Levin with the heads of parliamentary friendship groups with Israel. In the course of the conference involving the heads of inter-parliamentary friendship groups with Israel the issues of better inter-parliamentary cooperation between Knesset and the parliaments of other countries were discussed.

Currently, these “friendship groups” in their absolute majority remain formal and amorphous formations that do not support active contacts with their vis-à-vis from foreign parliaments. For instance, the Committee’s website features only two official reports on inter-parliamentary meetings in 2019. This is by far not the result that would be expected from over 40 “friendship groups” launched by the end of 2019. In 2020 the situation will not be very different, the number of meetings held by friendship groups hardly reaches 10. Even under the conditions of coronavirus lockdown, which really mean not so much as canceling cooperation and communication as simply working on it online, this number is far from satisfactory.

The activities of Ukrainian delegations in bodies and institutions of inter-parliamentary cooperation

PACE

On 30 September – 4 October 2019 an autumn session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe took place, without Ukrainian delegation participating in the official part, however, working on the sidelines due to disaccord with the changed PACE regulations, which, in its turn, allowed for the Russian delegation to take a full part in the work of the Assembly. The results of such work on PACE sidelines included over 20 meetings held by the Ukrainian delegation in multilateral and bilateral formats with the delegation members from Great Britain, Georgia, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany and Sweden. The head of PACE Ukrainian delegation Yelyzaveta Yasko had meetings with political groups, in particular, with European People’s Party group, with group of conservatives and liberals, where the standpoints of our delegation were mentioned, in particular, regarding the refusal to take part in the work of the session due to the return of rights to the Russian delegation.

The results of work done by the Ukrainian delegation included signing a document on creating a coalition “Baltic+” (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Georgia and Ukraine) in order to define further steps to return the trust of the Council of Europe. Another achievement was made when the monitoring report included the fact that the Russia is a party subjected to Minsk agreements. The Ukrainian delegation facilitated the adoption of PACE recommendations regarding the Russian Federation with requests to implement all resolutions and recommendations that had been adopted before. Procedure mechanisms were used in order to challenge the authority of the Russian delegation.

OSCE PA

On October 4–6 2019 OSCE PA session took place. The top officials of the Parliamentary Assembly gave their principle agreement that in case of successful de-escalation in Donbass, Ukraine could get additional assistance from the organization including enlarging their monitoring missions and launching new monitoring missions with additional mandates. Despite all of this there were no resolutions adopted on Ukraine. The Ukrainian delegation used OSCE PA sidelines to make a proposal of launching a constant monitoring mission under OSCE auspices in the Crimea.

PABSEC

On November, 20, 2019 the 54th plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation took place with the mandate of Ukrainian delegation being ratified. On the sidelines of the Assembly the Ukrainian delegation arranged a discussion on the following topic: “The European Choice of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Current situation and potential cooperation between EU and BSEC”.

NATO PA

On October 11–14, 2019 NATO PA took place with Ukrainian delegation participating as an associated member. The delegation communicated two main messages: one on the stability of Ukraine’s NATO membership course; and the other one on Ukraine moving forward to harmonizing its own legislation with NATO standards.

At the Assembly a report on Ukraine was offered and it can be described as a balanced and well-considered one. The members of the Ukrainian delegation worked on its approval. Another report regarding Ukraine was dedicated to economic sanctions. It included, among other things, highlighting that economic sanctions against Russia were not effective and did not work out as efficient countermeasures that would make the Russian Federation fulfill its international obligations. Thanks to the positions stated by Ukraine, the USA and Great Britain, the report was rejected and this has happened for the first time during many years of PA existence.

Since October 2019 the preparation for the spring session of NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Kyiv had been taking place (it was planned for 22–25 May 2020). However, due to the coronavirus outbreak, the session was postponed.

Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU)

On 12–17 October 2019 Inter-Parliamentary session took place, with the members of Ukrainian delegation chosen to be included into the Committee on Peace and International Security (one of the top positions) and to the Committee (Bureau) of Women Parliamentarians.

The Ukrainian delegation managed to stop Russia's potential resolution on the damage to unilateral sanctions against specific MPs from different countries. The Russian Federation tried to support this resolution and create a relevant working group in several committees. The members of Ukrainian delegation took part in debates with a report on "Boosting international law: parliamentary roles and mechanisms, regional cooperation input", where such issues were highlighted as violating international law in connection with the Russian military aggression and the importance of the peaceful resolution of the Donbas situation.

Recommendations:

1. The Verkhovna Rada website should have regular updates on work conducted by Ukrainian parliamentary delegations in different international organizations. The lack of information regarding the activities of parliamentary delegations is a significant drawback as it makes it impossible to monitor the performance of Ukrainian delegations, successful initiatives and continued work in the directions defined before.
2. The existence of such friendship groups needs to be reviewed as they should become active players at least when it comes to informing foreign parliamentarians on Ukraine's key positions in foreign policy issues.
3. The work of the Committee and the VRU delegations with MFA has to be improved. Currently, this cooperation involves informing delegates on the vision of Ukraine's priorities in separate issues of consideration of parliamentary assemblies from the side of MFA. However, the information that is provided to the MFA reaches the delegations rather late and often helps to plan only tactical actions. Strategic tasks, though sometimes mentioned by MFA in the course of the meetings with separate MPs, cannot be systematically fulfilled by means of direct delegation work.
4. A basic tool set of evaluating the efficiency of "friendship groups" has to be implemented. Monitoring the efficiency of such work, in its turn, would allow the Subcommittee to initiate talent decisions regarding the heads of "friendship groups".

NADIYA BUREIKO

PROMOTING UKRAINE'S IMAGE ABROAD

Promoting Ukraine's image abroad is a comprehensive process requiring deep involvement of all public offices, government and non-governmental institutions. Smooth interagency coordination and systemic efforts are extremely important in this regard. Therefore, legislative support for initiatives aimed at forming and implementing the image component of foreign policy is of importance.



