

Volodymyr Khandogiy

INSIDE UKRAINIAN DIPLOMACY

Vol. 1: True Stories by a Career Diplomat, 1970–1994



Ukrainian Voices, vol. 105

ibidem

Volodymyr Khandogiy

Inside Ukrainian Diplomacy

Vol. 1: True Stories by a Career Diplomat, 1970–1994

UKRAINIAN VOICES

Collected by Andreas Umland

- 104 *Viktor Savchenko*
Free Will in Civil Law
A Ukrainian Perspective
With a foreword by Thomas Douglas
ISBN 978-3-8382-2133-5
- 100 *Sergiy Korsunsky*
The Age of Revisionism
International Relations in Times of War, Uncertainty, and Insecurity
ISBN 978-3-8382-2023-9
- 101 *Olena Bogatyrenko (ed.)*
Was bedeutete Russlands Besetzung der Krim?
Zwölf Frauen berichten, wie sie 2014 den Beginn des Russisch-Ukrainischen
Krieges erlebten
Übersetzt von Hermann Haushahn
ISBN 978-3-8382-2292-9
- 102 *Alla Prokhovnik-Raphique*
Whispers of Survival
War, Trauma, and the Making of Civilian Rescuers
With a foreword by Sarah Adams
ISBN 978-3-8382-2114-4
- 103 *Maryna Starodubska*
Ukraine Layer by Layer
Freedom and Friction in a Frontier Society
With a foreword by Natalka Cmoc
ISBN 978-3-8382-2117-5

The book series “Ukrainian Voices” publishes English- and German-language monographs, edited volumes, document collections, and anthologies of articles authored and composed by Ukrainian politicians, intellectuals, activists, officials, researchers, and diplomats. The series’ aim is to introduce Western and other audiences to Ukrainian explorations, deliberations and interpretations of historic and current, domestic, and international affairs. The purpose of these books is to make non-Ukrainian readers familiar with how some prominent Ukrainians approach, view and assess their country’s development and position in the world. The series was founded, and the volumes are collected by Andreas Umland, Dr. phil. (FU Berlin), Ph. D. (Cambridge), Associate Professor of Politics at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and an Analyst in the Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs.

Volodymyr Khandogiy

INSIDE UKRAINIAN DIPLOMACY

Vol. 1:

True Stories by a Career Diplomat, 1970–1994

ibidem
Verlag 

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Cover picture: ID 87957061 © Bluraz | Dreamstime.com

ISBN (Print): 978-3-8382-2147-2

ISBN (E-Book [PDF]): 978-3-8382-8147-6

© *ibidem*-Verlag, Hannover • Stuttgart 2026

Leuschnerstraße 40
30457 Hannover
Germany / Deutschland
info@ibidem.eu

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlanges unzulässig und strafbar. Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und elektronische Speicherformen sowie die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who commits any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

Printed in the EU

To my wife, Natalia Shevchenko,
with gratitude for her understanding and support.

“A diplomat is a man who always remembers a woman’s
birthday but never remembers how old she is”

Robert Frost, American poet, 1874–1963

Contents

In Lieu of a Preface	9
Introduction.....	17
I. The Mysterious Word “Diplomat”	27
II. My Universities	43
III. Pakistani Contrasts.....	83
IV. Diplomacy of a “Phantom” State	101
V. Stories from the New York Period – 1	149
VI. Diplomacy of the Stagnation Era	217
VII. Stories from the New York Period – 2.....	273
VIII. Back to the Future	333
In Lieu of an Afterword	391
Notes.....	399

In Lieu of a Preface

...The minister of foreign affairs was the epitome of courtesy. He received me without delay immediately upon my return from London in the summer of 2014, where I had been accredited to the Court of St. James's¹ for four years as Ukraine's ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary. This was somewhat at odds with the plebeian "tradition" of keeping ambassadors – hastily recalled by the acting "head of state" on the eve of the May presidential election – waiting in the corridors of the new government for weeks on end. After what struck me as an insincere tirade about how "sad" he was that this had happened, and excuses that recalling me to Kyiv was not at all part of the ministry's plans, he suddenly asked: "And where do you see yourself? With your experience, you've surely made arrangements for some 'fallback option'?" After carefully surveying the office, which I had once had to settle into following the ostentatious renovation carried out by the young Foreign Minister Yatsenyuk, I replied: "Pavlo Anatoliyovych, if I had any doubts, your question has completely dispelled them. It means only one thing – you don't see me anywhere!" The minister mumbled something awkwardly along the lines of "we'll keep you in mind," and that he would have "interesting proposals" to share with me later. It was at that very moment that I decided for myself that this was my last meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), where I had served for nearly forty years, having come a long way from attaché to ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary, one of the leaders of Ukraine's foreign policy department, without skipping a single rung on the career ladder.

As soon as I left the minister's office, I felt an immense sense of relief, because lately I had witnessed how the new team of "young reformers" – carried into power on the shoulders of the rank-and-file soldiers of the Revolution of Dignity – had been making strategic mistakes, whether intentionally or not.

These random, and perhaps even planted, individuals, who by hook or by crook had managed to get their hands on the reins of government solely to get as close as possible to the public trough, had already inflicted irreparable political, economic, and reputational damage on Ukraine, parasitizing the sincere desire of our highly educated, patriotic youth for genuine democratic reforms and for a life according to European standards, free of corruption, where human rights are the highest value. And I saw no prospects for turning the situation around for the better within this framework. The final straw – the one that destroyed my faith that the “revolutionary lustrators” were capable of making balanced strategic decisions – was their clumsy attempt to dismantle the Ukrainian diplomatic service. They acted in accordance with the hackneyed dogmas of the well-known classic of Marxism-Leninism: “We will destroy the whole world of violence to its foundations, and then we will build our new world; whoever was a nobody will become everything,” as well as: “Every cook should be able to run the state.” Under populist slogans of reform – discredited by their predecessors – departments responsible for the strategic directions of the MFA were eliminated, the institutional memory of the diplomatic service was severed, and the scholarly and educational potential of the Diplomatic Academy was reduced to nothing. Through thoughtless pseudo-lustration, the unique talent pool of the Ukrainian diplomatic service was lost. And all of this was done in the name of creating a “new European diplomatic service.” To be sure, the younger generation knows what that is and how it functions, at best, from the stories of their older colleagues, the very people they dismissed. In other words, it all turned out to be a bluff. They destroyed what they set out to destroy, but they were never able to build something truly professional and modern that would serve the interests of the

people. Unfortunately, history teaches only those who are willing to learn. Even in 1917, the Bolshevik horde did not dare to destroy professional cadres, and guarded military specialists and diplomats like the apple of its eye.

