

## UKRAINE'S INTERESTS IN DEVELOPING COOPERATION WITH STATES OF OCEANIA

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*From the very beginning of the full-scale invasion the primary task of Ukrainian diplomacy was to expand the circle of Ukraine's closest partners in order to strengthen its political position on international negotiation platforms, unite as many of Russia's external opponents as possible, and search for material prospects in bilateral relations. Guided by these principles, Ukrainian diplomacy is already trying to gain favor with the governments of the Global South. Nowadays the most dynamic centers of activity are Africa and Latin America, but it is extremely difficult for Kyiv to break through the prevailing pro-Russian and anti-Western sentiment there. The other space—the Oceania region—is still out of the focus of domestic diplomacy, although the starting point for building cooperation up there is much better.*

*Ukraine's interest in developing relations with Oceania is both political and economic. The region is entirely dependent on agricultural imports, which until recently were covered by Australia, but due to certain factors, the continent's economy is currently undergoing structural changes. In terms of politics, Ukraine is interested not only in formal support for "Ukrainian resolutions" in the United Nations, but also in developing a global strategy to counter Russian and anti-Western information pressure within the Global South. Moscow itself is not very active in the political dimension of the region, which allows us to talk about a certain vacuum of presence that Ukraine can fill. Nevertheless, Russia retains leverage in Oceania, which could potentially allow it to legitimize its seizure of territories in Ukraine, gain support on multilateral platforms, and avoid international sanctions, especially in the area of maritime supplies.*

### Situational assessment

#### ***Political and socio-economic characteristics of Oceania***

##### ***General pattern of regional geography:***

Oceania is only conventionally united into a single political and geographical space. In fact, the region is a cluster of islands and atolls that are scattered over a considerable distance in the Pacific Ocean. In total the region covers 15%<sup>1</sup> of the world's surface. There are several

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<sup>1</sup> The world Bank in Pacific Islands

variations of the political division of Oceania, but we will use the UN classification as a standard. According to it, there are four sub-regions in Oceania.

The first is Australia and New Zealand, which includes the respective states and their subordinate island territories. Culturally and in the international political dimension, this sub-region stands apart due to socio-economic reasons and the history of colonial formation, but in the regional sense, Australia and New Zealand are integrally involved in the life of the island satellites.

The second sub-region is called Melanesia. It includes the independent states of Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and the French overseas territory of New Caledonia.

Micronesia is the third sub-region of Oceania. Independent countries: Kiribati and Nauru, as well as the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau, which are in free association with the United States. The sub-region also has dependent American possessions: Northern Mariana Islands and Guam.

The fourth sub-region of Oceania is Polynesia. Among the independent states: Fiji, Tonga and Samoa. The subordinate territories are French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna (France); American Samoa (USA); Niue, Cook Islands and Tokelau (New Zealand); and Pitcairn (UK).

More than 52 million people<sup>2</sup> live on the islands and countries of Oceania. The South Pacific region is the most vulnerable to current climate problems, especially sea level rise. It is this factor that Oceania's governments are paying attention to at international platforms, including the UN General Assembly. Another factor in their concern is nuclear safety, as the territories of Oceania have historically been testing grounds for French and American weapons of mass destruction. Attention to climate change, potential flooding and nuclear threats is a major element in gaining the loyalty of ocean societies.

### *Economic bloc:*

According to the UN classification<sup>3</sup>, the territories and states of Oceania (with the exception of Australia and New Zealand) belong to the group of Small Island Developing States, while Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands are part of the Least Developed Countries. The economic existence of Oceania's states and territories is based on financial and humanitarian aid from international organizations, remittances from migrant workers abroad, tourism and related industries such as traditional jewelry and souvenirs, and the exploitation of the marine biosphere. Oceania's communities are mainly artisanal, growing traditional and colonial-imported crops for domestic consumption within the family or commune, rather than relying on selling to the external market. According to an exclusive statistical study<sup>4</sup> conducted in the Kingdom of Tonga in 2015, 86% of households were engaged in agriculture. Of these, 37% grew crops exclusively for their own consumption, 62% were engaged in semi-subsistence farming, but only 1% sold their agricultural products to the market. For its part, Tonga is no exception to the general trend, as similar trends have also been observed in Samo<sup>5</sup>a and Fiji<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Tonga national agriculture census. Main report. Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Forests and Fisheries. 2015

<sup>5</sup> Agricultural survey report Samoa Bureau of Statistics. Government of Samoa, 2015

<sup>6</sup> Fiji agriculture census report. Fiji Government, 2020

The region is extremely dependent on imports of agricultural products, especially grain, which forms the basis of the Oceania diet. The main trade partner of Oceania's grain imports is Australia, which covers more than 90% of the region's needs.