The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Given that the promotion of Ukraine's image abroad is a multi-sectoral process, institutional support and organization of relevant work should not be limited to one parliamentary committee. The **Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation** (13 MPs) is at the forefront of this work. All seven of its subcommittees can take care of certain issues of public diplomacy.

In addition, the issues of promoting the image of Ukraine are directly or indirectly **in the focus of other committees of the Verkhovna Rada**, such as the ones on Ukraine's Integration into the EU; Education, Science and Innovation (in particular, the subcommittee on Science and Innovation); National Security, Defense and Intelligence (including the Subcommittee on the Implementation of NATO Values and Standards, International Military Cooperation and Peacekeeping); Youth and Sports; Economic Development (in particular, the Subcommittee on Interaction between the State and Business and Investment); Humanitarian and Information Policy (in particular, the subcommittees on Cultural Policy; Information Policy; Tourism and Resorts; Cinema and Advertising); Anti-Corruption Policy; Digital Transformation.

Such a wide scope is explained by the fact that the image of the state depends on many components, with the foreign policy aspect being closely related to the domestic one, given that the world's perception of Ukraine depends on progress in reforms, implementation of the EU Association Agreement, success in tackling corruption, corresponding promotion of this progress in partner countries, etc.

Ukraine's image abroad is also promoted by means of visits to foreign countries and international organizations, meetings, political statements and appeals, work in inter-parliamentary and parliamentary assemblies, friendship groups, etc.

The Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation remained most active during the first year of the new Verkhovna Rada. Members of The Committee **held numerous meetings** with representatives of foreign states and participated in relevant international forums. For example, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee H. Nemyria represented Ukraine and the Parliamentarians for Global Action transnational network of MPs at the 18th Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court at the World Forum in The Hague (13 December 2019).

The Chairman of the Subcommittee on Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, Bilateral and Multilateral Relations, the Head of the Permanent Delegation to the PACE, Y. Yasko (Servant of the People faction member) displayed rather high engagement. In particular, Yasko and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine developed **The Priorities of Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in 2020**, which the Committee adopted on 7 January 2020. Six declared priorities include: *“to promote the image of Ukraine abroad and cultural cooperation (debunk anti-Ukrainian propaganda fakes and stereotypes, introduce*

foreigners to the best examples of modern Ukrainian culture)”, and “to improve awareness of Ukraine and increase the number of Ukraine’s friends in the national parliaments of partner countries and international organizations”.

The Public **Council**, as an advisory body providing legal, expert and consulting support for the Committee's activity, has not been functioning.

The other mentioned committees are mostly focused on the internal dimension while the foreign policy component in their activities is almost absent. This is essentially a consequence of low political interest in this field during the 2019 election campaigns.

Although public diplomacy or its components in their specifics were not in the focus of the agenda of the Verkhovna Rada (unlike the Verkhovna Rada of the eighth convocation), MPs still paid attention to the matter, for example, in the context of improving **investment attractiveness**. To this end, on 5 June 2020, the Verkhovna Rada set up an Interim Ad Hoc Commission on Investor Protection tasked with drafting proposals for the development and implementation of state policy on investment protection and improvement of relevant legislation. According to MP D. Natalukha, who heads the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Economic Policy, the purpose of this commission is to “turn parliament into an ally of investors”⁵¹. Favourable investment climate and its promotion among foreign partners are expected to facilitate the transformations that create preconditions for the improved image of Ukraine in the world. Therefore, a number of bills (No 3724, No 3725, No 3739) were adopted to help investors.

Parliamentary hearings on tourism development, including with regard to COVID-19 pandemic risks, are scheduled for 11 October 2020 and seek to intensify **tourist flows** to Ukraine.

Examples of parliamentary diplomacy include:

- the **open letter** of MPs to the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the US House of Representatives E. Engel on the situation around Congress members' statements about the Azov Battalion (31 October 2019);
- the Address of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation to national parliaments of foreign states, international organizations and their parliamentary assemblies on Russia's attempts to ease or lift international sanctions imposed in response to its armed aggression against Ukraine on the pretext of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic (22 April 2020);
- the Address of the Verkhovna Rada to the UN, the European Parliament, the PACE, the OSCE PA, the NATO PA, PABSEC, governments and parliaments of the world with a call to commemorate victims of the genocide of the Crimean Tatar people and condemn violations of the rights and freedoms of the Crimean Tatar people by the Russian Federation as an aggressor state (2 June 2020), etc.

⁵¹ https://www.rada.gov.ua/documents/tskVRU/tsk_zplinvest/197375.html

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine provides main institutional support and organizes efforts to promote the image of Ukraine abroad. It has the Department of Public Diplomacy, which includes departments of image policy and diplomacy, as well as the sector of online projects. This area received more attention when D. Kuleba was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs (4 March 2020). Among his priorities in office, he highlighted public diplomacy as means of promoting Ukraine as an “*attractive country of opportunities*”.

D. Kuleba’s practical intentions to focus on the area were confirmed by the appointment of E. Dzhaparova as his first deputy (since 10 June 2020), whose main focus is on the deoccupation of Crimea (including the creation of an **international platform for the deoccupation of Crimea**) and public diplomacy.

In addition to the new personnel policy, the changes initiated in 2020 include the restart of the **Council of Exporters and Investors** (an advisory body that helps Ukrainian businesses enter foreign markets and develop exports), as well as digitization of consular service.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also oversees the state institution **Ukrainian Institute (UI)**, whose mission is to strengthen the international and domestic subjectivity of Ukraine by means of cultural diplomacy.

