

# Cross Party Group on Ukraine

**Tuesday 20th February 2024 18:00 – 20:00 (hybrid)**

## Minutes

## Present

### MSPs

Colin Beattie MSP  
Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP

Paul O’Kane MSP  
Russell Findlay MSP

### Invited Guests

Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture  
Bridie Ashrowan, EVOG  
John Edward, The Scottish Council on Global Affairs  
Juliette Lichman  
Iryna Knyzhnyk, Hospitallers Battalion  
Luke Massey, Ukraine Solidarity Project  
Councillor Amy McNeese-Mechan, City of Edinburgh Council  
Olga Niekrasova  
Diletta Lauro, British Red Cross  
Nataliya Drozd, Dobrochyn Centre  
Oleksandr Pidhorniy, Centre for Human Rights

### Non-MSP Group Members

Hannah Beaton-Hawryluk	Steven Carr
Yevgen Gorash	Anastasia Klimash
Viktor Radchenko	Illia Malanchuk
Zhenya Dove	Doug Allan
Anna Kulish	Kseniia Smyrnova
Hanna Tekliuk	Bohdan Kruk
Kateryna Campbell	Olena Litvinova-Kutsai
Tanya Balanova	Oleksandr Chernykh
Oleksandra Novatska	Anne Yarney
John Hawryluk	Maryan Pokhylyy
Yulianna Shalenyk	Olha Maksymiak
Oleksandra Wierzbicka	

Consulate of Ukraine in Edinburgh represented by Andrii Kuslii  
AUGB Edinburgh represented by Linda Allison  
AUGB Dundee represented by Maria Jemicz, Valentyna Myhailenko, and Natalia Liamina  
Scottish Refugee Council represented by Sabir Zazai  
Center for Civil Liberties represented by Oleksandra Matviichuk, Alona Maksymenko, and Anna Nazaruk  
Nadiya represented by Derek Edwards, Anna Merchuk, Nadiia Savchenko, Valeriia Dovhan, and Mohammad Khaled

### Apologies

Miles Briggs MSP  
Donald Cameron MSP  
Katy Clark MSP  
Christine Grahame MSP  
Michael Ostapko  
Olga Biryuk  
Vasyl Kren

Clare Adamson MSP  
Ben Macpherson MSP  
Liam McArthur MSP  
Dmytro Syrota  
Olena Yuzkova  
Kvitka Perehinets  
Peter David Kormylo

### Agenda item 1 Convenor

#### • Welcome and Apologies

Colin Beattie MSP (CB MSP) welcomes attendees (both in the Committee Room and online) and opens a meeting. Apologies are to be noted in the minutes.

- **Minutes 5th December 2023 Meeting**

Minutes are approved as presented.

- **Matters Arising**

Clare Adamson MSP and Russell Findlay MSP have recently joined the Cross-Party Group. Alina Ostapenko has resigned as a non-MSP individual member, Olga Lutsyshyn has been confirmed as the representative from the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB) Glasgow branch.

It is decided to address matters arising in the course of the meeting.

## **Agenda item 2 Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture**

Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary (AR CS) highlights the strong ties between Scotland and the Ukrainian community. He condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine, noting its severe impacts, and reiterates Scotland's support for Ukraine's sovereignty and peaceful resolution efforts. AR CS takes pride in Scotland's response to the humanitarian crisis, mentioning the support and sanctuary provided to displaced Ukrainians and the significant role played by the community in welcoming Ukrainians into their homes and lives. The Scottish Government's financial commitment to the Ukrainian resettlement program is highlighted, with over £100 million allocated for 2023-2024 and £40 million for 2024-2025 to ensure displaced Ukrainians receive a warm welcome and support in rebuilding their lives in Scotland.

AR CS suggests further strengthening ties through twinning Scottish and Ukrainian cities, using Edinburgh's twinning with Kyiv as an example.

AR CS closes by inviting direct communication with Scottish officials to address any concerns or suggestions, emphasizing the government's commitment to supporting Ukraine.