I am not a believer in conspiracy theories, but the decision by the quasi-legitimate leadership of the time to strip Ukrainian embassies in most European capitals of their heads looked like a Moscow special operation as part of a hybrid war—one in which Crimea had already been annexed and aggression in eastern Ukraine was being prepared. It was launched by Russian intelligence services abroad through their agents of influence among Ukrainian migrant workers, who for some reason demonstrated their “civic stance” not in front of Russian embassies but by circling in fancy cars around Ukrainian diplomatic missions under the lumpen-proletariat’s favorite slogans: “Down with the gang!” They even staged some kind of indefinite protests in front of foreign ministries, as I saw, for example, outside the Foreign Office in London. It was an utterly senseless, if not provocative, stunt, since the United Kingdom was then effectively leading the international movement for sanctions against Russia in connection with the annexation of Crimea and was providing comprehensive political and material support to Ukraine. As an ambassador, it was difficult for me to understand what else the Ukrainians in Britain were seeking. In Kyiv, no one lifted a finger to stop this chaos and explain to the diaspora—which includes many educated, intelligent people, true patriots rather than mere enthusiasts—that professional diplomats, who make up the vast majority of ambassadors, always serve the state, in times of trouble and in joy, and not the president who signed their credentials. Therefore, the main task at this critical juncture for Ukraine is to unite efforts in support of Ukraine, not to engage in “wild protests” demanding

the recall of this or that ambassador simply because he did not join them in shouting outside his own embassy. It is telling that, as often happens here, genuine professionals were quickly dismissed during this upheaval, while political appointees—lacking professional training and foreign-language skills, and whose “merits” for holding their posts remain unclear—continued in their roles. To finally dislodge some of these “diplomats” from their comfortable positions, they had to either botch their work completely or become embroiled in various scandals that had already swept through the diplomatic service under the new administration.

For Yakovenko, the Russian ambassador to London—whom I knew from my time in the Soviet diplomatic service—as well as for many other Russian diplomats, this “cleansing” of Ukraine’s diplomatic field at a critical moment was the best possible gift. After all, the disappearance of Ukrainian ambassadors from the information space gave them a unique opportunity to serve as the Kremlin’s unchallenged mouthpiece, shaping public opinion in European countries to their advantage. The fruits of this, to say the least, shortsighted policy are already visible to the naked eye. Under pressure from the Russian information machine, which does not shy away from any methods in the arsenal of Goebbels-style propaganda, the united front of support for Ukraine that emerged in response to Russia’s aggressive actions has begun to show cracks. Legislative bodies in several countries are increasingly calling for the lifting of sanctions imposed against Russia, which are severely harming the interests of Europeans themselves. Politicians are now flocking to annexed Crimea, ignoring its status as Ukrainian territory. The logic behind our partners’ actions, stemming from the “Ukraine fatigue” that has built up in Europe, increasingly resembles the infamous policy of *faits accomplis* on the eve of

World War II. It threatens to evolve into a policy of “appeasement of the aggressor,” which already wreaked havoc in Europe and beyond in the last century.

I have come to realize that there are no simple solutions to the situation involving external aggression against Ukraine. Nor can any timeframe be set for such solutions – a mistake many Ukrainian politicians are currently making. It will take exactly as long as it takes. But we must start by adjusting our foreign policy paradigm. Foreign policy must be based on society’s demands and must be understandable to society. Hence the need for professional outreach, a radical improvement in the quality of our domestic discourse on foreign policy issues, and the active participation in that discourse of civil society and the expert community – not just representatives of political forces. Defining the state’s foreign policy priorities and the mechanisms for their implementation cannot remain the domain of the select few. History preserves the collective experience of entire generations, which can be used to resolve situations that, at first glance, seem simply impossible to solve. And everyone who possesses even a small part of this experience can and must make a modest contribution to the revival of the country.

First and foremost, we must not forget the unique experience in multilateral diplomacy accumulated by the Ukrainian diplomatic service over the years of UN membership, which, unfortunately, remains on the periphery of professional analysis and is, consciously or unconsciously, ignored by government structures. The UN’s inexhaustible potential for conflict resolution, along with its broad arsenal of peacekeeping mechanisms, international legal instruments, and UN-affiliated institutions, is crying out to be used in the search for a way out of the crisis in Ukraine. Only the full-

scale involvement of this most authoritative universal organization in the process of resolving our problems can serve as a reliable guarantee that, in this process, we will act as a full-fledged subject of international relations, rather than as a vulnerable object of geopolitical rivalry.