The **Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine** (as well as its subordinate bodies, such as the State Agency for Tourism Development of Ukraine, the State Agency of Ukraine for Cinema, the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory) and indirectly the **Ministry of Education and Science** are involved in promoting Ukraine’s image abroad. The Ukrainian Book Institute contributes to the promotion of Ukraine’s image abroad. It is worth noting also the work of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, thanks to which numerous projects with an international component are implemented.

The Cabinet of Ministers’ Action Program approved by the Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of 4 October 2019 focuses primarily on internal transformations, including in the context of European and Euro-Atlantic integration with regard to compliance with membership criteria. “Homework” done properly, meaning the implementation of domestic reforms, contributes to Ukraine’s better standing in international indices. The promotion of Ukraine’s image abroad was reflected in goals aimed at improving the investment climate, as well as providing support for business, culture and sports, and increasing the tourist flow. At the

same time, this program did not directly refer to “promoting Ukrainian culture abroad” or “promoting Ukraine’s interests in the world.”

D. Shmyhal’s Government Program, presented on 12 June 2020, describes public diplomacy and promotion of Ukraine’s positive image in the world as a separate priority (countering anti-Ukrainian information campaigns abroad; conducting information campaigns to present and promote Ukrainian culture abroad; informing foreign audiences on events in Ukraine, official domestic and foreign policy, progress in implementing reforms; expanding the Ukrainian Institute geography). Efforts to improve Ukraine’s image are also mentioned in the context of securing Ukraine’s foreign economic interests through economic diplomacy.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ attention to Ukraine’s image in the world and public diplomacy has increased since D. Kuleba headed the ministry. In September 2020, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with experts and representatives of civil society, began to develop a **strategy for public diplomacy**. Some objectives of the strategy include increasing Ukraine’s influence on key platforms of international cooperation, effectively countering the stereotypes to improve the perception of Ukraine in the world, and advancing career diplomats’ required competencies.

The Ukrainian Institute is busy promoting Ukraine’s image in the world through its program activities. In summer 2020, the Ukrainian Institute presented its strategy by 2024, which, among other things, identifies priority countries for work. Given the limitations caused by the pandemic, the proper functioning of public diplomacy requires considerable attention to be paid to the creation of quality digital content.

The pandemic has hampered the **government goal of developing inbound tourism**, which is to promote greater awareness of Ukraine abroad. The growth in the number of foreign tourists to Ukraine will largely depend on the numerous restrictions imposed in connection with the pandemic. In the meantime, work could be done to determine “Ukraine’s place on the tourist map of the world, create brands based on existing points of interest and launch internal and external programmes to promote them”⁵². It is planned to create a multilingual portal which will offer information about tourist destinations and cultural heritage sites in Ukraine. The promotion campaign #TravelUkraine was presented (12 June 2020) in this context while the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine together with international experts have already drafted a roadmap for tourism development (14 July 2020).

⁵² <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/188-20%2523Text#Text>

As part of **the Cabinet of Ministers' Action Program goal to support sports**, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports together with the team of the Office for Humanitarian Policy Development presented the Strategy for Sports and Physical Activity Development until 2032 for public discussion. One of the expectations from its implementation is that *“the state will improve its authority and image through sports achievements of Ukrainian athletes in international competitions”*⁵³.

In addition to the difficulties caused by the pandemic, the real challenge was posed by the Ministry of Finance's attempt to significantly reduce the culture budget in spring 2020. After all, the funding was not cut. However, this revealed vulnerabilities: the lack of appropriate inter-institutional cooperation, as well as the lack of understanding of the importance of public diplomacy tools.

So far, due to financial issues, occasional red tape and insufficient institutional cooperation, the opening of the Ukrainian Institute's foreign offices and the launch of Ukrainian language courses abroad are still open to question.

Recommendations

Some progress has been observed in the implementation of previous recommendations, such as: the approved Action Program of O. Honcharuk's Government directly mentioned some components of Ukraine's promotion abroad, albeit with internal focus; the presented Action Program of D. Shmyhal's Government places a special emphasis on public diplomacy and promotion of a positive image of Ukraine in the world; work on developing a strategy for public diplomacy has begun/intensified; work is underway on Ukraine's foreign policy strategy which will include a separate section on public diplomacy; the Diplomatic Academy launched a training program on public diplomacy for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff, as well as a course on international relations and foreign policy of Ukraine for MPs.

In their further efforts to promote the image of Ukraine in the world, the Verkhovna Rada and the Cabinet of Ministers are advised to pay attention to the following:

1. **Complete the development of strategic narratives, namely public diplomacy and foreign policy strategies. The strategy of public diplomacy should contain a clearly defined conceptual framework, priorities and directions, identify the main actors involved in its implementation and the specifics of their interaction;**

2. **Speak in “one voice” abroad while prioritizing national interests over allegiance to different political forces;**
3. **Strengthen interagency coordination directly through the development of roadmaps; resume the work of the Public Council under the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation.**
4. **Ensure sustainable rather than residual funding. Provide for the possibility of three-year budget planning for the Ukrainian Institute;**
5. **Check internal regulations on the functioning of the sector for compliance with modern demand, including as far as funding of certain activities (for example, grants, organization of foreign visits, etc.) is concerned;**
6. **Establish closer cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the diaspora (through foreign diplomatic offices, the Ukrainian World Congress), as well as certain sectoral communities (for example, IT, business) to ensure more efficient functioning of this sector;**
7. **Intensify those components of public diplomacy that are currently “slacking” while cultural diplomacy pushed forward by the Ukrainian Institute is actively developing. In particular, pay attention to scientific diplomacy. The National Research Foundation of Ukraine or the Ukrainian Institute, for example, can be involved in its implementation in order to strengthen Ukraine's representation at scientific events on topics of Ukrainian interest (such as security, deoccupation, misinformation, historical memory, language and identity, etc.).**
8. **Implement the President's Decree No 329/2020 of 18 September to optimize the efforts of the Cabinet of Ministers to develop modern tourist infrastructure, including by introducing youth mobility programs within the framework of tourism development, holding international events on tourism development in Ukraine, promoting Ukraine's tourism potential in the world, strengthening the work of cultural and information centers at foreign diplomatic offices for promotion of Ukraine's culture and tourism potential.**

