Elena Leticia Mikusinski,

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Argentine Republic to Ukraine

**Alliance through the milestones of history**

–*Ms Ambassador, which aspects of professional activity inspire you the most? Could you clarify your key priorities in the post?*

*–* I am a career diplomat and have been working in this field for more than three decades, having got the opportunity to work in the diplomatic service in many countries.

A diplomat experiences many lives in one and each destination opens up the opportunities to promote initiatives and connections to complement each other in various sectors and to cooperatively perform a plethora of domestic functions and the ones abroad.

At present, my priorities as Ambassador of Argentina to Ukraine are to strengthen our cooperation between Argentina and Ukraine, enhance bilateral relations, find new opportunities of mutual interest and explore new options for strategic alliances.

I managed to integrate into Ukrainian society successfully, implementing plenty of fascinating projects. Since heading the diplomatic mission in April 2019, I have been exploring new realms to deepen our established kinship. I look forward to promoting our bilateral relations in many areas.

– *What circumstances and situations have had the greatest impact on you becoming a professional?*

– Great historical epics have always fascinated me, as, from ancient times, the diplomatic activities involved philosophers, politicians and monarchs, which struggled to maintain stability with their neighboring states, avoiding confrontations.

My professional history should not be separated from the life circumstances, which had a huge impact in my case. From an early age, I had to adjust to living in different countries, as I accompanied my mother during her work as a researcher and during her postgraduate studies and obtaining degrees in London and Paris, I had a chance to live in several European capitals. In fact, the very desire for my future profession was indirectly inspired by my mother, a person of a high culture and broad erudition. She emigrated to Argentina after World War II together with my father, who was born in Krakow, worked as a career soldier. He was a prisoner of war incarcerated in a German fortress in Koldytsia for three years together with French, British and Belgian officers. At the same time, my mother, who was born in Lviv, was deported to Siberia as soon as she finished a high school.

After graduating from university, I decided to apply for the annual competition at the Argentine Foreign Service Institute (ISEN) in Buenos Aires, a postgraduate institution established fifty-seven years ago under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Studying at this Institute is a mandatory step towards starting a diplomatic career in Argentina, which stipulates an extremely strict and transparent selection with a quota of 20 to 30 applicant. The learning process equates to three semesters of theoretical training and the one of professional training.

–*During your pastime in Ukraine, which events have imbedded in your memory the most vividly?*

– I have spent a year in Ukraine so far, and from my first day here I am determined to make Argentina strongly represented in the areas we specialize on among the leading countries of the world.

Argentina provides 75% of all Malbec wine produced in the world. It is the leading country in terms of the cultivated area of ​​Malbec vineyards, reaching 44,000 hectares, while the corresponding space amounts to 6,000 hectares in Chile and 5,300 hectares in France. Argentine Malbec is distributed to Ukrainian hotels, restaurants and supermarkets, giving the opportunity for profit in pertinent sectors of the Ukrainian economy.

In April 2019, for the first time in history, we organized the *Malbec Week* in Ukraine in a form of master classes conducted by the famous Argentine sommelier Emiliano Stratiko, the student of renowned British wine expert Stephen Spurrier, a graduate of the world-famous 4-level course *WSET* in London and a professor of the same course in Bordeaux. He was granted membership at the exclusive group *Master of Wine*, which features the epotime of the sommelier’s professionalism. Mr. Stratiko is the second Argentine to achieve such a high award.

For the first time, presentation of Argentine Malbec was held jointly with the Association of Sommelier of Ukraine, as well as with numerous restaurants, such as *Veranda, Argentina Grill, Rancho El Gaucho*. Additionally, a master class in the specialty store *Good Wine* was organized. About 180 participants took part in these events, including entrepreneurs, sommeliers, representatives of Argentine wineries, supermarkets, restaurants, and specialized media. Consequently, numerous brands of Argentine wines were introduced to the Ukrainian market. In May 2020, a video conference was organized on the latest production innovations of the Argentine Malbec and the latest trends of the brand. Traditionally, Emiliano Stratiko was a speaker of the event.

