**Dr. Himani Pant:** Good afternoon, everyone. So, on behalf of the Indian Council of World Affairs, it is my pleasure to invite the delegation from Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" once again. We had them in December 2023. So, it's my pleasure to invite you once again for our discussion here. For those who do not know, Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" is a leading Ukrainian think tank covering issues of foreign and security policy. And we've had, as I said, a very productive discussion in December 2023. So today we have with us Dr Hanna Shelest. She is the Director of Security Studies and Outreach at Ukrainian Prism. Then we have Ms Olha Vorozhbyt. She is a Ukrainian journalist and an Affiliated Expert at Ukrainian Prism. She is also a visiting lecturer at the Ukrainian Catholic University. She will be delivering the talk today on the theme, "Heading Towards a New Level: Indo-Ukrainian Relations in an Era of Shaky Geopolitics". We also have with us Ms Nataliya Butyrska. She is a journalist and she focuses on East Asia. So, the order of the program will be as follows. We have the opening remarks by Additional Secretary, Nutan Kapoor Mahawar. Then we'll have the opening remarks by Dr Hanna Shelest. It will be followed by the talk by Ms Vorozhbyt. And then we'll have a Q&A moderated by the chair. With this, I hand over the mic to Additional Secretary.

**Nutan Kapoor Mahawar:** Good afternoon, everybody. A very warm welcome to our friends from Ukraine, to Hanna, Olha, Nataliya, you are most welcome to the Indian Council of World Affairs. And as my friend just mentioned, and she has been reminding me, that this is our second interaction with Ukrainian Prism. And we had a very fruitful discussion last year. And so, I thought that I would make some welcome remarks to basically set--to basically outline how we view the situation in Ukraine at ICWA. And when I give remarks, please rest assured that my

researchers give me inputs on the basis of which I make my remarks. So, these represent a view of this think tank. And also, since I am a serving diplomat, I also take into account what the government's position is as I outline my remarks.

So, friends, the war in Ukraine has entered its fourth year in the absence of any credible bilateral talks to find a mutually acceptable solution to bring an end to the devastating loss of life, infrastructure, and environment. The world understands the global nature of this conflict. And therefore, since the beginning of the war, the international community has consistently engaged with both, the Ukrainian and Russian stakeholders to bring an early settlement of the war. The Indian Council of World Affairs has been actively monitoring the Ukraine war and engaging with delegations from both sides.

In April 2023, we hosted Ukraine's First Deputy Foreign Minister, Ms Emine Dzhaparova, for a talk on the global implications of the war. It was a very successful talk, very well received by our media. That same year, ICWA also interacted with your council in December, and we are happy to host you again. In February 2024, ICWA had the pleasure to listen to the views of Ms Iryna Borovets, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine. Thus, based on our previous interactions, I look forward to listening to your assessment of the war and understand how the situation has changed since we last interacted.

The prospects of a mutually acceptable settlement of the Ukraine war continue to look bleak. The shift in US policy with the election of President Trump, a weakening Euro-Atlantic alliance, and the recent Russian successes on the battlefield has made the peace process more complex in the absence of security guarantees for Ukraine from any

quarter. The war has exposed the vulnerabilities of the European countries, who are struggling with their own defence insecurities. Europe is in the midst of a great churn, both internally and externally. The electoral successes of the far-right parties in many European countries threatens the mainstream European narratives. This, along with the fast-crumbling trans-Atlantic alliance, has forced Europe to reassess its military and defence capabilities.

Apart from this, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who was here some days ago heading a delegation of the College of Commissioners of the EU, after the meeting of your President with President Trump in Washington, she has commented that, and I quote, “we are in an era of rearmament, and Europe is ready to massively boost its defence spending". The impact of this reassessment by EU on the war in Ukraine is yet to be seen. Although the main impact of the Ukraine war has been on Ukraine and Europe, its ripple effects have been transnational. Rising fuel prices, disruption in energy and food supply chains have contributed to rising inflation, global food insecurity, energy market volatility, and declining economic growth. Stock markets all over the world have been impacted. These adverse impacts of the war have especially been felt by the global South, making it a stakeholder in the conflict. The global South is a stakeholder in the conflict. And why do I say that? Because many of the third-party peace plans for resolution of the war have come from countries like Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, and also the African continent.

India, as a responsible global player and an important member of the Global South, has consistently emphasised the need for peace in Ukraine. From the Indian perspective, an end of the war is urgently needed to stop the endless harm to human lives, but also to stabilise

the world economy by normalising global supply chains. The war in Ukraine, my friends, it has impacted India directly. It impacted our students who were studying in Ukraine. We had to launch an operation, which we called the Operation Ganga, to evacuate Indian students. And we are really grateful to all the help that we received from the Ukrainian authorities in their evacuation, in their safe evacuation.

The Indian leadership on multiple locations has actively engaged with both Russia and Ukraine and has advocated immediate cessation of hostilities. PM Modi's statement that this is not an era of war reflects India's commitment to a conflict-free world. Rooted in the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which in Sanskrit means the world is one family, India believes in resolving disputes through discussion and cooperation for collective global prosperity. India has actively engaged in diplomatic efforts to resolve the Ukraine conflict, holding key discussions with counterparts in Russia and Ukraine. India has participated at the meetings based on Ukraine's peace formula held in Denmark, Malta, Saudi Arabia. India has also participated in the Swiss Peace Summit, which focused on President Zelenskyy's 10-point peace plan. This highlights New Delhi's consistent commitment to promote a peaceful resolution through dialogue and diplomacy. So, we have been part of all your peace efforts, given our commitment to peaceful resolution through dialogue.