⁵³ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TJ4JDgLSvQAFN8yC9CUoMMxFUmzTn1l-/view?fbclid=IwAR1FXVVOM7VeerPfpA1qjpWaY1-xBZPh2QuldiO2O-QtGs8A4fpXlLr4fKfo>

DOUBLE (MULTIPLE) CITIZENSHIP IN UKRAINE

An appeal to unite 65 million Ukrainians for a prosperous Ukraine was a key message of the inauguration speech President Zelensky delivered to the Verkhovna Rada on 20 May 2019. Many commentators interpreted this inflated number as a signal of the long-expected change of legislation on citizenship. In practice, this translated into the expectation of the numerous Ukrainian diaspora to finally obtain the right to gain Ukrainian citizenship on the basis of territorial or ethnic origin. This ambitious statement encouraged foreign Ukrainians (ethnic Ukrainians that hold citizenship of other countries) to hope that they would soon be out of the legal gray area and be able to legally obtain citizenship in their country of residence without having to give up their Ukrainian citizenship or to hide it, which is a widespread approach. Over a year after the speech, there has been no breakthrough in this area of legislative change on citizenship.



The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Using his right to legislative initiative, President Zelensky submitted bill No2590 to the Verkhovna Rada for immediate consideration. In short, it proposes a simplified procedure of granting citizenship to those who fought for Ukraine or fled the Russian Federation. While the proposed amendments to the **Law of Ukraine on Citizenship** referred to many other categories, the most debated and controversial provisions were the ones that were supposed to make the gaining of Ukrainian citizenship easier for the foreigners who:

- are or were enrolled in contract-based military service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (and were decorated with a Ukrainian state award);
- have extraordinary merits before Ukraine, or whose Ukrainian citizenship is of state interest for Ukraine;
- are citizens of the state qualified as aggressor or occupant by the Verkhovna Rada, provided that they faced political persecutions in the country of their citizenship as confirmed by a document issued by Ukraine's MFA;
- are refugees or have been granted shelter in Ukraine.

The draft law would allow such persons seeking Ukrainian citizenship to submit a declaration about rejecting their foreign citizenship instead of a statement of commitment to terminate their foreign citizenship.

The criteria listed above make it clear that, firstly, a small category of people will meet them, and, secondly, this will expand opportunities for those whose admission into Ukrainian citizenship is the most controversial. Apart from that, the granting of Ukrainian citizenship as the second citizenship to diaspora and abolishing the demand to terminate Ukrainian citizenship for foreign Ukrainians is not written clearly, leaving some questions open on these categories.

In the 9th Verkhovna Rada, the Committee for Human Rights, Deoccupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol, National Minorities and Ethnic Relations **is in charge of citizenship issues**. It is chaired by Dmytro Lubinets from Za Maybutnie (For the Future) party. Vadym Rabinovych, Deputy Head of the Opposition Platform–For Life faction, chairs the **Migration and Citizenship Subcommittee**. He and Viktor Medvedchuk, a Committee member and head of the Opposition Platform–For Life political council, have often stated that double or multiple citizenship is only unacceptable for officials in central and local executive authorities.

Three other opposition parties, including **European Solidarity (ES)**, **Batkivshchyna (Fatherland)** and **Golos (Voice)**, have consistently criticized any substantial changes in the law on citizenship, including the ones proposed in the President's bill.

European Solidarity Speaker Viktoriya Siumar has criticized bill No2590, calling on the President to withdraw it in order to prevent the voting at an inconvenient timing. She added that *“this draft law runs counter to the Constitution”* and *“could lead to extremely negative consequences; it allows the incorporation of the Russian scenario into Ukrainian public policy.”*

Batkivshchyna's Yulia Tymoshenko demanded the removal of the draft law, making a point that if passed, it will *“end up fragmenting Ukraine's territory.”*

Golos MP Serhiy Rakhmanin referred to the draft law as an *“ineffective document”* that is *“legally inappropriate, unwarranted and untimely”* because of two factors: *“it would create additional privileges for representatives of the aggressor-state, including in the occupied territory, and to non-resident citizens who can use the situation and bypass residency provisions to gain citizenship under a simplified procedure to benefit from the launch of the land market”*.

Some criticism of the draft law was beyond the political discourse. Despite the fairly harsh criticism from the opposition and the Chief Expert Department at the Verkhovna Rada, the Committee in charge recommended including bill No2590 in the parliament agenda and approve it as the basic document to work on in the first reading at its meeting on 15 January 2020. All other thirteen committees, except for the budget committee, but including the subcommittee on ties with Ukrainians abroad and protection of their rights and interests (under the Foreign Policy and Parliamentary Cooperation Committee), did not provide their written opinion.

Meanwhile, the Committee in charge proposed rejecting an alternative bill No2590–1 dated 28 December 2019, On Amending Some Laws of Ukraine to Remove Persons with Double Citizenship From State or Publicly Important Affairs, sponsored by MP Andriy Lopushanskyi. By contrast to the President's bill, Lopushanskyi proposed clarifying and adding requirements on restrictions of service in public authorities for individuals who are citizens or subjects of foreign states and on immediate dismissal in case of a discovered violation of that requirement.

