

[January 26, 1993]

Speech by the head of the delegation of Ukraine Yu.I. Kostenko at the opening of negotiations with the Russian Federation on the destruction of nuclear weapons

Mr. Ambassador,

The negotiations that are opening here today, in Irpen, on a range of issues related to nuclear weapons, both still deployed in Ukraine and previously withdrawn from its territory to the Russian Federation for dismantling and elimination, are intended to be important and, we hope, a turning point in establishing relations of business cooperation in one of the most sensitive and important areas of relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

The presidents, heads of governments and parliaments of our states expect positive, significant results from us. For Ukraine, the special significance of these negotiations is also due to the fact that they will take place against the backdrop of hearings in the Supreme Council of Ukraine on the ratification of the START Treaty, Lisbon Protocol to it and Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

It should be emphasized that many issues that the Ukrainian side will raise in the course of the current negotiations have been sharply raised during the discussion of the aforementioned agreements in the commissions and specially created working group of the Supreme Council of Ukraine. In general, it would not be an exaggeration to say that too much will depend on the results of our work.

As for the subject of our negotiations, the Ukrainian side considers it necessary, first of all, to focus on consideration of the following issues:

1. The nuclear safety of the Strategic Nuclear Forces.
2. The status of the Strategic Nuclear Forces.
3. The elimination of strategic nuclear weapons.

We proceed from the fact that it is in our common interests to build the negotiation process in such a way as to start with relatively clear and simple technical issues, which, however, require urgent solutions, and then move on to rather complicated military-political and economic problems. On this basis, we believe that at the first stage of negotiations our main task should be the speedy settlement of the issues of ensuring the nuclear safety of the Strategic Nuclear Forces deployed in Ukraine.

1. On the nuclear safety of the Strategic Nuclear Forces.

The issue of ensuring the reliable operation and storage of nuclear warheads on the territory of Ukraine until they are eliminated raises serious concern not only among the relevant specialists directly involved in it, but also seriously worries the political leadership of Ukraine.

So far, the essence and true scale of the threat that Ukraine faces as a result of the artificially created problem of maintaining the nuclear safety of the Strategic Nuclear Forces on its territory have not become known to wide political circles and the public of Ukraine. This problem should be removed as soon as possible in order not to cause another trauma to the people who have not yet healed from the wound inflicted by Chernobyl.

The essence of the problem is that for many months components from Russia that are necessary to ensure the safe operation of nuclear warheads have deliberately not been delivered to the relevant units of the Strategic Nuclear Forces on the territory of Ukraine. We have come to the point where a real threat to the nuclear safety of a significant number of such warheads is beginning to appear. And this circumstance is now being used as a means of

pressure and blackmail against Ukraine by the same circles that systematically disrupted the usual regulatory work to ensure nuclear safety. This is not a method that will solve any problems, especially in such a sensitive nuclear field.

We propose to discuss the issue of nuclear safety as a matter of priority and without linking it to other issues. At the same time, we proceed from the assumption that Ukraine and the Russian Federation are equally interested in ensuring nuclear safety.

Specifically, we propose concluding bilateral agreements on a comprehensive guarantee and author's supervision of strategic nuclear weapons, on the scientific and technical support of nuclear warheads temporarily located in Ukraine, and on joint material and technical support of the Strategic Nuclear Forces.

2. On the status of the Strategic Nuclear Forces

As you know, the armed forces of Ukraine are not a part of the armed forces of the CIS; however, in order to maintain international strategic stability, Ukraine agreed in accordance with the Almaty and Minsk agreements to maintain the joint command of the CIS Strategic Nuclear Forces and single control over nuclear weapons. Therefore, we consider the attempts of the Russian Federation to subdue the Strategic Nuclear Forces located on the territory of Ukraine as completely unacceptable.

We regard such attempts as a violation of already concluded agreements. This poses a difficult choice for Ukraine: we have no intention of taking over the operational command of the Strategic Nuclear Forces deployed on our territory, but for fundamental reasons we cannot agree that any armed forces in Ukraine be directly subordinated to a foreign state.