Oceania also purchased agricultural products from Ukraine, in particular, the Marshall Islands were the main importer of domestic wheat flour (in 2014–2018)<sup>7</sup>. Fiji is also a very important agro-industrial power within the Oceania region. It serves as a hub for the supply of agricultural goods to surrounding communities. In 2018, Fiji provided 85% of food imports<sup>8</sup> to the oceanic states and territories. The largest buyers were the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu. Fiji's main exports within the region are various cereals, grain and flour (Fiji has the necessary milling infrastructure).

From the other side, some countries in the region, such as Papua New Guinea, have managed to integrate successfully into the global markets for the sale of natural resources and finished products. According to statistics, the main exports of Papua New Guinea in 2021<sup>9</sup> were oil gas (\$4.17 billion), gold (\$1.72 billion), palm oil (\$706 million) and nickel matte (\$662 million). The main export trading partners of Papua New Guinea are Japan (\$2.71 billion), China (\$2.71 billion), Australia (\$1.7 billion), Taiwan (\$697 million) and South Korea (\$617 million).

When it comes to resource-rich Oceania territories, one cannot leave New Caledonia out of the picture. This small archipelago in Melanesia, owned by France, has the fourth largest nickel ore reserves in the world, and the French overseas territory became the second largest exporter of nickel globally in 2021<sup>10</sup>. Most of the nickel ore from New Caledonia is shipped to Asian countries, including China and South Korea. The need to mention the nickel resources of Oceania is necessary because of the price shocks that the global nickel market has experienced since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It is important to remember that Russia is also a significant exporter of this metal in the world, primarily thanks to the efforts of the mining company Norilsk Nickel.

The region gets a large amount of international aid. In particular, according to the Australian Lowy Institute in 2021<sup>11</sup>, the largest recipients of foreign financial support were Papua New Guinea, the Oceania region as a whole through international programmes, Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. Australia provides the largest total grants to Oceania (\$1.3 billion). Individual financial loans are not very popular, especially from the treasury of individual countries. The most active creditor is The World Bank. In 2021, the volume of international obligations to it reached \$318 million for the region. It is worth noting here that according to statistics, China does not stand out among other donors to Oceania, as China's activities are mostly clandestine. China is actively trying to get involved in various infrastructure projects. The most notable in this regard are the reconstruction of the airport in Papua New Guinea, the construction of the royal palace in Tonga, and the construction of the Melanesian Group

<sup>7</sup> Pacific Wheat: Import dependence and Global Shocks. Food Security Cluster. Pacific Community, 2022

<sup>8</sup> Thow, A.M., Ravuvu, A., Ofa, S.V. *et al.* Food trade among Pacific Island countries and territories: implications for food security and nutrition. *Global Health* 18, 104 (2022)

<sup>9</sup> The Observatory of Economic Complexity/ Papua New Guinea, 2021

<sup>10</sup> The Observatory of Economic Complexity/ New Caledonia, 2021

<sup>11</sup> Pacific Aid Map. Lowy Institute, 2021

headquarters (a sub-regional organisation including Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and the Kanak Socialist Front) in Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu.

*Political element:*

Surprisingly, in terms of regional indicators of the level of democracy in the world's political regimes, Oceania is slightly ahead of Europe and ranked first in 2022<sup>12</sup>. However, the quality and effectiveness of these regimes in Oceania is quite lower than in Europe and even in the world. According to the World Bank's index<sup>13</sup>, only Fiji (0.62) could boast of mediocre government effectiveness, ahead of Croatia, Poland and Greece. On the other hand, regional countries such as Vanuatu (-0.56), Papua New Guinea (-0.89) and Solomon Islands (-0.91) performed much worse, which means that the government's ability to meet the social and humanitarian needs of its citizens is weak.

