

#94 (BOHDAN DENYSENKO)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing crime features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

Bohdan Denysenko is a Ukrainian civilian security sector organized crime expert and a former police officer. We talk about the challenges of policing during the current conflict, development of intelligence capacities, and the goals of the European Union Advisory Mission in Ukraine.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is Reducing Crime, and I'm your host, Jerry Ratcliffe. Back in October last year, I was invited by the European Union Advisory Mission in Ukraine to run a multi-day seminar covering strategy, intelligence-led policing, and organized crime prevention. Since the Russian invasion of February 2022, air travel's been impossible, so it required two flights and two long train journeys over more than a couple of days to get to Kiev. However, it was a rewarding and eye-opening trip. While there, I had a chance to get to know one of the innovators spearheading reform of their policing knowledge environment, Bohdan Denysenko.

Denysenko is a Ukrainian civilian security sector reform and organized crime expert with over 20 years of experience in Ukrainian law enforcement and international advisory work, supporting the government and parliament of Ukraine through the European Union Advisory Mission in Ukraine. The advisory mission is what they call a non-executive civilian common security and defense policy mission. This is a European Union initiative to deploy civilian experts to support, train, or revise host countries, and has been operating in Ukraine since December 2014, supporting the reform of their civilian security sector. Its mandate focuses on making law enforcement and the rule of law institutions more effective, efficient, transparent, and trusted by the public. Throughout the recent invasion, the mission has continued to operate from Kyiv and regional offices and implement its mandate through three main lines of effort, strategic advice, hands-on support for reform implementation and coordination among Ukrainian and international actors.

Prior to working for the mission, Bohdan served 10 years in the Ukrainian police, mainly in criminal investigations and international police cooperation, during which time his career progressed from the local police station level up to the Ministry of Interior headquarters. He's been with the mission for 10 years, specializing in intelligence-led policing,

strategic analysis, planning and management, and international police cooperation. He has a criminal justice diploma as well as degrees in law and public administration. Oh yeah, and he's also a graduate of the FBI National Academy.

Now, we started recording the episode in a lovely coffee shop in the historic podium neighborhood right on Contract Square in the heart of the old city, just stones throw from the Ferris wheel. As you join us, we've just ordered a boozy coffee after a long day of training, talking about organized crime and security.

I will tell you, Bohdan, this seems really strange to be sitting here, what are we now? Three over three years into a war and I'm ordering a latte with Baileys.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah, so the life is ongoing. There are challenges of, let's say, during the missiles and between the missiles for sure, but so that it makes us stronger.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, I think so. I get that sense from people here.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. We have no other choice.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's another way of looking at it. Yeah. You have a very different system of policing here, don't you?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yes. The model of policing is definitely different to other countries. And I'd say that probably the specifics is that policing functions are spread over some law enforcement agencies, which makes it a little bit difficult from one side. From the other side, it brings some opportunities, definitely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In policing, I think it's interesting here that in many other countries, everybody starts on patrol and they go to the academy for say six months on patrol, but that's not how it works here in Ukraine at all. You can be direct entry into being a detective, which is what you did, but then you spent ... How long did you spend at the police academy?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Four years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's a huge ... But you come out immediately as a detective.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. Right. After the graduation, so you start your police career as a detective. It all depends on the police academy, you are graduating, but so the graduates of the police academy, so in four years of education, you are becoming the investigator or the active. So we have the specifics of splitting detective into two, our operative and investigator. So the operative is rather focused on the covert investigative actions and the investigator is a procedural detective.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. So you can actually go into the police academy with no police experience and graduate four years later as an operative as a covert operator.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, that's quite incredible. I've never heard that anywhere else.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Probably with the other countries from the so-called Soviet block, could be the same.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. So it has its traditions in the Soviet system?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yes. Yeah, I'd say. So about the last years, the reform of the law enforcement education has been started so that you have to start with the patrolling. But even with all those four years of education, you have mentorship for about a month each year. And in between, you could also be deployed for patrolling. So it used to be in my case. We had some police station next to the police academy where you are invited to join the patrol police during the shift.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you get some patrol experience when you're in the academy, but you still come out as a detective or as an operator?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did you do that?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yes. But unfortunately in many cases, just for short period of time.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Nevertheless, so you feel the taste already, how it goes with the patrol policing on the ground.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it didn't make you want to become a patrol officer?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Involved in covert operative activities, it makes you more attractive. I mean, so that-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Being more attractive could be interpreted in many ways. Yeah. Your wife's not going to listen to this. So it is a very different system.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yes. But in fact, if it comes to the law enforcement or Ministry of Interior Universities, so the changes have been started. So there are changes which are ongoing. The system of education, it looks different to the one which used to be before.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Got it. Yeah, this is crazy. Look at this. Disgraceful. A latte with Baileys in the middle of a war zone. Shouldn't be allowed. You started working for the European Union Mission before the war started.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yes. Yes, it was more than 10 years ago. The mission is the engine of changes, so the engine of reforms, and I was really happy to join the mission. So to be a part of the reforms.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is the European Union Advisory Mission.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it's predominantly focused on the criminal justice system, isn't it?

