



Interview with H.E. Vasyl Marmazov, Ambassador of Ukraine to Seoul

by Rachel Leng

On Ukraine Current Affairs

1. *In an interview with the Korea JoongAng Daily in March 2015, you said that 2014 was “definitely the most difficult year since 1945 for Ukraine as well as for Europe in general” following the first anniversary of Ukraine’s regime change. Looking back now on 2015, what would you say were the main milestone events or setbacks for the people of Ukraine?*

Let me express my appreciation to the Global Politics Review for its interest in the situation in and around Ukraine as well as Ukraine-Republic of Korea relations and the place of my country in East Asia.

The main result of 2015 is that, despite Russian military and economic aggression against Ukraine, Ukraine and its people withstood and created preconditions for further national development. In this regard, I would like to draw attention to the following key achievements:

First, Ukraine, with the strong support of the international community, stopped the military escalation of the Russian “hybrid war” against Ukrainians and strengthened Ukraine’s defense capacity significantly.

We avoided default, ensured macro-economic, financial, and banking stabilization, restructured foreign debt, increased foreign exchange reserves, improved the banking system and created preconditions for economic growth.

The new law enforcement bodies – Patrol Police, National Anti-Corruption Bureau, and Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecution – were created on new principles and with new people.

Ambassador Vasyl Marmazov received his Ph.D. in Law from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, and previously holds Law Degree from the above mentioned University. He also improved his academic skills at London School of Economics (UK), Sidney Sussex College (Cambridge, UK), International Institute of Human Rights (Strasbourg, France) and Stanford University (USA).

Previous work of Ambassador Marmazov’s experience includes acting as the deputy dean of the Faculty of Law of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, practicing law as the Lawyer at the European Court of Human Rights (Strasbourg, France) and a Partner of Yuris Law Offices, and serving as the deputy ministers in Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Economy of Ukraine.

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Second, the international community continued to support Ukraine both at the political and financial level. A very bright demonstration of this was the election of Ukraine, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, by the vote of 177 UN countries.

Last year ended with a decision by all 28 EU members on the prolongation of sanctions against Russia for its continuous aggression against Ukraine.

Third, despite the unprecedented migration crisis in the EU, the European Commission approved the final report on the full implementation of criteria for the visa-free regime of Ukraine. After the agreement on political association and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA with the EU entered into full force on January 1, 2016) Ukraine took another decisive step towards integration into the EU.

Fourth, we eliminated our energy dependence on Russia and took steps towards integration into the common European energy market.

2. *The Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea was occupied by Russia a month after the February 2014 ouster of Moscow-backed President Viktor Yanukovich. In your opinion, what will happen to Crimea in the long term?*

The brutal occupation and attempted annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol two years ago by neighboring Russia was a vile act carried out contrary to international law. Unfortunately, this fact demonstrated that the global post-war security system was destroyed and it does not work anymore.

The Ukrainian Government, the people of Ukraine, as well as the entire civilized world do not recognize the Russian occupation of Crimea. That was clearly confirmed by the results of the vote at the meeting of the UN General Assembly on March 27, 2014, where 100 UN Member States supported the Resolution (68/262) “Territorial integrity of Ukraine” and affirmed their commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Currently, there is serious deterioration of the human rights situation in occupied Crimea. According to the observations of different international institutions focused on human rights (e.g., Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International), Crimea has turned into a peninsula of fear within the two years of occupation. People are afraid to express their opinions, are fearful for their lives and future, and are afraid to practice their faith and communicate in their native language. The indigenous population of the peninsula – Crimean Tatars, as well as those Ukrainians who still live there after annexation have been frequently subjected to serious human rights violations.

One concrete example of human rights oppression was the stopping of broadcasting of the only Crimean Tatars TV-channel ATR in 2015 in Crimea. The Russian occupation authorities take every possible step to deprive the Crimean Tatars of the right to freely use their native language, receive and distribute reliable information, preserve their national identity, and to educate children in the spirit of national traditions.

Numerous arrests of journalists, activists, and NGO staff members who adversely treated annexation, have also been observed in Crimea. One flagrant example is the Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, who was detained in the Crimea, forcibly transferred to Russia, and sentenced to ten years of prison on charges of “terrorism.” Another is cameraman of the Crimean Tatar TV channel ATR, Eskender Nebiyev, who was sentenced by a “court” in Simferopol to two years and six months of prison for “participation in mass riots.”

