



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 27 February 2025

Session 6



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**CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
7th Meeting 2025, Session 6**

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)

*Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)

*Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

*Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Andrii Madzianovskiy (Consul of Ukraine in Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 27 February 2025

[The Convener opened the meeting at 08:45]

Ukraine

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and a warm welcome to the seventh meeting in 2025 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee.

Our only public agenda item today is to take evidence from the consul of Ukraine in Scotland. We are joined by Andrii Madzianovskyi, the consul of Ukraine in Scotland, and by Ms Oleksandra Zhyhalkina, from the office of the consul, who will interpret for us. I warmly welcome them both, and I invite Mr Madzianovskyi to make an opening statement.

Andrii Madzianovskyi (Consul of Ukraine in Scotland): Good morning, distinguished and highly respected members of the Parliament, ladies and gentlemen. It is a great honour for me to be here today and to represent my country in one of the most ancient Parliaments in the world, which has a long and powerful history of law making, and in such a legendary city.

Unfortunately, the occasion of our meeting is not a pleasant one, as Ukraine and the civilised world are going through difficult and dark times together. For several years now, my country has been bleeding innocent victims because the aggressor state of Russia, a terrorist country led by war criminal Putin, has been bombing and destroying Ukraine and its people.

Contrary to the Russians' bold and arrogant predictions three years ago that they could easily take Kyiv in three days, the brave Ukrainian people have proved the opposite, namely that good—even if it does not have the same power and strength right now—will always be able to withstand evil. As the holy scriptures say, the light will always overcome the darkness. We are still alive, we are still breathing and we are bravely confronting the northern wild barbarian.

We clearly remember that that resistance would never have been possible in full without the help of our partners and friends—without the help of the western civilised world. The United Kingdom has always stood apart among those countries. Its political and military support has always been crucial for our army and is becoming critical today, when the UK, despite some geopolitical

turbulence, remains steadfast in its position on Ukraine and its leadership of such support.

I am convinced that such military and political steps are based on the strong and unwavering position of the Scottish people and of the Parliament and Government that represent their will. Since the first days of Russia's full-scale invasion, hospitable Scotland has become a warm haven for almost three dozen thousand Ukrainians, mostly children, women and pensioners.

Generosity, hospitality, compassion and boundless optimism are the synonyms with which the Scots are associated in Ukrainian society. Our country greatly appreciates such humanity and has repeatedly expressed its gratitude to Scotland for making life easier for Ukrainian refugees. That the Scottish supersponsorship programme is one of the best in Europe confirms what I have said.

We were delighted to see the level of representation of the Scottish elite—the leaders of the Government, led by the First Minister, and all the leaders of the political factions in the Parliament—at Monday's event to honour the heroes and victims of war.

I was greatly inspired by every conversation with each of your colleagues there, and I felt once again the spirit of unity between our peoples. After all, unity among allies is what Ukraine needs right now. Unity is the key to our common victory. It is our chance not only to stop an existential enemy, but to crush its predatory and barbaric principles.

Before we begin the second part of the meeting, I again emphasise a key aspect, which is that Ukraine desperately needs three powers: the first is the power of weapons, the second is the power of economic sanctions and the third is the power of diplomacy. That is exactly what we have from the UK and Scotland—our friends and partners. I am convinced that Scotland and its people will continue to provide unwavering support to Ukraine and its people.

I am ready to answer your questions. I apologise in advance for the use of translation. As this political topic is quite sensitive, I would like my words to be properly understood and interpreted.

Thank you for your attention.

The Convener: Thank you very much, consul. We now move to questions. Before I ask my first question, I thank you for your kind words about our hospitality. I felt the solidarity of the Scottish people with you at this week's "Ukraine Forever!" concert in the Usher Hall.

I would like to reflect on the visit to mark the third year since the illegal invasion of Ukraine, when colleagues from Westminster talked about the utter defiance of the people of Ukraine. They

said that their resilience and resolve were unlike anything that they had experienced in their lifetimes.

I would like to understand what the mood of the displaced Ukrainians in Scotland is at the moment, as we see the geopolitical landscape changing almost daily in relation to the global players in the situation.

Andrii Madzianovskyy: *(simultaneous interpretation from Ukrainian)* As I said before, we are extremely thankful for Monday's visit to the castle to commemorate the fallen heroes. It was evidence of our unity as partners, friends and like-minded individuals.

That is exactly what we require right now: unity against a common enemy. The geopolitical turbulence that I mentioned cannot leave us at rest at the current moment. We are as shaken as you are, but we remain optimistic, because we believe that Europe and the United States have enough influence to enable us to win this war.