Based on the Committee's decision, the President's controversial bill was put on the Verkhovna Rada's agenda on 16 January, but Speaker Dmytro Razumkov removed it on 18 May 2020, including because of concerns among some Sluha Narodu (Servant of the People) MPs. Draft law No2590 was resubmitted to the Verkhovna Rada at the fourth session on 3 September 2020, but it still awaits consideration at a plenary session.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

President Zelensky **instructed the MFA**⁵⁴ to design a mechanism to grant Ukrainian citizenship as second to ethnic Ukrainians from friendly democratic countries and a mechanism to grant Ukrainian citizenship to people suffering from violations of rights and freedoms in their own countries.

As the coordinator of citizenship issues within the Cabinet of Ministers, the **MFA** has not yet submitted any draft laws to the Verkhovna Rada. In briefings, former MFA Vadym Prystaiko and current MFA Dmytro Kuleba, as well as Deputy MFA Vasyl Bondar, have frequently mentioned the need for wide-scale consultations involving the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU), Migration and Border Services and other central executive authorities, followed by work on the respective proposals.

The **MFA's first approach** to legitimizing double citizenship is to abolish restrictions in the current laws that force Ukrainians to give up their citizenship in order to obtain citizenship elsewhere or prevent individuals of Ukrainian origin from obtaining Ukrainian citizenship. Another approach suggests expanding the status of foreign Ukrainians introduced in 2004. At the same time, all government representatives have always made the point that the constitutional norm about “single citizenship” should remain intact: only Ukrainian citizenship would be recognized in Ukrainian territory regardless of the individual's other citizenships. “The change will be that we will not demand people to quit their other citizenship in order to obtain a Ukrainian passport,” commented Maksym Sokoliuk, Head of the State Customs Service.

⁵⁴ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/07/18/7221217/>

Recommendations

Expert recommendations and attempts of civil society to effectively draw attention to citizenship last year have not drawn due attention. So the issue remains more relevant than ever.

If the Verkhovna Rada ends up looking at bill No2590, amendments on the two biggest categories – diaspora and foreign Ukrainians, particularly liberalization of laws to help them – would be the priority. In practice, this means that:

1. People of Ukrainian origin under territorial or ethnic criteria should have simplified conditions for seeking Ukrainian citizenship with partial or full restriction of their right to serve in public offices with access to classified information. At the same time, people coming to Ukraine for temporary or permanent residency to study, volunteer or work in any sphere other than civil service should enjoy favorable legal conditions;
2. Foreign Ukrainians with a foreign passport alongside their Ukrainian citizenship should have a legalized opportunity to use double or multiple citizenship without needing to seek gaps in law to keep their Ukrainian citizenship;
3. There should be clear preventions against abuse of liberalized laws for other foreigners. First of all, this should apply to the citizens of the countries Ukraine recognizes as aggressor or occupier. In order to avoid any threats in the future, Ukraine should ban double citizenship with all neighboring countries until it fully restores its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

NATALIA SHEVCHENKO

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In the late 2019–early 2020, prospects were good for intensifying the Latin America vector in Ukraine’s foreign policy. Ukraine realized the need to coordinate its legislative and executive efforts. The pandemic affected these intentions, forcing the diplomatic missions of both Ukraine and of the countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region to focus their key efforts on it in spring. Still, cooperation with the LAC countries rapidly increased during the summer and early fall of 2020. Parliamentary diplomacy has been less effective this year as the established friendship groups barely showed any interest in intensifying cooperation in the new reality.

10

The Verkhovna Rada

Relations with Latin America countries are in the portfolio of the Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Committee in the 9th Verkhovna Rada. The analysis of the committee staff and their professional background inspired hope that the Latin America segment would have its proper place in its work. Some of its current member MPs, including Iryna Herashchenko and Hryhoriy Nemyria, have experience of working with Latin American political elite.

In its first year, the 9th Verkhovna Rada **established 6 groups of MPs** for parliamentary relations with Latin America countries, including Brazil (05.12.2019, 22 MPs); Cuba (19.12.2019, 50 MPs); Mexico (19.12.2019, 6 MPs); Chile (10.02.2020, 12 MPs); Argentina (03.03.2020, 11 MPs) and Peru (06.07.2020, 8 MPs). By contrast, the 8th convocation had 9 friendship groups. The analysis of the group membership leads to the following conclusions:

1. the groups were established with representatives of all political forces present in the Verkhovna Rada. The group of friendship with Peru is the only exception as all of its members represent Sluha Narodu (Servant of the People);
2. some current members in groups of cooperation with the LAC countries, such as Artur Herasymov, Dmytro Lubinets, were MPs in the previous convocation. This signals their possible interest in effective work of the restaffed friendship groups;
3. the number of participants in LAC parliament cooperation groups and disproportions in their membership do not match the level and the scale of Ukraine's bilateral political and economic cooperation with these countries or the level of Ukraine's diplomatic representation in the region.

In its first year, the 9th Verkhovna Rada had Latin America topics on the **agenda of the Foreign Policy and Parliamentary Cooperation Committee** and in parliamentary decision-making. On 5 February 2020, three draft laws were submitted to the Committee, focused on the **ratification of Ukraine-Argentina Treaties** on extradition, transfer of convicted persons and mutual legal assistance in criminal matters. On 7 April 2020, the Committee discussed the Draft Law on Joining the Inter-American Convention on Serving Criminal Sentences. All laws were passed in the VRU's extraordinary session on 30 April 2020. Over 300 MPs voted for each.

The Committee work plan scheduled a roundtable on economic and diplomatic relations with countries in "Asia, South America and Africa regions and the Persian Gulf" for its second and third sessions in September 2019-July 2020, and intensification of cooperation with the international economic affairs representatives of the MFA and the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. However, that event has not yet taken place — possibly because of the quarantine.