Bohdan Denysenko:

The EUAM is focused on civilian security sector reforms.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Bohdan Denysenko:

So having a real wide focus.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you have about 400 people.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yes. Right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We've been working together, working with the local police and the national police for the last few days. I have to say, I found it kind of fascinating, especially about how much policing has had to change since the invasion in February in 2022. That must have made things harder for the mission to be able to support the civilian security sector because of just how many changes have taken place.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. In fact, the mission has to also adjust its mandate, so to fit the real needs for the law enforcement system for the entire security sector. Nevertheless, the mission is focused a lot. Basically, I'm on the development and improvement of organized crime capacities. We still have more or less the same threats, the same focus, which was a little bit adjusted. For more than 10 years, we are focusing a lot to develop the proactive policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Proactive policing is something that hasn't traditionally come easily to policing in Ukraine. I got that sense. It seemed to inherit a lot of its policing model from the Soviet system.

Bohdan Denysenko:

It is quite difficult to introduce any changes. I think

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You just described policing just about any country anywhere to think about bringing in change, right?

Bohdan Denysenko:

These kind of challenges are universal.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Introducing changes into the information management, analytics and decision making. So it's just a huge pile of work to do, which requires to changing the mindset first, mindset of decision makers, those who are gathering information from the streets and those who are processing information, analyzing information. So there are many, many challenges on the way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So I mean, so far I've been impressed with the level of information technology that's here. I mean, you have a lot of systems that are way more advanced than I see in many other police departments. We visited a police station day before yesterday, and just to get through the doors, you've got facial recognition systems and things like that. You've got breathalyzer systems to access the armory to get to weapons. I mean, your databases seem in ... Your IT systems seem in very advanced.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. But I'd say that there are many police stations which would require support, hands-on support on the ground. And from the other hand, to make it properly, there are more efforts to be done, to make it centralized. And then support and management, it would require changes in the IT infrastructure as well. So it's not like having a quick solution. IT solution will not fix everything for sure, but it has to be integrated into the IT ecosystem.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I see that with some other large police departments. A vendor will come and say, why don't you just buy this great new shiny IT system? But the department has to think, well, it has to work with everything else that we have.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah, right, right. And yeah, there are many, many alternative providers in this field, and it is a challenge for us to choose the best. And then I think that the bigger challenge is just to find a budget for this.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The guys were telling me a couple of days ago about some of the changes that have happened since the war.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. Yeah, sure. So it requires to introduce a number of changes for sure. Obviously, the redistribution of personnel and additional trainings refocusing on those challenges which popped up with all this.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I love the fact you said these challenges just popped up. I mean, this is a major shift in how the national police and the police departments are having to work because this is ... I got the sense it's really taking up a lot of space and time.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah, you're right. Again, so there are much less personnel which were engaged with some particular activities before. Now they have to be engaged with the other type of security related activities.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. Please excuse me. Breaking in here, our sort of fourth wall break, if you will. But for a bit of background, at the time of recording, it was a requirement that 10% of the Ukrainian police service was deployed to the front lines in the military capacity. So since the invasion, police in Ukraine have effectively been permanently understaffed. Okay, back to the cafe.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The conversations we had a couple of days ago with police in various stations is fascinating because now you're seeing since the invasion, an increase in weapon use explosives. The guys were telling me about the number of bomb threats that are actually emanating out of the Russian Federation that are just designed to overwhelm the response forces here in the city. One of the guys was saying there were 300 bomb threats a day just in Kyiv, and some of them have been designed to actually ambush police.

