

January 27, 2021

Dear TOUCH Sponsors and Donors,

COVID and the flu virus have caused the closing of schools in Uzhhorod starting Monday, January 24 for the next two weeks. This impacts the lives of the children in The TOUCH Project. Some have better access to online learning during a quarantine. Some of the children have no access to online classes.

COVID IN UKRAINE AND TRANSCARPATHIA

The Omicron variant is rampant in Ukraine right now. We were told by a friend in Uzhhorod today that the numbers are higher than they have ever been right now. Only 34% of the population is vaccinated.

In Ukraine:

Coronavirus Cases: 3.86 million	January 2, 2022
Deaths: 103,000	January 2, 2022
Coronavirus Cases: 4.1 million	January 26, 2022
Deaths: 106,000	January 26, 2022

In Transcarpathia (Oblast/state where Uzhhorod is located):

Coronavirus Cases: 88,130	January 2, 2022
Deaths: 2,383	January 2, 2022
Coronavirus Cases: 94,097	January 26, 2022
Deaths: 2,529	January 26, 2022

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

Renewals and sponsorships have been coming in steadily thanks to **200** of you!! Sabra will be checking with the handful of those who sponsor a child and have yet to renew to determine their status. We are thankful for the patience of those on a waiting list. Usually there are new children continually coming into the program, but with COVID and quarantines, various systems in the Ukrainian society and government are experiencing strain.

Any donations and renewals can be mailed to:

The TOUCH Project
Corvallis Sister Cities Association
P.O. Box 176
Corvallis, OR 97339

OR renewing by online through the website:

<https://sistercities.corvallis.or.us/touch-sponsorship-and-donor-form/>

If you donate online, remember to check the “Submit” button at the bottom of the page after you insert your donation amount. And then take the next step of being directed to the page for payment. **THANK YOU!**

Please check out the list of supporters at the end of this email to make sure we haven't missed you.

UKRAINE'S SITUATION ON THEIR EASTERN BORDER NEXT TO RUSSIA

We know that you have the same worries and concerns that we do about the situation in Ukraine. Even though we try and stay abreast of the Russian incursion on the Ukrainian borders, it's hard to know what is really happening. It's important, though, to remember that for our Ukrainian counterparts, this “war” has been happening since 2014. Ukrainian territories and land have already been taken by Russian forces over the last 8 years. One friend in Ukraine shared, “What is happening now is not an evasion but an escalation of what has already been occurring.”

Because we do not feel qualified to speak for the Ukrainian people, we wrote to a few friends and asked for their thoughts. We wanted them to be open with their feelings. We let them know we would likely share with others, but we would not be using their names. They range in age from young people to senior citizens. Four of them are male and four individuals are female. Since they all claim western Ukraine as their birthplace, we understand that they look at the situation influenced by the western countries near them. Here are the written words of our eight friends and their varying personal perspectives. Each individual entry is

separated by a line:

Thank you for supporting us in this rather complicated situation. I hope and pray for peace in Ukraine. I am absolutely sure that we will never be the part of the USSR. My family had this awful experience so I hope that it will never happen. Concerning the war - I think that our government will unite in spite of all the disagreements and do their best to prevent war. As far as I know many countries like the USA, Britain and many others are sending us military aid so it might prevent Putin from attacking us. The most dangerous situation is in the East near Kharkiv and it's scary. Let's pray and hope for our country to stay independent and free from Russia.

This is a very complicated issue. We still don't understand what is going on, what our tomorrow will be like. There is no official information about it. The only thing that is giving us an answer is that women are obliged to get to the army check in point and sign in in case war starts. Some people say Russia has not enough people for invasion. Some people say it is a trick to come and invade from the south. No one knows for sure. Personally, I don't want to fight. I want my family to be safe. I'd rather be a refugee than go and die at the battlefield. I hope these are just games of an old man and he will not go further.

I have some items regarding the situation here.

- 1. People's minds are clear without panic in Ukraine (the media is quiet and there is no panic among the civil people in the country). Major panic comes from abroad (i.e. foreign guests, Ukrainians living abroad are scared to visit Ukraine though it is still safe here this time).*
- 2. People understand that mega forces from different sides want to play big and dirty games on our peaceful territory but we can't change this situation on our level.*
- 3. People are used to having a war conflict in the East for a long time but hope that there won't be a big war all over the country.*
- 4. Nobody wants back to the USSR in Ukraine: we have been feeling independent for a long time already.*

5. *We realize that we can't predict or forecast the future scenario, and the decision is being made on a much higher level (not by us) but we still hope for the best. We believe that we don't know the real clear and whole picture of the ongoing escalation, but we are doing our work honestly here and hope for the best in our country.*

6. *People are worried by the new wave of economic instability (higher taxes, inflation, etc.) meanwhile.*

In my opinion, the current situation is a bit far-fetched. We had a similar thing last summer when Russia was amassing troops near our border. But nothing happened- luckily. And I'm quite sure that this time nothing bad will happen either. It's only to scare us. But Russians must be out of their mind if they start such a massive conflict. It isn't beneficial at least to say for them now with all the sanctions against them and imagine their international situation and status if they attempt to take another part of our country. It would be dreadful for their economics, too. So I'm not quite worried about any worse scenario than the current one with the war still going on in south of Ukraine. Yes, it's a bit stressful when you constantly hear about it in the media but still all the headlines feel too far-fetched for me. Ukraine is an independent country and it wouldn't ever do better under Russia's government.