The twelfth report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the situation of human rights in Ukraine (December 9, 2015) indicated that “residents of the peninsula continued to be affected by broad curtailment of their rights due to the application of a restrictive legal framework imposed upon them by the Russian Federation.”

I would also like to draw attention of the international community to the need to support and protect Crimean Tatars from illegal actions by the Russian Federation occupation authorities in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol in connection with the beginning of a so-called legal process aimed to recognize the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People as an extremist organization and prohibit activity thereof, which will entail criminal prosecution of Mejlis members who do not recognize the annexation of Crimea and defend their national priorities, as well as their indigenous people’s legal right to reside safely in the territory of Crimea.

It is noteworthy that Crimea was once the tourist pearl of Ukraine and attracted several million tourists every year. At present, regrettably, the peninsula has been transforming into a huge Russian military base. The occupation authorities failed to secure the proper social and economic state of the inhabitants, which has been getting worse since the annexation. Against this backdrop, the number of tourists, according to different sources, decreased by more than six times – from six to one million, last year. I do not believe that people in Crimea are satisfied with their current life conditions.

As such, Ukraine will never give up its sovereign rights to Crimea. Ukraine will defend by all available means the rights of people who live there.

The struggle for the return of Crimea remains one of the priorities of the Ukrainian government’s agenda. The President of Ukraine announced early this year that Ukraine would offer to establish the international mechanism on de-occupation of the peninsula. The optimal format is considered “Geneva Plus”: with participation of our partners from the EU, USA, and signatory countries of the Budapest Memorandum.

One day, I am confident Ukraine will regain control over the peninsula.

- 3. After Ukraine and Russian-backed militants agreed to a new cease-fire plan, fighting declined in September but picked up again in November, causing multiple deaths and injuries to Ukrainian troops. An estimated 9,000 people have been killed and more than 1.3 million displaced as a result of the conflict to date. Nonetheless, Russian military aggression in Donbas is receiving less attention in*

recent months as the world is focused on increased terrorism and a refugee crisis caused by conflicts in Syria and Iraq. What is your prediction for the future of this conflict – can there be a resolution? What is the biggest obstacle to implementing the ceasefire laid down in the Minsk Agreement between OSCE, Ukraine, and Russia, especially from the perspective of the Ukrainian government?

In 2015, significant efforts by Ukraine and its partners were invested into laying the ground for a sustainable peaceful resolution. The Minsk agreements were reinforced by the package of measures and the Addendum. Regular meetings in the Normandy format and activities of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) and the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) served as important contributing factors in the peace process.

At the same time, we regret that Russia and its proxies have been demonstrating consistent unwillingness to abide by their commitments, undertaken in Minsk. Full-fledged offensives last year near the Donetsk airport and Debaltseve in winter, clashes in Shyrokyne in spring, provocative attacks on Maryinka and Krasnohorivka in summer and recent escalation (December 2015-January 2016) after a two-month calm, serve as examples of ongoing violations of the Minsk agreements by Russia.

Shooting attacks on an OSCE SMM vehicles by Russia-backed militants on January 16 and April 7 2016 in the areas of Maryinka and Snizhne respectively are regarded by Ukraine as blatant attempts to intimidate the OSCE SMM observers and yet another examples of the deliberate violations by Russia and its proxies of their obligations under the Minsk agreements.

A huge gap between Russia's political declarations and its real actions in Donbas has prevented the implementation of the Minsk agreements in line with the established timeframe.

Against this backdrop, one year after the approval of the package of measures in Minsk, the situation in Donbas remains extremely fragile and is far from achieving peace and restoring security.

Ukraine seeks early restoration of peace and stability in Donetsk and Luhansk regions and is ready to do everything necessary for that except meaningless concessions and aggressor's soft-soaping.

Our position is clear – the full implementation of the Minsk agreements by Russia, verified by the OSCE.

- 4. In December 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin has for the first time conceded that military intelligence officers were operating in east Ukraine. In your assessment, will this acknowledgement of Russia's role lead to greater determination to implement and cooperate on the Minsk agreement, or does it send a more ominous message vis-à-vis international law considerations?*

The Kremlin's "peaceful" rhetoric and "gallery play" don't match its real actions in

Donbas in order to stop active hostilities. Moscow continues to transfer to Ukraine its heavy military equipment, finance mercenaries, and provoke armed clashes. Russia has not withdrawn its regular units and has never condemned any militants' terrorist attacks. Russia continues to send "humanitarian convoys" contrary to Ukrainian legislation and international law. The list of Russia's crimes is very long.