## **Agenda item 3 Membership Requests**

CB MSP proposes establishment of a process for Cross-Party Group membership requests - a requirement for future applicants to submit a brief CV, background information, statement etc. to provide insights into the applicants' interests in joining the Cross-Party Group, allowing the meeting participants to make informed decisions about memberships. Membership requests from Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council, The Scottish Council on Global Affairs, and Juliette Lichman were unanimously approved by the Cross-Party Group.

## **Agenda item 4 Consulate of Ukraine in Edinburgh**

Andrii Kuslii, Consul (AK) opens by requesting a minute of silence to honor the victims of the Revolution of Dignity, marking its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. AK acknowledges the substantial support from Scotland and the wider UK in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine two years ago. This period is remembered as a pivotal moment in Ukraine's recent history, impacting the European continent and the world.

AK details the ongoing challenges faced by Ukraine, including the use of advanced weaponry by Russian forces, the tragic loss of civilian lives, and the significant territorial occupation by Russian forces. Despite these adversities, Ukraine has successfully reclaimed a significant portion of the territory occupied after 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

Emphasizing the critical need for continued and reinforced support from Scotland and its citizens, AK urges for aid in the protection and reconstruction of Ukraine.

AK proposes that the Cross-Party Group issue an official statement condemning Russia's war crimes against Ukraine, including the abduction of Ukrainian children and violations of the Geneva Convention.

**Q&A:** Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP (ACH MSP) appreciates AK's remarks and questions AR CS about adopting Ireland's resettlement strategies for displaced Ukrainians in Scotland, namely permitting discretionary travel, enhancing access to housing and job opportunities outside major urban areas. AR CS acknowledges the significant hospitality shown by the Irish, despite facing housing challenges, and commits to further consideration and update on the Scottish Government's position. He also thanks ACH MSP for his personal contributions as a host to displaced Ukrainians.

## **Agenda item 5 Guest Speakers on War Crimes**

- **Oleksandra Matviichuk, Chair, Center for Civil Liberties**

Oleksandra Matviichuk (OM), as a human rights lawyer with a decade of experience documenting war crimes initiated by Russia against Ukraine since 2014, expresses deep gratitude for the support received from the international community during this critical period in Ukraine's history. Highlighting the severe human rights violations committed by Russian troops, including targeted attacks on civilian infrastructure and the forced displacement of Ukrainian children, OM details the challenges faced in seeking justice and upholding human dignity in the face of such atrocities. Emphasizing the broader implications of the war, OM frames it as a war between authoritarianism and democracy, cautioning that Russia's success could embolden other authoritarian regimes worldwide.

OM states that the cycle of impunity enjoyed by Russia for its war crimes across various regions must end, advocating for the establishment of a special tribunal to hold Russian leadership accountable. OM also calls for the confiscation of frozen Russian assets in Europe to fund Ukraine's defense, recovery, and compensation for victims. This, OM argues, is essential for demonstrating to the world that justice is not only possible but imperative.

- **Iryna Knyzhnyk, Hospitallers Battalion**

Iryna Knyzhnyk (IK), a combat medic from Ukraine serving on the frontline since 2019, expresses her gratitude for Scotland's support against the Russian invasion, highlighting the significance of international solidarity for Ukrainian survival. IK details the systematic targeting of medics in the war, noting that over 200 have been killed in the past two years, including close friends and the destruction of medical facilities and vehicles. One of the damaged ambulances has been brought to Scotland for display.

She emphasizes the necessity of military support, including reliable munition supplies and air defense missiles, for Ukraine to win the war. Acknowledging the sensitivity around weapons supply, IK urges for action in any possible way to help prevent further loss of life.

The meeting proceeds to discuss the formation of Working Groups as agreed upon in the previous Cross-Party Group meetings, aimed at achieving more effective results. The Working Groups outlined include: Resettlement, Education, Culture, Business and Economy, and Health and Wellbeing; the nominated Chairs are introduced to present their visions and plans for moving forward. The next meetings will finalize the membership and other details related to the activities of the Working Groups.

