

Solidarity with Ukraine

VIDEOMEETING 03.05.2022



Present:

- Volodymyr Dzobak; Head of the Council of UARP (representative for Ukraine)
- An Hermans; ESU President
- Guido Dumon; ESU Secretary General
- Heinz Becker; ESU Vice-President
- Michelle Vervaeke. Student at ESU

Welcome by President An Hermans, presentation of the participants of this meeting.

Mrs. Hermans: “We intend to continue our conversation. As I understood you named two organisations: The Union of Pensioners and on the other hand an organisation that is helping people who are internally displaced in Ukraine.

Most of our member organisations are linked to a political party, linked to the EPP.

If I foreword your information to the EPP, in one or other sense, I take ‘you’ also to the party. Do you agree or do you say: No, I don’t want this?”

Mr. Dzobak: “If you allow, I would like to start just with one step back and provide you with a brief overview of the history of UARP (Ukrainian Association of Retired Persons) in recent years. Our actual cooperation and collaboration with ESU were interrupted in 2012. Our activities were very well known by Mr. Worms and Mrs. Uhlenbrock. They came to us and visited our regional departments and had a look at our activities in the regions. As far as I remember, they went to three different regions and were also in our head office.

But there were some events that took place between 2012-2018 that I would like to share with you to get a broader and clearer picture of what happened. We have 27 states (obsats/ regions) in Ukraine and in 16 of them we have our representations. In some of them, we even have smaller sections or communities. For some major activities, we had more than 33,400 members of our association

We were one of the strongest and most powerful non-governmental organizations in Ukraine.

But then the President of Ukraine Yanukovich was in power together with his right-hand, main advisor, and helper: Vice-President Klyuyev.

Representatives of Klyuyev, twice came to us to try and overtake the management of UARP in 2007 and in August of 2011 to use the association to go ahead with all his plans and activities he wants to carry out.

Yanukovich and Klyuyev were representatives of the same political party that was in the Ukrainian Parliament at that time, and it was called “The party of regions”. It is like the party of Yanukovich was a pro-Russian party in the Ukrainian Parliament.

No one agreed to change the head management of UARP, though some of the regional offices were forced or bribed to go under new management.

On 26 January 2012, the office of UARP was attacked, and it was an attack by a special group of paramilitary people. They have taken everything. We started to contact all member associations and international organizations. Vouching and support of international organizations could be the most important factor in saving us from jail, as at that time Ukrainian judicial system was corrupt and rigged to work against citizens. We called all organizations-members of the ESU for support, but only our Spanish and Greek colleagues supported us unconditionally, and they helped a lot with our protection. Mr. Worms has also raised his voice for our protection. Many colleagues of the European Senior's Union did not take an active position and stepped back because they did not catch a point of what was going on here in Ukraine. And in 2012 in court, we were destroyed.

The debts they assigned to us were fictional and fake. We have lost some of our departments, for example in Odessa. The heads of those offices were threatened or corrupt.

However, despite this all, UARP has continued its activities in many areas. Until 2004 retired people or pensioners could not obtain credits, and neither banks nor organizations provided them loans. We made our own credit union and till today, it helps retired people with financing. In 2020 we obtained in the Supreme Court of Ukraine that Ukraine pensioners obtain the indexation of their pension rate. Today we still have our social networks and a website. We still have an office in Kyiv and the regions. ~~We~~ were still involved into the realization of several cultural programs (till the war).

Only the charity organization can provide charity aid in Ukraine therefore, a second organization is currently involved in the provision of help: we are helping internally displaced people who were forced to leave Kyiv and the eastern part of the country because of the military actions there. We now obtain humanitarian aid from Poland and from Switzerland.

Thank you for your attention. We will reply to the questions you have."

Mrs. Hermans: What do you need most immediately? Is clothing and housing the most important currently?

Mr. Dzobak: Yes.

Regarding your question about the EPP, the answer was not yet provided due to our brief introduction, sorry for that.

In Ukraine, the parties said that they were connected or involved with EPP, but they did not represent the values of EPP, in other words, EPP values at the time were not represented in Ukraine-

Mrs. Hermans: At this moment four Ukraine parties are linked as observer to EPP. Some associations – like yours – can say: “No, we do not want to be linked to a political party.” We can understand it, is this also the case for your association?