Unlike Ukraine, which has fulfilled almost all its commitments, Russia continues to neglect its obligations under the Minsk agreements and has not fulfilled any so far.

Russia is fully responsible for the fact that the situation in Donbas remains unregulated.

In this situation, the international community should continue to put strong pressure on Russia.

I believe sanctions against Russia are working and the position of the Western countries is working as well. Sanctions are not a strategy, they are tools. However, the international community should use all its available tools to maintain political pressure on Russia and force it to honor its agreements.

Aggression against Ukraine has become a real threat to global security everywhere. Hybrid proxy wars, terrorism, national radical and extremist movements, the erosion of international agreements, the blurring and even erasing of national identities: all of these threats now challenge Europe. If they are not stopped now, they will cross European borders and spread throughout the globe.

It is worth noting that by its current actions towards Ukraine the Russian Federation is setting a bad example for the DPRK and other countries as the country-violator of the security system of the European continent and the existing global nonproliferation regime. In addition, I would like to note that Professor Ihor Piliayev, a well-known Ukrainian political analyst (with whom I have written several books on European and continental integration), observes that the current Russian state and the Russian economy, based on the merger of power and property and, therefore, deeply anti-market and anti-democratic, have been obtaining "a palace" nature increasingly in direct proportion to a systemic aggravation of conflict between Russian and the West and, more broadly, with the world of modernity. He labels the modern Russian state and economy as "a palace-neopolitar," taking into account the tracking of their historical connection with so-called "palace" states and economies of antiquity.

Ukraine is in the process of improving its market economy and delegitimizing corruption as well as striving for the democratization of society and institutions after the Revolution of Dignity. At the same time, in Russia we have been witnessing the archaic and natural styles of economic activity and the strengthening of its corruptive nature, the intensification of the conversion of power into property, in addition to the increasing self-isolation of the Russian political regime and economy from the civilized world.

5. *There have been recent discussions about whether Ukraine will join NATO. What*

is your view on the role of NATO in the coming 10-20 years? How big will the influence of the U.S. be in 10 years from now in Europe? Will Ukraine want to shift to the West? Moreover, is there the sentiment in Ukraine that Europeans are inviting them to come closer, or is the Russian opposition a primary concern?

Currently, the deepening strategic partnership with NATO is one of the priorities of Ukraine in the field of foreign policy, complying with the principles of the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between Ukraine and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1997) and other bilateral documents.

Since the gaining of independence in 1991, Ukraine, as a peace-loving state, has adhered to a non-bloc status and relied on number of international legally binding instruments and principles of the European collective security system.

Under the provisions of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 Ukraine eliminated all of its nuclear weapons (the third most in the world) and the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America, reaffirmed their commitment to Ukraine, in accordance with the principles of the CSCE Final Act, to respect the independence and sovereignty and existing borders of Ukraine as well as refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of Ukraine.

Facing Russian military aggression against Ukraine since 2014, Kyiv appealed to the Guarantor States under the Budapest Memorandum (USA, UK, France, and China) to react immediately to prevent these unfriendly actions by the Russian side. However, we are now witnessing that this mechanism doesn't work.

In December 2014 the Parliament of Ukraine adopted the law on abandoning the non-block status of Ukraine, which proved to be ineffective in the context of securing the state from external aggression and pressure.

The development of relations between Ukraine and NATO focuses on two main dimensions: political dialogue and practical cooperation. The most recent main achievements in these areas, to my mind, are the exchange of high-level visits in September and December 2015, the signing of the Roadmap for NATO-Ukraine Defense-Technical Co-operation and the launching of practical interaction with NATO aimed at achieving the full interoperability of the Armed Forces of Ukraine with NATO forces.

The NATO Summit in Warsaw in July 2016 and the meeting of NATO-Ukraine Commission at the highest level on the sidelines of the Summit are considered as landmark events for future directions of cooperation between Ukraine and NATO. In his invitation to Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg pointed out that NATO-Ukraine summit in Warsaw is the clearest sign of constant and strong Alliance's support for Ukraine, as well as a clear political signal of nonrecognition of aggressive policy and any attempt to change the borders in Europe by force.

The issue of joining NATO, on the one hand, requires the consensus of all member-

states and currently there is no consensus in NATO on Ukraine's membership. On the other hand, this process requires relevant internal procedures and reforms in Ukraine. So, these processes will take a considerable amount of time.