## **Agenda item 6 Members on Working Groups**

- **John Hawryluk on Resettlement Working Group**

John Hawryluk (JH) highlights the national commemoration at the Scottish National War Memorial for the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, noting it as the only event of its kind for a non-British Commonwealth, non-EU nation. He acknowledges the collaborative efforts with the Ukrainian Consulate in Edinburgh, the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain, and the Ukrainian Catholic Church for the event, as well as the City of Edinburgh Council for securing an ambulance location, brought from Ukraine by the Ukraine Solidarity Project.

JH invites the Scottish Refugee Council to support the efforts of the Working Group on Resettlement. He praises the "Warm Scots Welcome" initiative but cites the strain it places on existing resources. JH argues there's an urgent call for action from the Scottish Government to secure funding for community and voluntary sector services; despite the UK Government allocating £240,000 for resettlement efforts, there's a lack of commissioned funds in Scotland. JH addresses Scotland's housing crisis, appealing for the Scottish Government to ensure the effective use of £50 million allocated funds, including for social housing properties purchasing, rather than short-term fixes.

JH concludes by stressing the importance of partnership, and continued support for the Ukrainian community.

- **Kseniia Smyrnova on Education Working Group**

Kseniia Smyrnova (KS) as the Vice Rector on International Cooperation at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, discusses the educational collaboration between Kyiv and Edinburgh, strengthened by city twinning. This partnership includes initiatives like the twinning labs project with the University of Edinburgh, focusing on the war's societal and geopolitical impacts. In May 2022, a strategic partnership was formalized, enhancing educational resilience among Ukrainian universities and introducing the Ukrainian language and cultural events at the University of Edinburgh. A pivotal aspect of this partnership has been the emphasis on student and researcher mobility, including innovative virtual exchange programs. KS also proposes the creation of an Interdisciplinary Center for Ukrainian Studies, aimed at exploring Ukraine's national identity, history, and culture through rigorous academic research.

Ongoing negotiations aim to establish double degree programs, offering flexible learning options to ensure educational continuity for Ukrainian students. KS emphasizes the role of educational diplomacy in these efforts, highlighting their importance in supporting the academic community during challenging times.

- **Zhenya Dove on Culture Working Group**

Zhenya Dove (ZD) draws a parallel between the resilience of Ukrainian culture and the nation itself, enduring centuries of oppression yet flourishing globally. ZD highlights the international success of Ukrainian filmmakers, artists, and other creatives, many of whom defend their country's sovereignty on the front lines.

This cultural resilience is contrasted with a commitment to promoting Scottish heritage in Ukraine, citing the influence of Scottish literature and the film "Braveheart" on Ukrainian perceptions of Scotland. ZD is eager to organize events that celebrate the rich traditions and values of both nations, aiming to strengthen cultural ties and community unity.

- **Anna Kulish on Business and Economy Working Group**

Anna Kulish (AnK) discusses strengthening business ties between Scotland and Ukraine, focusing on three areas: introducing Scottish businesses to Ukraine, promoting Ukrainian businesses in Scotland, and supporting business initiatives among the displaced Ukrainian community in Scotland. She expresses optimism about Ukraine's post-war recovery and the importance of attracting Scottish business interest, even in challenging times.

AnK notes the UK's popularity among Ukrainian entrepreneurs and proposes a strategy for mentorship and support to help Ukrainian businesses enter the Scottish market through local partnerships. She also suggests using trade missions, forums, joint ventures, and conferences to explore new opportunities.

- **Steven Carr on Health and Wellbeing Working Group**

Steven Carr (SC) has been supporting Ukrainian children for a decade and shares insights from experiences of Ukrainian hospitality in Ukraine and Scotland. Concerns about adapting to Scottish healthcare practices, particularly differences in hospital procedures and challenges posed by language barriers, are highlighted. Some Ukrainians have returned home for medical treatments due to these difficulties.