No geopolitical obstacles shall put us off the common journey to victory. Tomorrow's meeting between President Zelenskyy and President Trump and today's meeting between Keir Starmer and President Trump will provide reassurance on what we have already said.

The Convener: The committee has frequently asked about the welfare of the displaced Ukrainians who are here and how they are settling in Scotland. At the moment, are there any aspects of the support that concern you? Are there any areas in which you would like additional support to be given?

Andrii Madzianovskyy: *(simultaneous interpretation)* To be far away from home is not an easy fate, and Scotland has assured an extremely warm and hospitable welcome to our citizens.

Although a person cannot be truly happy when they are so far away from their own home, and displaced persons in Scotland face some issues, I want to immediately note that the Scottish Government and the Scottish people are doing a great deed. I can only compare the response to that of several other countries around the world. This helps people—mainly women and children—to adapt to their new environment and to feel most at home. As I have already noted, the Scottish supersponsorship programme is one of the most effective in Europe. That is your achievement, and, on behalf of the Ukrainian people, we are extremely thankful.

However, the displaced Ukrainian people's problems remain, and they are in two categories: the inherently structural and the psychological. The structural aspects are resolved through the social institutions in Scotland, which provide

people with access to learning English, social security payments and the ability to work in a job so that they can feed and sustain a family. I am especially thankful for the opportunity for Ukrainian children and students to receive a world-class Scottish education for free. They are our future, and they are meant to rebuild Ukraine.

Our people are extremely strong and will persevere through many challenges, including the current ones.

09:00

The Convener: I open up the meeting to questions from committee members.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you, convener, and good morning, consul. In your opening statement, you had three asks: weapons, economic sanctions and diplomacy. Those have all played, and will continue to play, a part in the process that you are going through. Your courage, determination and resolve are outstanding, and we commend and congratulate you on what you have achieved. As you said, they said that Ukraine would not last for three days, but you have lasted for three years, which is a major achievement.

Scotland has played its part in supporting Ukraine, and we are looking at what the future holds. What other support do you think might be required once the change that we hope for is made? If we are able to do so, should we send people back to Ukraine, or should they stay in Scotland for longer in case things do not progress? We all hope that, one day, everything will be resolved, but we cannot sit back and wait, because things might not go in the direction that we want them to. We need to ensure that your people are safe and secure. If some progress is made, what is your view on what we should do? If things do not progress, how should we resolve any difficulties?

Andrii Madzianovskyy: *(simultaneous interpretation)* Hospitable Scotland has done so much for our people. One of their main worries is the uncertainty about their future. A person's happiness depends on the happiness of their family. There are two aspects to that: first, parents are concerned that their children are far away from the war, which is currently the most important aspect of their life; and secondly, they are concerned about their future. People are worried about what will happen tomorrow.

If you were to ask me to divide the Ukrainian people into two categories, based on their feelings, I would say that the first category of people have adapted quite well and are looking forward to building a future and a life in Scotland. Those children are attending amazing and

prestigious schools and universities and other higher education facilities. Due to the actions of the Scottish Government, the parents have been able to improve the level of their English language and subsequently find a job that pertains to their qualifications.

The second category, which would encompass most people, is made up of those who expect to return soon to their homes. It remains our Government's policy to be in constant dialogue with our European partners, in relation not only to assistance and support for our citizens currently but to their subsequent return home. The war will end, and our country will be rebuilt, and our vision is that the children who are currently attending Scottish institutions, including Scottish universities, will be the ones who will return to rebuild a new and flourishing Ukraine. We will need them.

Alexander Stewart: Thank you.

The Convener: I call Neil Bibby.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): First, it was an honour to join you at the "Invicta Ukraine"—unbroken Ukraine—event at Glasgow cathedral and to pay tribute to the sacrifice made and the bravery and strength shown by the Ukrainian people over the past three years.

I suppose that the most important question today is this: what do you need? You have answered that in your opening statement; indeed, Mr Stewart referred to it when he mentioned weapons, economic sanctions and the power of diplomacy. Do you want to expand on any of those points? For example, do you believe that European neighbours, including the UK, should and must increase defence spending? Should there be greater defence and security co-operation? Should economic sanctions be applied not just to Russia, but to third parties that support Russia's aggression in Ukraine?

Andrii Madzianovskyy: (*simultaneous interpretation*) I can of course expand on all three of those points, and I will begin with diplomacy, as we are diplomats ourselves. What is particularly important—and this is supported by the UK—is to have at the negotiating table the country that is actually at war. The country that is bleeding in this war and which is sacrificing the lives of its people every single day deserves to be heard.