On Embassy of Ukraine in Seoul

6. *Could you speak more on your personal experience as the Ukrainian Ambassador to Korea? What has left the strongest impression on you during your time in Korea or East Asia as a whole thus far? What do you think are the major differences (in terms of culture or society) between South Korea and Ukraine? What is your vision for Ukraine-ROK relations?*

Ukraine, like the Republic of Korea, is a multicultural and multi-confessional society. Numerous Christian communities have traditionally inhabited my country as they have in Korea, including the Catholic one. We also have a Buddhist community and there are a lot of atheists. Ukrainian people as well as South Koreans tolerate religious beliefs and respect and absorb the wisdom of the different religious and philosophical doctrines, both of the West and the East.

Touching upon differences, first of all, perhaps, I would note the high external emotional sensitivity of Ukrainians. Often, our people follow their hearts first, then rational arguments. This, probably, makes them different from the people of Confucian culture. Ukrainians are less prone to strict observance of rituals and are more inclined to overthrow than to respect authority. On the one hand, it is an advantage when there is a need for drastic transformation and the breaking of obdurate old orders, which prevent the modernization of society. On the other hand, we should learn from the people of South Korea such characteristics as great patience, rationality, a sense of personal responsibility for one's own actions, and respect for one's own ancestral traditions and rituals that make up the national identity.

7. *How many Ukrainians currently reside in Seoul? How about Koreans in Ukraine? Have there been any notable trends on Ukrainians living abroad that you have noticed during your time as Ambassador?*

According to our recent data, some 350 Ukrainians reside in South Korea. Most of them are employees of Korean companies or students. During recent years around 10 000 Ukrainian citizens visited the Republic of Korea with various purposes.

As of today, more than 30 000 ethnic Koreans reside in Ukraine. Governments of both countries entered into constructive cooperation on solving the current issues of their residence.

The Ukrainian Government established a Special Committee on ethnic Koreans in early 2007. Seven meetings of the Committee were held since its establishment. A pilot

project aimed at surveying ethnic Koreans living in the southern regions of Ukraine was conducted in order to further legalize their stay in Ukraine.

Ukraine will continue to support ethnic Koreans living in Ukraine.

8. *South Korea ranks third among Ukraine's trading partners in the Asia-Pacific region after China and India. Bilateral trade between Ukraine and Korea has been increasing steadily over the years since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 and South Korea remains one of the leading investors in Ukraine. Could you elaborate on the nature of ROK-Ukraine bilateral trade and investment? Which areas do you believe have the greatest potential for further cooperation between the two countries and why (e.g.: high-level exchanges, trade, investment, development, consular affairs, education and culture)?*

Nowadays strengthening cooperation with the Republic of Korea is one of the major priorities of Ukrainian foreign policy in North East Asia.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the Republic of Korea's principle stand and support in preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine both on the bilateral level as well as in the United Nations is highly appreciated in Ukraine.

The important step, taken by the Korean Government in 2014-2015, was the providing of humanitarian aid worth \$1.5 million to support forcibly displaced people due to the current developments in the east part of Ukraine, caused by Russian aggression. We appreciate the Republic of Korea for its essential contribution to the maintenance of the Ukrainians who were forced to leave their homes.

For 24 years, since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Ukraine and the Republic of Korea, the two countries have been dynamically developing cooperation in all spheres of mutual interest. However, we still have a lot of opportunities for promoting our cooperation in the spheres of economy and investment, science and technology, culture, and education.

Economic cooperation is a key aspect of our bilateral relations. Ukraine considers the Republic of Korea as one of the most promising economic partners in the Asia Pacific region.

Unfortunately, the current trade turnover does not correspond to the potential of the two countries. In 2014, bilateral trade turnover decreased by 20.2% and amounted to \$988.5 million. The same trend continued in 2015 - bilateral trade turnover decreased by 24 % and amounted to \$ 651.8 million.

The enhancement of trade cooperation, especially the diversification of export and import operations, is among the priorities of our relations.

In this regard, I think that the regular sessions of the Intergovernmental Ukrainian-Korean Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation could play a more prominent role in the intensification of bilateral economic cooperation in various sectors. The two countries have been exploring possibilities to hold the next (Third) session of the

Commission in Seoul in the near future (the second session was held in November 2013).

I would like to note that Ukraine, as a huge market with a population of 43 million people, has many attractions for Korean investors. The Ukrainian Government is making continuous efforts to create a favorable investment climate in Ukraine. We are interested in attracting more Korean investments, particularly, in infrastructure, agriculture, construction, metallurgy, energy, and high-tech industries. As of December 31, 2015 the total amount of direct Korean investment into the Ukraine's economy accounted for \$ 161.5 million.