In the foreign policy dimension, the region was heavily influenced during colonial times. Oceania was completely colonized. The list of foreign metropolises that have ever owned territories in the South Pacific is extremely varied. The main external players in Oceania at the same time were the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Germany, Japan, Spain and Portugal, but only the first three still retain leverage over the foreign and domestic policies of Oceania's societies. The phenomenon of internal colonialism was and still is widespread in the region, in particular due to the possessions of Australia and New Zealand. In political terms, the independent Oceanic states have always followed a clear pro-Western course, minor deviations have become more frequent only recently in light of China's growing involvement in Oceania. Beijing is trying to openly bribe regional governments in pursuit of its own geopolitical goals. The key objectives of China's increased activity in the Oceania are: (1) creation of a permanent military presence in the region; (2) expansion of communication lines between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and towards Antarctica; (3) deprivation of the Republic of China (Taiwan) of diplomatic recognition by the countries of the Oceania. In a certain way, this struggle between China and traditional Western powers has influenced the outlook of the Oceania people and the mood of the governments there. By the way, several governing regimes have begun to show interest and even some political loyalty to China: Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, who signed a defence agreement with Beijing in 2022. China, through private companies (China Enterprise Group), negotiated the leasing of Tulagi Island in the Solomon Islands. This decision was later declared unconstitutional; the government of Vanuatu, which applied for Chinese loans from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; Frank Bainimarama's government in Fiji demonstrated some ambiguity in its position (the politician was a fierce critic of Australia's policy during the prime ministership of Scott Morrison (2018–2022), but in December 2022, he lost the parliamentary elections to a pro-Western coalition of parties led by Sitiveni Rabuka. Papua New Guinea stayed out of the global spotlight for some time, but in May 2023, the government of James Marape signed a defense agreement with the United States. In 2019, the government of Kiribati, led by Prime Minister Tanesi Ma'amau, withdrew diplomatic recognition of the Republic of China (Taiwan) and expressed its commitment to the One China policy. At the same time, Beijing was negotiating with the government in Tarawa to restore a military airfield on Canton Island in the north of the country.

<sup>12</sup> Democracy Index by Region. Statista, 2022

<sup>13</sup> Government Effectiveness Index. The World Bank, 2021

### *Social dimension:*

Oceania still has vestiges of the feudal era at the level of everyday life. Despite considerable progress in parliamentarism and democracy, Oceania is still characterized by a rudimentary social system, at the top of which is a public ruler, who can be called a chief. Such titles are passed down from generation to generation and are tied to archaic notions of a magical force that permeates the world, mana (widespread primarily in Polynesia). Chiefs retain authority and influence within their own communities. In some places, they are the largest land managers. However, in countries such as Papua New Guinea, traditional institutions are decentralized due to the bizarre topography, which affects settlement patterns; In Fiji, the leading inter-community agency, the Great Council of Chiefs (Bose Levu Vakaturaga), has a mixed perception in society. The functioning of the institution was suspended by the military junta in 2007 due to incitement of inter-communal violence and xenophobia against the Indian population of Fiji (38% of the country's population is of Indian origin<sup>14</sup>). The Council of Chiefs resumed its activities only in 2023.

## **Assessment of Ukraine's Political and Information Presence in Oceania**

### *The Ukrainian side:*

The main problem with Ukraine's foreign policy prospects is the lack of a communicative, and therefore diplomatic, base for establishing bilateral contacts. Ukraine does not exist on its own in the information sense on a global scale. It is mentioned only in relation to other countries and historical epochs: earlier it was the Soviet Union, later the post-Soviet heritage, and now Ukraine is associated with the Western bloc, which is not very beneficial in the current format. In this light, Ukrainian issues are not perceived by the world, especially by the part of the world that has been negatively influenced by Western countries on a historical scale, which is the vast majority of the so-called Global South. Ukraine does not produce an influential information product abroad, which leads to distortions of the state's image by foreign media, which has to be constantly corrected.