So it's causing the huge shifts in how the local police and the national police are allocating resources.

Bohdan Denysenko:

So that's basically probably one of the reasons why the mission is still pushing for developing of analytical capacities of the law enforcement system or the civilina security sector agencies, and then particularly for developing the strategic analysis, capacities, or introducing rather the Europa SOCTA methodology and then writing the strategic analysis reports like SOCTAC, serious organized crime threat assessment. Deploying resources more efficiently is something which needs to be introduced with any system, any agency, and with the currency and circumstances, it is the utmost important. This way we are enforcing, we are supporting with trainings, we are mentoring, we're supporting in development of analytic capacities to the level they would use the resources more efficiently.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The serious organized crime threat assessment. You and the work of the people in the mission, that's the European Union Advisory Mission, have been central in making that happen. And it's interesting because one of the things that I've been impressed by in terms of strategic thinking is the number of conversations that have taken place around planning ahead for when the war is over or finishes or has a ceasefire, however it chooses to end, because I think everybody recognizes that that's going to bring a significant change to Ukraine at that point.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah, right. Everybody recognized that. And I think that having the type of reports and then applying the strategic analysis for being prepared for different type of scenarios is something which you are also trying to reinforce with the developing of the capacities for producing foresight. I was lucky to be a part of one of the foresight research for

Ukraine where we were developing the scenarios of development of the country. It is something which I would really love to introduce to the law enforcement system.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a bit of a fascinating question. And it's more than an intellectual exercise. In terms of crime and policing, what does post-war Ukraine look like? I think there are going to be some significant changes.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Having any type of scenarios, it all depends on the different type of factors which will influence the scenarios. But what is obvious is that there is a need of improving the coordination of resources, coordination of information sharing, and having more reliable information on the ground than for analysis.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. And I don't think many police departments do strategic thinking, forward thinking well at all.

Bohdan Denysenko:

We are really, really working hard to make it happen with as many agencies as possible. Basically, we are focusing on all the law enforcement agencies. It just takes time.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, it does. I'm impressed that you're filling that space because I don't think they have the capacity to think about it for themselves right now.

Bohdan Denysenko:

In fact, there are many, many good analysts, strategists, so they are available.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hearing about over the last few days about some of the new things that the departments have had to deal with during the war, such as the looting that took place at Chernobyl nuclear power plant, which is only 60 miles north of where we are right now, the arsons taking place on military vehicles by individuals hired by the Russian Secret Service. I mean, these are kinds of covert attacks on the country that I don't think many police forces anywhere would really be capable of even thinking about and dealing with. It's such a new way of having to think about policing.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. The law enforcement system faces just multiple, multiple challenges, multiple new challenges. And this is why that we are repeating again and again. So there is no other choice other than introducing proactive policing, evidence-based policing, intelligence-led policing. So that is something which will make law enforcement system prepared to identify priorities and then they cover the gaps if they are identified.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I wanted to talk a little bit more about that because I think it's unusual that the Russian Secret Service target vulnerable individuals who can be coerced to commit attacks here within the country. That's such a difficult thing to prevent and to predict, isn't it?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah, but believe me, the agencies, the Secret Service, the national police, they are making really, really great efforts in this, that they are using mass media to spread the word. For example, if it comes to the involvement of children into any kind of activities that parents will have the appropriate discussions with children and then guys from secure service, from national police, is the challenge which the mission also steps into support.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. It's me interjecting again. Look, at this point, a gaggle of noisy, enthusiastic teenagers came in, clearly drawn by the smell of Baileys and coffee. So we decamped to a quieter hotel bar up towards St. Andrews. St. Andrews, by the way, is a splendid Baroque 18th century church overlooking the city. Quite fantastic and well worth a visit should you ever find yourself in town. Because Russian forces had been heavily targeting the power infrastructure at the time I was in Ukraine, we lost power partway through and you'll hear a beeping sound in the background just in case you're wondering if you were hearing things.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I mean, you still have a little bit problems with organized crime, though a lot of the serious players in organized crime have left Ukraine for now.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. Basically, you could treat it with the serious organized crime threat assessment report for Ukraine, which was published and is available on the website of the Ministry of Interior. It says a lot about, yes, the existing organized crime, but to my understanding, and then if you are reading the report, it was reduced pretty much due to all the circumstances with the invasion. And it helps police, particularly to the entire law enforcement system to look deeper or to revisit the defined priorities.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And