On 03 June 2020 **the Committee had a meeting with Foreign Affairs Minister Dmytro Kuleba** to look at Ukraine's foreign policy and strategy on the international arena. No attention was paid to the **LAC region at the meeting**. It was only indirectly mentioned in the context of working with "Ukrainians abroad". Apart from that, the Committee members pointed to the lack of communication with the leaders of parliamentary cooperation groups, to the fact that it is not fully informed about their work, and to the need to keep the Verkhovna Rada friendship groups informed about the current state of bilateral cooperation.

Despite having parliamentary cooperation groups for LAC countries, MPs are still passive when it comes to work in these groups. In the first year of the 9th Verkhovna Rada, members of the friendship group with **Mexico** were the only ones who held a working meeting with Mexico's Ambassador to Ukraine (27 February.2020). In some instances, MPs had contacts with representatives of embassies before these groups were officially established in the Verkhovna Rada. Examples include attendance of receptions to celebrate Independence Days of Cuba and Brazil in October-November 2019 and contacts upon private initiative: Sviatoslav Yurash, a Servant of the People MP and member of the VRU Foreign Affairs Committee, visited the Embassy of Argentina with the team he curates. Out of the Ambassadors of LAC countries accredited in Ukraine, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Argentina visited the VRU most often in the past year. She attended several ceremonial assemblies and a videoconference of the VRU Committee on Social Policy and Protection of Veterans upon invitation from the VRU leadership.

A comparison of **platforms from the political parties** in the 9th Verkhovna Rada, as well as of the statements of their leadership shows a general lack of interest in deepening economic and political cooperation with the LAC countries. The interest in some countries of the region was mostly focused on the analysis of their experience and the possibilities of applying it in Ukraine or comparing it with Ukraine. Such statements most frequently came from representatives of the Opposition Platform-For Life and Batkivshchyna (Fatherland). Among other things, these speakers mentioned Argentina's experience in the context of the recent partial default and the prospects of Ukraine's further cooperation with the IMF, dangers related to COVID-19 spread in the LAC region, and the land market situation in these countries, most often referring to the experience of Argentina and Brazil.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

Starting from September 2019, **Government teams** expressed interest in the LAC region in general terms **in their official documents**. This interest is based on the need to maintain political support against Russia's aggression, restoring Ukraine's export potential, seeking new markets and expanding the current ones for Ukrainian produce, and attracting foreign investment, including via support to Ukrainian diaspora. These points were made in the Programs of Governments led both by O. Honcharuk (04 October 2019) and D. Shmyhal (04 June 2020).

The foreign policy aspect of the **Program of Oleksiy Honcharuk's Government** (2019) placed an accent on protecting the interests of Ukrainian citizens abroad, including with agreements on visa-free travel, improved visa terms and simplified stay abroad. Nine LAC countries were mentioned in the overall list of 21.

Foreign Affairs Minister Vadym Prystaiko and Ihor Zhovkva, Deputy Head of the Presidential Office of Ukraine, highlighted the importance of **economic cooperation with Chile and Peru** at the VRU Committee meeting on 18 September 2019, and assured that "the Latin America vector would have due attention from the President" in 2020.

In September 2019, Ukraine **established diplomatic relations** with Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. It now has diplomatic relations with all 33 LAC countries. As of now, **only 6 diplomatic missions of Ukraine** operate in LAC. Apart from that, Ukraine's Embassy to Argentina has been without an ambassador for a year now, and the mission to Cuba since 2013. Kyiv has not yet appointed an ambassador to Peru after the previous ambassador was dismissed on 1 September 2020, and there was a rotation of ambassadors in Mexico.

In line with the Programs of O. Honcharuk's and D. Shmyhal's Governments, the MFA has intensified work to **expand the list of visa-free countries** for Ukrainian citizens in the past year. Ukraine reached an agreement to mutually abolish visas with Columbia in September 2019; signed the Protocol to Amend the Visa-Free Regime with Argentina in November; and signed a visa-free agreement with Grenada (16 July 2020). The agreements to mutually abolish visa requirements with the Government of Ecuador came into effect on 2 April 2020, and with the Government of Columbia on 17 April 2020. In October 2019, the first Ukraine-Brazil consultations took place and Ukraine opened its Honorary Consulate in Belize in September 2019.

Over the past year, Ukraine has intensified political dialog with the LAC countries too. **Heads of Ukrainian diplomatic missions in the Western Hemisphere discussed that need at their meeting** in Washington on 20 February 2020. However, the pandemic seriously affected the work of Ukrainian embassies as they mostly focused on returning Ukrainian citizens home.

The global situation forced Ukraine to delay the organization of the President's visit to the LAC countries announced in September 2019 by the Presidential Office. Still, Ukraine's MFA managed to use new opportunities of **online diplomacy**. Among other things, Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister had video conferences and telephone conversations with representatives of Brazil, Chile and Panama.

Ukraine responded harshly to **Nicaragua's** intention to open a so-called "honorary consulate" in the Russia-occupied Crimea, warning Nicaragua that this decision of its government will lead to the launch of the sanctions tool against it (28 August 2020).

The Ministry of Economic Development and Trade intensified its work to protect and promote Ukrainian economic interests in the LAC region. Thanks to efforts to expand the access of Ukrainian goods to the Brazil market, Brazil's Trade Ministry decided to cut the anti-dumping tariff on Ukrainian products for five years in October 2019. Ukraine's Trade Envoy Taras Kachka held video conferences with representatives of government and business from Mexico and Argentina.

Prime Minister Shmyhal and Ambassador of Argentina visited the stands for Argentina produce and held a short conversation on bilateral projects and business opportunities (11 August 2020) at Agro 2020, Ukraine's biggest agricultural expo. Representatives of Chile, the Dominican Republic and Cuba were expected to attend the UITT-2020 Ukraine International Travel and Tourism Exhibition which was delayed from March to September 2020.