As a fact, in July 2020, for the second year in a row, the Argentine winery *Zuccardi Valle de Uco* was listed first in the ranking *Best Vineyards in the World*, which involved 1,200 wineries from 18 countries.

In September 2019, for the first time in history, a demonstration polo match for the *Argentine Ambassador's Polo Cup* took place in Ukraine and was attended by over 1,000 distinguished guests and spectators. The Directorate-General for Rendering Services to Diplomatic Missions was one of the sponsors of this exclusive event. Polo is an elegant sport with a history of more than 2,000 years. It provides an immaculate example of how sports diplomacy can bring countries together. Argentina retains a world championship in this sport for about 15 years.

Owing to the *Argentine Ambassador's Polo Cup,* Kyiv has become part of a ring of European cities, where such events take place annually with the participation of Argentine polo players. As an outcome, Andrii Bilyi, a Ukrainian businessman and President of the Kyiv Equestrian Federation, founded the Ukrainian Polo Federation. In December 2019, as a part of the annual conference of the International Polo Federation in Buenos Aires, the Embassy of Argentina in Ukraine organized a meeting between corresponding federations of Ukraine and Argentina, as the outcome of which an Agreement on Cooperation was signed. Consequently, Ukraine became a member of the International Polo Federation, which unites 86 countries.

This sport creates a platform to explore new enterpreneurial opportunities. Polo is a sector which turnover outstrips a billion dollars, covering many different economic activities. The demonstration match itself is an opportunity to create and promote business at the local and international levels, as it brings together and maintains contacts with prominent members of the business community, who are the honorable guests of the Cup, including big business owners and the patrons of polo. Today, there is a plan to open the *Polo School* in Ukraine, which will provide an opportunity to expand knowledge and practical skills about this sport at the local level.

On 30 June 2020, an online meeting *Building Bridges Between Our Countries, Argentina and Ukraine* dedicated to the IT sector was held. I obtained a chance to moderate this meeting, which was co-organized by the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine and the European Business Association.

The event was equally attended by IT associations, universities, chambers of commerce, industry associations and over 40 representatives of the private sector. This meeting gave new momentum to bilateral cooperation in this area.

Additionally, in November 2019, a series of conferences of Professor Pablo Holschmidt, the Argentine Doctor of Biomolecular Pharmacology, took place in a number of higher education institutions of Ukraine specializing in biotechnology and molecular biology investigations. The above-mentioned conferences were held at the Ivan Franko National University, the Danylo Halytsky Lviv National Medical University, the Institute of Molecular Biology and Genetics of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, the D. Zabolotny Institute of Microbiology and Virology, the Kyiv City Oleksandrivska Clinical Hospital, the Odessa I. Mechnikov National University and the National Technical University of Ukraine *Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute*. These conferences were a further step in cooperation with Ukrainian higher education institutions and provided an opportunity for mutual exchange of knowledge and technologies.

– *On 21 November 2019, the Protocol to amend the visa waiver agreement was signed between the governments of Ukraine and Argentina, increasing the period of visa-free stay in the territories of the states to 90 days. What prospects do you believe it gives for both countries?*

– The conclusion of the mentioned intergovernmental Protocol allows prolonging the period of mutual visa-free stay to 90 days during 180 days for Argentine and Ukrainian citizens in Ukraine in Argentina respectively for tourist purposes excluding working opportunities.

This achievement in bilateral relations bears a monumental value for promoting tourism and business cooperation. Owing to these achievements and tourism promotion measures, the tourism exchange between Argentina and Ukraine increased by 30% in 2019.

– *Our countries are known to have forged close cultural and economic ties. Is the level of bilateral cooperation between Argentina and Ukraine satisfactory at present? How can we upgrade it? What are the most promising areas of our partnership?*

– Above all, the progress in development of the political and parliamentary dimension of our relations has to be mentioned, implying that in March 2020, the deputy group of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on inter-parliamentary relations with the Argentine Republic was formed. This will undoubtedly facilitate strengthening relationship between our countries.