So, the meeting with the minister — with his ritual question, “Where do you see yourself?” and his clumsy joke about a “backup airfield” — led me to realize a simple truth. The state bureaucratic apparatus and its underdeveloped offspring, the diplomatic service, are incapable of reforming themselves. The only way to pull Ukrainian foreign policy out of the quagmire of unprofessionalism and provincial stereotypes is to strengthen the institutional capacities of civil society in this crucial area. And I decided to take the minister’s hint about the “alternate airfield,” but to build it myself, and to invite Ukraine’s true diplomatic elite — the best diplomats, practitioners, and foreign policy experts — to land there. Thus, a decision was made — one that, to be honest, I had been mulling over for quite some time — to establish the nongovernmental organization Ukrainian Foreign Policy Association. Only time will tell whether the collective experience of my fellow ambassadors, who agreed to join the Association’s governing bodies, will prove useful to our modern-day Talleyrands, Disraelis, and Kissingers (it is not entirely politically correct to speak of Chicherins, Molotovs, and Gromykos today). And also, the realization that there is no future without the past. American presidents, for example, understood this and strongly supported their Association, which will soon celebrate its one-hundredth anniversary. The legendary FDR — Franklin Delano Roosevelt — once wrote in a letter to General Frank R. McCoy, president of the New York Foreign Policy Association, that the government functions “with the support of the entire people,” who provide this support

based on facts. So, this American nongovernmental organization received the highest praise from the US president for its “clear and concise” presentation to the public of facts regarding global issues and their impact on the United States. Earning such praise in our Ukrainian reality is no small feat.

So, the Ukrainian Foreign Policy Association is my final diplomatic topic, with which I would like to begin a conversation about everything that ultimately led me to its creation. Let’s wish it success.

Introduction

I've always wanted to write about diplomacy and diplomats. At least, one day it became clear that I had been lucky and that my diplomatic career had become irreversible. On an intuitive level, I understood that what I did, and the circle of people I had to work with or simply meet, might be interesting—or even instructive—to others. But I have to write not memoirs, but recollections. After all, memoirs generally require chronological order, accuracy, and, preferably, objectivity in the presentation and interpretation of events. For that, at the very least, I would have had to keep notes. I promised myself a million times that “starting Monday” I would begin keeping a diary, but I never wrote a single line while the events were still fresh in my mind. Therefore, everything I have written here is what my memory has retained. Many events have not stood the test of time; they have faded from memory. Some, years later, are perceived differently, through the lens of my own life and professional experience, that is, subjectively. Hence the “stories.” Not fictional, but lived, in which real people are the main characters. Moreover, I am proud that at every stage of my diplomatic career, whether as an attaché or acting minister of foreign affairs, my personal efforts yielded not virtual but real results. It is precisely this—working toward results—that I strive to convey in this book. Proof of these words lies ahead.

Here I am compelled to set aside a phrase my father used—one that has been etched in my mind since childhood and was borrowed from the “leader of the peoples,” J. V. Stalin: “modesty adorns a Bolshevik”—and say that it is unlikely there is anyone in modern Ukrainian diplomacy who, during the tectonic geopolitical shifts of the late 1980s and early 1990s, served in four diplomatic services: those of the USSR,

the Ukrainian SSR, Russia, and, finally, independent Ukraine. To this, one might add that, upon assuming the post of deputy minister of foreign affairs of Ukraine in 1995 at the age of forty-two, I managed to serve as deputy and first deputy to seven ministers (twice for one of them), receiving awards from three of my own presidents, prime ministers, and the Verkhovna Rada, as well as from one monarch and the presidents of two foreign states. For seven months in 2009, I served as acting minister of foreign affairs, until President Yushchenko's preelection intrigues pushed the capable businessman Petro Poroshenko to the forefront of the diplomatic struggle.

...It seemed rather strange and quite unexpected, no matter what those "in the know" might say. On October 8, 2009, amid the ongoing stagnation in Ukrainian-Russian relations, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and I held a landmark meeting in Kharkiv between the heads of Ukrainian and Russian border regions. After the meeting concluded, we arrived in Chisinau for a session of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Council of Foreign Ministers, which preceded the meeting of heads of state. And already on the morning of October 9, on the sidelines of the summit, information began circulating that the issue of approving Petro Oleksiyovych Poroshenko as Ukraine's minister of foreign affairs had been brought before the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. The irony of the situation lay in the fact that back in the spring, President Yushchenko had submitted the candidacy of our ambassador to Washington, Oleg Shamshur, to the Verkhovna Rada. A nomination that, as everyone understood, had no chance of passing, but which the dismissed Minister Volodymyr Ogryzko, a friend and classmate of Shamshur, had insisted upon. By the way, the president didn't lift a finger to even try to lobby for his candidate for minister, who ultimately turned out to be a "downed pilot."

So, everyone assumed that Khandogiy would hold on as acting minister until the presidential election, and then we would see. At the time in Chisinau, the head of the Presidential Administration, Vira Ulyanchenko, assured me and others that Poroshenko didn't have the necessary number of votes and that his bid for the ministry wasn't serious. These predictions were quickly refuted by a text message from Kyiv, which reported that P. Poroshenko had received, if I am not mistaken, around 240 votes and, thus, had become the new minister of foreign affairs. And already in the second half of that same day, Petro Oleksiyovych arrived in Chisinau on private plane, marking the beginning of the new minister's brief but extraordinarily intense diplomatic activity. He made no secret of the fact that he had little time to establish himself in the post of the country's chief diplomat, regardless of who won the upcoming presidential election. As an exceptionally talented individual with a background in international relations, Petro Oleksiyovych very skillfully "spread his bets" and hoped that he held the "golden key" in his pocket. But history had other plans...

To be honest, after the decision to appoint a new foreign minister — the ninth, by the way, since Ukraine gained independence — I breathed a sigh of relief and returned to Kyiv to continue, as Hryhorii Skovoroda liked to say, "plowing the field" of diplomacy. But a not-so-pleasant aftertaste remained from the fact that I had been kept in the dark. At the same time, this kaleidoscope of ministers, each of whom operated according to the "three envelopes" scheme, is precisely what testifies to the weakness of the Ukrainian diplomatic service and of state institutions in general. For the younger generation, I will recall an old but still relevant parable that every official should remember. Here it is. A minister is dismissed from his post. He leaves three envelopes and a note on his desk for his successor. The note reads: if problems arise, open the envelopes one by one — they contain advice on what to

do. Very soon, the successor feels that his work is not yielding the desired results and opens the first envelope. It reads: "Blame your predecessor for everything." So he does, but still gets no results. Then the new minister opens the second envelope and reads: "Start reforms." When this advice also fails to bring success, he opens the third and final envelope and reads: "Prepare three envelopes."