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar has highlighted four principles of India's engagement with the peace process. One, this should be a time of peace. Two, there would be no solution to the war on the battlefield. Third, both sides must be at the table for any successful peace process. And four, India is concerned and engaged in trying to find a way to resolve the conflict. He has expressed India's

readiness to offer advice if both sides seek it. India attaches highest importance to ensuring the safety and security of nuclear plants and has expressed concerns about the possibilities of nuclear fallouts of the war. It has also categorically stated that it sees use or threat of use of nuclear weapons as unacceptable. Escalatory nuclear rhetoric from any side is not helpful. India has actively participated in the humanitarian assistance to our Ukrainian partners. Indian side has handed over more than 15 consignments of humanitarian aid to Ukraine since the war began. The assistance caters to both material and financial needs of Ukraine and includes medicines, medical equipment and other relief materials, besides helping Ukraine with infrastructure to keep operating its educational system during this time of crisis. Both India and Ukraine enjoy close bilateral relations, which extends to defence, trade, cultural and scientific collaboration.

Building on the earlier telephonic interaction between PM Modi and President Zelenskyy, PM Modi became the first Prime Minister of India to visit Ukraine after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1992. During the visit, the leaders expressed readiness for further cooperation through areas such as trade and commerce, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, defence, education, science and technology and culture, besides exploring the need for a stronger partnership in the domain of digital public infrastructure, industry, manufacturing and green energy.

To our friends from Ukraine, I would like to say that Ukraine is having to deal with Russia, the EU and the US all at the same time while the war rages on the ground. Your resilience and will to defend your people is noteworthy. It is important to remember that in international relations, smaller countries have their agency too. Maintaining

neutrality in the face of great power rivalry is easier said than done. And more difficult than this is giving sage direction to people's opinion in times of war. Your diplomatic outreach in these tough times is important. You have a friend in India and that is our assurance. Prime Minister Modi has said, India is not neutral, it is on the side of peace. ICWA is glad to host you and we look forward to listening to your views on the current situation in Ukraine and India-Ukraine bilateral relations. We look forward to an engaging discussion afterwards and now I wish to invite my friends from Ukrainian Prism to deliver their talk.

**Hanna Shelest:** Thank you very much. It is a great pleasure for us to be again here in this warm, not in the direct but indirect meeting of this world building and the Indian Council of World Affairs. We really had a fantastic conversation with you a year and a half ago. It's a pity that due to the distances and the war, we cannot have them more often and we hope that soon it would be our pleasure to host you in Ukraine as well. It is my extreme pleasure to see twice more people in the room than we had last time and that is the clear demonstration about the importance of the topic we are talking about and the necessity to speak more about bilateral relations and about the opportunities we have and also definitely about those conditions in which these relations are developing despite the generations of the relations between Ukraine and India that very often we are forgetting because it is the shadow of the Soviet past, forgetting that it is also our shared past for sure.

And here I would like to refer to your last phrase, quoting Prime Minister Modi about being on the side of peace and it seems to me that when we speak in the Russian-Ukrainian world to be on the side of peace is to be on the side of Ukraine because that is the first war in the last probably

40 years when you clearly know who is the victim, who is the aggressor. And that's why here we usually don't like to say war in Ukraine or peace in Ukraine because it sounds like we have a civil war or a domestic conflict and that is what we definitely can assure you that there is no conflict in Ukraine, has never been, because in questions of sovereignty, territorial integrity, our independence, doesn't matter what political party you are, what ethnic group you are, what region you are, people have the same position. And the last weeks clearly demonstrated it when all competitors and opponents of the current president supported him after the White House interactions.

And our group here is the clear indication like you have people from the West, South, and the capital, and that is the joint voice of Ukraine with which we usually speak when we are abroad. And with these conditions, that's definitely for us is important that the peace talks are starting. But I always try to remind that the first peace talk started in March 2022. And Ukrainians always were ready for them. However, the question is that, as you said, that smaller nations must have their agency. And that is exactly about us, because all the demands that Russia had in March 2022, they are absolutely the same in March 2025. And that is de facto about the dissolution of Ukraine as a state, as the nation, as the people. Because when they are saying that the war started because of NATO, my question always is, okay, so why in this way you are burning Ukrainian school, not only schools at governmental control territory, but books and libraries at the occupied territories, proudly bringing Russian books and burning Ukrainian, it's something for me like from the Middle Ages. But that is the demonstration that, for us, this war is anti-colonial.

And that's, in India, the issue that we can speak openly. Because you are one of those who clearly understand what does mean the imperial legacy and how, even after many years, it can influence. We are speaking with you here in English, but it doesn't make you British. So, the question that we being born in the Soviet Union can speak Russian doesn't make us Russian. And that's why it's always easy for me to speak about these issues in India, because I must not explain these things. You understand what does mean such difficult history of the relations. And that's why, for us, very important with the many countries around the globe to see the picture wider, to look to the relations and the context in which we are, meaning the war, because it has a lot of limitations. It has a lot of the international obstacles or assistance. But at the same time, to look at the relations purely bilateral. What if? Or what is the next day after? Because if we would allow other countries like Russia or China or the US determine our bilateral relations, we can lose a lot of the opportunities, and we can lose a lot of possibilities for the dialogue between our nations. That is why the situation in Ukraine now is very, I even don't know how to say the proper word, because Ukrainians are very determined. I can't say that we are losing at the battlefield. The situation demonstrates different. But when you speak about 2,000 kilometres of the battlefield, definitely it cannot be the same everywhere.

So, some parts you have when we are winning, some parts are where we are losing, and that is the clear identification of the negotiation process when Russians are trying now to get as much as possible so to have a stronger position before the negotiations. And that's why we understand that before this, it is a lot of propaganda coming, a lot of disinformation coming, because everybody's building the ground for the support of the international community. Ukraine is getting ahead with

the European integration, and you spoke about European countries in your introduction remarks, and we know that Europe finally woke up. The difficulties with the US, it weakened Euro-Atlantic bond, but it made stronger the European bond. And here I'm intensively not speaking about the European Union, but European, because you have the United Kingdom returning back when you speak about the security. We're speaking about Norway as well, and we're speaking about Turkey as part of Europe. And the last negotiations clearly demonstrated that Turkey is with Ukraine, and they're ready to be part of this peace process as they were since the day one.