Oceania is not included in Ukraine's foreign policy strategy for 2021. The lack of strategic interest has led to a weakness in the expert base on the region—Ukraine shortage of specialists capable of substantive analysis of Oceania and the prospects for its cooperation with Ukraine. Kyiv does not have any diplomatic representation in the South Pacific region, except for Australia. Of the seven states with which Ukraine has not yet established diplomatic relations since regaining independence, five are located in Oceania (Kiribati, Palau, Tonga, Nauru, and Papua New Guinea). In more than 30 years of sovereign foreign policy<sup>15</sup>, Ukraine has signed only six international agreements with the countries of the region: five with Australia and one with the Marshall Islands on the introduction of a visa-free regime in 2019. For Ukraine, the diplomatic map of Oceania is a total white spot, but recently the presence of Ukrainian officials in regional politics has begun to emerge. First of all, it is worth emphasizing

<sup>14</sup> Census of Population. Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2007

<sup>15</sup> Mostly with neighbors, least with European countries and the United States: which countries has Ukraine built working relations with since independence? (in Ukrainian), Yelyzaveta Dorontseva. VoxUkraine, 2022



President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's speeches to the parliaments of Australia (March 2022) and New Zealand (December 2022), Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba's online speech at the 51st Pacific Islands Forum in July 2022 (the main regional Pan-Pacific organization) and a meeting between Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and his Fijian counterpart Pio Tikoduadua on the sidelines of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore (June 2023). In his speech at the Pacific Islands Forum, Dmytro Kuleba raised the following issues: (1) continued support for Ukraine during the UN General Assembly vote; (2) joining international sanctions against Russia; (3) limiting Russia's maritime activity in the internal waters of Oceania and preventing Russia from using their jurisdictions to escape sanctions. Despite its geographical remoteness, Oceania has become a shelter for a quite large Ukrainian diaspora: more than 38,000 ethnic Ukrainians and their descendants live in Australia<sup>16</sup>, and another thousand immigrants from Ukraine have settled in New Zealand. Since the middle of the last century, Ukrainians in Australia have been publishing a number of magazines (Free Thought and Church and Life) and broadcasting radio programs (SBS Radio and Ukrainian Radio Brisbane). With the support of the diaspora, seven Saturday and Sunday schools were opened; more than two dozen organizations (Plast), and the women's movement (Australian Ukrainian Women's Union) is also developing. However, the most valuable resource in the Ukrainian diplomatic toolkit was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Papua New Guinea, Justin Tkachenko, who has Ukrainian roots. It was during his cadence that the prospects for establishing diplomatic relations with Ukraine and opening an embassy were outlined. However, the minister recently resigned from his post. Justin Tkachenko's resignation was accompanied by a serious scandal within Papua New Guinea's society related to the misuse of taxpayers' money by the government. The minister was heavily criticized on social media, recalling his white skin color, which evoked memories of the colonial era, and his Ukrainian origin.

### *The Chinese-Russian factor:*

China, for its part, accompanies its expansion in Oceania with soft power instruments, emphasizing the peaceful intentions of China's penetration into the region. China has one of the most extensive networks of diplomatic missions in Oceania. The only countries that lack missions are those that have rejected the One China policy and therefore recognize the Republic of China (Taiwan) at the diplomatic level. China's diplomatic envoys are surprisingly active in the information space of their host countries. They publish articles of various kinds under their own names, emphasizing China's achievements in developing relations with the countries of the region and the negative role of China's enemies. From 2016 to 2020, Chinese heads of diplomatic missions published more than 92 articles<sup>17</sup> in mainstream oceanic media (Fiji Sun (Fiji), Kaselelhi Press (Federated States of Micronesia), Post-Courier (Papua New Guinea), Samoa Observer (Samoa), Matangi Tonga (Tonga), Daily Post (Vanuatu)). In this way, China seeks to tell its "own story", which is obviously different from the prevailing pro-Western narrative.

The main counterattacks by the Western bloc against these activities of China in the media field are still China's contribution to environmental pollution and militarization of the islands The South China Sea (here, parallels are drawn directly with Oceania), the Chinese debt pit,

<sup>16</sup> Ukrainians in Australia. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine

<sup>17</sup> China's media strategy in the Pacific. Denghua Zhang, Amanda H.A. Watson. Australian National University. 2020

into which cash-hungry governments, especially in Asia, are falling, human rights violations, and so on.