It's the same with us. Every new minister — whether sincere or simply "pretending to be busy" — believed that everything that had come before him should be forgotten and that we should start from scratch. This was a major mistake that prevented us from quickly establishing an effective, self-sufficient diplomatic institution that would enjoy authority not only among foreign colleagues but, above all, within the country. In the early years of independence, the Ukrainian bureaucracy, which had emerged from the Communist Party nomenklatura, openly viewed Ukrainian diplomacy as something alien. Even the highest-ranking officials could not fathom why diplomats were needed. It seemed to them that apart from the magic word "protocol," everything else diplomats did was of the devil.

To be fair, it must be said that the MFA had not yet realized its place in the new framework, and our diplomats were not actually creating the added value that would interest their colleagues and society. All of this stems from a breakdown in institutional memory, a lack of collective experience in defending national interests — experience that is passed down from generation to generation — as well as from the very uncertainty surrounding those national interests themselves. Hence the perception of the MFA as a purely decorative structure, which, unfortunately, still persists in society. And, consequently, the chronic underfunding led to a sharp decline in the prestige of the diplomatic service. Back in the

1990s, the MFA—which practically overnight transformed from a sort of “club for the select few” into a large organization with missions abroad—was joined by people who had not found a place for themselves in business or in various private entities. It is no exaggeration to say that, in the early stages, people were recruited for the diplomatic service straight off the street. In other words, the lack of qualified personnel was undoubtedly a serious problem.

But the most important thing is that the top management of the MFA at the time completely failed to understand the priorities of its work and the basic principles by which any diplomatic service operates. For example, I was trained by the Soviet diplomatic service to believe that a diplomat cannot take a single step without the appropriate directives and instructions from leadership. That has always been the ABCs of diplomacy. I know from my own experience that Ukrainian diplomats, as a rule, improvised, guided at best, as the classic of Marxism-Leninism put it, by “revolutionary legal consciousness.” All of this is because Ukraine’s position on most international issues simply did not exist, and no one was in a hurry to develop one, while its own national interests remained unidentified and unformulated. Moreover, even today, most diplomatic missions abroad do not know what classified correspondence or a coded telegram is. And without this, genuine diplomatic activity is impossible.

Many of those who participated in negotiations at the start of independent Ukraine’s international activities had no idea that the word “yes” in diplomatic language means “maybe,” and “maybe” sometimes means “no.” Some newly minted “diplomats,” who had previously been warmly welcomed in Moscow with a “Kyiv cake” and a bottle of “pepper vodka,” simply could not understand why these “arguments” no longer worked in negotiations with the Russians,

and why appeals like “guys, we’re all on the same side” did not yield the desired result. And today, in my view, the definition by the renowned English diplomat Ernest Satow remains relevant: “Diplomacy is the application of reason and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of different independent states.” So, the necessity, under any circumstances, of being tactful, as the renowned expert on classical diplomatic practice Harold Nicolson aptly put it, “forced diplomats to put into circulation the paper money of conventional phrases instead of the ringing coin of ordinary human conversation.”¹ And the exchange rate of this “paper money” remains high to this day.

I cannot help but mention one circumstance that will allow us to better understand the general context in which our “diplomatic narratives” unfold. The diplomatic service of any serious state, given its specific nature, is to a significant extent self-sufficient within the overall civil service system in terms of its legal status. And this is recognized by society. In addition, it relies on adequate funding, a well-developed and robust infrastructure that includes its own capabilities for information influence, primarily abroad, a modern system of cryptographic and diplomatic-courier communications with foreign institutions, and autonomous logistical support for its own needs and for international events. Of course, a necessary component is the availability of a network of properties in Ukraine to host foreign delegations, as well as abroad to create suitable conditions for the operation of Ukrainian embassies. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian diplomatic service still lacks all of this and much more, such as an attractive benefits package. And it is regrettable that the authorities sincerely believe that all of this is unnecessary. Suffice it to say that only in 2011, after titanic efforts, did the Verkhovna Rada manage to adopt a new version of the Law on the Diplomatic

Service, which, despite its imperfections, nevertheless laid the legal foundation for the activities of Ukrainian diplomats.

Like my colleagues, I fully understand that there are objective difficulties stemming, above all, from the country's overall economic situation. But there is also an objective need for an independent state to have an effective, modern army, law-enforcement agencies, and a diplomatic service. The issue lies in the political elite's awareness of this need. And while the authorities occasionally mention the needs of the army or the police, the diplomatic service has always lived – and continues to live – by the principle of “whatever is left over.”

My desire to recount the diplomatic path I have traveled became practically insatiable after the collapse of the Soviet Union and, consequently, its diplomatic service, which, despite its ideological bias, was recognized as one of the most professional and effective diplomatic services in the world in terms of protecting the interests of the ruling party elite. Whatever anyone may say, the Soviet diplomatic service, whose roots run deep into the “dynastic diplomacy” of the era of Kyivan Rus–Ukraine and later the Russian Empire, had its own “school” and its own traditions. It is evident that Russian diplomacy has usurped this “school” and these traditions. At the same time, it would be desirable for the diplomatic corps of independent Ukraine to preserve this institutional memory – having, of course, weeded out the imperial and class-party layers. And to position itself in the historical context not only of the diplomacy of Bohdan Khmelnytsky and the UNR,² but also of the best traditions of the Soviet diplomatic school. It is illogical for a state, on the one hand, to insist that it is one of the legal successors to the USSR, as evidenced, in particular, by our claims in the courts of a number of foreign states regarding the distribution of Soviet foreign

