

Conference on Ukraine, The University of Birmingham, June 13, 1996

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to open this conference today. Speaking in football terms my mission is to kick-off discussion on Ukraine. So, like a good game of Euro-96, I hope this discussion will be worth to participate in and to listen to.

When addressing the participants of conferences like this one, ambassadors are in a somewhat privileged position - first of all because they speak unchallenged and also because the audience is fresh. So I promise that the next speaker on this rostrum will find you as fresh as you are now, and not overburdened with facts and figures - you will have enough of it during the discussion. What I want to do is to explain or remind you briefly what makes Ukraine a special country for a close-up review.

I believe it is important to remember that Ukraine is not just one of the fragments of the Former Soviet Union. This is a country with the population of 52 million people and a territory bigger than France. The country that played a key role in the breakdown of the former Soviet Union - Ukrainians cast a decisive vote during the referendum of December 1991 that doomed the communist empire to disintegration. This is the country that since its appearance as an independent state managed to avoid social confrontation and ethnic strife. One of the few countries of the FSU where transition of power went in a peaceful constitutional way. The country that was the first in the world to abandon its weapons of mass destruction and proceeded from nuclear to a non-nuclear status. (Just a fortnight ago the last nuclear warhead was transferred from the territory of Ukraine). The country that inherited from the former empire more problems than wealth (one of them is Chernobyl) - this is also Ukraine.

With 0.45 per cent of the Earth's territory and 0.8 per cent of the world's population, Ukraine accounts for 5 per cent of world production. In Europe, Ukraine is among the major producers of iron ore, steel, cast iron, mineral fertiliser, sugar and grain; it has the second largest coal mining industry and is the third largest producer of cement, electricity and industrial machinery. Oil and gas pipelines of international importance run through Ukraine. Rich natural and human resources, the multitude of rail, road and air links, the economic and scientific potential, and the country's location at the cross-roads of east and west Europe are sufficient for the creation of a

developed internal market and furnish an opportunity to enter the world market harmoniously. The

Ukrainian government is committed to continue reforms and there are several successes on road from planned and command economy to the market one. However, to realise its huge economic potential Ukraine needs assistance of the world leading countries including the United Kingdom. The sooner Ukraine copes with its economic crisis, the more stable Europe will be. Both economically and politically.

Surely, you will discuss security issues later this day but I want you to remember the words of Mr Warren Christopher, American Secretary of State who called Ukraine "a linchpin of European stability". I would also like to remind you the words of Mr John Major who described Ukraine's role in the European stability as "pivotal". Please note that this is not flattery - serious politicians never say things like that in vain - but recognition of true reality.

Ukraine was the first CIS state to sign the Partnership for Peace treaty with NATO, it concluded the Agreement on Partnership and Co-operation with the EU and took active part in the development of the Pact of Stability in Europe. Ukraine's activities in the leading international organisations like the UN, OSCE and in the regional structures have found recognition of the international community. By acceding to the Council of Europe in November 1995 Ukraine confirmed its attachment to the observance of democratic principles, which are the cornerstone of the concept of democratic security on the European continent.

As one of the founding members of the UN Ukraine supports the international measures aimed at maintaining peace and strengthening security by taking part in the UN peace-keeping efforts in the former Yugoslavia. The events that have taken place in Ukraine during five years of independence - decisive steps in reforming the economy, consolidation of the political forces in building Ukrainian statehood, responsible actions in foreign policy have laid a firm foundation for further independent development. All this inspires confidence in Ukrainians that their nation will cope with all hardships of the transition period and become a full-fledged member of the international community.

Ukraine, a young democratic nation is back to Europe, a place where it once belonged. In the following discussions you will analyse different aspects of Ukraine and I hope you will learn more about Ukraine from one another and you will draw correct conclusions. I wish you all successful work and hope your discussions will be fruitful.

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Written by Administrator

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Thank you.