Bohdan Denysenko:

That is something which we are introducing, keeping in mind that there are many, many resources to cover different type of challenges.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think some of the strategic intelligence analysts listening, and I'm sure there's got to be at least one, please, there's got to be at least one analyst listening. We'll probably be impressed to know that some of the techniques that are

learned in strategic intelligence courses like scenario generation and thinking in those areas are really actively being used right now in Ukraine to think about what the future of the organized crime threat assessment is going to be.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. And I tell you that luckily I used to be involved in one of the foresight research for Ukraine where we were trying to develop scenarios of development of Ukraine for the future for horizon scanning. And then we were involved in applying all the other strategic analysis techniques. That is something I would like to be introduced for scenarios for Ukraine if it comes to organized crime development and for the future of policing. And that is something which we have already in the pipelines and we're discussing with some of the guys.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's weird. You're in this strange position that as and when there is peace, most of the participants in the course agree that crime will increase. So crime has gone down right now. It helps that you have a curfew from midnight to five in the morning, but also that there's been a reduction in organized crime, but with peace will probably come ... I got the sense that people thought would come and increase in some freedoms, but also with that increase in opportunities for corruption and organized crime and other types of exploitation. I'm impressed that people are thinking ahead to try and anticipate and deal with that future.

Bohdan Denysenko:

There is no crystal ball, for sure. And you could never know that it will be increase or decrease of the criminality. Nevertheless, we are trying to prepare law enforcement system for different type of scenarios. Russians are using not only weapons, but also propaganda.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How's that propaganda getting to Ukrainian people?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Mass media, social media, and countering foreign information manipulation and interference is something which the mission is also jumping into this way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's such a strange and unique area for a mission to get involved in, to go from sort of generalized reforms to policing and public safety, to now you're also working in the area of helping the country combat misinformation and propaganda.

Bohdan Denysenko:

The mission has a wide focus of supporting different types of civilian security sector reforms.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've been particularly working in the development of intelligence-led policing. Why did you focus on intelligence-led policing as one of the things that you think is going to help Ukraine moving forward?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Let's start with the easy answer and then I will go in depth.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm just impressed there's an easy answer apparently.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Okay. Let's recall it the quick answer.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. Quick answer is that being proactive, being prepared means using less resources. Being reactive is just spreading resources. I'm not happy if the resources are spent not efficient way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So if you figure out what intelligence-led policing is, do let me know.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Okay. One day.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What do you hope to gain from this move into intelligence-led policing?

Bohdan Denysenko:

What we are trying to support Ukraine for the last probably more than 10 years. It brings a number of challenges on the way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Also some opportunities though, right?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Absolutely. There are just plenty of opportunities. I don't know where the challenges could be. In fact, over here, just only opportunities.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Look at you being all glass half full.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. Yes. Having in mind that we were able to discuss with the management of police and the Ministry of Interior years ago, convincing them the need of creating this crime analysis department, which was the very first step of enhancing analytic capacities of the police. We are quite happy the way analytic capacities, particularly in the police, are developed.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You were also telling me that ... Oh, the generator's just gone down. You were also telling me that you're trying to coordinate and integrate the information technology across all of these agencies because you have a lot of different agencies doing very specialized roles across Ukraine.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah, right. That's basically on the way of introducing an implementation of intelligence like policing, we see three blocks or three chapters to focus on analysis, information management and decision making. What would contribute to the appropriate implementation of intelligence led policing and definitely single IT infrastructure for all the law enforcement agencies. Introducing the single IT ecosystem is something which would bring a number of benefits for all the law enforcement systems. The law enforcement agencies would be able to have the single platform for cooperation and information management therefore could be greater coordination of knowledge base.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You hit on one of the, I think, big challenges for any of this kind of work, decision making

Bohdan Denysenko:

Where to start with the Intelligence Cycle. You don't know what would be the starting point somewhere in the middle or not. So then the decision making, is it the last chapter to focus on or the first one? And that is something what we were also trying to focus on since the very first day. Decision making is something you have to consider, handle it first or last, what would be the focus like shifting from having the appropriate decision based on what? And that's the reason why we were focusing a lot of efforts on the analytic capacities.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. So there's no point developing the decision making if you don't have the analysis to support it?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Absolutely then. How could we prepare managers for the appropriate analytic products if there are no analytic capacities?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. So you've got a chicken and egg problem, which came first. Yeah.