property, while, on the other hand, pretending that everything must start from scratch. As the classic saying goes, “learn from others, but do not shun your own”³. In my view, the rather fragmented historical experience of Ukrainian diplomacy today requires enrichment not only through the systematization of the documentary corpus, which our MFA does sporadically. The centuries-old history of Ukraine’s international relations requires more in-depth research – both scholarly and literary – as well as popularization. The work of those who were directly involved in Ukraine’s international activities in the postwar period could be exceptional. Unfortunately, their numbers are dwindling. Those who are still with us, in my view, owe a debt to the younger generation, which often lacks basic historical knowledge. We must break down the stereotypes – which we ourselves created – regarding the secondary nature of Ukrainian diplomacy and diplomats. I remember how one of the leaders of the MFA of the Ukrainian SSR described Ukrainian diplomacy of that era as nothing less than “fabulous.” And now we wonder where our insurmountable sense of inferiority comes from. In my view, my colleague Ambassador Oleksandr Slipchenko made a significant contribution to laying the foundations of Ukrainian diplomacy’s self-identity through his exceptionally fascinating trilogy *Notes on Diplomacy and Diplomats*.⁴

The aim of my work is to try to show that Ukrainian diplomats are not “fairy-tale heroes,” but true professionals who, even under the conditions of Moscow’s total domination in all spheres of social and political life at that time, were able to maintain a foothold from which the diplomatic service of independent Ukraine grew. I am far from exaggerating the role of Ukrainian Soviet diplomacy, but it is an integral link in the chain that firmly connects our past and present.

Thus, I offer readers not merely memories but narratives “framed” by my own assessments. It seemed to me that my nearly forty years of experience—exactly half of it gained while working abroad—could serve as a small brick in the foundation of the diplomatic “school” of modern Ukraine, which we have yet to build.

I. The Mysterious Word “Diplomat”

The story began with my aunt Maria, who dispelled the doubts of a high school senior by telling me that I should become a diplomat and enroll in the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) under the USSR MFA. At the time, I was graduating from the best school in Cherkasy – School No. 1, named after V. I. Lenin – on track for a gold medal, and honestly didn’t know what to do next.

So, I accepted Maria Oleksiyivna’s proposal with enthusiasm. The mysterious word “diplomat” entered our family vocabulary. But, in reality, my family’s “international activities” had certain historical roots at that time. My father, aside from the fact that he ended the Second World War in Berlin and served for some time in the Soviet occupation forces, was sent to West Germany in the early 1960s as a highly qualified practicing veterinarian to select breeding stock. At the time, that was really cool. The assignment was arranged through the USSR Ministry of Foreign Trade, and one of the outcomes of that trip was my father’s acquaintance with a senior official at the Soviet trade mission in Cologne, who visited us in Cherkasy several times with his wife to relax on the picturesque banks of the Dnipro. In their appearance, manners, and demeanor, they struck me as people living a completely different life somewhere in a completely different dimension. Later, when I first heard about the “Iron Curtain,”¹ I got the feeling that such a life existed right there, and a natural desire arose to peek behind it.

Thus, the near future took on concrete shape. Preparations for admission began. Although, to be honest, it all seemed almost like an adventure. At the same time, the most difficult part turned out not to be the issue of knowledge it-

self—knowledge sufficient to enter an elite metropolitan institute without shame. I felt quite confident in this regard, thanks to the education I received at school, which, in fact, met the highest educational standards of the time. Particularly noteworthy was the unusually high level of English proficiency—uncommon for a provincial school—which we had been studying since first grade. Our progressive school even attempted to teach a number of subjects in English. Admittedly, this experiment was never fully implemented because of a lack of staff. However, in addition to the language itself, our curriculum included technical translation, as well as English and American literature. Nowadays, this would surprise no one. But in the 1960s, there were only a handful of such schools in Ukraine.

The main effort was focused on proving that the applicant met high moral standards—the criterion of “reliability” that dominated everywhere: when applying for a job, entering an institution of higher education, and sometimes, it seemed, even when enrolling in kindergarten. After all, MGIMO trained not just diplomats, but loyal “fighters” on the ideological front, called upon to carry out the party and government line. And not just anywhere, but abroad, in the very “den” of the enemy.

Naturally, the Communist Party was the one to decide on a candidate’s “suitability for the profession.” Thus, the rules for admission to this institute explicitly required that every applicant, in addition to the standard documents, have a recommendation from the regional committee of the Communist Party. To obtain such a document, a tenth-grade student had to successfully navigate the entire Komsomol-Party chain: the primary Komsomol organization, the district Komsomol committee, the city Komsomol committee, the District Party committee, the City Party committee, and the regional

committee bureau – and, most importantly, the personal signature of the first secretary of the regional committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU).

Imagine if today the Institute of International Relations at Kyiv University were to require something similar from applicants! The question would immediately arise: which party’s regional committee should provide the recommendation? You must agree that, given the current domestic political situation in Ukraine, such a formulation of the question elicits, at the very least, a smile. Although, in my view, filters are still needed today for admission to this very program. Of course, not party-based ones. Perhaps psychological ones. I am convinced that a test of patriotism must become mandatory. A person for whom the state is merely a place of residence cannot effectively defend the interests of that state on the international stage. Absolutely essential traits of a diplomat are inner flexibility, tolerance, and a willingness to work in a sociopolitical environment where values are upheld that do not always coincide with one’s own (not to be confused with a lack of principles).

...The period of the “Orange Revolution”² provided us with interesting examples in this context. At that time, riding the wave of nationwide enthusiasm, a number of younger-generation Ukrainian diplomats issued an open letter condemning the actions of the Ukrainian authorities during the 2004 presidential election, which led to the falsification of those election results.

