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Journal**

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**The World After the Coronavirus. Ukraine
and Redistribution of Spheres of Influence**

**It's time for PtX-solutions
in energy engineering**

**The Evolution of American
Geopolitical Thinking**

**Democracy Vaccinated:
The Post-Corona Epilogue
of Sino-American Relationship**

**Geopolitical Dimension
of Taras Shevchenko's Work**

Our Place in the World. Blood Formula

Africa is becoming a center of world development

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Liubov Abravítova:
 “Africa is becoming
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Interview with Ambassador
 Extraordinary and
 Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to
 the Republic of South Africa

— Ms. Abravítova, diplomats and military are said not to be choosing the assignment. What explains your appointment as Ambassador to such a remote Republic of South Africa? An order? A necessity? Did you happen to be the best of all who aspired to work there?

— I cannot help agreeing with this saying, especially since my father was a military, a Ukrainian patriot and raised me in the spirit of the defender of our country, for whom honor and dignity are above all. I consider diplomacy to be the dimension where I can, want and will defend the interests of my country, as our military do today in countering Russian aggression. As for my recent appointment as Ambassador to South Africa... Our Foreign Ministry once joked that if you get to work in an African country, you can forget about any other country and continent, as so to speak, geography of assignments. That is, you will be building your diplomatic career exclusively in Africa — “once in Africa — forever in Africa”. But I am convinced that there is another “side of the coin”. Because when you start to closely study this continent, to realize its real scale, potential and prospects for our bilateral cooperation, to immerse yourself in this process, the prospect of working in “fashionable countries” no longer seems attractive. Because the work on this continent is what it should be for a diplomat — interesting and responsible without any exaggeration. South Africa is special because it has a large territory (twice the size of Ukraine!) and three capitals that provide administrative management. The city of Cape Town is considered the “legislative” capital, Bloemfontein — “judicial”, and Pretoria — “presidential”. South Africans call themselves a “Rainbow Nation”, and rightly so. Colossal ethnic diversity coexists peacefully in South Africa, with 11 official languages equal in status.

— Before talking specifically about such work, I would like to ask: having received the appropriate education, in what positions did you have to work?

— I think that it is right and useful for a common cause, when you work in all positions, starting with the simplest. It's like in the army: you have to be ready to carry out the order. Only then will your work be effective.

I began to work as a Specialist at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then moved every step to the position of Advisor. I know and respect the work of the Head of the Office,

the Assistant to Ambassador, the Press Attaché and the Counsellor, am familiar with the responsibilities of the Secretariat of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I am very grateful for pieces of good advice of such experienced colleagues as M. Maimeskul (former Ambassador of Ukraine to Canada), Ye. Bersheda (former Ambassador of Ukraine to Belgium), I. Dolgov (Ambassador of Ukraine to Georgia), I. Ostash (Ambassador of Ukraine to Lebanon).

— **Didn't you feel the lack of knowledge gained at the university at the turn of all known transformations in our young state?**

— One has to study non-stop to keep up with the events of our present. I've got a diploma of international relations specialist at the Institute of Social Sciences at the I. Mechnikov National University of Odesa (1997–2002), headed by the founder of the Odesa school of international studies, academician S. Appatov.

I have also studied at the University of Geneva and simultaneously completed an 8-month course at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). It was then that I began to realize the important role of the African continent in the world, where Ukraine needs to consolidate and strengthen its position as an independent (politically and economically) state. Despite the previous geography of my positions, I consciously agreed to go to work in South Africa. After all, if you want to be a real specialist, you have to test yourself without any reservations, not to avoid what is considered “not prestigious” or difficult. Only then a diplomat can be successful and useful to his/her country.

— **It is important for a diplomat, whether Ukraine has strong connections with the country where he will work. And this depends on predecessors who had worked as ambassadors there and left a “heritage” for their successor.**

— I can't say that during almost three decades of Ukraine's independence our diplomacy did not pay attention to Africa. But it is obvious that our country, for objective reasons, still does not have a professional platform of African experts. In forming the concept of Ukraine's foreign policy in this direction today, in addition to diplomatic contacts and the development of trade and economic cooperation, we must also keep in mind the analytical component. That is, to take into consideration the history of Africa, traditions and culture of the peoples who

live there, and, of course, the fast processes shaping the continent today. Therefore, all diplomatic missions of Ukraine in Africa, and especially our Embassy in South Africa, face an interesting but rather difficult task — to form the African direction of Ukrainian foreign policy. In particular, to develop and adopt a relevant African concept by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, like the European, Middle Eastern, Asian, American and other regional concepts of Ukraine's foreign policy. The work is extremely responsible, but only adhering to a defined long-term action plan will allow us to establish long-term and mutually beneficial cooperation with African countries.

