

## THE HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF UKRAINE'S RELATIONS WITH AUSTRALIA

### ІСТОРИЯ РОЗВИТКУ ВІДНОСИН УКРАЇНИ З АВСТРАЛІЄЮ

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**Abstract.** *The article discusses the main milestones in the development of Ukrainian-Australian relations since the early 1990s up to the present day. Australia recognized Ukraine as a sovereign and independent state on December 26, 1991, and on January 10, 1992, diplomatic relations were established between the two states. However, the Embassy of Ukraine in Australia was opened only on April 14, 2003. The official visit of the Australian parliamentary delegation to Ukraine in June-July 2004 became the important evidence of support for the statehood democratic course of Ukraine. The first visit of the President of Ukraine to Australia took place in December 2014.*

*The investigation of the MH17 plane crash gave the impetus for the intensification of relations between Ukraine and Australia. During the terrorist attack, 38 Australian citizens were killed. This event strengthened Australia's empathy for Ukraine, which is waging a fierce existential war against the aggressor country Russia. Ukraine and Australia signed the "Agreement between Ukraine and Australia on the Deployment of Australian Personnel to Ukraine in Connection with the Crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17" (2014).*

*Russia's full-scale invasion of the territory of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was another milestone in the history of relations between Ukraine and Australia. Ukraine was the first state visited by Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (July 3, 2022). Australia supports Ukraine at the diplomatic and political level. Financial, material, military, and humanitarian assistance to our country from Australia, one of the G20 countries and Ukraine's largest donor in Oceania, does not stop. In 2024, Australia provided the largest aid package in its history to Ukraine.*

**Keywords:** *MH17 plane crash, Australia, security situation, support for Ukraine, Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukraine.*

**Анотація.** *У статті розглянуто основні віхи розвитку українсько-австралійських взаємовідносин від початку 1990-х рр. й по сьогодні. Австралія визнала Україну як суверенну і незалежну державу 26 грудня 1991 р. Вже 10 січня 1992 р. між державами були встановлені*

дипломатичні відносини. Але Посольство України в Австралії було відкрито 14 квітня 2003 р. Посольство Австралії в Україні першопочатково було акредитоване за сумісництвом у Польщі. У Києві посольство Австралії відкрили у лютому 2015 р. Міжпарламентська співпраця між державами була започаткована з листопада 1992 р. Важливим свідченням підтримки державницького демократичного курсу України став офіційний візит австралійської парламентської делегації у червні-липні 2004 р. перший за всю історію українсько-австралійських взаємин візит Президента України до Австралії відбувся у грудні 2014 р.

Розслідування авіакатастрофи МН17 стало поштовхом до активізації взаємин між Україною та Австралією. Під час теракту загинуло 38 громадян Австралії. Дана подія посилила емпатію Австралії до України, яке веде запеклу екзистенційну війну проти країни-агресорки Росії. Між Україною і Австралією укладено «Угоду між Україною та Австралією про направлення Австралійського персоналу до України у зв'язку з падінням літака «Malaysia Airlines» рейсу МН17» (2014 р.).

Повномасштабне вторгнення Росії в Україну 24 лютого 2022 р. стало черговою віхою в історію взаємин між Україною та Австралією. Вперше Україну відвідав прем'єр-міністр Австралії Ентоні Албенізі (3 липня 2022 р.). Австралія підтримує Україну на дипломатичному, політичному рівні. Не припиняється фінансова, матеріальна, військова, гуманітарна допомога нашій країні з боку Австралії, однієї із держав G20 та найбільшого донору України в Океанії. У 2024 році Австралія надала найбільший у своїй історії пакет допомоги Україні.

**Ключові слова:** авіакатастрофа МН17, Австралія, безпекова ситуація, підтримка України, російсько-українська війна, Україна.