During that difficult period in our history, I served as Ukraine’s ambassador to the Benelux countries³ and as head of the Mission to NATO. Our team in Brussels was quite large and politically aware, and I sensed that the diplomats were at a crossroads. Whose side should we take? How should we express our civic stance? Everyone was waiting to hear what the ambassador would say. I gathered the team, and we had a frank conversation. Credit

must be given to then-minister Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, who did not send circulars to ambassadors demanding an immediate halt to the chain reaction of support for Yushchenko and the punishment of "dissidents." Although one could imagine the uproar at Bankova over a "diplomatic uprising." So, the gist of our conversation – or rather, my monologue – was as follows. I tried to explain that a diplomat is not and cannot be a politician. And everything that was happening at that time on the Maidan was nothing other than a political confrontation. Diplomats, like the military, unlike other citizens, are not simply at work but in public service and must carry out the orders (except criminal ones) of their superiors. An ambassador is a unique figure. He presents his credentials to the head of state or the head of an international organization, signed by his president, in which the president asks that the ambassador be "trusted" as he himself would be trusted. Therefore, until he is recalled, the ambassador represents the current government, whether he likes it or not. The prime minister of Belgium or the NATO secretary-general is not currently interested in the ambassador's political preferences. He is of interest to them solely as a channel of communication with the current government of his country.

If, however, the diplomat's inner discomfort regarding the performance of his duties becomes too great, the ambassador has the right to resign and, as an ordinary citizen, express his political sympathies and participate in political activities. In September 2003, our colleague, the respected diplomat Anton Buteyko, exercised this right by resigning from his post as Ukraine's ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to Romania in protest against the signing of an agreement between Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan on the formation of a "single economic space." This was the first and, so far, the last instance in the history of the Ukrainian diplomatic service in which an ambassador voluntarily stepped down from his post. Subsequently, Buteyko became an active member of the Ukrainian Republican Party; however, after the victory of

the "Orange" team, he returned to the MFA as first deputy minister. Unfortunately, being an introvert, he, according to his colleagues, was unable to cope with the psychological stress of those difficult times and fell seriously ill, while the Ukrainian diplomatic service lost an extraordinary individual and a true professional.

So, I told my colleagues that I personally had no intention of joining any "statements," as this contradicted my understanding of the role of an ambassador. At the same time, I made it clear to everyone that I had no intention of fighting "dissidents" and that in their free time they were free to express their political emotions and passions. In the end, only two junior diplomats from the embassy and the mission to NATO signed the "statement."

To tell the truth, the idea of the "statement" was met with mixed reactions among senior Ukrainian diplomats. The majority view was expressed at the time by our ambassador to Libya, Oleksiy Rybak. He noted, quite rightly in my opinion, that it would be more honest to resign – even temporarily – in the event of a fundamental disagreement with a decision made by a government body or official, and only then to voice one's opinions and views outside the scope of one's official duties.

The minority view was voiced by Ukraine's ambassador to distant Australia, Oleksandr Mishchenko, who, in his open letter to Ambassador Rybak, emotionally called on the diplomatic corps to "make a choice in favor of truth, democracy, and the nation's well-being."

Incidentally, the problem of choice has always faced – and continues to face – not only Ukrainian diplomats. History knows many examples of diplomats from various countries and of various ranks resigning in protest against their government's decisions or even its policies. I recall that the high-profile resignation of John Brady Kiesling, a career American diplomat with twenty years of experience, garnered particular attention and was widely covered by the media. On March 7, 2003, while serving as political counselor at the US Embassy in Athens, he published an open letter to the US

secretary of state in which he requested his resignation in connection with President George W. Bush's decision to send US troops into Iraq. His words strike me as very apt, and I would advise all "dissidents" – who are nevertheless trying by every means to cling to their government posts – to keep them in mind. J. Kiesling, in particular, noted: "I am resigning because I have tried and failed to reconcile my conscience with my ability to represent the current US administration. I have confidence that our democratic process is ultimately self-correcting, and hope that in a small way I can contribute from outside to shaping policies that better serve the security and prosperity of the American people and the world we share."⁴ In short, life in general and political life in particular often present diplomats with dilemmas – primarily moral and ethical ones – for which one must prepare oneself in advance.

In this regard, an apt characterization of a "diplomat" from the classic work *Diplomacy* by the aforementioned Harold Nicolson comes to mind: "An ambassador is an honest man sent abroad to lie for the good of his country." Nicolson attributes these words to the English ambassador to Venice, Henry Wotton, who allegedly wrote them in jest in the album of his acquaintance Christopher Fleckmore of Augsburg. Whether it was a joke or not is, in fact, irrelevant. Interestingly, everyone believed that Wotton had expressed a view of ambassadors that corresponded to reality. At the very least, his own king, James I, took Wotton's words seriously and was displeased with him, believing that the ambassador had behaved indiscreetly and "let slip" the true nature of diplomatic activity at the time.⁵ French diplomacy operated within the same system of values. Thus, Louis XI, instructing his ambassadors, gave them the following directive: "If they lie to you, lie even more."⁶ Perhaps today this sounds rather cynical, but by internalizing this maxim, a diplomat acquires a certain immunity from "pangs of conscience" regarding the fulfillment of his difficult mission...

We will discuss the role and place of the diplomat within the political landscape on numerous occasions, but for now, let us return to the provincial high school graduate who has prepared to conquer the lofty heights of an elite Moscow university...