In the economic terms, Argentina is known for its attainments in producing agricultural machinery. Argentine equipment is widely represented on the Ukrainian market. The export introduces sprayers, grain dryers, service equipment for grain storage tanks as well as spare parts for agricultural machinery. The full set of tools and implements, when used properly, increases productivity of the industry.

We envision great potential for increasing beef and pork supplies, agricultural machinery, software for direct seeding and precision farming, inoculants, microfertilizers and plant protection products, as well as collaborating in certain agricultural sectors.

Plastic grain-storing containers is the Argentine invention. This is referred to the silo bags embodying low-density polyurethane repositories, which is a low-cost, still, quite reliable solution. As soon as this method became a common practice for Argentine farmers, these containers replenished the export structure to Brazil, Spain, the United States, France, India and Ukraine.

Horse cloning and polo equipment likewise present an important commercial component of further partnership. Strengthening cooperation in cattle breeding as well as in the fields of ecological, adventure and wine tourism is of particular interest to Argentina.

In May 2019, 15 Argentine businessmen from the province of Buenos Aires paid a visit to Ukraine. Together with Ukrainian entrepreneurs, they took part in the round table in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Ukraine, in the course of which several joint projects were negotiated and are currently examined.

It is valuable to note about our cooperation in cultural, educational and scientific spheres. Argentina is one of the leading know-how exporters, as Argentine scientists and researchers are world-renowned experts. Three Argentines, who are the Nobel Prize winners, are worth to be mentioned. They are Bernardo Alberto Usai, an Argentine physician and pharmacist who received the Nobel Prize in 1947 for his discovery of the role of anterior pituitary hormones in glucose metabolism, becoming the first Latin American to get this prize in science; Luis Federico Leloir, an Argentine physician, biochemist and pharmacist, who received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1970 for the discovery of the first sugar nucleotide and the study of its functions in sugar conversion and in the biosynthesis of complex carbohydrates and Cesar Milstein, an Argentine chemist, who won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1984 for discovering the principle of producing monoclonal antibodies used to diagnose and treat cancer, rheumatology, some neurological and respiratory diseases. By the way, Milstein came from a family of Ukrainian emigrants.

We cooperate extensively with the National Technical University of Ukraine
*Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute*, the Kyiv National I. K. Karpenko-Kary Theatre, Cinema and Television University, the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and the Kyiv National Linguistic University.

Jointly with the Kyiv National I. K. Karpenko-Kary Theatre, Cinema and Television University and the P. Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine, certain film events were set up. Argentine films and film directors were ones triumphed in the Molodist Kyiv International Film Festival.

The famous Argentine composer Esteban Benzekri in collaboration with Pablo Boggiano, the Argentine conductor, Mariano Rey, the famous Argentine clarinetist, and the Lviv National Philharmonic recorded a custom-made CD for the international music label Naxos in May 2019.

As early as in December 2019, the National Philharmonic of Ukraine hosted a concert by Mariano Rey and the National Presidential Orchestra of Ukraine in M. Lysenko Hall.

April 2020 noted for launching a new format for our traditional tango and folklore classes via the video conferencing platform ZOOM, featuring renowned Argentine choreographers and dancers Nicolas Correa and Roman Garcia Fleury, heads of the company Malambo al 2x4, who likewise performed such Argentine folk dances as Chammé and Malambo.

–*What was the initial response to the pandemic in your country? Are there any points of convergence between Argentina and Ukraine in this respect? Which possible economic challenges could we face?*

– Since 20 March, a regime of ‘social, preventive and coercive self-isolation’ has been implemented in Argentina, as it is an integral responsibility of any state to safeguard the health of its citizens.

Still, the introduction of extremely strict quarantine around the world gave rise to new problems in protecting our society. Thanks to the extensive cooperation with the Ukrainian authorities and the common efforts of our Embassy and the consul, we managed to provide an adequate response to the situation. We feel the steadfast support of Ukraine, which has always lent a helping hand in the most challenging times.