## **Introduction.**

Australia is gaining more and more significance in the international political, economic, security, and humanitarian domains, despite the fact that it did not hold a major position on the geopolitical map of the world for a considerable amount of time. Its geographical location and specific history of development leave an imprint on Australia's relations with European countries, including Ukraine. Being a former colony of the British Empire, Australia is culturally related to the Western world. At the same time, Australia's economic focus is mainly oriented toward trade with Asian countries, especially China. Australia, with its political system and soft power, has a significant impact on trade and economic cooperation and security policy in the Pacific region. In the global dimension, Australia was forced to balance for a long time between the collective West and China, openly siding with the former (*Matskovych, 2021*). Following the fall of the USSR in 1991, as well as the emergence of new states on the political map of the world and the restructuring of international politics, Australia's foreign policy remained focused on its "military-political partnership with the United States, competition for leadership in the region, an active position in international organizations, special relations with New Zealand" (*Historical and Social-Cultural..., 2023: 434*). In the words of A. Martynov, "Australia is the link that connects the Euro-Atlantic region with the Indo-Pacific one" (*Martynov, 2021:184*).

## **Literature Review.**

Various aspects of the political, diplomatic, historical, cultural, and environmental history of Australia are covered in the scientific publications of Zernetska O., Korol M., Lapa I., Martynov A., Myronchuk O., Oliinyk P., Perha T. (*Zernetska, Myronchuk, 2023; Korol, Lapa, 2020; Martynov, 2021; Oliinyk, 2012; Perha, 2019*). There are a number of works devoted to the Ukrainian diaspora in Australia (*Boiko, 2001; Yekelchuk, 1994; Tymochko, 2008; Usatenko, H., Usatenko, T., 2021*).

Kulinich M. has accumulated his practical diplomatic experience as Ambassador of Ukraine to Australia in a number of scientific publications saturated with analytical and factual material (*Kulinich, 2020; Kulinich, 2022*). Solomenna T. studied the vectors of Australian policy in the XXI century, with an emphasis on strategic relations with the United States and the tendency to form an autonomous format of its defense in the context of globalization. According to the researcher, this is

explained by the growing influence of China, Russia's aggressive policy in the post-Soviet space and in Syria, Russia's occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea, and Russia's war in the east of Ukraine (*Solomenna, 2021*). The reasons and the history of development of Ukrainian-Australian relations and their impact on geopolitics were also considered by Siekunova Yu. and Maslianyk S. (*Siekunova, Maslianyk, 2022*).

**Emphasizing the previously unresolved parts of the general problem to which the scientific article is devoted.** A holistic coverage of the main aspects of the history of relations between Ukraine and Australia requires further research and systematization. Taking into consideration Australia's role in geopolitical processes and in strengthening its presence in international relations, in particular, in relations with China, it is extremely important for Ukraine to have such a country among its allies and partners.

**The purpose (the aim) of the scientific article** is to highlight crucial aspects of the history of development of Ukrainian-Australian relations

**Presentation of the material.**

In order to gain a better understanding of Australia's role in modern geopolitical processes, it is necessary to dwell in more detail on its "soft power" and its policy among the states of the Asia-Pacific region (APR). The countries of the Asia-Pacific region are the states that are geographically located along the perimeter of the Pacific Ocean and the island states directly in it. The most economically influential and demographically saturated cities in the region are as follows: Vancouver, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Los Angeles, Melbourne, San Francisco, Seoul, Sydney, Seattle, Singapore, Tokyo and Shanghai. The developed countries, especially in the field of high technology, include Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and the Western United States. The natural resources of Australia, Canada, the Philippines, the demographic potential of China and Indonesia, agriculture of Chile, New Zealand, the United States, and the Philippines are also important factors of development and influence in the geopolitical plane. Australia's importance in this geographic, political, and economic area is still expanding. This is facilitated by the factors as follows: firstly, reliance on the country's historical and cultural traditions; secondly, an effective system of assistance to developing countries; thirdly, political and legal traditions and values; fourthly, cultural diplomacy; fifthly, a policy of working with diasporas both at home and with its diasporas abroad; and sixthly, positioning the country in the international arena as a peace-loving state. In addition, Australia is actively working in the direction of solving global issues of a planetary scale, in particular, climate change and human rights protection, international terrorism, drug trafficking (*Historical and Social-Cultural...2023: 573-576*). When it comes to the European vector of Australia's foreign policy, the EU and Australia signed a partnership agreement as early as in 2008. There is an Australian Mission to the EU in Brussels; and there is the EU Delegation to Australia in Canberra, respectively. Trade relations between the continental country and the EU are gaining momentum. Australia has also been actively involved in military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, which were conducted under the auspices of the United States and NATO (*Martynov, 2021: 185*).