So, with the signature of a high-ranking party official secured, the final exams passed, and a gold medal in my pocket, Moscow lay ahead! It must be frankly acknowledged that a significant factor in my final decision to apply to the MGIMO was that, at the time, it was one of only three educational institutions in the Soviet Union where entrance exams were held a month earlier than everywhere else. Besides my first choice, these were Lomonosov Moscow State University and the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, the legendary Fitech, attended by the most outstanding Soviet scientists, as well as the future foreign minister of Ukraine, Pavlo Klimkin! So, in case of failure, I could still manage to submit my application to another university. This circumstance undoubtedly added a sense of optimism but, on the other hand, made me somewhat complacent, because it opened up a fallback option and, consequently, lowered my motivation. In other words, subconsciously, I wasn't going there to get in at any cost, but merely to test my abilities. That mindset played a treacherous role, and instead of concentrating one hundred percent on the exams, I allowed myself to relax a bit in Moscow: going to the theater, to a soccer game, and, for example, to watch the living legend of Soviet sports, Eduard Streltsov. "Edik" was already winding down his soccer career with the Moscow team Torpedo, a career that had been so senselessly crippled by a dubious court verdict sentencing him to many years in prison, and he looked quite portly and sluggish. But he could still, as they say, outplay half the opposing team "on one foot." I had the pleasure of witnessing

such a soccer masterpiece with my own eyes during the Moscow derby between Torpedo and Dynamo in the summer of 1970. Besides, I had come to Moscow with a friend and classmate who, “just for the company,” had also decided to study to become a “diplomat.” So we spent our time in all sorts of ways. In other words, we didn’t just sit with our textbooks.

The institute welcomed me warmly, but in a very professional manner. I could tell right away that this was a serious institution and that they treated “aspiring diplomats” like adults. I submitted the required documents fairly quickly, but it turned out that a standard medical certificate wasn’t enough: I had to undergo a full institutional medical examination and appear before the so-called “mandate commission,” which conducted an additional review of the submitted documents. But I overcame these hurdles as well and was admitted to the exams, confirmed by a special pass that granted me entry to the “inner sanctum” — the institute’s premises.

But I certainly wasn’t going to give up, even though the applicants’ surnames alone made me wonder: was this perhaps a competition among the parents? Most of the applicants were the children of career diplomats and high-ranking party officials, mainly from Moscow. But there were also applicants from the Soviet republics, backed by prominent figures at the republican level, which, as it turned out, did not guarantee admission to the institute at all.

What, then, was in store for someone like me, who had not even the faintest connection to the upper echelons of society? My mom was a high school teacher, and my dad was a veterinarian. Frankly speaking, this example had considerable psychological importance for me. To some extent, it softened the bitterness of my own fiasco in the “cradle” of diplomacy. Although that would happen a little later.

For now, the exams awaited me. The first was English, which proved to be an insurmountable hurdle for many. Those who passed this test had promising prospects ahead of them. So, without false modesty, I can say that I cleared this hurdle without any trouble. The preparation I received at my school, which I have already mentioned, really paid off. Perhaps it is not modest to say this, but the Moscow professors were frankly impressed by my level of preparation and predicted a place for me among their students. But things did not turn out as expected. The second exam was the history of the USSR. I must say that I truly knew the school curriculum inside out. I had very strong motivation for this. My mom taught history at my school, including in my class, and it was a matter of principle. After all, I couldn't know the subject any worse than the others did. Moreover, I had to know it better, since my knowledge was, to some extent, the yardstick for the others' grades. In other words, within the high school curriculum, I felt very confident. True, there was one circumstance that somewhat limited my ability to show myself in the best light. For all ten years, I had attended a Ukrainian school, and accordingly, all subjects, including history, were taught in Ukrainian. But I had to take the exam in Russian. And although I, like most of my peers, spoke Russian fluently in everyday life, during the exam, Ukrainian words from the textbook would come to mind first, and I had to translate them into Russian. I think this did not make the best impression on the examiners, since it all looked like slow-motion footage.

Despite this, during the exam I spoke quite animatedly and in detail about the Battle of Kulikovo,⁷ but when it came to discussing Lenin's works, to be honest, I wasn't quite prepared. As it turned out later during the "debriefings" with fellow exam-takers, questions about the works of the classics

of Marxism-Leninism were the main weapon used to “take down” inexperienced applicants. Those who knew this had prepared separately for such questions, since Lenin’s works were only briefly covered in the high school curriculum. I no longer recall exactly which work they asked me about, but my answer apparently did not satisfy the examiners, and they sincerely congratulated me on my well-deserved B. This meant that, as a “medalist,” I had not achieved a perfect score and now had to take all the other exams. Formally, my chances weren’t lost yet. To have a shot at winning, I had to get the highest score on the geography exam and write an excellent essay in Russian. Given the fierce competition, this was practically impossible, so I decided to collect my documents so as not to waste time and to begin preparing for the second round of the admissions saga as soon as possible.

Despite the setback, my spirits remained high. All the more so because my interactions with students increasingly convinced me that in Moscow, support from “outside forces” was needed not only – and not so much – during the admissions process, but afterward as well. Without it, your future depended on which foreign language you were assigned to study after enrollment. There was practically no choice. Those who, through “connections,” were enrolled in European language groups had no reason to worry about their future. Under certain conditions, London, Paris, and Geneva awaited them; at worst, Oslo or Copenhagen. Those who ended up, by default, in the Urdu or Swahili groups could only dream of these cities. Their diplomatic careers began and ended in the vast expanses of the African continent or in Asia. I am not saying that second-rate diplomats work in Africa or Latin America. What was unfair was the very principle of selection and the sense of a certain professional determinism that was impossible to fight at the time.

Moreover, as it turned out in conversations with students graduating from the Moscow diplomatic school, they were by no means guaranteed a path to the MFA, even though the university was a departmental institution. Here again, much depended on "external forces." An invitation to continue one's career within the KGB system was considered a decent option. Graduates of this university were eagerly recruited by numerous foreign economic organizations working in the field of providing technical assistance to developing countries. But only if they had a Moscow residence permit, which could be obtained by marrying a woman from Moscow. Some graduates were awarded a so-called "open diploma," and they faced the difficult task of finding employment. In short, I realized that the distance from a student of this elite institute to a diplomat was enormous. Therefore, the farewell was brief and without tears. When I received my documents, the head of the admissions committee, in my view sincerely, invited me to come back the following year, but given the experience I had already gained, I just as sincerely said that it was unlikely. In addition to the circumstances already mentioned, there was another one that compelled me to become a student that very year. That was the prospect of being drafted into the Soviet Army. To be honest, that option did not suit me at all.