Currently, Chinese activity in the oceanic media is aimed only at improving China's image in the regional space that is important to it. However, this channel of potential outreach can also be used to spread pro-Russian narratives, given the depth of relations between the governments of Beijing and Moscow, as well as China's tendency to blame the Russian-Ukrainian war on Western countries that allegedly supply Ukraine with weapons. However, it is worth emphasizing here that China still keeps Russia as far away from its sphere of influence as possible, maintaining an atmosphere of a situational authoritarian alliance rather than a strategic partnership. As for Russia, historically, Oceania did not play an important role in the strategic plans of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The only prominent figure in the South Pacific who had a connection to Russian history, though essentially stolen from Ukraine, was the explorer and ethnographer Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay. His request for the establishment of colonial Russian possessions in Oceania was rejected by the then imperial elite. In the Soviet period, Russia's activation came during the "late Gorbachev" era, which marked the collapse of the USSR.

Russia's diplomatic missions in Oceania are limited to embassies in Australia and New Zealand, while the diplomatic mission in Papua New Guinea was closed in 1992. Now Moscow is trying to imitate a regional presence in Oceania by relying on hybrid instruments, such as the Russkiy Mir Foundation and the Miklouho-Maclay Foundation.

The last organization, fully managed by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aims to introduce Papuans to the legacy of the world-famous explorer through the prism of the supposedly prosperous Russia of today. The foundation organizes numerous exhibitions of traditional indigenous culture, as well as the so-called "Days of Russian Culture" in Papua New Guinea.

In Australia, Russia often engages its own diaspora to promote an agenda favorable to the Kremlin. Important in this regard is the Russkiy Mir Foundation, which forms an information arena of active public support for Russia abroad. The Foundation covered the demonstrations of Australian Russians against the Covid-19 vaccination policy, which gradually turned into a platform for spreading anti-Western, anti-Ukrainian and pro-Kremlin narratives.

In July 2023, an article was published on the Foundation's platform under the headline: "Russians in Australia protest against violation of their rights"<sup>18</sup>, which equated the situation of people from Russia in Australia with "Jews in Nazi Germany"<sup>19</sup>, according to pro-Russian propagandist and "Adelaide Cossack chieftain" Alexander Kozlov. The rally was organized by a very prominent person in the pro-Russian field in Australia, the "Ataman of the Sydney Cossacks" Semyon Boykov, who also initiated the so-called "Z-rally" in support of the Russian war in Ukraine, which took place in Sydney in 2022.

In Soviet times, when Moscow was not particularly eager to exchange resources for Oceania, it tried to build bridges of communication through various leftist puppet organizations. In this context, there is a threat of Russia's influence on the political space of Oceania through the

<sup>18</sup> Russians in Australia protest against violation of their rights. Russkiy Mir Foundation, 2023

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

World Federation of Trade Unions (Federation of Trade Unions) or the Pacific Trade Union Community. Left-wing international organizations in Oceania do have prospects, as separatist political forces in the region's states and territories are sometimes left-wing, such as the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front, which has historically advocated for the independence of the New Caledonia archipelago from France.

Russia has not been able to build a line of contacts in Oceania using soft power tools, but Moscow always keeps the so-called "checkbook diplomacy" at the ready to achieve short-term political goals. In this regard, it is worth mentioning such a state in the region as Nauru. This island country recognizes the quasi-republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia controlled by Russia at the diplomatic level. Moreover, Nauru's officials are making high-level visits to these separatist entities. While Nauruan politicians justify this decision by their intransigence in the face of pressure from Western countries, a number of media outlets believe that Moscow is actively sponsoring<sup>20</sup> the island country's political position. The situation in Nauru should be viewed in the broader context of the global political game: in addition to pro-Russian quasi-entities, the small Oceania country maintains diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan) and also hosts camps for asylum seekers in Australia (Nauru Regional Processing Center). Theoretically, these facilities provide temporary shelter for refugees, but in reality, fugitives from the islands have been staying there for years. These factors may shed light on Nauru's privileged position in the face of the Western bloc.