Australia declared its recognition of Ukraine on December 26, 1991. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on January 10, 1992. Ukraine has had its own Embassy in Australia since April 2003 (by reorganizing the Consulate General of Ukraine in Sydney, which had been operating since May 2000). The Honorary Consulate of Ukraine has been operating in Melbourne since 1993, and the Honorary Consulate has been operating in Sydney since 2017 (as of 2024, the positions of Honorary Consuls in Sydney and Melbourne are vacant). The Honorary Consulate of Australia in Ukraine had been operating in Kyiv from September 1992 to January 2015. The Embassy of Australia was accredited on a part-time basis in Poland. The Embassy of Australia in Ukraine has been established in Kyiv since February 2015 (since February 2022, the Australian Ambassador to Ukraine is physically located in Warsaw). A legislative delegation led by the Chairman of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada visited Australia in November 1992, marking the official beginning of inter-parliamentary cooperation. In June-July 2004, an Australian parliamentary delegation paid an official visit to Ukraine. This visit was the important evidence of Australia's

support for the democratic course chosen by Ukraine as a way of its state development (*Political Relations...*, 2020).

Several important high-level meetings have taken place over the years of diplomatic relations, confirming the significance of dialogue and cooperation between the two countries, namely:

- the meetings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and Australia during the sessions of the UN General Assembly; September 1992, October 1997, September 1999, September 2003, September 2022;
- the meetings at the ministerial level during international security conferences: London Conference on Afghanistan (January 2010), Munich Security Policy Conference (February 2011, February 2022);
- the meetings during the session of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Vilnius (December 2011), the NPT Summit in New York (February 2011) (*Political relations...*, 2020).

It is necessary to emphasize the intensification of relations between Ukraine and Australia in connection with the investigation of the MH17 disaster that occurred on July 17, 2014. The civilized world was shocked by the news of the terrorist attack committed by the Russian occupiers; however, the judicial investigation lasted for years to establish the details of the catastrophe. There were 38 Australian citizens among the victims. As part of the UN's work, the Joint Working Group was established to investigate the MH17 accident. In the summer of 2014, Air Marshal A. Houston, a special envoy of the Australian Prime Minister, visited Ukraine to investigate the MH17 crash and discuss cooperation between the Australian and Ukrainian sides. That was the time when the "Agreement between Ukraine and Australia on the Deployment of Australian Personnel to Ukraine in Connection with the Crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17" was signed (*Agreement between...*, 2014).

The President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko paid a state visit to Australia in December 2014. It was the first visit of the President of Ukraine to Australia since 1991. In 2009, the visit of the President Yushchenko V. to Australia was scheduled, however, it had to be canceled due to the financial crisis (*Petro Poroshenko was the first to...*, 2014). It was extremely important for Ukraine that the Australian political leadership condemned the occupation of Crimea and Russia's aggression against our country and reaffirmed its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The possibility of supplying uranium and coal from Australia to Ukraine was also discussed at the highest level. The Australian Prime Minister T. Abbott expressed his support for Ukraine in words: "We stand on the side of freedom, democracy and self-determination", and called the crash of the passenger plane flight MH17 "a large-scale mass murder" (*Poroshenko and Abbott...*, 2014).

Another manifestation of the unity of values between Ukraine and Australia was the "Invictus Games" held in Sydney in October 2018. 15 athletes from Ukraine represented Ukraine in the competition. The head of the Ukrainian delegation, Iryna Klympush-Tsintsadze, emphasized: "<...> The participation of our team in these competitions is extremely important. Here you can feel the true power of the unity of Western civilization and the inviolability of its value foundation" (*The Australian competition started...*, 2018).

The development of relations with Australia is becoming increasingly significant for Ukraine in its foreign policy activities, especially since 2022. Australia is geographically located extremely far from our country, but it is also part of the culture of the Western world. Moreover, in the context of globalization and digitalization of many areas of life, geographical distance is no longer a key factor that hinders fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation. Australia is a crucial Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asian partner for Ukraine, particularly, in light of the Russian-Ukrainian War, ongoing post-conflict rehabilitation efforts, and the creation of international cooperation initiatives (*Shaipova*, 2024).