So, what are the perspective? We don't know. Nobody's ready to predict. We want to be optimistic. Unfortunately, we have 300 years of history that make us more realistic or pragmatic. We're trying not to have wishful thinking. We are looking to the facts on the ground. The facts on the ground that the shelling are intensifying, so we don't see that goodwill that Mr Trump sees. Maybe we hope after tomorrow conversation, maybe we also would feel a little bit more optimistic. But at the same time, we understand that Ukrainians are determined to defend our nationhood, our sovereignty, and to be a responsible member of the international community. That's why we speak with our partners about nuclear safety and security. That is where we share, and I'm really glad that now we are talking about this because out of the script, but I remember when we came here for the first time, nobody wanted to speak with us about nuclear security. And it was one of the, not in this building, but in general in India for all of our meetings, and we discussed at the time, like we were sure that India will speak with us about this, but it was less interest. Now we return back to this topic, and that is, I think, a huge step forward and very important for the two

of our countries as responsible in the nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear safety.

That's why we hope that during these negotiations, we will find out even more opportunities for the countries like India to join Ukraine in different articles or points of the peace formula with the food security, with the nuclear, with the return of Ukrainian kids, with the sovereignty, with many other issues, because we understand that from how Ukraine-Russia war would end, that would be the lesson for the many other conflicts around the globe. For current and for the potential. We know that Korea is watching. We know that Taiwan is watching. We know that Middle East is watching. We know that some Latin American countries is watching. So, it is in our joint interest that the peace talk would finish in the just peace, not just peace, because we really need understanding of what consequences it will have. And I intentionally have not spoken about what all of this means for the bilateral relations, because we are glad that Olha prepared a freshly report that we will be glad also to give it to you. Last year we prepared just the bilateral relations, the overlook, and this time it is the fresh paper analysing what are the perspectives. What is the next after the meeting of Zelenskyy and Modi in August and what impetus it gave to us.

**Olha Vorozhbyt:** Thank you. Thank you, Hanna. Thank you, Madam Secretary. Yes, so my speech will be much based on my recent paper, which we have today with us. And actually I wanted to start with the other point, but I think I need to repeat, because I already once mentioned it in one of my speech, not here, about the hidden pages of Indo-Ukrainian relations. There is, which we both, in India and in Ukraine, often neglect. In the school program in Ukraine, we have in secondary school, we have a book called The Cathedral by the writer

Oles Honchar. And the main protagonist there is called Ivan from India. And why? He was an engineer who helped to construct the Bhilai Steel Plant. And he came to his village back in the central Ukraine. And everyone knows him as Ivan from India because he worked there for so long. And a big part of the novel is devoted to his friendship with the Indian engineers. And actually, each kid at school reads this novel. But when you ask about it, then this part sometimes is forgot. But we really have many such pages which are rather hidden and which we can develop.

But coming back to the nowadays shaky geopolitics and difficult times that we are facing in, the development in the last year has shown that the world entered an extremely turbulent period. When I was on the way here to India, we've heard the news about cutting the funds for the Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, which were very important for bringing democracy to Eastern Europe and for us. And having the background in journalism, also for me, for our families, and democracy, this is what at stake in Ukraine now is. The Russia-Ukraine war has been the major factor that had influenced geopolitical stability in the world over the last years. The outcome of the war, if it brings justice and lasting peace, which Hanna already mentioned, with punishment to those responsible for mass killings and violation of international law, may become the push for creation of an updated rule-based order. If not, we risk plunging into an era of chaos, where the stronger will have the power only by the rule of force.

Besides that, the Russian invasion of Ukraine had major influence on food security, global economic stability, and global arms trade. Ukraine, considered the breadbasket of Europe, produced 10% of the world wheat market, 15% of the corn market, and 13% of the barley market.

Blocking of Ukrainian food exports to international markets caused a shock increase in global prices and resulted in severe disruption of grain exports. Yet, we were lucky to overcome, due to the Black Sea Grain Corridor and effective work of the Ukrainian armed forces. As a result, last year, in 2024, Ukraine, for the first time, exported more grain than in 2021. And this is very important for the world food stability.

Other issues, as the rise of AI technologies, misinformation, cyber warfare, has created new ways for countries to counter each other and to fight. AI technologies have been actively developed and tested on the front line in Ukraine and also other battlegrounds. There are also multiple endeavours to regulate the usage of AI technologies, and many future outcomes will depend on how the regulation will work. Just recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi together with the French President co-hosted the AI Action Summit, which means that this is an important topic for all of us. China tries also to present itself being a global stalwart amidst worldwide turbulence. Its economic and military development poses a growing threat for the Indo-Pacific region, and all this brings to the turbulence of the nowadays which we face. Yet last year, already at the year of volatility, we had a symbolically very important event, but also not only symbolically, but politically. So Prime Minister Narendra Modi was, as is mentioned by Madam Secretary, for the first time in Ukraine. This was a historic visit, as we haven't seen the visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Ukraine for the last 30 years, since independence. The last Indian Prime Minister who visited Ukraine was Indira Gandhi in 1982, and it was just Soviet times. And this was a very important visit due to the documents that were signed and also a comprehensive joint agreement which covered multiple issues, and I think it is very important to group these issues under the levels of cooperation they cover.

So, politically, this bilateral agreement stressed that both states share interest in raising the level of bilateral relations from a comprehensive to strategic partnership in the future. Last year before Ukraine, Prime Minister Modi visited Poland, where the India-Poland Joint Statement on the Establishment of Strategic Partnership was signed. Although some of the Polish experts noted that the agreement lacked content, but the fact that the level of partnership was increased to the strategic meant also increased interest for India, not only in Poland, but in the whole region of Eastern Europe, which Ukraine is also part, because yet earlier, in January 2024 India also signed a strategic partnership on innovation agreement with the Czech Republic. Also opened its embassies in Baltic states over the last years, so this means that our region is also interesting for you.

