

Ukraine, working together for sustainable reconstruction

Position Paper Chief Government Architect for the round table discussion on recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine on 19 May 2022

In this position paper, I share my views on the reconstruction of Ukraine, at the request of the Permanent Committee on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Lower House.

Reconstruction

In his speech to the Lower House on 31 March, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that he dreamed of the day when Ukrainian refugees could return to their homes. Returning to rebuilt cities and a renewed Ukraine. And he invited the Netherlands to take part in this task: to choose a city and a region to rebuild and to do 'what you do best'.

Zelensky was probably referring to the rich Dutch tradition of spatial planning and to our strong design and construction sector. As Chief Government Architect, I feel a moral obligation to assist and help Ukraine wherever possible. In this, a certain humility seems to me to be in order. After all, the war is still in full swing, the devastation continues and is taking place on a scale that is barely comprehensible. Human lives are being lost every day. I cannot offer any protection against that, but what I can offer is my knowledge and my network. To be able to make a small contribution to the hope of recovery and a safe return.

With the Board of Government Advisors (CRa) - of which I am the chairman as Chief Government Architect - we work on complex social issues from a design perspective. We do this with a team that puts connection first: of disciplines, of sectors, of interests and of actors. It is this design approach based on landscape, urban planning and architectural quality that I can offer to the Ukrainian people. With the CRa, I not only have a large relevant network of experts at my disposal; we can also offer knowledge ourselves from the many studies and recommendations we have published in recent years.

For example, in 2015 we challenged design teams to design sustainable and humane refugee housing through the [A home away from home](#) competition. Some of these concepts are already in production. In addition, we have recently built - together with the Ministry of the Interior and seven municipalities - a rich catalogue of flexible housing in the existing city under the name [Flexwonen](#). We also work closely with the Central Government Real Estate Agency (RVB) to facilitate the accommodation of refugees and status holders in government buildings. A good example is how the Koepelgevangenis in Breda, thanks to the efforts of RVB, the municipality and countless volunteers, was quickly turned into an emergency shelter.

Building according to need

But in order for Ukrainians to actually return, much more is needed than emergency accommodation and temporary housing. First of all, more insight is needed into the total extent of the destruction, as Slava Balbek of Kyiv-based studio Balbek Bureau stated in [Dezeen](#). So that resources can be allocated fairly and efficiently across the country, according to need. Not only have many houses been destroyed, but schools, churches, theatres, hospitals, bridges, roads and energy supplies have also been irreparably damaged. According to estimates by the [Kyiv School of Economics](#), at the beginning of May the count stood at EUR 92 billion in damage to infrastructure and EUR 30 billion in damage to residential buildings.

I think it is important to emphasise that the reconstruction of Ukraine is not just about asphalt, concrete and bricks. It is also about culture and heritage, about places of significance and of great emotional value. In my opinion, it is essential that Ukrainians themselves are able to indicate what is important to them; what they need. The Board has experience in linking stakeholders and

involving residents in changes to their immediate living environment, and would also like to share that experience if there is a need.

European cooperation

In addition, it is important that what is built back is also as sustainable, affordable and of the highest possible quality. President Zelensky has indicated that he wants to use the rebuilding of the country to make housing fairer and more sustainable. In this field, too, the Board of Government Advisors has relevant knowledge to share. With the programme [A new building culture](#), we want to stimulate bio-based and nature-inclusive building in a way that is scalable and affordable. We are certainly not alone in this: the Dutch design and construction sector has countless good and inspiring examples of circular construction and reuse of materials, with an eye for design quality.

Ukraine is a big country. With an area of more than 14 times the Netherlands, the reconstruction covers an area larger than France. That is why Ukrainians will soon need the help of the whole of Europe to build houses, repair roads and bridges and to get the economy going again. After 1945, with the support of other countries, the Netherlands elevated spatial planning to a craft by way of reconstruction. In my opinion, European cooperation is therefore essential for the reconstruction of Ukraine. So that we can pool knowledge and strengths. In this regard, I see opportunities for cooperation within the network of a [New European Bauhaus](#), an initiative of EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for a more beautiful, sustainable and inclusive Europe, linked to the objectives of the Green Deal. Many design experts are affiliated with this network. As a Board, we are a partner and national point of contact for the Netherlands. We are currently exploring how to pool resources within this network.

Call

Ukraine is currently still at war. Cities are being bombed and entire neighbourhoods wiped off the map. An estimated 5 million people have fled their country and are anxiously awaiting the moment when they can safely return to their homeland. By aiding refugees in the Netherlands, we are currently taking a first step in humanitarian aid. But in order to create a liveable home for them again, it is now desirable to show our commitment, contribute our knowledge and expertise and join forces.

I can already see some inspiring initiatives such as [Ro3kvit](#): over 40 international experts from inside and outside Ukraine have joined together in a coalition. These include urban planners and architects, but also specialists in the fields of energy supply, infrastructure and legislation. They are in close contact with the Academy of Architecture in Kharkov. In my own home town, Mayor Aboutaleb has suggested that Rotterdam can help Ukrainian port cities with their reconstruction, and organisations such as the Independent School for the City, the Rotterdam Reconstruction Platform and the Rotterdam Architecture Institute are joining forces to work with Ukrainian designers on reconstruction.

Because many hands make light work, I call on the Dutch design and construction sector to offer design strength and knowledge for the country's recovery. I would like to examine with you what we can offer from the Netherlands to contribute to a sustainable and dignified recovery for Ukraine.

On behalf of the Board of Government Advisors,
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