Australia is a member of the G20, an association of the world's largest economies, "The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation" or APEC, the Intergovernmental Forum of Pacific Rim Economies, the Asian Development Bank and other important global and regional economic organizations.

Australia's economy had been growing for 28 years before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has the leading position among the world's economies, in particular, in iron ore mining,

exports of meat products, sugar, wines, and grains. Australia's share of global trade is steadily increasing (*Kulinich, 2022: 211*). Australia is a leader among Ukraine's trading partners in Oceania. It should be noted that Australia's bilateral trade with Ukraine has grown significantly in recent years prior to Russia's full-scale aggression of the Ukrainian territory. In 2021, the volume of trade between the two countries amounted to USD 215, 2 million. Exports of goods from Ukraine to Australia increased by 43%, compared to 2020, and amounted to USD 60, 9 million. Imports of Australian goods tripled to USD 154, 3 million.

After the commencement of Russia's full-scale aggression, bilateral trade declined significantly (USD 97, 2 million in 2023); however, there is significant potential for renewal. Ukraine exports to Australia metallurgical and machine-building products (sea/river vessels), plastic products, fats and oils of vegetable and animal origin, etc. Along with this, Ukraine receives mineral fuels, machine-building and pharmaceutical products, optical devices, wool, precious stones, cardboard, paper, etc. from Australia. In December 2021 - February 2022, Ukraine purchased Australian coal for the first time. The exchange of services in the transportation, tourism, and telecommunications sectors is developing in bilateral trade.

Australia has invested in Ukraine in wholesale and retail trade, telecommunications and information technology as well as the mining sphere. In 2021, the Australian company "Volt Resources" acquired 70% of the "Zavallivsky Graphite" group, which, in turn, has a permit for mining in the Zavallivsky graphite deposit, the largest in Ukraine and one of the world's largest graphite ore deposits, located near the village of Zavallia, Kirovohrad region (*Australians are taking over..., 2021*). The Ukrainian-Australian company resumed operations in 2023.

Australia has lifted tariffs on imports of Ukrainian products for 1 year as part of its assistance packages to Ukraine in connection with the full-scale Russian war, starting in July 2022 (excise taxes on fuel, alcohol and tobacco products remain in place). In 2023, the Australian side extended this tariff-free regime for 1 year, and in April 2024 – for another 2 years (until July 2026). This favorable trade regime, in particular, facilitated the shipment of metallurgical products of PJSC "Arcelor Mittal Kryvyi Rih" and products of the pharmaceutical company "Darnytsia" to Australia in 2023.

It is crucial to institutionalize the commercial and economic ties between Australia and Ukraine and to sign bilateral and multilateral agreements that will provide the groundwork for future productive collaboration. In this context, it is important to start negotiations on the conclusion of the Convention between Ukraine and Australia on the Elimination of Double Taxation. Negotiations on this agreement were initiated in 2023.

With the commencement of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, ties between Australia and Ukraine underwent a significant uptick. The President of Ukraine V. Zelenskyi and the Prime Minister of Australia S. Morrison (holding the position at that time) had a telephone conversation on March 5, 2022, during which they agreed to start Australia's assistance to Ukraine amid Russian aggression.

In March 2022, a new Ambassador of Ukraine to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, was appointed, which also contributed to the increase in contacts between the two states. Three conversations were held between the leaderships of the Ukrainian and Australian Foreign Ministries during the spring of 2022. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that on March 31, 2022, the Australian Parliament received an extraordinary video speech from the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi (foreign leaders rarely address the Australian legislature).

On July 3, 2022, the first-ever visit of the Prime Minister of Australia to our country took place. On this day, the new Prime Minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese, arrived in Kyiv. The dialogue between the leaders of the two states was continued on October 11, 2022 (telephone conversation), and on November 12, 2022, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba met with E. Albanese on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit (Phnom Penh, Cambodia).