Yuriy Poliukhovych, Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Education and Science, the Ambassador of Mexico to Ukraine and others discussed ways of cooperation in **science and technology** at the meeting on 18 February 2020. On 16 January 2020, a Memorandum of Cooperation between Diplomatic Academies of Chile and Ukraine was signed on 16 January 2020.

Special attention was paid to deepening cooperation with representatives of the **Ukrainian diaspora**. To meet the language needs of Ukrainian communities in the LAC region, Taras Kremin, Ombudsman for the Ukrainian Language, and President of the Drahomanov National Pedagogical University met with the Ambassador of Brazil to Ukraine on 21 August 2020, to discuss ways to improve the situation in teaching Ukrainian and promoting it in the young generation of Ukrainian diaspora.

Recommendations

1. Intensify parliamentary diplomacy via meetings, primarily online, of parliamentary cooperation groups with the respective friendship groups in the parliaments of the LAC countries.
2. Hold committee hearings with representatives of Ukrainian business, Chamber of Commerce, MFA and Ministry of Economic Development and Trade on legislative, financial and organizational support of Ukrainian exports in LAC countries.
3. Intensify cooperation with R&D centers and higher education facilities to keep members of MP groups for parliamentary cooperation informed on the state and prospects of bilateral cooperation.
4. Hold video conferences with the MFA leadership and representatives of Ukrainian communities in the LAC region.
5. Intensify communication with diplomatic missions of LAC countries accredited in Ukraine.

OLGA VOROZHBYT

ASIA AND AFRICA

Despite some changes in rhetoric, Asian and African countries do not get sufficient attention from the Verkhovna Rada MPs or the Cabinet of Ministers. Positive changes of the past year include intensified cooperation with Asia countries. Negative developments include very little activity of the Verkhovna Rada MPs in parliament cooperation groups with the region's countries.

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The Verkhovna Rada

Relations with Africa and Asia countries are in the portfolio of the Foreign Policy and Parliamentary Cooperation Committee in the 9th Verkhovna Rada.

On July 6, 2020, the Committee approved 2020 **Parliament Cooperation Priorities for the Verkhovna Rada**, outlining the opening of “new” areas of cooperation in the “new economy”, including with the countries beyond Europe and North America, as one of the items. This can be interpreted as a positive signal of the aspiration to develop economic cooperation beyond the traditional vectors.

The Verkhovna Rada has established **friendship groups** with the following countries:

Africa: Algeria (5.12.19), Ethiopia (6.7.20), Egypt (10.06.20), South Africa (10.02.20).

Asia: Afghanistan (21.01.20), Vietnam (19.12.20), India (3.03.20), Indonesia (28.04.20), Korea (18.11.2019), Malaysia (5.11.19), Pakistan (28.02.20), Singapore (26.11.19), Thailand (10.02.20), Japan (15.10.2019), China (6.03.20)

Friendship groups with Kenya, Morocco, the Philippines and Sri Lanka are not staffed yet.

COVID-19 restrictions in international cooperation and contact setting in all spheres have affected the work of the Verkhovna Rada's Foreign Policy and Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. However, MPs tried to establish cooperation via embassies of the region's countries in Ukraine or remotely. **MPs** representing the respective friendship groups and the Foreign Policy Committee **have met** with ambassadors of Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco and South Korea. It is important to note that MPs do not use parliament cooperation groups as a tool much.

A delegation of the Ukrainian parliament visited **Korea** (9.12.19) before the pandemic. Members of the Verkhovna Rada group for parliament ties with Korea met with the leaders of the Korean International Trade Association (KITA) in Seoul.

Over the year, the Verkhovna Rada ratified a range of treaties and protocols which will simplify Ukraine's cooperation with Morocco, Singapore and China.

The parties in parliament acted as follows in the first year of the new Verkhovna Rada.

Servant of the People. Sluha Narody (Servant of the People) MPs chair or co-chair all friendship groups with Asia and Africa countries, except for Egypt and Afghanistan. Yet, even their co-chairs barely comment on the development of this vector. Sviatoslav Yurash stands out as chair of friendship groups with India, Ethiopia and Brazil: he shared his opinions on what Ukraine could find useful in Ethiopia's expertise in one interview and reported on his conversation with Ethiopia's H.E. Ambassador Mulu Solomon who cannot yet visit Ukraine because of COVID-19 restrictions. Sluha Narodu's Artem Kunayev, chair of the friendship group with Indonesia, said that he was willing to support parliament cooperation between the two countries at the meeting of Indonesia's Ambassador.

Opposition Platform-For Life. Cooperation with Russia and the CIS remains the key priority for the party. However, its MPs chair friendship groups with Afghanistan, Iraq and Serbia.

Batkivshchyna (Fatherland). While the party's election platform did not cover foreign policy development in other vectors, its MPs have mentioned Asia countries that illustrate success stories of development in their speeches. Batkivshchyna co-chair Vadym Ivchenko pointed to the scale of the Chinese market and the need for Ukrainian agricultural producers to occupy part of it by supplying goods under the contract with the China National Complete Engineering Corporation (CCEC). Andriy Nikolayenko, member of the friendship group with Korea, attended the Eurasia Finance Conference 2019 in Seoul where he said that Ukraine should draw on Korea's expertise.

European Solidarity. ES MPs chair and co-chair parliament friendship groups with Georgia, Chile and Malaysia – all non-EU and non-NATO countries. However, they have not spoken about developing different areas of cooperation with these countries beyond the key areas of Ukraine's foreign policy.

Golos. The party supports strengthened cooperation with the EU and NATO, but its MPs did not speak on establishing cooperation on other vectors in the first year of the 9th Verkhovna Rada. Golos MPs chair and co-chair friendship groups with the following non-EU and non-NATO countries: Japan, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and Australia.