We require not only peace but a just peace. A strong position before negotiations is acquired in two ways. The first pathway is on the battlefield, and the second pathway, no less important, is at the diplomatic table. That pathway is related to two other components—arms and weaponry and economic sanctions.

We are extremely thankful to all our allies and friends, especially the UK, for our united and

common position in these negotiations. Without western arms and western economic sanctions, Ukraine would have a much harder time during this war. Now is the time to reach maximum unity and exert the final push on the enemy. We anticipate the next two days in Washington. I am confident that western civilization has enough power to overcome not only Russia but world tyranny overall.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The consul probably knows that this is one of the few subjects that unites all the parties in the Scottish Parliament. Our support for Ukraine is unstinting and will be unrelenting; it is characterised by the 100-year agreement that was signed between the United Kingdom and Ukraine last month.

I will ask a few questions about the Ukrainians who are in Scotland. We know that around 30,000 came, and you paid tribute to the schemes that brought those good people here and the support that they have received. How many are still here? I am specifically interested in how the Ukraine permission extension scheme is viewed. Will the Ukrainians here apply to stay for another 18 months under the same conditions as the original visa, or do you anticipate that people might begin to return to Ukraine?

09:15

Andrii Madzianovskyy: (*simultaneous interpretation*) You are correct that 30,000 people are currently located in Scotland. We cannot anticipate the behaviour of our refugees in Scotland over the next year. That will depend on very many factors. In the case of a quick wrap-up and end to the war, there will be one pathway; in the case of the hostilities continuing, there will be another.

However, I can say that the majority of people have applied for their visa—their stay—to be extended for the simple reason that many of them used to live in what are now occupied territories or in cities that are currently on the front lines and, as a result, they have nowhere to return to. They are planning their lives for the short term, not the long term. I hope that the vast majority of them will return—indeed, that is our Government's stance. We are fighting not only for our territories, but for the future of our people; territories without people are not what we are going for—that is not what we need.

I would like to take this moment to thank the British and Scottish Governments for giving us the great opportunity to extend our visas.

Stephen Kerr: The Office for National Statistics has produced a lot of information on the status and experience of the Ukrainians who came to the UK after the Russian aggression and invasion.

Some of the numbers suggest that one of the greatest things that we could have done—and which we maybe should have done better—was help the Ukrainian people to learn English, which of course would have been a lifelong advantage to the people who have come here. I note that 49 per cent of the people who have come to Scotland say that they have found it difficult to get the kind of work that you were describing earlier. Teaching people English, and encouraging them to learn it, seems to have been a real challenge and we might not have done that as well as we could have done it. What more can we do to help the Ukrainian people in Scotland learn to speak and use English?

Andrii Madzianovskyi: *(simultaneous interpretation)* I will not cease thanking the Scottish Government for all its help, and I reiterate that the quality of life for Ukrainians in Scotland is one of the highest in Europe. We genuinely and truly value all that. However, what you have raised is extremely true, and it is a problem that needs to be addressed.

I see one reason for it. A person begins to learn a language when they are in a truly stressful situation—when, for example, they understand that they will be here long term. We should not forget that our children and our students at university have no trouble with the English language; it is their mothers, their grandmothers, their grandfathers and their parents who are having trouble.

The ability to attend free courses that lead to qualifications is an amazing opportunity to improve English, but, unfortunately, not everyone has used that opportunity. The main reason for that is that people simply do not plan or see a long-term future here. As I said previously, their main concern is the happiness of their children. My stance is that the older generation will return to Ukraine and leave their children here to finish their education, so that they can subsequently come back to Ukraine and rebuild it. There is a problem, but we will unite in order to resolve it.

Stephen Kerr: I have one last question about the 100-year agreement. I know that we should not take the name of the agreement too literally, but it is intended to underline the permanence of the relationship between the United Kingdom and Ukraine. One of the pillars of the agreement is community and cultural links. Do you have a personal vision as to how that might come about after the hostilities have ended? I specifically mean links between Scotland and Ukraine.

Andrii Madzianovskyi: In Scotland first of all.

Stephen Kerr: Yes.

Andrii Madzianovskyi: *(simultaneous interpretation)* For me and for my fellow citizens

and countrymen, Ukraine and Scotland are extremely similar countries. We both have a long, brave history. We are as open and hardy as Scottish people and we are as fun and optimistic as Scottish people.

We have been at war for three years, but we are still living. We are an extremely strong nation, which is similar to the Scottish nation. That is one of the reasons why Ukrainians have had such an easy time adapting to Scotland.