#### *Weaknesses in Oceania for foreign influence:*

Russia's strategy for building external contacts is based mainly on the following factors: (1) oil and gas producing states, whose influence will be ensured by controlling world energy prices; (2) countries in need of energy generation facilities, to which Russia can offer cooperation in the development of peaceful nuclear energy (through Rosatom); (3) states and territories with reserves of rare earth metals and minerals; (4) areas of potential political instability, where the need for cheap weapons and services of private military companies is growing.

In Oceania, there are three territories where the threat of uncontrolled foreign influence remains. First of all, this is the province of Bougainville<sup>21</sup> in Papua New Guinea, which was in a state of armed confrontation with the government in Port Moresby during 1988-1998. The province wanted to separate and create an independent state. At the beginning of the new millennium, the militants were disarmed, but the threat of separatism in Bougainville remains acute today. Especially after the referendum on the future status of the province held in 2019. According to its results, more than 98% of Bougainville residents voted in favor of independence, but no serious steps have been taken by the Papuan government since then. The province's importance lies in its enormous copper reserves, which reach more than 5 million tons. The French overseas possession of New Caledonia. Since the mid-1980s, the indigenous population of the archipelago (called "Kanaka") has been trying to gain independence from Paris. The opposition mostly competes in the political arena, but in toughest years, extremist circles have resorted to armed confrontation. In the 21st century, New Caledonia held three referendums on self-determination, which, however, ended in failure for the indigenous population (the last one took place in 2021 amid a boycott by pro-

<sup>20</sup> Russia to pay Nauru to recognize rebel provinces. The Sydney Morning Herald, 2009

<sup>21</sup> Bougainville Referendum Commission, 2019



independence indigenous political parties and the coronavirus crisis). The importance of New Caledonia was outlined earlier—it has nickel deposits.

The instability of the Solomon Islands comes primarily from the growing anti-Chinese sentiment in the country, the increasing dictatorship of the government elite led by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, and the disagreements between the island clans (Malaita and Guadalcanal). Sogavare is pursuing a policy of rapprochement with China, but this is causing discontent among citizens, who in 2019 destroyed the capital's Chinatown in Honiara. In 2022, the Solomon Islands postponed parliamentary elections, allegedly due to financial problems. There is a possibility that the Solomon Islands will be transformed into a so-called “turnkey state” when the political immunity of the loyal elite is guaranteed by a foreign military contingent (similar to the Central African Republic and the Wagner Group). Probably, pursuing similar goals, Sogavare secured a defense agreement with China in 2022.

## Ukraine's Interests and Prospects in Developing Cooperation with Oceania

### *The political area:*

We assume that the benefits of political cooperation between Ukraine and Oceania have already been outlined by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba at the Pacific Islands Forum. At least, these are the prospects seen by domestic diplomacy. They include: (1) continuing support to Ukraine during the UN General Assembly vote; (2) joining international sanctions against Russia; (3) limiting Russia's maritime activity in the internal waters of Oceania and preventing Russia from using their jurisdictions to escape sanctions. The latter factor, by the way, is of particular importance. Shortly after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, a number of media outlets blamed Russia for fraudulently changing the ports of registration of its ships<sup>22</sup>. In particular, Russian shadowy fleet boats were flying the flag of the oceanic country of the Marshall Islands, thus avoiding international sanctions. It is worth noting here that, along with Panama and Liberia, the Marshall Islands have the most widespread maritime registration flag in the world. However, in our opinion, the prospects for building contacts between Oceania and Ukraine at the political level are not limited to the three components mentioned above. Ukraine's diplomatic expansion in the Global South has far from being a short-term goal designed exceptionally to sway the opinion of the dominant elites toward Ukraine now. Expanding diplomatic presence in Oceania is necessary to advance the overall process of Ukraine's emergence from the shadow of the Washington-London-Brussels triangle.