The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Agriculture Development are in charge of cooperation with Asia and Africa within the Cabinet of Ministers (CMU).

The CMU's 2020 Program, as approved by the CMU on June 12, 2020, but not approved by the Verkhovna Rada, mentions Asia and Africa countries in the context of expanding the geography of economic cooperation.

On May 22, 2020, the MFA and its Council of Exporters and Investors drew a list of TOP-10 markets for Ukrainian exporters. 9 out of 10 countries in the list are not in the EU and NATO and include Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, India, China, Kazakhstan, Chile, Qatar and Uzbekistan.

Asia and Africa countries remain the key export destinations for UkrOboronProm. This state enterprise sold 85% of its exports to China, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Jordan, Vietnam, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Morocco and Ethiopia in 2020.

Within the past year, ambassadors were appointed to South Africa, Morocco and Japan, Tunisia and Nigeria. However, Ukraine still lacks ambassadors to Ethiopia, Senegal, Angola and Vietnam. In fact, Ukraine has not had an ambassador in Angola for a long time, and in Ethiopia for almost ten years.

Asia

Ukrainian MFA is especially interested in developing cooperation with Asia countries. Among other things, it has announced preparation of the Asia Strategy. In April 2020, the MFA held the first **Asia Week** when Minister Dmytro Kuleba had telephone conversations with his peers in China, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Singapore, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, and met with ambassadors of India, China, Korea and Japan.

China's Foreign Affairs Minister accepted the invitation to visit Ukraine in a telephone conversation. If it takes place this year, this will be the first visit of China's Foreign Affairs Minister to Ukraine in the past ten years. In the eight months of 2020, China was the key trade partner of Ukraine. Over that period, Ukraine exported USD 4.5bn worth of its goods to China, which was 85% or USD 2bn more than in 2019. Ukraine's trade with **ASEAN** countries increased from USD 2.837bn in 2018 to USD 3.065bn in 2019. **India** provided humanitarian assistance of medical supplies to Ukraine three times in 2020. This could be a push towards intensified cooperation in pharmaceuticals.

On February 15, 2020, Ukraine's Defense Minister Andriy Zahorodniuk met with **Japan's** Defense Minister Taro Kono at the Munich Security Conference to discuss further implementation of the defense memorandum from 2018 and other areas of cooperation, including cybersecurity and exchange of expertise.

The MFA tried to intensify the work of Ukrainian diplomatic missions in **Southeast Asia**. During his visit to Singapore in January 2020, then Foreign Affairs Minister Vadym Prystaiko held a conference of Ukrainian ambassadors to Southeast Asia countries. Apart from that, a memorandum of cooperation was signed between Ukraine's MFA Council of Exporters and Investors and the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry during the visit to Singapore.

In the last year, there were no meetings of government trade commissions between Ukraine and the region's countries although they are an important instrument of cooperation with the region.

Africa

In 2020, Ukraine finally intensified cooperation with the **African Union** where it holds the observer status since 2016. On 6–7 February 2020, a delegation of Ukraine's MFA attended the 36th session of the African Union Executive Council with Foreign Affairs Ministers of member-states for the first time. During its visit to Addis Abeba, Ukraine's delegation met with Mohamed El-Amine Souef, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and the Francophonie of the Union of the Comoros, and top officials from Ghana, Zambia, Rwanda and South Africa. Some of these meetings were the first since Ukraine established diplomatic relations with these countries. This work would be far more productive if Ukraine had ambassadors there — it has not had one in Ethiopia for ten years now.

In the context of **trade and economic cooperation with Africa countries**, Ukraine's exports there seriously exceed imports. The key destinations for Ukrainian exports in Africa include Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco. Ukraine's total trade with Egypt, its biggest partner in Africa, was USD 2.631bn in 2019 and an encouraging USD 1bn over the first five months of 2020.

It is important to intensify joint government trade and economic missions in the Asian and African vectors for Ukraine. In a telephone conversation with **Kenya's Foreign Affairs Minister** Raychelle Omamo, Ukraine's Foreign Affairs Minister Dmytro Kuleba highlighted the importance of the Joint Ukraine–Kenya Government Trade and Economic Commission in effective coordination of the bilateral work.

Recommendations

Recommendations for cooperation with Africa countries:

1. Hold parliamentary hearings on the Current State and Development Prospects in Ukraine's Relations with Africa Countries;
2. Appoint ambassadors in the Africa countries where they are missing. Ethiopia and Angola are the most pressing destinations;
3. Define possible points of cooperation between the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the Pan-African Parliament;
4. Staff MP groups of friendship with Angola, Kenya, Morocco, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar and Mozambique;
5. Establish new MP groups, primarily with Senegal, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Ghana and Rwanda;
6. Intensify work within trade and economic commissions and establish a Ukraine-Kenya commission.

Recommendations for cooperation with Asia countries:

1. Consider the possibility of obtaining a Dialog Partner status with ASEAN;
2. Appoint Ukraine's ambassador to Vietnam;
3. Staff friendship groups for Bangladesh and Sri Lanka;
4. Hold Asia Days at the Verkhovna Rada. Intensify the work of friendship groups with Asia countries, hold meetings of group members with diplomatic missions of these countries to Ukraine.
5. Establish new MP groups for parliament ties with Nepal and Bhutan.





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The Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism”,

is a network-based non-governmental think tank, the goal of which is to participate in providing democratic ground for development and implementation of foreign and security policies by the government of Ukraine, implementation of international and nationwide projects and programs, directed at improvement of foreign policy analysis and expertise, enhancement of expert community participation in a decision-making process in the spheres of foreign policy, international relations, public diplomacy.

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