Meanwhile, Australia's active support for Ukraine and the intensification of bilateral cooperation continued in 2023. Meetings and phone calls were held at the level of the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Finance, etc. Interparliamentary relations were actively developing. On March 10, 2023, the First Deputy

Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine O. Korniienko met with the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Australia M. Dick on the sidelines of the 146th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Manama, the Kingdom of Bahrain), and on March 20-25, 2023, the delegation (leadership and members of the Parliamentary Group of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Interparliamentary Cooperation with Australia) paid an official visit to Australia. Along with this, on May 9, 2023, the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine R. Stefanchuk and M. Dick had a telephone conversation.

On May 21 and July 12, 2023, the President of Ukraine V. Zelenskyi and the Prime Minister of Australia E. Albanese met again, and this time it was on the sidelines of the G7 Summit (Hiroshima) and the NATO Summit (Vilnius). 2023 featured almost twenty high-level contacts between Australia and Ukraine, the highest level of communication in the history of the two countries' bilateral ties.

This tendency is still maintained in 2024. In particular, on April 27, 2024, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense of Australia R. Marles visited Ukraine, during which he met with the Prime Minister of Ukraine D. Shmyhal (Lviv). On May 29, 2024, the President of Ukraine V. Zelenskyi had a scheduled phone conversation with the Prime Minister of Australia E. Albanese.

It should also be noted that the intensification of Ukraine's relations with Australia indirectly leads to an increase in Ukraine's attention to the entire Pacific region. For instance, on July 8, 2022, for the first time in history, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba spoke at the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), an influential regional organization of which Australia is a member (in the online mode). This speech is a significant step toward recognizing Australia's (and Ukraine's) place in the region's foreign policy agenda as well as the security situation in the Pacific Ocean (*Myroshnychenko V., 2022*).

As of August 2024, Australia's total assistance to Ukraine amounted to more than AUD 1 billion (USD 682 million), of which AUD 880 million (USD 583 million) was military aid. Australia is providing Ukraine with ammunition, armored vehicles, special purpose vehicles, defense equipment, drones, dry rations, etc. Australia is also cooperating with other countries in the field of assistance to Ukraine: production of artillery shells with France; cooperation with Germany and the UK on humanitarian and military aid. Thus, Australia is one of the largest contributors of military assistance to Ukraine beyond NATO. Australia's support for Ukraine also continues in financial terms.

In addition, Australia has imposed large-scale sectoral and personal sanctions against Russia in connection with the commencement of a full-scale military aggression against Ukraine. As of August 2024, Australia has imposed sanctions on more than 1,400 individuals and legal entities supporting Russia's war against Ukraine.

### **Conclusions.**

Starting from the 1990s to the present day, the development of relations between Ukraine and Australia has had a stable vector towards strengthening cooperation and searching for important points of contact. Relations have developed both at the political and diplomatic level, as well as in the areas of trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation.

The events of 2014 – Russia's annexation and occupation of Crimea and the start of hostilities in eastern Ukraine – provided the motivation for the two nations to step up their collaboration. Australia has unequivocally condemned Russia's aggressive actions and supported Ukraine in its efforts to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty. A painful reason for strengthening cooperation was the terrorist attack by the Russian occupiers resulting in the deaths of 38 Australian citizens - the downing of the MH17 passenger plane in 2014. The outbreak of full-scale Russian aggression and the solidarity of the Australian people with our country, as well as the active work of the Ukrainian side, contributed to the maximum increase in bilateral dialogue and Australia's assistance to Ukraine. 2022-2024 were the most active years in the context of relations between the two countries.

Australia continues to support Ukraine politically and diplomatically while also strengthening sanctions against Russia and offering financial, military, and humanitarian aid.

Trade and economic ties between Ukraine and Australia had been steadily expanding until Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine began. Trade has declined between the two nations as a result of the disruption of trade routes, a significant rise in logistics costs, insurance expenses, etc. brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, Ukraine and Australia have the potential to increase bilateral trade in goods and services. Australia is a leading partner in Oceania for our state. Further intensification of Ukraine's relations with Australia will also contribute to strengthening Ukraine's position in the Pacific region. Australia is a very promising partner for Ukraine in the fields of trade, investment, security, and military and technical cooperation. Australia is rapidly developing into one of the Asia-Pacific region's leading nations.

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