We all worry. It's not only the threat to our country. I remember these words of my husband a long time ago - "Putin sleeps and sees Ukraine under his rule." He just can't stomach anybody's freedom and independence. I don't trust him even if he negotiates and promises something. And our government doesn't know what they are doing. So I pray and believe that with God's help and all our friends we will survive. But it's scary. No to Russia. Only independence!!!

Ukraine proclaimed independence 30 years ago and has been fighting very hard to overcome years of oppression by Russia while under Soviet Union rule. Ukrainians have been working hard to re acquaint

the World with Ukrainian culture and history and to establish their own identity that was censored out and suppressed for over 70 year prior. When in U.S. a Ukrainian person is asked where they are from - it was very common to hear them ask, "Oh you are from Ukraine and what part of Russia is that?" Ukraine has a rich and complex history starting with Kievan Russ and Slavic tribes from which at one-point Russia started as a separate tribe and later nation. Ukrainians have been fighting very hard to build democracy with efforts which have been constantly undermined by Russia, the latest of which was illegal annexation of Crimea and invasion of Donbas region and the continuous war in that region funded and supported directly by Russia. Ukrainian people don't want to be under Russian rule, they want independence and they want to look to the West and other developed countries for how to build democracy and strengthen their economy. The latest aggression from Russia and the latest threat of invasion has everyone I know in Ukraine including many ethnic Russians living in Ukraine worried and scared. Everybody is depressed. So many families already have at least one family member who has been to the war in Donbas and has suffered. Ukrainians don't want war. Nobody in their right mind does. But the reality of Russia amassing military on the border of Belorussian and Eastern Ukraine has everyone worried and preparing for the worst. Prices have gone up a lot - 30% and Ukraine and Ukrainians are struggling in already challenging economic times during the world pandemic. Everybody is in a state of hurry up and wait. Some are trying to buy and stock non-perishable supplies such flour, rice, sugar, salt, potatoes, pasta, and canned goods. Ukrainians want to be a free, independent, democratic country that works with the western world and learns from the best. They feel bad for the regular Russians living in Russia because they know that they are living under dictatorship and suppression of many human rights and freedom with the internal politics of an aggressor. Ukrainians don't want that. When my elderly mother thought about leaving Ukraine and going to Hungary if the Russians tried to take over the country, she said, "What about my house, all my things in the house, my back yard and my flowers and my dog. It is all my home, my soul is here. I would rather stay put. I just can't let it all go and be in a foreign land where everything is strange. This is my home for generations of my family and

their graves are here. This is MY home, I am not going to leave.”

The war has been going on since early 2014, but has not been present in the daily news feed in the U.S. Whereas we have always been aware of insurgencies, escalations, killed or PTSDed soldiers and displaced people. It's not for the first time Russia amassed armed troops, artillery and whatnot. I have no idea why it's such a big deal in the US this time. It's the US officials we keep hearing from that Russia will surely invade and expand its presence further westward. Maybe they know better and it will happen indeed, maybe there is some sort of negotiation or trade between Russia and the US going on behind the scenes that requires this kind of speculation. I have no information to neither confirm nor deny any of it. You never know what to expect from Russia. It's like living next to a moronic, alcoholic neighbor that bullies everyone around and reasoning or discussion makes no effect on the situation. Maybe there will be an attempt to annex more eastern territories in order to get direct access to Crimea by land. Let's wait and see what happens in the upcoming two-three months. At least it's not going to be as unexpected as it was eight years ago. I don't think people are worried, it's not something new.

It's out of the question, regarding being under Russia's government! You should not worry. There is nothing you can do. If you believe that western sanctions or threats can thwart Russia's plans, you simply don't understand Slavic mentality.

The situation is unstable. Historically, Russia has always wanted to conquer Ukraine. Since the 17th century. From the period of Bohdan Khmelnytsky's liberation war. Then Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire until 1917. then from 1919 as part of Bolshevik Russia. And then as part of the Soviet Union. Lenin also said that Russia could not exist without Ukraine.

Now the situation is very unstable. Alexander Lukashenko (Belarus Pres.) intends to unite with Putin in an alliance. It is very bad that there are people in Ukraine who support relations with Russia. Yes, there is information about the Russian troops 13-20 kilometers to the

border of Ukraine.

We all understand that Putin is a very smart and pragmatic politician, but he has even bigger ambitions. He wants the restoration of the Soviet Union. But the Ukrainian army is no longer as weak as it was in 2014. We will be able to repel the aggressors. But the help of Western countries is urgently needed. After all, in the event of Russia's occupation of Ukraine, Putin will not stop. This is already an example of World War II. Of course, we are afraid of a large-scale war. But we do not think that is possible now. I do not think that Putin will risk everything for the sake of Ukraine. This is Nord Stream (gas pipeline from Russia to Germany), this is disconnection from SWIFT, and the partner countries are starting to help Ukraine with weapons. We are very hopeful that diplomats will be able to avoid war. But Russia is a very serious opponent. You can expect anything from them. We hope that there will be no war.

We hope this gives you a glimpse into the hearts and minds of a few of our dear Ukrainian friends. We are thankful they were willing to share their thoughts with all of you.

Stay safe and healthy! Check the list of sponsors/donors below to ensure your name is included. And thank you for being consistent and loyal heroes for the TOUCH children.

Sincerely,
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