Economically, the agreement stressed the importance of simplifying the business environment for mutual economic activity and investment. These points are important for the development of cooperation in economic sphere, like this could be construction or pharmaceuticals, because the agreement recognises cooperation in the pharma sector as one of the strongest pillars of the partnership between the states. Among the four other bilateral agreements that were signed during the visit of Prime Minister Modi was one which is part of the pharma sphere. This was the Memorandum of Understanding between the State Service of Ukraine and Medications and Drug Control and Central Drug Standards Control Organisation of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India on cooperation in the field of medical regulation. I should say that traditionally, pharmaceutical products are among the biggest export items from India to Ukraine. In 2024, these were over 200 million. In 2023, it was 184 million, but before the war, before the full-

scale invasion was like slightly more than 200 million, but I should stress that having the country which is in the state of war, pharmaceuticals is what we will need and what we are needing. So this is also the prosperous sphere of cooperation in the future.

Representatives of the Indian pharma sector in Ukraine formed Indian Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association earlier, and it allows them also to promote collective interests, and among the members of the association are important players of the global pharmaceutical market like Dr Reddy's, Abryl Pharm, Dia Pharma. So these manufacturers, they understand the situation on the ground in Ukraine because some of them have their manufactories just near the battleground, like the Kusum company, which has their plant in Sumy, so this is close to the border with Russia, and Sumy are now bombed by Russian army. And these companies are highly involved in humanitarian aid.

Agriculture, of course, was also noted in that agreement, and it stays an important sphere for also future cooperation. So besides that, additional agreement on agriculture and food industry was signed during the visit. According to the agreement, Ukraine and India focus their cooperation not only on trade, but also on scientific exchange in the field of agriculture, exchange of experience and mutual research. Probably, as you know, sunflower oil from Ukraine is the biggest export item for us. So, in 2024, export crossed over $700 million, and almost 14% of all sunflower oil that Ukraine exports goes to India.

Defence cooperation was noted and outlined in the agreement. Just recently, in 2025, Ukraine has also restored its full participation in the largest aerospace and defence exhibition in Asia, Aero-India 2025. And besides that, like Ukrainian gas turbines produced by Zorya-

Mashproekt complex in Mykolaiv are necessary for Indian Navy. The final points of this bilateral agreement were devoted to culture and people-to-people contacts, and this is the sphere of cooperation which was rather neglected over the last 30 years. Because, for example, the first inaugural, so the first meeting of the working group on cultural cooperation took place just a few days before the meeting of Prime Minister Modi and President Zelenskyy. India and Ukraine also signed the program of cultural cooperation between the Minister of Culture and Informational Policy of Ukraine and Minister of Culture and Government of the Republic of India for 2024-28. The program underlines the party's desire to expand cultural exchange in various fields. In the bilateral agreement, scholarships for scholars, artists, these scholarships were also suggested through that program.

Also, Ukraine and India agreed to explore the possibility of opening branches of higher educational institutions to meet the educational needs of citizens of both countries. As you probably know, before the full-scale invasion, 18,000 of Indian students were in Ukraine, which were, as mentioned by Madam Secretary, then brought back to India through the Operation Ganga. Currently, the numbers are really scarce. But the west of Ukraine, for example, is open and relatively safe for Indian students. And cooperation in this educational sphere could develop further. So taking all this into consideration and taking these points that were mentioned in the agreement and the shaky geopolitics we have around us with the points that I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, we think that among the most prosperous spheres of cooperation for India and Ukraine could be, of course, economical cooperation and what I mentioned, the pharma sector, but also construction industry, as Ukraine will, after war or with the ceasefire, Ukraine will need to restore its cities. And India is one of the leading

countries in construction. But of course, for that, we already have other companies that would like to join this sphere. So, for India, it could be some kind of a contest.

Another important sphere for economic cooperation is in IT sector. So, we have, over the years, we have new companies, Ukrainian companies that opened their offices in India and increased their presence here. So, it could be beneficial. As Hannah mentioned, nuclear safety and security dialogue is probably one of the most important in this sphere. Just recently, probably, as you've seen, Russian drone attacked the Chernobyl nuclear reactor shield, which is an extremely difficult and risky situation that may provoke a major nuclear incident. India has huge experience because of its conflict with Pakistan and having this agreement together. Yet, as we see from the recent research, these Indian experiences could be used, but it is necessary to maybe research for some other recommendations, which will take into consideration this Indian experience.

Another important political sphere of cooperation is, of course, UN reform. And this was stated by both Ukrainian ministers for foreign affairs and for Indian minister for external affairs, Dr Jaishankar. So taking, of course, goals of both India and Ukraine when we talk about the UN reform, some differ, but the determination that the UN structure should be changed is determined by both sides, by both countries. So having this in mind, I think these are the most of the spheres which we should take into consideration in this era of shaky geopolitics for both of our states. Thank you.

**Nutan Kapoor Mahawar:** Thank you very much for your presentation. Let me begin by commenting on what Hannah said, that yes, indeed,

that when Ukraine war ends, there will be lessons to be learned by all, by all those who are a party to a particular territorial dispute, or those who do not enjoy good neighbourly relations, which can be seen, actually, all over the world. So good neighbourliness as a principle of international relations is in dire crisis these days. And the other point that you mentioned, Olha, regarding the need for reform of global governance institutions, of course, it is India's position, and we are pushing for advancing the reform of these institutions. But the fact that a war has occurred, that there are conflicts all over the world, that itself is a reflection of the fact that things are not okay everywhere, that there are weaknesses in global governance. Or in fact, a few weeks earlier, we had a discussion in ICWA on the crisis in the liberal international order. And that discussion, actually, at the end of the discussion, we actually concluded that the liberal international order was neither liberal nor international, though it was an order of some sorts, and that its weaknesses have come to the fore with the Ukraine conflict.