Bohdan Denysenko:

That's the challenge we are facing with.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. So you're trying to bring in a whole new system of, not system, but a concept in policing, intelligence led policing. How do you go about implementing that across the country? Where do you start?

Bohdan Denysenko:

We started this with piloting of implementation in the national police about 10 years ago. So all the benefits which we could have from the implementation of knowledge led policing could only happen when it is deployed to the entire enforcement system.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But that's pretty ambitious just to try and implement it countrywide, right?

Bohdan Denysenko:

The best way of implementation of intelligence led policing is to deploy it throughout the country, but still some homework to be done. So we suggested national police to have four pilots, at the police station level.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Has it been successful at the pilot level? You've got four stations now working with intelligence led or an intelligence led policing training and idea for a small amount of time now.

Bohdan Denysenko:

We are just on the very initial stage so far. Unfortunately, luckily, but that's the reality.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, it's kind enough that your implementation has brought me here, so I'm grateful for that opportunity.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah, I really appreciate that. We're trying to claim the set of benefits, let's call it this way, on the local level. And then we will try to start implementation to the level which could be possible, in fact. So again, so intelligence that policing is not something which will fly on the local police level at the same time. There are some set of benefits they could bring first. And the second is that while deploying all those benefits, we could see and then have lessons learned.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. And I think that's the classic reason to have a pilot, is to learn the lessons for how to implement it in a couple of places and then use that experience to deploy something nationwide.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah, right, right. Our main counterpart here is the national police, which is the biggest law enforcement agency. What makes me optimistic is that I have a lot of managers who already went through the trainings and we are speaking the same language. I realize that it just takes time.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And we've talked about this before. Yeah. The objectives and key results methodology is far more specific than the sort of key performance indicator kind of stuff, right?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah, because KPI is focused on static evaluation.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Just kind of ongoing monitoring tracking of something.

Bohdan Denysenko:

And OKR is focused on the developing systems. And this is something which fits well with introduction of something which didn't exist is the other benefit is that it is flexible. It's not like KPI, so it could be reviewed. Some objectives could be reviewed and obviously key results is exactly which is reviewed even more frequently.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's an important consideration that if you're going to bring something in, you're going to pilot something, what are you measuring? I think one of the problems I have when I go to do consulting work sometimes with police departments is that they tell me what the solution is, but they're not clear about what the problem is it's supposed to be fixing.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. And that's exactly where the OKR methodology helps, the objectives and key results. Having the clear objectives and basically over here we have very clear, at least three strategic objectives, which is the improvement of information management, analytics and decision making.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. All of what you're trying to do needs a lot of training. It strikes me it's pretty difficult to get people to come to Ukraine and do training, right?

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah, you're right. In many cases, mission is trying to focus on its own resources. Yes, for sure. Traveling into Ukraine, it is challenging. In fact, it is the best for us, for the law enforcement to agencies so that they do not have to travel abroad. The best case scenario is the trainer will come into Ukraine. And so we appreciate Jerry.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, it certainly took a while to get here. It was a flight from Washington, DC to London, then London to Warsaw, and then a four-hour train from Warsaw to the border, and then a 13-hour train in Takyiv. But it certainly gave me an opportunity to catch up with some work.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. Yeah. It is definitely challenging, but it gave us opportunity to invite as many experts for the training and then-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I'd suggest if anybody's thinking about trying to support the mission here, I'd encourage them to come here. It's fascinating to see what the situation is on the ground. And I think we've been able to tailor the training. I've been providing a little bit to make it more realistic for the work that everybody's been doing here.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Yeah. And that is the experience I would really like the others to apply.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. Well, it's time to get home even though we're still in the middle of a power cut, I think, and catch up and do it all again tomorrow. Thanks, Bohdan.

Bohdan Denysenko:

Thank you, Jerry. Thanks a lot.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 94 of Reducing Crime recorded in October 2025 in Kyiv Ukraine. If you're an instructor, DM me for multiple-choice questions for every episode, and you can find a transcript of this episode at reducingcrime.com. Subscribe at Spotify, Sand Cloud, Apple, or wherever you pod, because otherwise you might miss episodes like this.

Be safe, especially to my Ukrainian friends, and best of luck.