9. *Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin's visit to the ROK in September 2015 marked the first of its kind by a Ukrainian Foreign Minister in eleven years. The ROK was also the only country Minister Klimkin visited on this occasion. As you were with him during this landmark visit, what were some of your key impressions? What is your view on the impact of this diplomatic exchange and how the two countries will cooperate on an international level (particularly with respect to the Korean Peninsula and the situation in Ukraine)?*

We consider the official visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Pavlo Klimkin, to the Republic of Korea in September 2015 as a milestone event in bilateral relations. This visit was paid after an 11-year pause in the exchange of visits at the foreign minister level and demonstrated the importance of the further boosting of cooperation between Ukraine and the Republic of Korea in political, trade and investment, and cultural spheres, as well as in international arena. Special attention was paid to the issue of further liberalizing the visa regime between the two countries (concluding the intergovernmental Agreement on the Mutual Abolition of Visa Requirements for citizens of both countries).

So, we have ahead of us very intensive work aimed at the implementation of the agreements reached during the visit.

On Ukraine in East Asia

10. *After having spent more than four years in Seoul, what is your outlook on the future of the nation? What do you see as the major opportunities or challenges for Korea or other countries in the East Asian region?*

One of the key issues in the East Asia region that will probably remain is further ensuring peace and stability. In this regard, the attention of all the countries in this region will be focused on North Korea's nuclear weapons program and the efforts of the international community, including the Six-Party Talks, will be crucial to resolving this issue.

In this sense, it is worth noting that Ukraine is a unique country in terms of nuclear safety and security: Firstly, because of the Chernobyl disaster (1986), the aftermath of which we still have to deal with today and due to which we have gained valuable experience on nuclear safety and the protection of people from nuclear disasters and their effects;

secondly, because of our historical decision to abandon the world's third largest nuclear arsenal (1994), inherited by Ukraine from the USSR; and thirdly, because of Ukraine's fulfillment of its pledge to remove all highly enriched uranium from its territory (2012).

Ukraine supports the trust-building process in Northeast Asia, put forth by the President of the Republic of Korea. At the same time, taking into account recent DPRK's provocations (fourth nuclear test and launch of a long-range ballistic missile) we, as the UNSC's non-permanent member, were completely supportive of the relevant Security Council's Resolution 2270 (2016) as well as unilateral actions, taken by Seoul in order to put pressure on Pyongyang.

We consider South Korea an influential player in the settlement of security problems in the Northeast Asia. The South Korean Government can count on Ukraine's support in actions to pursue the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

11. Concerning Ukraine's relations with Northeast Asia more broadly, what do you foresee as fundamental developments in the next 5 years? In your opinion, which aspects of Ukraine's presence in the region should be strengthened? What do you think should be priorities for Kiev to focus on in the region?

Despite the focus on integration into the EU, East Asia remains an important region in the political and economic sense for Ukraine. Last year was marked by the high-level activity of the President and the Foreign Minister of Ukraine. In particular, President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko met with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in Davos and held talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe within his official visit to Ukraine. Top diplomat of Ukraine Pavlo Klimkin paid visits to Japan and, as it was mentioned above, to the Republic of Korea. These events were aimed at paving the way for further boosting cooperation in areas of mutual interest both at the bilateral level and within international organizations.

In recent decades we have witnessed a steady trend of internationalization and the globalization of production in the world economy, which in turn leads to the necessity of forming an integrated transport and logistics systems. The new transport and logistics initiatives of China ("One Belt, One Road") and the Republic of Korea ("Eurasia Initiative") trend towards the extension of their product share into the European market and the intensification of commodity flows between Asia and Europe.

In this regard, given the favorable geographical location and scientific-industrial potential, the Government of Ukraine has been making efforts to be included in the new Silk Route from Asia to Europe and vice versa.

Thus, Ukraine accepted the Chinese offer to join the "One Belt, One Road" project and has already started work on its implementation. In this context, we are in a constant dialogue with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and other interested countries on forming efficient tariff conditions for cargo transportation using the transport infrastructure of

Ukraine.

As a result, in January 2016 Ukraine in cooperation with Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan launched a pilot container train to China via a new Silk Road (through the Black Sea and Caspian Sea) bypassing Russia, which delivered cargo to China within 15.5 days.

The new route is an alternative that would allow redirecting cargo flows from the West to the East and in reverse, bypassing the territory of the Russian Federation, which, starting from January 2016, completely stopped the transit of any commodities originating from Ukraine through its territory, regardless of which country was the final destination.