On the other hand, a diplomatic presence, even at its embryonic stage but with prospects for expansion, has sufficient tools to counter pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives rooted in the Global South. It is impossible to effectively dispel Russian nonsense in the information field about Ukraine without a regional presence. Most recently, a popular New Zealand news outlet, RNZ, was caught spreading pro-Russian articles<sup>23</sup>. Representatives of the Ukrainian

<sup>22</sup> Russian ships are ditching their flags and registering in the Marshall Islands and St. Kitts, a tactic that could be used to evade sanctions. Hannah Towey. Business Insider India, 2022

<sup>23</sup> RNZ chief executive apologizes after pro-Russian sentiment added to stories. RNZ, 2023

diaspora in New Zealand contributed to countering the destructive Kremlin propaganda by reporting suspicious content on the media platform more than six months ago, but the New Zealand editors have only now purged it. Material political interests should also focus on Oceania, in particular because of the example of Nauru and its special position in the regional status quo. On the other hand, despite a certain resource deficit, the Oceania region has highly specialized areas in the field of natural resources. New Caledonia (nickel) and Papua New Guinea (oil, gas, copper) were mentioned earlier. These market players can mitigate the price shocks caused by Russian aggression in Ukraine.

#### *Economic component:*

In our opinion, the economic benefits of cooperation with the states and territories of Oceania have the potential to cover several areas: exports of agricultural goods and raw materials, as well as means of processing them; sales of light aircraft and small boats; and spare parts for them. In terms of agriculture, the dependence of the Oceania region on imports of agricultural products is extremely important. As noted earlier, the vast majority of Oceania's needs for grains and cereals are covered by Australia, but the continent often suffers from natural disasters and is currently undergoing a structural restructuring of export destinations, in particular after the several-year trade blockade imposed by China in 2020. Australia is reorienting the flow of agricultural products to India and Indonesia, and Ukraine can take advantage of this. Kyiv has already had experience selling agricultural products to Oceania (from 2014-2018, the Marshall Islands bought domestic flour), so it will be a hundred times easier to penetrate the market. In the same vein, the grain embargo imposed by some EU countries, which refuse to buy Ukrainian grain due to the oversaturation of their own markets, can be used to their advantage. In such circumstances, the transition to a completely new agricultural space seems promising and necessary. However, the outcome of the upcoming stages of negotiations on the continuation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and the general state of relations between Ukraine and Russia should be taken into account. It is possible that grain could be transferred to Oceania as humanitarian aid in the early stages of building relations, primarily within the framework of the UN or through the Grain from Ukraine program. Currently, this initiative is focused primarily on helping countries in Africa and the Middle East, but its expansion serves both Ukraine's political and economic interests.

From the other side, the intra-regional infrastructure makes it possible to penetrate oceanic markets with technology goods, which, however, are closely related to the processing of agricultural raw materials and their transformation into finished products, such as flour. With the exception of Fiji, the Solomon Islands are also engaged in the milling and processing of flour, but this sector is focused exclusively on domestic consumption. It lacks foreign investment and new equipment. Similarly, in the Oceania region, light aircraft and boats are the only means of communication between islands. They are used not only for simple transportation, but also in the event of natural disasters that sometimes shake the region: underwater and underground earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and hurricanes. The largest natural disaster in recent times was near Tonga in 2022, when the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Haapai underground volcano erupted. At that time, military boats of the Chinese army helped the Tongans to eliminate the consequences of the disaster, which did not sit well with the Western bloc countries. In 2021, Fiji's second largest import position was airplanes and

helicopters<sup>24</sup>, which were purchased for \$149 million. It is also worth noting that the government of Kiribati severed relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan) in 2019 and recognized China instead because of Taipei's refusal to re-equip the oceanic country's air fleet. In this context, the prospects remain open not only for large Ukrainian industrial enterprises such as Antonov or Ocean, but also for highly specialized companies such as Aeropract.

### *Tools for achieving goals:*

It is clear that Ukraine cannot cover Oceania with investments and loans, so it should focus on soft power tools to improve its image and pave the way for the region.

First of all, we should focus on foreign pro-Western media sponsored by Australia and New Zealand. In this regard, it would probably make sense to launch a campaign to inform the local population about Ukraine through our diplomatic representatives, as there are many useful tools to learn from China's experience on the information platforms of the countries of Oceania.