— **You are responsible for relations not only with South Africa, but also with several neighboring African countries. Will this not lead to simplification of interstate relations when the peculiarities or interests of each of them are not taken into consideration?**

— Here I have to point out that I am responsible for relations with ten countries of this great continent, because the main task of our Embassy, located in the executive capital of South Africa, Pretoria, is to represent the interests of Ukraine, promote our political, economic, cultural, scientific and other ties, as well as to defend the rights and interests of citizens and legal entities of Ukraine in the territory of South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Mauritius, Madagascar and Eswatini. Those countries are very different, with more or less democratic governments, sometimes even with monarchical regimes, such as Eswatini and Lesotho, island countries or enclave countries.

There are a total of 54 countries in Africa. They differ in size and economy, each with its own political culture, language and trajectory of historical development. Destabilization of the political situation, emergence of religious or interethnic conflicts, natural disasters, and even a slowdown in the economy in some of the local countries have an immediate impact on security, migration, and other coordinate systems of entire regions of Africa, whose natural resources and human potential are becoming the center of world development, where the interests of all so-called major geopolitical players intersect. This has its explanation: the continent possesses about 30 % of the world's natural resources, including 83 % of world production of platinum,

55–60 % of world production of cobalt, manganese, 40 % of gold, 46 % of diamonds and 43 % of palladium. And even more, there are 10 % of the world's oil reserves there, the continent accounts for almost 70 % of world trade in diamonds. Integration processes on the continent have moved into the implementation dimension.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is already being formed, under which a single trade market will operate on the continent, reviving economic relations between African countries. In case of formation of a large aggregate economy, large-scale and long-term investments will be attracted. As for South Africa, in addition to having the second largest nominal GDP in Africa and being a member of the G20 and the BRICS, the country is also a leader in the pan-African movement.

— **Having looked at the photos from events where you take part in political or cultural events and communicate with the leaders of African countries, I will ask: what are your impressions of such meetings in general? Because Africa's natural resources are not all that should define its essence...**

— I understand what you mean... My answer will be short and objective. The UNICEF's “Generation 2030” Report provides statistics on changes in the demographic situation in Africa, survival rates and urbanization. In the current 2020, the population of Africa will increase by more than 34 million people and at the end of the year will amount to 1 billion 370 million people. In 2055, 40 % of the world's children will live in Africa. The United Nations estimates that by 2050, the African population will be at least 2.4 billion. All in all, the continent's population will quadruple over the next 100 years.

— **I had the opportunity to communicate with students of our universities who came from Africa to Ukraine to study. At least some of them have clearly determined their future and know exactly what it takes. And they did not say that they study to work somewhere abroad, as our students do. They are set to return home to their homeland. How can this be explained?**

— It is easier to explain each case individually, based on the interest of each such student. But one should keep in mind the following: by 2030, one in five people in global society will be of African descent. The exceptional economic

importance of the African continent is also becoming apparent, as the world will depend to a large extent on the availability of raw materials, energy resources and human capital in Africa. And only those will be “on roll” who has been actively working there.

If we talk about Ukraine's diplomatic presence on the African continent, it is, unfortunately, quite modest, especially in the region of Sub-Saharan Africa. Ukraine should be present there and actively interact with African countries both, bilaterally and within the framework of international and regional organizations. Of course, it will take years to intensify cooperation with the countries of Southern Africa. This should be a well-studied, long-term process, which includes strengthening our diplomatic presence in the region, intensifying bilateral political dialogue, including organization of summits, visits of our representatives to African countries, active interparliamentary cooperation, assistance to Ukrainian business in opening new African markets. And this, believe me, is not the whole list of our tasks.

A formed and formalized Concept of Ukraine's Foreign Policy in Africa could be a signal of Ukraine's readiness to develop relations with the African Union and the countries of the continent (which would include concrete steps to develop bilateral and multilateral relations, support the development of African countries and preparation of promising projects). So, we have much to work on.

— **It seems that Ukraine should have certain ties with Africa, because our military are participating in UN peacekeeping missions there. But the military sphere just “a narrow aspect of cooperation” that can only concern armaments and military equipment.**

— At one time, the citizens of the USSR, including Ukrainians, helped the South African region in its liberation from colonial dependence. The economies of the young African states were also given some assistance at that time. Eventually, about 60,000 Africans got higher education in Soviet educational institutions, and about 240,000 specialists from Africa underwent various types of training, including in Ukraine. Therefore, among the representatives of African political and economic elites today you can meet sympathizers of Ukraine. Our peacekeepers have been helping to settle conflicts in Ethiopia,

Eritrea, Sudan, Mali, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC and other countries since 1992. At the moment, about 80 % of Ukrainian peacekeepers are deployed in African countries.