The COVID-19 has created a truly unprecedented situation in the world economy, which poses complex challenges, meanwhile unveiling new opportunities. This situation exemplifies a paradigm shift in the ways to facilitate trade at the time of pandemic and in the world thereafter. The landmark opportunities it reveals include promoting knowledge economy, which has become the second largest commodity in Argentina’s export. We have numerous similarities as well as points of interaction with Ukraine in this area.

–*The fact that the multifaceted cooperative background between our countries is underpinned by solid interpersonal connections is undeniable. What is the role of diaspora in this respect?*

– Ukrainian diaspora in Argentina is the seventh largest in the world and the second one in South America. More than two hundred thousand Ukrainians immigrated to Argentina, and today almost half a million Argentines have Ukrainian origin. The Ukrainian diaspora in Argentina has made a substantive contribution to the development of the economy, agriculture, industry, science, medicine, politics, music, art and culture in general.

For over 120 years, the Argentine Republic has been a second homeland for many Ukrainians. In 1898, for instance, the AG Weser steamer arrived in Argentina carrying immigrants from Khmelnytskyi region.

Currently, almost 470,000 Ukrainians and their fourth-generation descendants reside in Argentina. This community is fully integrated in Argentine society simultaneously preserving its national features, namely language, culture and customs.

The Ukrainian community is particularly active in the cultural and business spheres. The greatest number of Ukrainians immigrated to the province of Misiones, located in northeastern Argentina. It is there that many Argentines of Ukrainian descent dedicated themselves to the cultivation of traditional maté tea, which is Argentina’s flagship product. Now, they are among the leading representatives of this sector of economy in the country.

In order to reflect the profound relations between two countries, a monthly newsletter entitled *In Search of My Roots* has been published in Spanish and Ukrainian since January 2020, portraying information about the life of famous Argentines of Ukrainian origin and/or descendants of outstanding Argentine figures, the Ukrainians. The publication covers the stories of all those who have testified their interest to this initiative and feel connected to Ukraine through their roots, including both members of various associations of the Ukrainian community in Argentina and those who, owing to the analysis conducted, learned about their history and expressed a desire to share it. The publication is comprehensive and exclusive, engaging representatives of various regions, practices and religious denominations.

A newsletter, which is the product of the prolonged research and revelations, turned out to arise the great interest. The sixth issue of June 2020 has been published recently. The complete range of publications is available on the official website of the Embassy of Argentina in Ukraine.

–*Touching upon the economic aspect, in your opinion, will the export-import structure between our countries remain unchanged in 2020 and in the world as a whole? What can it be shaped by?*

– Taking into consideration the similarities between Ukraine and Argentina, my vision is to embolden companies in our countries to establish rapid communication, to generate products and markets by elaborating architectures of systemic links and acquiring shared beneficial experience. The objectives include promotion of strategic alliances using logistics opportunities and access to the region’s markets. Being familiar with the system of simple transactions in purchasing and selling goods and services, I tend to increasingly implement the concept of developing international business.

With regard to the economic relations between Argentina and Ukraine, conducting the analysis that covers not only exports and imports, but also creation of viable international business, bringing positive outcomes for all subjects of the value chains.

Around the world, the year 2020 is distinctive due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We noticed, however, the growing interest in certain industries.

In 2019, bilateral trade between Argentina and Ukraine exceeded $ 61 million, there was an increase of 70% in pharmaceuticals, 50% in chemicals, 20% in the wine sector and 8% in fish and shellfish.

Over the first five months of 2020, bilateral trade crossed the line of $ 24.6 million, while the turnover of pharmaceuticals increased by 66%, fruits and nuts by 20% and wines by 12%.