We are convinced that preservation, in accordance with the agreements concluded within the CIS, of the operational subordination of the Strategic Nuclear Forces of Ukraine to the Joint Command of the Strategic Nuclear Forces of the CIS is in the interests of both Ukraine and Russia during the transition period until the destruction of nuclear weapons deployed in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian side is ready to discuss with the delegation of the Russian Federation the possibility of finding a mutually acceptable compromise on this issue, which would include the following main elements:

-- Strategic Nuclear Forces on the territory of Ukraine remain under the operational command of the Strategic Nuclear Forces of the CIS during the operational management of these forces by the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine. At the same time, we are ready to discuss with you the possibility of determining the special status of nuclear-technical units in order to give the Russian side the confidence that Ukraine does not have direct access to nuclear warheads. In particular, we would be ready to consider the possibility of appointing military personnel to a limited number of posts directly related to the maintenance of nuclear warheads who, after the elimination of nuclear weapons, intend (and have appropriate guarantees in this regard) to continue service in the Russian Federation.

-- an agreement has to be concluded on the creation of a control system with the aim of preventing the unauthorized use of strategic offensive weapons deployed in Ukraine.

A mutually acceptable solution on the issue of separating the operational and administrative control of the Strategic Nuclear Forces located in Ukraine should become a key element of our proposed compromise. Such separation should be based on the following principles:

-- operational control of these forces with regard to the maintenance of nuclear warheads and nuclear safety is carried out by a single command for all Strategic Nuclear Forces.

-- issues of personnel shifts, implementation and financing of those types of activities (including logistics), for which the main responsibility lies with the operational command of the Strategic Nuclear Forces in Moscow, have to be solved together with the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine.

-- the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine is responsible for staffing the Strategic Nuclear Forces, providing material and technical supplies to Strategic Nuclear Forces units according to the agreed nomenclature of equipment and materials, solving social problems, making payments to military personnel, etc.

3. On the reduction and elimination of strategic offensive weapons.

The question of the further use of the nuclear components of the warheads of strategic offensive weapons deployed in Ukraine, as well as tactical nuclear missiles previously withdrawn from Ukraine, is the most important aspect of the problem of reducing and eliminating strategic offensive weapons.

I am authorized to state that Ukraine's position on this issue is as follows.

First. The property of the Armed Forces of the former Soviet Union, located in Ukraine at the time of independence, including all property of the Strategic Nuclear Forces, belongs to Ukraine. This property includes, in particular, the physical components of strategic nuclear missile warheads that are currently deployed in Ukraine, as well as tactical nuclear missile warheads that were withdrawn from Ukraine to Russia in the spring of 1992 to dismantle and destroy them.

Second. Such a position of Ukraine does not mean that Ukraine intends to gain control over nuclear warheads on the understanding that this would contradict the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Ukraine has transferred the right to use these weapons to the Joint Command of the CIS Strategic Forces. As you know, Ukraine agreed that these nuclear weapons stationed on its territory should be under the operational control of the Joint Command of the Strategic Forces of the CIS.

Third. Ukraine neither directly nor indirectly controls the nuclear warheads of the Strategic Forces and does not intend to control them. But Ukraine proceeds from the fact that from the legal point of view all the physical components of the warheads are its property. Based on its ownership of these warheads, Ukraine, after dismantling the START nuclear warheads, intends to retain their nuclear components, having previously reduced their concentration to a level that allows them to be used as fuel for nuclear power plants and precludes the possibility of their further use for creating nuclear weapons.

Fourth. Ukraine has not decided where exactly the dismantling of nuclear warheads and processing weapons-grade uranium and plutonium will be carried out.

From the point of view of ensuring the most economical and environmentally safe implementation of these processes, the best option would be to carry out these operations at the enterprises of the Ministry of Atomic Energy of Russia, where the warheads were manufactured. At the same time, Ukraine would be ready to pay for dismantling and reprocessing, but provided that all final nuclear material would be returned to Ukraine in its physical form as fuel for Ukrainian nuclear power plants or in the form of compensation from its sale to third countries. This also applies to nuclear material extracted from tactical missile

warheads withdrawn earlier from Ukraine. For this Ukraine is ready to conclude an agreement with Russia.

If such an agreement cannot be reached with Russia, then Ukraine will have to resort to the search for other solutions, including the construction of an appropriate enterprise on its territory. Moreover, the possibility of an invitation to work in the most sensitive areas under an appropriate license of specialists from nuclear states is not ruled out.

Fifth. This position of Ukraine meets the requirements of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the START Treaty. The latter does not determine where and how exactly nuclear warheads should be destroyed and, accordingly, Ukraine may solve this issue as it sees fit.

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The instructions that the Ukrainian delegation received from its government allow us to negotiate in a constructive spirit. We are determined to search for concrete solutions to existing problems and expect that the delegation of the Russian Federation has also brought in its baggage quite flexible directives and a desire to seek mutually acceptable solutions.

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