And regarding the bilateral relations, as I said, and I would like to repeat, that you have a friend in India, and this is our assurance. And we have several high-level statements made at the highest level, which are a reflection of this sentiment. And, Prime Minister Modi's visit, first time to Ukraine after Ukraine became independent, was a milestone, a seminal, a landmark in our relations. And you have highlighted several areas where the two sides have agreed to work together and to elevate the relationship. One area that you have specifically mentioned is pharmaceuticals. It is of interest to us. And it is a matter of great pride for India that our pharmaceutical industry enjoys such goodwill in not only the post-Soviet space, but also in Eastern Europe. So that is something that we take note of. And I'm sure our diplomats in the

ministry are working hard to operationalise the agreements that have been reached at the highest level between India and Ukraine.

And the other thing that you are mentioning, that we are upgrading our relationship with East Europe, is very interesting. And the fact, yes, we have opened new missions in the Baltics. And we have upgraded our relationship with Czech. And Poland saw a recent visit. At ICWA, we have been engaging with all these countries. We have a dialogue partner in Poland. And with Poland, we have somebody coming from the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs to speak on President Trump 2.0, his politics, and what is the impact on Europe, that will be day after tomorrow. So now with that, I think I'll open the floor for questions. So, should we take two or three first? And then, so please raise, yeah. So please raise your hands and be pointed and brief, and just introduce yourself.

**Ambi:** I have a question, which is on return and reintegration. So I study migration studies here, and we have a Centre on Migration, Mobility and Diaspora Studies. And one thing which I feel I'm really curious to know is that there have been different stands of, let's just say, international organisation, European Commission, separate European member states, or so on, how to reintegrate Ukrainian refugees once the war is over. And since now we're actually thinking about that moment now, how do you sort of see these three different positions? Especially, I mean, the role of international organisations in this regard has been something which doesn't really get talked about much. So how do you see a safe and regular channel to return and reintegration of the people?

**Nutan Kapoor Mahawar:** Who's next? Mehdi?

**Mehdi:** I would like to talk also about the food supply chain. You know, the war has affected the global food supply chain, and we did the efforts towards sustainable development goals for several countries. India is one of them. India had to impose export restrictions on certain wheat products, items. Recently, I mean, last year, Prime Minister Modi launched 109 high-yielding varieties of seeds and horticultural crops. So, in this field, how Ukraine see, in terms of cooperation with India, be it in the agricultural technology? Thank you.

**Aman:** Hi. My name is Aman. I work on European Security, Russian Foreign Policy in the Council. My question is about the Kursk operation that Ukraine took. And what is your assessment of the whole operation that has happened in the last few months? And how do you see the result of the operation in terms of the goals that were perceived that Ukraine thought it would achieve through those operations in Kursk? So can you give a brief assessment of that? Thank you.

**Hanna Shelest:** Yeah. I can go with Aman. I will go with the Kursk, and then will give my colleagues also the words. With the Kursk, there were several goals, de facto, visible and more of the indirect influence, let's say. So the first goal was definitely to take some of the Russian forces from the east, where at that time, it was the very heavy fighting. So to disperse their forces and to make them to defend their territory. This goal was not reached as it probably been planned because Russians didn't take originally, as they didn't want to recognise that somebody can come to their territory that they're weak. So they brought a lot of the conscripts from the regions like Kaliningrad, 18 years old boys who were just surrendering on the battlefield, instead of bringing professional military. But only in the months when they brought them. And even with this, we are now months nine, and only now they

managed to liberate some of the territories and they are pushing because they made this task the main before the negotiations.

And here we come to the second goal, where success is 50-50. As well, the goal was to have the exchange land. As we understood that Russians don't want voluntarily to give back Ukrainian land, so as soon as you are controlling some parts of their land, it's always the possibility to say, okay, we are controlling this, let's exchange in this way to liberate at least some part of Ukraine. The proposal was sent to Russia to exchange Kursk to Zaporizhzhia region, in particular to the Enerhodar town, where Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant is situated. That is the biggest nuclear power plant in Europe. Russians didn't want. That's clearly demonstrated that they didn't care about their villages and their people at the border, for them strategically to control nuclear power plant and in this way definitely to threaten with the nuclear security Ukraine was much more important, and they hope that they can take by force their own territories. But at the same time, I mean, at least this negotiation started, and now when you hear Mr Trump with his proposal, it's already impossible for Russia to say, how they said, it was the official statement of Lavrov, let's accept what is the territorial status quo, and in this way we will continue controlling where we are now. That was before summer 2024, all the statements. After summer 2024, you cannot find such statements, because status quo means us controlling Russian territory. So that's changed the pattern, the style of the discussion a little bit.

The goal that we definitely reached, it is the goal that now nobody is telling us that Russian forces are unbeatable, or that Russia is so strong that Russia cannot be attacked, because if you return back to the summer 2024 discourse, it was all about you cannot shoot against the

Russian territory, Russian airfield, and so on. With the Ukrainian forces coming there, we demonstrated that Russia cannot protect their own territory, so they are not so militarily strong. The second, we demonstrated that they are not ready to defend and to liberate. As we haven't heard even Putin's statements for almost two weeks, he tried to hide it. In the Russian social networks, it was like, oh, some sabotage groups probably coming when we already occupied several towns. Because that is the undermining of his authority. So, you saw how it took them several months before acknowledging even that this is happening. But that's helped us a lot with the European and with American counterparts, because we always could say, look, nothing happened. No escalation at the battlefield. So why do you think that if we shoot the airfield with the strategic jets, that would be any type of escalation? So in this way, maybe even if this was not the primary goal of the operation, the primary goal was to take off forces from east. But that was the most successful, probably, because after these, these questions just disappeared from the conversations and negotiations with our European partners.