Since we have touched on the "military" topic, I cannot ignore the following: today the Russian Federation is waging military actions against Ukraine, including a hybrid war. The world community sees it all. And when we have to appeal to it on this issue, we must remember that African countries have more than a quarter of the votes of all UN members. If we have consistent development of relations with them, we will be able to ensure tangible support for Ukraine in the international arena. That is why our diplomatic mission pays enough attention to informational and explanatory work among the official circles of the local countries regarding the Russian aggression and the annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

— In such an explanatory work, it would be good to rely on history, but not only on the related to the military actions.

— You mean the Ukrainian from Poltava named Yuriy Pokos (Budyak), who at the age of 25 got to South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War of 1898–1902, fought against the British on the side of the Boers and allegedly helped military journalist Winston Churchill escape from captivity...

— ...for which Churchill's grateful father later arranged for the Ukrainian to study at Oxford. Later, Yu. Budyak (1878–1943) became a well-known Ukrainian writer who was persecuted and tortured in Stalin's concentration camps.

— To tell the truth, so far we have not been able to find documentary evidence of such a fact of saving Churchill, who became the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. But another interesting fact does not require documentary proof. As the head of the Ukrainian Embassy, I can't help being proud that one of the interesting places in South Africa has a Ukrainian name. I mean Mazepa Bay and the village of Mazepa on the South African coast of the Indian Ocean. The Ukrainian Hetman's name was "brought" to Africa in the 19th century by an English sailboat that sank in local waters. Today it is a very picturesque place, and somehow the idea arose to attach a memorial plaque there or even to build a monument to Ivan Mazepa, which would immortalize the Ukrainian trace on that land.

— Probably, this would be an impressive diplomatic step in the cultural and historical sphere of our relations with Africans. Especially when our "opponents" (I mean the Russians) in the North of the African continent deploy military bases and "Wagnerians", who intervene with weapons in the internal conflicts of some countries, including Libya...

— I agree with you, because in general, economic cooperation on a mutually beneficial basis develops states, which can never be done with weapons. The global pandemic confirms this once again. South Africa has now one of the toughest quarantines on the continent. You may ask, if this will have any social or economic consequences that will affect our plans to develop cooperation? At present, we do not see, at least in the near future, any preconditions for a sharp and significant reduction in trade activity. As for the indicators of trade volumes, in the first quarter of 2020 they even increased slightly as compared with the same period of last year. For example, Ukrainian exports to South Africa increased by 8.3 %, and imports from South Africa to us — by 33.9 %. The Embassy actively monitors all changes in trade and promptly informs relevant Ukrainian institutions and organizations.

— Ukraine has mainly to export not goods but raw materials. Is the same picture generally observed in trade with Africa? Shouldn't we offer to South Africa products of domestic machine builders (KRAZ machinery, mining industry equipment, products of the defense industry, pharmaceuticals)? In their turn, haven't our companies shown a desire to work in the market of South Africa, neighboring countries?

— Last year, Ukraine's trade with South Africa had a negative balance. To change this situation and increase trade in general, our Embassy in South Africa was preparing Ukrainian trade delegation to the Republic of South Africa, headed by one of the Deputy Ministers for Economic Development, Trade and Agriculture of Ukraine — Trade Representative of Ukraine. If it were not for the coronavirus pandemic, due to which the work of the delegation had to be postponed, we would now be talking about certain achievements. Ukrainian enterprises of machine-building, aircraft-building, and food industries are actively

studying the South African market in order to create joint ventures on the territory of this African country.

Just one example: last year was considered cooperation of the state enterprise “Antonov” with the airlines of the accredited country for the promotion of regional An-148/158 aircraft. In particular, about the promotional tour for the presentation of the An-158 aircraft in November 2019. Due to certain circumstances, “Antonov” proposed to postpone this event to the first half of 2020. As for exports to South Africa of the HS 88 product group, we are talking about units and parts for aircrafts.

To eliminate the consequences of restrictive measures, together with the South African Embassy in Ukraine, we have launched an online platform and thus establish cooperation in the new circumstances. Representatives of governmental organizations and business circles take part in its work. Its first meeting took place on May 15, 2020. Also, the Embassy of Ukraine to South Africa regularly informs stakeholders about exhibitions, fairs and specialized conferences taking place there and in Ukraine. By the way, recently I had an opportunity

to participate in the online conference “UKRAINE — SOUTH AFRICA: BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES”, which was about the relations between Ukraine and South Africa. In preparation for the future trade mission to South Africa, interest was expressed and effective contacts were established with the country's largest associations not only in agriculture, but also in engineering, shipbuilding, and the IT sector.

— **I understand that we talked a lot about the tasks facing the Embassy of Ukraine in South Africa. But, probably, not about all...**

— Oh, they are numerous! And I am grateful to the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the trust and support of our initiatives on the African direction.

— **I am sincerely grateful for the answers to my questions. I wish you success in your work in such a responsible post of Ambassador of Ukraine.**

Interview recorded by Oleh Makhno ■