So, after receiving the documents, I found myself wondering what to do next. At the time, things at home were quite difficult. On the eve of my entrance exams, my mother suffered a serious injury and was bedridden. My father and older sister were handling my mother's treatment and care. The immediate problem was transporting my mother to Kyiv, to the Institute of Orthopedics and Traumatology, for surgery with a renowned professor. In other words, as they say, they had no time for me. Because of this, at seventeen, I

traveled to Moscow unaccompanied and made all subsequent decisions practically on my own. Only one thought dominated my mind: the best medicine for my mom would be my admission to the institute.

So where should I apply? I had no doubt that it would be a language university. An excellent grade on the English exam for the MGIMO finally convinced me that this was the right decision. So, at first, my friend and I decided to find a suitable university in Moscow. Back home, I had heard of the Maurice Thorez Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages, which trained translators. In my understanding at the time, a translator was a specialist who was closer than others to international issues — a sort of quasi-diplomat. At the very least, translators were fluent in a foreign language and could communicate with representatives of foreign states.

...It was only later that I realized that although a translator and a diplomat are completely different roles, they have a lot in common. Since, in the end, I earned a second degree as an English-language translator and even worked in this field (I'll talk about that later), I am entitled to my own opinion on this profession. A translator, in fact, is a specialist who must accurately (no worse, but, God forbid, without embellishing or improving) convey the thoughts of others, whether they agree with them or not. This is very similar to a diplomat's role of conveying their government's position to an interlocutor, whether they like it or not. Besides this, a translator has another function that people shy away from mentioning. It lies in the ability to calmly accept the role of "scapegoat" or "fall guy." It often happens that during official negotiations, which are usually conducted with interpretation, success is attributed to the diplomats, while failure is explained either by objective reasons or by "inaccurate translation." There are plenty of examples of this sort. A barrage of scathing comments in the "blogosphere" was sparked,

in particular, by a report in the French weekly Le Nouvel Observateur, which provided insight into the emotional state of the Russian leader immediately after the war with Georgia. Describing the August 12, 2008, meeting in the Kremlin between French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, the publication cites a series of statements allegedly made by the Russian prime minister. One of them goes like this: “...I’ll hang him (Saakashvili) by the balls... Why not? After all, the Americans hung Hussein.” Following this “quote,” Putin’s press service immediately stated that no such statement had been made and that the “translators” were to blame for misunderstanding it.

Here is another example. According to some media reports, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was dissatisfied with her meeting with Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich at the Munich Security Conference on February 4, 2012. Summing up her conversation with the Ukrainian president, Clinton, according to sources close to the talks, allegedly said: “It seems to me we had a very bad interpreter. I see no point in further communication.” A similar incident occurred during the visit of Ukraine’s first deputy Prime Minister Valeriy Khoroshkovsky to Brussels in April 2012, when he spoke about the connection between the case of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and Ukraine’s relations with the European Union. Commenting on what he considered inaccurate media reports on the matter, Khoroshkovsky said: “This is a journalist’s interpretation of my words, which may have occurred due to a misunderstanding or nuances in the translation.” At the same time, everyone is aware that translation, in fact, has nothing to do with it.

A top-notch translator – and it is precisely such translators who serve high-level negotiations – must, in addition to having a perfect command of a foreign language, understand the issues being translated no less well than the negotiators themselves. Having worked at various levels of the diplomatic hierarchy, both in the USSR and in Ukraine, I was always amazed at how fearlessly some

interpreters plunged into the maelstrom of extremely complex negotiations while having absolutely no idea what was being discussed. This was particularly characteristic of the period when independent Ukrainian diplomacy was taking shape. I call this the Intourist school since the MFA primarily enlisted interpreters from Intourist and Sputnik.⁸ There were simply no others. And the MFA, which was rapidly expanding, had no translation service of its own. Unfortunately, it still does not have one today. The assumption was that during meetings and negotiations with foreign partners, a translator was not needed, since diplomats who spoke the foreign language were present and could take on the role of translator. But only people who have absolutely no understanding of the intricacies of foreign philology could think that way. After all, translation is a profession that must be mastered with dedication, just like any other. Being fluent in a foreign language does not mean being able to translate competently. There are countless examples of this.

So, the interpreters from Intourist actually had a very important “advantage”: a complete lack of fear of the audience and a self-confidence that bordered on philological arrogance. The main principle was: don’t stay silent. As a result, the translation was “descriptive” in nature, with no regard for terminological accuracy. And while a city tour or a tour of the Lavra Caves for an undemanding tour group could easily be conducted this way, during negotiations this method was completely unacceptable. During my student years, I actively worked part-time at the Sputnik Bureau of International Youth Tourism (BMMT) and, without much hesitation or deep terminological knowledge, served as a tour guide at the Tretyakov Gallery, the Hermitage, and the Shevchenko Museum.

In short, establishing an in-house translation service within the MFA itself would, in my view, be a justified step given our current circumstances. It must be said that a serious school of translation had developed within the Soviet Union’s MFA, which also

served as a source of new diplomatic personnel. Many of the ministry's translators went on to become well-known diplomats. In this regard, it is worth mentioning such luminaries of the diplomatic service as Oleg Troyanovsky and Viktor Sukhodrev. Incidentally, I had the honor and pleasure of working directly with these extraordinary individuals, and I consider Troyanovsky my mentor. Memories of these chapters of my life lie ahead...

Thus, the decision to pursue a career in translation was made, but as for where to study this field, after a brief hesitation, Taras Shevchenko won over Maurice Thorez, and I went to Kyiv to enroll in the university. Especially since I already had a base in Kyiv. My elder sister, Lyudmila, was a junior at the Institute of Foreign Languages and, of course, actively encouraged me to continue my studies only in Kyiv. As subsequent events showed, the choice was the right one.