Although we may seem competitors at first glance, in reality there is a high potential for our economies to complement each other. The bulk of bilateral trade is represented by products that are not found in one of our countries due to geographical or climatic conditions, such as fish and shellfish. In addition, considering that our countries are located in different hemispheres, the seasons of growing and harvesting certain products usually do not coincide, as in the case of fruit.

–*Cooperation between our countries on studying and deploying Antarctic resources is underway, and since 1995, Argentina's specialized agencies have been providing ongoing assistance in supplying livelihoods for the Ukrainian Vernadsky Research Base. Is Antarctic exploration a promising sphere of cooperation between Ukraine and Argentina?*

– As we know, Argentina and Ukraine have an Agreement on Scientific, Technological and Logistical Cooperation concluded in 2008 between the Secretariat for the Antarctica of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentine Republic and the National Antarctic Science Center of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

During 19–26 February 2020, as a part of the 3rd round of joint inspections of the Antarctic Treaty, the Argentine-Chilean team examined Vernadskyi Research Base. The final report will be presented at the 43rd Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting.

– *The world of the new century became extremely globalized; at the same time, states preserve a number of unique internal problems requiring immediate resolution. Which challenges and obstacles has Argentina’s foreign and domestic policy to deal with today? Is the country capable to manage these problems efficiently and are there relevant measures already in place?*

– The COVID-19 pandemic poses an unprecedented challenge for modern international society. It is a stress-resistance test for all countries and the quandary we face, without being able to compare it with similar situations in recent history.

The pandemic will change the priorities of states at the global level. Philosopher Mykhailo Minakov, who studied in Zaporizhzhia and Kyiv, contemplate on the concept of biopolitics and emphasizes that health care will become as important a subject as defense or education soon.

It is worth to recall that Argentina was identified as leading world economy in 1895–1898, and by the 1930s was listed among the top five economies in the world. Argentina is a country with broad prospects and has a lot to offer. The examples I mentioned in this interview provide eloquent testimony to this. The quality of human resources and a high level of education are characteristics, which help us to adapt to the wavering international context.

– *Which architectural monuments in Ukraine impressed you the most? What are the most memorable destinations you visited in Ukraine?*

– All of them personify valuable and scintillating cultural heritage. I had the chance to visit Kharkiv, Odesa, Zaporizhzhia and Lviv.

It took a while to explore Kyiv. This is a wonderful city. Each new walk or visit reveals more and more treasures of the historic capital. The contrasting features of some areas give an opportunity to contemplate majestic beauty of the city, rich in its sights, magnificent buildings, covered by the extraordinary golden domes, and other outstanding architectural peculiarities.

What makes us proud is the fact that Maria Shekhonina, the only granddaughter and heiress of the architect Mykola Shekhonin, who worked in Kyiv in the early twentieth century and designed a large number of buildings, including the Military Lyceum Ivan Bohun on Lesia Ukrainka Boulevard, was born and lives in Argentina. Other well-known buildings of his authorship, which survived the war and the German occupation, are the high school on 25 Volodymyrska Street and the Opera and Ballet Theater for Children and Youth in Podil, formerly known as *Kharchovik*, which used to be the House of Culture of the trade union.

Besides, I visited a number of Ukrainian universities and industry shows, assessing the dynamics of economic and commercial relations between our countries.

I savored a chance to enjoy the bucolic landscapes of Yaremche, where there was a house of my maternal great-grandparents. My mother always reminded summer vacations in that building by the river as well as walks in nature.

The particular attention should be paid to the majesty and uniqueness of the Odessa National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet and the Solomiia Krushelnytska Lviv State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet.

As for Lviv, I got to know this city long before my mission as Ambassador to Ukraine started. Many generations of my family come from here.

Last year, I visited the higher education institution in Lviv, where my grandfather, Tadeo Borkowski, a future military judge, studied law. I also visited the iconic George Hotel, where my mother celebrated her graduation from the then School Sisters of Notre Dame, which is currently a specialized school with in-depth study of the German language.

My experience of traveling in Ukraine is rich and emotionally saturated. Enjoying your country, I also recollect memories of my family’s past.