I have a lot to compare it with because I have been to every country in Europe. The UK—and mainly Scotland—are different in a very good way. Scotland and Ukraine have a long history together. The long history of both Scotland and Ukraine testify to the fact that our people have a united future together. We are excited and amazed by the fact that the 100-year agreement was signed specifically with Ukraine, and that is a testament to the power and strength of the links between Britain and Ukraine. That is a big advantage and, for us, it is an extreme honour. We hope and we know that this agreement will be not only a formality, but a testament to our friendship and our partnership and, in the end, will allow Ukraine to look more confidently into its future.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): Good morning. We are all here as committee members, but we are also here as party politicians. As the deputy leader of the Scottish National Party, I endorse the comments that have been made by Stephen Kerr and Neil Bibby. The SNP is very supportive of the policies of the previous UK Government and the current UK Government on Ukraine, including in relation to building up defences. You mentioned weapons. We need to produce weapons to replace those that have already been used. I think that you will want to know that there is a remarkable degree—almost a unique degree—of unanimity and unity among the political parties on supporting Ukraine. That also goes for our admiration of the way that Ukraine has conducted itself. The bravery of citizens who became soldiers is really remarkable.

I do not expect you to comment on this, being a diplomat, but I and perhaps others are appalled by the turn that things have taken whereby supporting Ukraine is now a transactional thing and international solidarity with Ukraine is being monetised like a protection racket—“We will defend you if you give us money.”

However, one of the biggest issues that we have had is convincing the rest of Europe that this fight is Europe’s fight and not just Ukraine’s fight. It would be useful if you could say a few words to drive the point home—this meeting is being televised—about why the fight in Ukraine is also Europe’s fight.

Andrii Madzianovskiy: *(simultaneous interpretation)* We are thankful to Britain for its stern position. Its position has not changed during three years of war, and that is extremely important. We remember every bullet and every arm that has been allocated to Ukraine—Britain has given the most.

One of the most notable things is the way that Britain has shown leadership in the past couple of days, when it has mattered most. Notably, it has specifically been able to unite the European partners at such a challenging geopolitical time. That is a testament to the fact that Britain has been, is and always will be a world leader, because only a nation that shares and displays human values can be a world leader.

I can only assess the actions of Great Britain. However, as a diplomat and a citizen of Ukraine, I am assured that common ground will be found between the President of Ukraine and the President of the United States. Today, the grey has disappeared. There is only black and white. A person must choose whether they are on the side of good or on the side of evil; there is no middle point, and because of that I remain an optimist, because there are more good people. That is my answer to your question.

09:30

Keith Brown: Thank you. It is encouraging to hear that you are as fun and optimistic as the people of Scotland. We take a lot of comfort from that.

I move on to the situation of Ukrainian refugees in Scotland. I hosted a Ukrainian family for a number of months, and they all—apart from the dog—took English classes as well as Scots classes. The mother asked me the meaning of the words “Nae bother”, which was interesting. It is a Scottish colloquialism. The mother, father and one of the sons have managed to get jobs, while the other son is still at school, and they have found a house for themselves in Argyll.

My question is about the extension. I understand that Ukraine will want people to return to help to rebuild, but there will be people who will want to stay here. That family in particular—I will not mention their names, apart from the dog’s, which is Uji—includes children who have been going through the state education system here for two years, and they might want to think about a future in Scotland.

As you said, it is hard for people to make decisions if they do not know what their future is beyond the next six months, 12 months or a year. From Scotland’s point of view, many of those people bring important skills. Are you picking up on the same worry or anxiety because people

cannot look further into the future to make plans in Scotland? The family that I hosted comes from Mykolaiv and their house was destroyed. They are keen to make longer-term plans, whatever going back to Ukraine might hold for the children. Are you still picking up some anxiety about the 18-month extension? I understand that applications have to be made in the final two weeks before the deadline, which seems absurd to me. I am interested in hearing your views on that.

Andrii Madzianovskiy: *(simultaneous interpretation)* This is not the first extension of visas, so people have experience of it. I am confident that the UK and Scottish Governments have a plan B for a case where some people are unable to submit their applications on time. I am confident that no person will be left on the street or scrambling.

Part of my responsibilities as the consul of Ukraine is to represent its people in Scotland. For example, I will draw on our co-operation with the organisation Dnipro Kids. Two weeks ago, we were able to rescue a family with five children from becoming homeless. We spent a lot of time reassuring them and convincing them to change their housing to that provided by the social programme. That is one of the many little details that signify that no one will be left without care.