**Olha Vorozhbyt:** So, concerning the reintegration of the refugees, as of now, I think the UN numbers are always 6 million Ukrainians that left Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion. The biggest parts who returned to Ukraine, so we talk about hundreds of thousands, they returned over the 2022-23. Now, of course, some can return, but these are very, very small numbers. So Ukrainian refugees who are now mainly in Europe, also 200,000 in the US, I think, and some in Canada. So, these are mainly women with children. And of course, this is very painful for Ukraine, because this is our future. But at the same time, to the point when people cannot sleep in Kyiv, for example, due to the drone attacks, and there is no security, these people can't come back to

the central Ukraine or to Kharkiv. So these mothers with kids, they are staying abroad. Ukraine just recently has founded the Ministry of National Unity, which aim should be to work also with those Ukrainians who are staying abroad. These are diaspora or refugees, but to construct the global Ukrainian citizens, so these people who are not living in Ukraine, but feeling themselves as Ukrainians. So the ministry now works on its strategies and develops the issue. So, it is in the process of development, but Ukraine is working on the strategies, of course, to bring back these people, but for women and children, of course, I think you understand it fully, we really need to have security. So the security matters. We have internally displaced people, or those who went abroad but then came back and left, for example, in Western regions. There are also such, well, now we can say that these people are IDPs, but they used to be refugees but came back because they wanted to stay in Ukraine and stayed in the Western part, which is considered relatively safe.

Concerning the agricultural security, I will just say that there is an initiative by the President, Grain from Ukraine, the EU pays for the grain exports from Ukraine, which are going to the countries, mainly in Africa, that are at the highest risk of food insecurity. I think that India can join also this initiative and cooperate more on that.

**Hanna Shelest:** I would probably add just one phrase about the immigration, what is interesting that most of the Ukrainians, even though they were women with small kids, they were searching immediately schools, that's understandable, and many countries created these conditions, that's why it was easier for integration of the kids. And the second, women started to search for work. So it's not that classical refugee one for the long time, it's just the social payments, yes,

that was a lot because it is the relocation for people, but at the same time, in some countries like Poland, Ukrainians paid more in taxes last year than the amount of the humanitarian aid coming from these countries for Ukraine. So that's why such countries as Poland and Germany and few others started to develop the policies where they would have a special conditions for Ukrainian refugees, if they don't want them to return back. They became a good labour force and the reliable, as you understand, it's not the categories that are under the risk, that is, mom with kids, so they are not considered high-risk immigration or something like this. That's why now it is more the challenge, not for the European countries, but for Ukraine, how to return back the refugees as soon as the security situation would allow. Because they are that much integrated into the societies, they are learning language immediately, everything, that for many of them, after kids being in school for three, four years, would be very difficult to return them back. That's why this Ministry of Unity is now with the discussion together with the international organisations how to create conditions for these people to return back, because otherwise Ukraine will need migrants to come and to help with the reconstruction of the country. So it is quite a serious dilemma now for the state policy.

**Nataliya Butyrska:** And regarding to Kursk operation, Hanna mentioned that it was some kind of a show of our partners of America and Europe that red lines of Putin, it's not so dangerous as they scared. Because it was very strong for our partners, they scared Putin's blackmail. And Ukraine showed that it's not a problem, they wouldn't use nuclear weapons, that's why, that's first. And another one, it is very clear that Russian army is not so strong as we think in the world. First of all, they couldn't capture Kiev and Ukraine using three days, but about Kursk region, they used, they involved North Korean army. And

they still try to push our army from Kursk region using this army. But the problem is the next. Now it's not Russia-Ukrainian war. Now it's more global war, because first time in history, North Korea sends their army to Europe, sends their army to other country, to help other country. And I think that in the world, even our Asia partners like South Korea and Japan, they don't think so deeply about this problem. Because I was in this country two weeks ago, they are looking and try to do not speak about North Korean army like it's a big problem. I think it's a problem for all of us, because Kim Jong-un used this army not only for food and not only for dollars. They are studying, they are studying very quickly. According to other army generals, North Koreans have very good skills to learn advantage technologies. And also, we have some of marks that Russia helped North Korea to improve their weapon. And also, we have information from our militaries that North Korea now is developing and is pushing its military sector, of course, to help Russia to sell weapons, but they would be well prepared in this region. And why they need this weapon, this technology, this army? Of course, for their own problems with South Korea. And even if Putin, for example, because we have this dangerous, will start war with NATO countries, Putin will use North Korea army, of course. North Korea have this resource, skills and weapon and money, and Russia will have very good, well-prepared army, more than one million army. And in the case of China, China is very silent about this problem. Despite we ask Ukrainian government ask China to stop this connection, to stop this cooperation between Russia and North Korea, they told that they don't know nothing about this situation. But you know that China and North Korea, they have the same treaty which Russia and North Korea have. In the case if the conflict will appear in Taiwan or with the US, because US will defend maybe, maybe will defend Taiwan, China will or may use North Koreans well-prepared with good skills of modern war.

I would draw your attention that our problem is now not only our problem, European problem is not European problem. I think it's a much more broader problem for all of us. Because you know now Ukraine have to fight on two fronts. One front is front line, of course, with Russia. But another one diplomatic. Unfortunately, this front is with our partners, with the US, for example. Because they don't understand why we need last peace and why we need just peace. Because false peace, it's problem for us. Russia will start war anytime because Russia did it. And another problem is for them. Because it would be signal for country like China, North Korea, that in other world, the rules are not working, and you can push all neighbours. You can take the land of your neighbours, put it to your constitution, and push with military to give this land, like we have the situation now. Because Putin wants to have Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, which are now our territories, but Putin claims these territories.

Now it's a situation very dangerous for medium and small countries, when the rule of power is under the rules-based order which we had, which was built during a very long period to save us, all of us. Thank you.

**Nutan Kapoor Mahawar:** Thank you. I do agree with you that the entry of DPRK troops is a paradigm shift in the nature of the conflict. And, of course, what will be the implications, they remain to be seen. And regarding the ground situation we heard from you, let's take another round of questions. Please raise your hands. Stuti first, Himani. And Sanjeev.