Mr. Dzobak: Yes, this is one way, but there is also another way. The political parties of Poroshenko, Tymoshenko are parties of one ‘leader’. If there is no leader, there is no party.

As you remember in 2004 there was an orange revolution here in Ukraine. The most powerful political party was “Our Ukraine”. Though after president Yushchenko's presidency when he resigned from politics this party quickly lost its popularity and votes, as it was based around a leader. And such examples are not scarce in Ukrainian history. If there are no values of the party, there is no future for

this party. The most important portion of each party is its values. That's why we would not like to cooperate with the parties.

We do not want to become a part or a wing of any of these parties. In Ukraine, we don't have such a party, as a Christian democratic party in Germany that has values irrespective of the leader. This difference remains key in our decision of not being in parties and we are waiting for the occurrence of value-based parties in Ukraine, contrary to now existing leader-based.

Mrs. Hermans: Other questions? I feel sorry I know too little about your country.

Mrs. Hermans: *"The best we can do now is exchanging information about associations like 'Caritas' and inform them (our contacts) about your initiatives in Ukraine. Also, at the congress of the EPP in Rotterdam, the EPP has the intention not only to speak about our values but also about the concrete needs and how we can help the people of Ukraine."*

Mr. Becker: Is there any other senior's organisation founding status or existing in Ukraine? Did you have any contact with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung?

Mr. Dzobak: *"Before 2012 a delegation of UARP visited a meeting of ESU. The KAS supported the Ukraine delegation with funds for travel costs and accommodation"*

Other seniors' organizations: As far as we know there was an organization 'Council of the war veterans', but it is a part or a wing of the communist party. It was one of the most powerful organizations because it receives donations from the government."

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Mr. Becker: Would it be helpful for you if our member organisations give you the names of the organisations of their countries that are helping Ukraine? So: a list of who is helping from the Netherlands... or more important you have contact with Caritas, Red Cross...?

Mr. Dzobak: *"We have contact with Caritas in Ukraine, but they informed us they mainly work with catholic churches.*

We contacted Caritas but you may understand there is a difference when just an organisation contacts them and ask for collaboration or when we will be referred to them from your side if that's even possible.

We do not want to receive the funds all the time. Therefore, we want to develop a program analogical to such program developed by Goodwill Industries, a company engaged in constructing houses for people in need. The former president of the US, Mr. Carter, supported the activities of this company.

We don't want to create a "frozen" group of refugees all over Europe, we want to make it possible for them to stay here and to be accommodated here in Ukraine. This project will be beneficial also to 7.5 million people already moved from the 27 regions of Ukraine to 5 regions of the western part of Ukraine.

For this purpose, we need some help as a beginning for the start of the program."

Mrs. Hermans: *"You brought already together some architects and people to speak with them it will be a great project ..."*

Mr. Dumon: The internally displaced people, do they intend to return to their region, or do they stay in the Western regions? Are you looking for permanent housing or temporary solutions? For temporary solutions it may be easier to find support for this kind of projects?

Mr. Dzobak: *"I give you the example of Mariupol, a city of 450.000 people. To where should they return? People who have left parts of Ukraine that are now occupied by Russian soldiers, how can they go back? A part of the people does not want to return for example to Butscha, where the infrastructure is destroyed, and many have physical and mental traumas. They do not want to go back and live in the streets where their neighbors were raped or killed. They are not able to have a normal life there.*

I want to give you the example of one my friends. He has a house in western Ukraine where 21 internally displaced people are living now (from different families).

They do not live in tents or camps, just in an ordinary house with several rooms which they all share.

Generally, we are not looking for tents, but a comfortable place where they can live. It should be able to be quickly constructed. One house should take 1,5 months. It's a specific type of house.

This might look quite unrealistic for somebody, but I want to share with you an example to illustrate that everything is possible, and we are able to implement large-scale projects.

For some period, article 24 of our Constitution allows basically discrimination against retired people. Back in 2004 we have engaged a group of our parliamentarians to work for the prohibition of the discrimination against retired people. They tried to pass the law three times, but the law was not adopted. However, much later we included our idea in the broader law that prohibits discrimination of all people in Ukraine. It was adopted. Thus, we are capable to implement big and long-term projects, irrespective of the efforts they take."