However, I would like to address another small problem that exists. Among mothers, fathers, parents and people of older generations, many people hold high qualifications—these are qualified teachers, medics and engineers. In Ukraine, before the beginning of the war, they held high positions and were in charge of major organisations, but they are now forced into working low-qualification jobs. That is a problem with the lack of translation of diploma qualifications. A good teacher or a good doctor does not have a nationality. If Scottish society is in need of a qualified doctor or engineer, why not use a programme that translates diplomas in order to bring qualified Ukrainian individuals forward? That is something that I would like to add.

Keith Brown: Thanks very much for your answers. Your final point is very interesting.

You mentioned Dnipro Kids. My football team, Hibernian Football Club, won 3-1 last night—

Andrii Madzianovskiy: I support you.

Keith Brown: That is good. You will know that Hibs had an association with Dnipro Kids before the war to help orphans in Dnipro.

It is not really for me to say, but I very much hope that we as a Parliament will be able to see your President, if that is at all possible. I know that he is a very busy man, but it would be good to solidify all these relationships. Thank you very

much, and thank you for what you are doing in your country.

Andrii Madzianovskiy: Thank you so much.

(simultaneous interpretation) The story of Dnipro Kids will go down in the history books. I met Steven Carr, having heard a lot about him, and what he did, what you have done and what your colleagues have done is a story out of a fairy tale. The relocation of 50 kids from war to peace is a fairy tale, but I can imagine how much work went into paying attention to each individual to help them adapt to society here. I spread the word about that story as much as I can in Ukraine, because those people are not only Scottish heroes—they have become Ukrainian heroes.

Children are the reason why Ukrainian soldiers are risking their lives on the front line every single day. I am assured and confident that their parents and families will see them again in a peaceful Ukraine.

I finish by noting the role of the professional football teams Hibernian and Hearts. We have a lot of projects in common and we will bring them to life.

The Convener: When displaced Ukrainians began arriving, the committee brought up the issue of professional recognition. I am happy to say that we will follow up on that work to see whether there has been any improvement. I had a conversation with a displaced teacher in my constituency, where we have many displaced Ukrainian people. We will certainly take that up.

My colleague George Adam has a final question.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Everything was going so well until you mentioned Hearts. My team, St Mirren, was beaten by Hearts last night.

Andrii Madzianovskiy: Our Ukrainian player Mykola Kukharevych plays for Hibernian, so I must support them. [*Laughter.*]

George Adam: I will go over some of the points that you made earlier. You spoke powerfully about light overcoming darkness but, as you said, the geopolitical world has changed dramatically since the start of this year. How are Ukrainian people in Scotland and Ukraine, and Ukrainian politicians, dealing with that change? How are you staying so optimistic despite all that difficulty?

09:45

Andrii Madzianovskiy: *(simultaneous interpretation)* I really enjoy the idiom that every pessimist is a well-informed former optimist. The more knowledge we possess, the more we feel pity. However, optimism is the only force that allows us to keep going. It is the stimulus to wake

up every day and do something good or great and to promote victory in my country. If we lose optimism or lose faith in the army or in God, we will lose. As I have already said, because of that, good will always reign over evil. Those are forever words, which are from the Bible.

No matter how uncomfortable and difficult it is for all of us, we have no other option. We are at the front line and this is the only way out. We have lost 600 children in this war. How can we ever forgive that? How can we ever retreat after that? We have lost 12,000 civilians. How can we ever forgive that? The memory of all those people, and the memory of our fallen soldiers, puts us on the path to continue, but that path is extremely difficult without you. My people appreciate the people that help them out, which is why I, together with you, have faith that everything will work out and be okay. Thank you.

George Adam: I leave the last word to the consul, convener. I cannot say anything on top of that.

The Convener: Thank you so much for coming to the committee today, consul.

Andrii Madzianovskiy: It is my pleasure.

The Convener: The words of your national anthem speak to the sentiments that you have just expressed, which are very moving.

The Parliament has provided support in many ways. We have hosted exhibitions about the destruction of some of your cultural buildings and we have worked with the Ukrainian Institute London in cultural areas. As the Parliament's culture committee, we are very open to hearing how we can continue to provide support in those areas. We will also take forward the issues that you raised on qualifications to see whether we can get some progress on them.

You know the feeling in the room. You have solidarity in the Parliament, which is still flying the Ukrainian flag. We extend our very best wishes to your countrymen, both here and in Ukraine.

Andrii Madzianovskiy: Thank you for your support and your attention. To be frank, I have no words to express my feelings, but I really appreciate every one of you, because your support is crucial right now. Thank you very much from the people of Ukraine.

The Convener: We are going to have a group photograph, but that concludes this morning's meeting.

Meeting closed at 09:48.

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