**Stuti Banerjee:** Thank you so much for your talk. I'm Dr Stuti Banerjee. I'm a research fellow here at the Council. And I primarily look at the United States. So my question stems from that. Ukraine's primary support in terms of military assistance has come from the United States. So how would you assess going forward your strategies, given the, I would say the roadblocks that you're going to face vis-a-vis the White House, and most probably the US Congress weighing in on it as well? And do you really feel that your European counterparts would be able to fill in that gap? So what is the change in strategy that Ukraine is kind of coming up with moving forward? Thank you.

**Himani:** So this is sort of a follow-up on what my colleague asked. So how are you going to navigate? So in that sense, what is the assessment and reactions to the US-Ukraine minerals deal? So, your insights on that. The other thing is the talks tomorrow. So it's sort of a deja vu feeling that we have. We have Russia asking for ironclad security guarantees. Something similar happened in December 2021. And since then, we have a chain of events
which have not really finished. So how is Ukraine preparing for a scenario? Hypothetically speaking, if the guarantees are given. If not, again, then how do you go forward? Because if the guarantees are not agreed, I believe as an observer that Russia is not going to go back. So what are your preparedness in terms of both scenarios, in terms of agreement to the guarantees or not? Thank you.

**Sanjeev:** Thank you, ma'am. My question is about China's approach to the conflict. You rightly referred to the Chinese silence on DPRK troops entry into the conflict. I remember that in May 2023, a special representative of China on Ukraine, Ambassador Lee, who visited Ukraine, Russia, and some European countries. And in Ukraine, his

approach was largely referred as pro-Russian neutrality. And the media also highlighted the differences on Chinese proposal to settle the dispute. So the question is, how do you assess China's approach now after two years here? Thank you.

**Nutan Kapoor Mahawar:** And I would like to add to what my colleagues have just asked. What are the security guarantees that Ukraine is seeking from its Western allies? And do you think that NATO membership is a long-term solution?

**Hanna Shelest:** Good question. Easy one. And that is probably the question to which I go to this question in all countries that have been from Middle East to Asia to Australia. Can we trust any security guarantees in general? Because all these countries have the different types of the security guarantees or agreements. And everybody started doubting, understanding that, de facto, it's always political will and goodwill to implement or not. Let's start from the US military support. That is partially the easiest question. Why? In the US rhetoric, I mean in the current White House rhetoric, they are quite exaggerating the number of the support that, de facto, Ukraine received in 2024. And if you look to the percentage, by the results of 2024, 30% were received from the US, 30% from Europe, and 30% was produced in Ukraine. The goal was in 2025 to produce 50% of weapons in Ukraine for what the money were coming from the European countries, the so-called Danish model. Because Denmark gave us, for example, all their howitzers. They didn't have any more. But they said, we have money. So they started to invest in production of these weapons in Ukraine. They were the first one after these other Nordic countries joined and now other countries are discussing because it is understanding that European industry is not always capable to produce those amounts that we need when the

active measures are coming. And Ukraine has a very developed military industry that just needs additional financing and it is cheaper to produce in Ukraine than produce in France, for example.

The issue with the US, first, they possess some types of the ammunition that unfortunately nobody else has, Patriot missiles. And most of these unique things, they are important for the air defence. That's why we're that much dependent because Russians are targeting critical infrastructure a lot and considering our huge territory we need a lot of these Patriots or similar systems. The second why US is important, because they have already produced, it is in the stockpiles. There is no long period of production of many of the ammunition that we need. They just need to take them from these stockpiles. My big question is, I recently saw, I have it on the telephone, a wonderful map done by the US Department of Defense, so it's not like our manipulations, where they put the US states and which of them received the biggest amount of the military investment and military orders to supply Ukraine, so-called Ukrainian money. Because you know that at least 60% of what you hear of the US support to Ukraine is spent in the US, not in Ukraine or somewhere. So all these states are Republican states. And that is really interesting because they received taxes, they received salaries, they received new employment places. What if the US stops this supplying? It means they're stopping this contract because these contracts are particular to Ukraine. What would be the economic losses for the Republican senators or members of Congress? What would be the reaction on the ground? So you know that can really influence the impact, the domestic situation, but absolutely not in the way as Trump administration thought when they just cut financing.

So that's why I believe that after this first rhetoric about Ukraine must pay off us or something like this, definitely the US policy would change as soon as they come to the real numbers and money. But Europeans definitely improved. Like before the war, France has been producing 10 CAESARs systems per month. Now they produce 81. Because CAESARs showed themselves extremely effective at the battlefield. So they have not only necessity to supply Ukraine, but also contracts from all around the globe.

**Nutan Kapoor Mahawar:** What is CAESARs? What kind of ammunition is it?

**Hanna Shelest:** Howitzer. Yep. And that, because they were really good videos, especially in the beginning of the war when our soldiers been doing the videos how it is shooting and showing the results, and it appeared one of the most effective at that time. So that was the best advertisement. And now for many of the European producers, first of all, because many countries started doubting in US supply, are they reliable? Can it be political? Already two European countries rejected F-35 contracts. So France is ready to provide Rafale, for example, for this. That's happening with other weapons as well. That's why it is not only political, but economically can be very beneficial for the big producers like France, like Sweden, like Norway, like Spain or Italy. And I believe that money would stimulate them much better than the necessity of war for the production. At least we saw it. Plus the European fund, this 800 billion that they already allocated, plus a rearm program that European Commission adopted. So will it be painful if the US stop? Yes. Will it be crucial? I believe no, because we started it not in January, but in April last year when the Congress couldn't vote for the support of Ukraine. When it was this long delay of voting Ukrainian package, that's when

Europeans and Ukrainians started to think, okay, what alternatives we have.