The arrival of 50 children with special needs in March 2022, supported by Dnipro Kids charity and the City of Edinburgh Council, illustrates the extensive support needs of over 20,000 Ukrainians in Scotland.

Mental health, often approached differently in the Ukrainian culture, poses challenges in Scotland, particularly when addressing issues through translation without cultural sensitivity. SC stressed the importance of firsthand emotional communication in treatment. SC emphasizes the importance of building trust and understanding around mental health.

The potential contributions of Ukrainian expatriate healthcare professionals are recognized, advocating for their retraining and integration into the Scottish healthcare system to effectively utilize their skills.

Upon receiving approval from the Cross-Party Group, the Chairs are appointed. CB MSP expresses optimism about the utility of the Working Groups and requests that Working Groups report back at each subsequent meeting.

## **Agenda item 7 Highlight Discussion: On Forcible Child Deportation by Russia**

- **Councillor Amy McNeese-Mechan, City of Edinburgh Council**

Amy McNeese-Mechan (AMM) refers to a meeting with Ukrainian Parliament member, learning about the largely unreported mass kidnapping of Ukrainian children by Russia. Motivated by this, AMM brought a motion to the Edinburgh City Council to raise awareness of these atrocities, citing Kyiv's twin city status. Shocking statistics from Yale University's Humanitarian Research Lab and the National Police of Ukraine suggest up to 744,000 children may have been kidnapped, subjected to forced relocations, adoptions under Russian names, and cultural and linguistic reprogramming, with older boys being trained as soldiers.

Addressing the methods of kidnapping, AMM describes how children are deceitfully taken under the guise of medical check-ups or charity outings, with many never returned to their parents. Others are abducted from areas being shelled where their parents were killed, making it difficult to ascertain exact numbers.

AMM calls for international action to expose and halt this "re-education" programs and initiate criminal charges. AMM references the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and UN General Assembly Resolution 26 stressing the clear evidence and legal basis for denouncing and prosecuting those responsible for the mass kidnapping of Ukrainian children. She advocates for urgent, coordinated international efforts to address this.

- **Video message, "Shadows": short film by Olga Niekrasova**

A short film was presented to the attendees.

## **Agenda item 8 Q&A**

- **Olena Litvinova-Kutsai, Investigations Lead, Business Ombudsman Council**

Representing the Business Ombudsman Council under the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, Olena Litvinova-Kutsai (OLK) discusses their support for the private sector, both domestically and for those entering the Ukrainian market, with EU backing. She updates on Ukraine's reconstruction, which has started, noting a World Bank report estimating the needs at USD 486 billion. To ensure transparency, a platform called "DREAM" has been launched to manage reconstruction projects online. Negotiations are ongoing to use frozen Russian assets for this purpose, and there is investment interest from entities like BlackRock. OLK invites the Scottish and UK private sectors to contribute to the reconstruction, emphasizing the need for both financial resources and modern expertise.

- **Sabir Zazai, CEO, Scottish Refugee Council**

Sabir Zazai (SZ) discusses the challenges Ukrainian refugees face in Scotland regarding housing, education, and employment. He notes recent UK Government changes to the Ukraine schemes: closure of the Ukraine Family Scheme and the reduction of visa validity under the Homes for Ukraine scheme from three years to 18 months. This shorter visa duration complicates securing stable housing and employment, as landlords and employers may hesitate to engage with those on short-term status. Additionally, the policy now requires Homes for Ukraine visa sponsors to be British or Irish citizens with indefinite leave to remain. SZ expresses concerns about the impact of these changes on Scotland's super sponsor scheme and their effects on both new arrivals and those already in Scotland.

## **Closing Remarks**

CB MSP concludes the meeting, expressing gratitude to all participants for their engagement. Key actions were outlined; CB MSP suggests the press release concerning forcible child deportation and drafting a motion to the Parliament related to child deportation to highlight the issue and its implications (in consultation with the Ukrainian Consulate to ensure accuracy). Agreement from the Cross-Party Group on these actions is sought and reached.