

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Fulbright Stories Project

KATERYNA SMAGILY

Interviewed by: Tom Selinger

Interview Date: May 8, 2025

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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Tom Selinger from ADST. It's May 8th, 2025. We're here on behalf of the Fulbright Association for an interview with Kateryna Smagliy. Kateryna, could you start by saying your name for us?

SMAGLIY: Absolutely. My name is Katya or Kateryna Smagliy. I'm Ukrainian, born in Kyiv, and I did my Fulbright here in Washington, D.C. in 2012-2013 at the Wilson Center.

Q: Can you tell us where you're working now?

SMAGLIY: Currently I work as a counselor for political affairs and public diplomacy at the Embassy of Ukraine in the United States. I switched from an academic career to a diplomatic career five years ago, when I joined the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine.

Q: And can you tell me, when you were growing up, what made you interested in international affairs? What attracted you to it?

SMAGLIY: When I graduated from high school, the Soviet Union collapsed. And I think I was fortunate to enter the university that was reopened thanks to the decision of the Ukrainian government of our first president, Leonid Kravchuk, who gave new birth to the school that was closed by the Russian government, by Catherine II, actually. At the National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" we had a lot of American scholars and a lot of Canadian scholars and other international professors who basically opened the world to us. I visited the United States in 1995 as a Harvard University summer school student, and it was a life-changing experience for me. You probably know that there is a Ukrainian research institute at Harvard University, which focuses on the history of Ukraine, culture of Ukraine, and I was absolutely amazed because they opened new Ukraine for me, the Ukraine that I didn't know existed, because I grew up under the Iron Curtain in the Soviet Union, where many aspects of our history and culture had been silenced or distorted by Soviet propaganda, and suddenly here in the United States I could realize what Ukraine was all about.

Q: Could you tell us a little bit about your Fulbright experience, that time that you spent in Washington?

SMAGLIY: Yes, I spent only six months in Washington working on my monograph, titled *Everyone is a Changemaker. Social Entrepreneurship and Strategic Philanthropy*. I was working at the Woodrow Wilson Center's Kennan Institute. I'm extremely grateful to everyone who helped me to publish this monograph. And I believe that my research in the United States facilitated by the Fulbright program helped to strengthen Ukraine's civil society because based on my book I later organized training for Ukraine civil society activists who were interested in social entrepreneurship and philanthropy generally.

Q: Thank you. Here in the United States in our current political environment, we like to talk about how the government programs make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous. Do you think your Fulbright experience and the Fulbright program make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous?

SMAGLIY: Well, absolutely, because this program helps us to understand each other better. You opened new career paths for so many scholars in my country. You made them believe in democracy, become great champions of democracy, and bring those ideas of human rights, freedom of speech, critical thinking into their classrooms, and they educate basically the new generation of young men and women, the next generation of leaders. And it was extremely important for a country like my country, which is now a champion of democracy in Europe and the world. So, I am extremely thankful, and I would love to encourage the government of the United States to continue supporting Fulbright.

Q: Thank you, anything else you'd like to add about the importance of Fulbright?

SMAGLIY: No, I just want to make this interview because I truly believe in the power of education and I'm extremely grateful to the Fulbright program because it helped me channel my energy and my leadership potential and to help me grow into who I am today.

Q: Thank you, Katya. This concludes our interview.

SMAGLIY: Thank you.

End of interview