The same with Starlink. We started to think about this not now, but earlier when Musk prevented our operations around Crimea. So it was the understanding that we cannot rely just on one private company. And we started the local development of the technologies about this. So that's why I would not answer you about the security guarantees what will be, because the question is, I mean, I'm very sceptical. We had Budapest memorandum. Even if it was just a memorandum, but we give up our nuclear weapons. We hoped what can be the best guarantee. It didn't stop anybody. So the NATO membership is good because it is the belonging to something stronger. But does NATO membership means immediately that Russia would not attack or that others will support us? Unfortunately, after 2024, I can't guarantee, and probably these countries cannot guarantee. That's why in Ukraine it is the phrase that the best security guarantee is the developed Ukrainian armed forces. That in the end, it is only our forces and our people who would be defending our land, but nobody else. That's why, that's when you're speaking about the guarantees. It can be naive, definitely it's not the only strategy that we are taking, but it is just the understanding that it doesn't matter what are the promises. Each time we will need to work with this to continue.

**Nataliya Butyrska:** I would say that this war is in interest of China. And we are strongly thinking about that. The first, the US and Europe focus on all resources on this war on Russia. The next one is Russia is going to be more dependent on China. And now we can say that Russia is a major partner of China. And also in Ukraine we don't believe in China. And when you see sociological leaders which Ukrainians hate,

Putin, the next one Lukashenko, the third, Xi Jinping. And in the list of countries which are hostile against Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Iran, North Korea, of course, and China. It's about Ukrainians' vision of China. From everything that Xi Jinping blessed this war. Because if you remember, Putin went to China just before start of war. It was Olympic game. And at that time Americans told China, Xi Jinping, that Russia seems to prepare for big war. And I think that Xi Jinping may ask Putin about preparation and also may stop him. But he didn't. First year when this war started, China provided this information help of Russia. Especially in the focus of reason of this war. Because Putin tried to put that NATO factor pushed him to start this war. But Ukraine was not NATO member. Ukraine is not NATO member. But Sweden and Finland, they are now member of NATO. But Putin didn't start war against them. If this factor is very important to start war against any country. But China helped Putin to spread this information warfare. Especially around Asia. Because there are a lot of Chinese who live in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, not only in China. And I think it was very important for Russia, because when Ukraine start to ask these countries to help us, they very strongly believe that it is proxy war between the US and Russia. It's not our interest. It's war of big powers. But it was Russia's war against Ukraine, first of all.

So, I think it was a very important Chinese factor. But now we can see that China economically supports Russia. Dual use products, about 60% or 70% of dual use products goes through China. And even some of military elements, now China help to produce Russia. So, in this case, we don't see China as a country which are neutral. We think that it's pro-Russian neutrality. And when China prepared its peace initiative, first time it was because of pressure of European countries. Our European partners, leaders of France, Germany, Italy, Spain, all of them

visited China and asked Xi Jinping to help stop this war, to push Putin. They prepared this list to show that they are very responsible actor in the world. But they didn't put nothing to this list. Because when you propose something, you have to push this, and you have to implement it. They didn't do nothing. It was only for European countries, because China has interest in trade and good relations with EU.

The next proposal was just before peace summit, because Ukraine and European partners pushed Xi Jinping to be a part of peace summit which Ukraine prepared. Why it was important for us, and why I think it was very good time for Ukraine to be much more closer to peace. If countries around the world, especially from global south, would be one voice to speak to Putin, like Prime Minister Modi, because Prime Minister Modi told directly it's not time for war. But Xi Jinping didn't do this. If China would be part of peace summit and speaks with all countries of global south, like one voice, stop this war, stop at least, because it was bad for all of us. No. They prepared an alternative document just before our peace summit. And they made some kind of split, because countries which are very close to China, like Laos, for example, Cambodia, they didn't know how to do, because from one side is China. And Chinese diplomats, which called for countries which are influenced by China, don't go to this summit, and let's make some kind of conference, when Ukraine and Russia will sit all together, and then all voices will be heard. But China didn't do nothing. China didn't call any conference, because it was some kind of will to show that they are very respectable, very good peacemaker, from one side to show global south countries, to show European countries, but from other side to split countries which wanted to help Ukraine, to support Ukraine. It was a very bad thing for us. So now when we are speaking about, and

when we are comparing Trump's proposals and Chinese proposals, they are very close.

But the US is our partner, despite changing our leadership, the US was a partner, we supported us. And that's why we think that we will speak with our US partners, we will try to convince them, and so on. But China is not our partner, China is not a neutral country, and when China speaks that they want to maybe send some peacekeeping mission, we don't want to have peacekeeping mission of China on our territory. They may send it to Russian territory.

**Olha Vorozhbyt**: Briefly the last question concerning the mineral deal. So if you probably, what we are talking about is a memorandum of understanding, so it will outline the main things. Actually, at the moment we are not sure, and necessary would be the development and research on what Ukraine has. So what we've had is based on the research of 30 years ago, and this is the one issue. The other thing is how this entity will look like, will it be the investment fund manageable by Ukraine and US or will it also involve some European partners? So all this still will be discussed, but the main issue is that this will be a memorandum of understanding. And the further development of the deal will proceed after that.

**Nutan Kapoor Mahawar:** Thank you very much for your very elaborate answers and your interest in addressing our questions. I think it was a very useful interaction. And now I would like to hand over to my colleague, Himani.

**Himani:** Thank you, ma'am. I would like to thank Dr Hanna Shelest, Ms Olha Vorozhbyt, and Ms Nataliya Butyrska for visiting us again and

for sharing your insights on the on-ground situation and taking up a variety of questions. I'd also like to thank Additional Secretary Nutan Kapoor Mahawar; Director Research, Dr Nivedita Ray; my colleague, Aman Kumar, for their support in making this event possible. Before we come to the end of this event, I would request, ma'am, to hand over a token of appreciation to Dr Hanna Shelest and then we'll have a group photo.

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**List of Participants**

1. Ms. Nutan Kapoor Mahawar, Additional Secretary, ICWA
2. Dr Hanna Shelest, Director, Security Studies and Global Outreach Programmes, Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism”, Head, Supervisory Board at the Ukrainian Institute
3. Ms. Olha Vorozhbyt, Expert, Ukrainian Prism, Visiting Lecturer, Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv, Ukraine