It is necessary to support the activities of Ukrainian diasporas in the region, especially those as numerous and socially active as those in Australia and New Zealand. Ukrainians in Oceania are present in the information field at the local level through publishing newspapers and hosting radio programs. Yet, it is clear that they lack the financial resources to reach the masses in the media market—the sources function through the sale of advertising and donations from readers. The key tool for making our position resonate in the minds of politicians and ordinary citizens abroad is to raise acute, but at the same time understandable, issues for these societies. From this point of view, we see the following range of nodal points that should be pressed during public contacts with the Oceania region:

- 1) the nuclear threat from Russia (both from weapons of mass destruction and nuclear blackmail of the Chernobyl NPP occupation and in the context of ZNPP safety). However, this element should be used with caution, as the Oceania people perceive the issue of nuclear weapons mainly through the prism of nuclear tests by the United States and France. Ukraine's foreign policy, although it should follow an independent course, should not stand out from the general Western resonance.  
The next meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum is scheduled for November 2023 and will be held on Rarotonga Island in the Cook Islands. It was here that in 1985 a declaration on the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the South Pacific was signed, an extremely symbolic place to raise the topic of nuclear blackmail by Russia.
- 2) The devastating damage to Ukraine's environment caused by Russia. Here, it is worth emphasizing the destruction of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant by the Russians and the flooding of settlements in the Kherson region (this factor makes sense to delicately parallel it with climate threats to Oceania);
- 3) Blocking ports and humanitarian corridors for the sale of Ukrainian grain in the context of food security in the region;
- 4) Mining of a large part of Ukraine as a result of military operations, as well as the remains of unexploded shells underground. This tool can be successfully used to exert

<sup>24</sup> The Observatory of Economic Complexity/ Fiji, 2021

gentle pressure on the Solomon Islands, whose political position is balanced between the United States and China. The Solomons survived one of the fiercest military campaigns in the Pacific Theater of World War II—the Battle of Guadalcanal. As a result, the danger of mines on the islands is still significant. In a recent aid package for the region, Washington allocated more than \$1 million for mine clearance<sup>25</sup> in the Solomon Islands. Given the likelihood of a change in the status quo on the Ukrainian front, it makes sense to offer our partners from the remote islands consultations and exchange of experience with Ukrainian deminers.

## Conclusions

Building bridges to Oceania is an important step in shaping a global Ukraine, as President Zelenskyi stated in his annual address<sup>26</sup> to the Verkhovna Rada in late December last year. However, the interpretation of this concept remains open. As we see it, a Global Ukraine is first and foremost a state that is an independent voice for its own interests in every corner of the world. Nevertheless, in order to communicate these interests to the general public, it is necessary to lay the foundation for viable channels of political communication—this is the need to achieve political presence in the regions of the world that Ukraine has only just begun to discover. Wide channels of political contacts are also a guarantee of flexibility of the foreign economic course in the face of crisis in the immediate environment. For its part, a favorable regional climate will make it possible to monitor the political activity of Russia and its hybrid institutions.

To summarize, the value of the Oceania region for Ukraine is primarily in the political and export—economic spheres. The region does not have the internal resources to provide Ukraine with humanitarian aid or security support. In addition, the South Pacific states themselves depend on investments from abroad, a factor that has allowed China to join the regional kitchen with relative ease.

The political area of Oceania is extremely favorable for Ukraine's soft penetration, as Russia cannot boast of well-fed spheres of influence at both the diplomatic and informational levels. Politically speaking, Oceania is a sphere of influence for Western countries, although they should not be seen as a single geopolitical bloc. The United States and France may act alongside each other in global terms, but at the local level they are regional rivals.

By the way, in Oceania, there are centers that could potentially become vulnerable to foreign influence, including the province of Bougainville, the New Caledonia archipelago, and the Solomon Islands, whose political instability serves as the basis for uncontrolled foreign interference. On the other hand, states Oceania may unknowingly get involved in the political adventures of extra-regional players, due to existential threats from climate change, food crisis, or economic poverty. In this regard, we believe that the key tool for expanding Ukraine's contacts lies in its domestic agricultural resources and relatively developed industrial potential by regional standards.

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<sup>25</sup> United States Launches \$1 Million UXO Project in Solomon Islands. U.S. Department of State

<sup>26</sup> Zelenskyi in Verkhovna Rada: Ukraine has become one of the global leaders (in Ukrainian). Ukrinform, 2022



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