

**Speech of Lidiya Izovitova – President of the Ukrainian National Bar Association
on the occasion of the 2022 CCBE Human Rights Ceremony :**

Brussels, November 25, 2022

Dear Mr. President,
Dear Vice Presidents,
Dear Colleagues!

I am sure everyone understands the profound joy, excitement, and emotions that overwhelm my heart regarding the CCBE Human Rights Award 2022.

I am deeply grateful to the Human Rights Committee for its recommendation to commend the Ukrainian National Bar Association with this award for its courage, determination, and commitment to protecting human rights and the rule of law in Ukraine.

The very name of this Award reflects the common features and goals that unite advocates, and command respect from the civil society of each country, regardless of the state's legal system and its political system.

Yes, we are from Ukraine, the focus of the news for the last nine months. We understand that the whole world is following us, which may have contributed to our being bestowed with such an award.

Since 1992, that is, 30 years, Ukrainian Bar has been resolutely and persistently fighting for its independence.

And for another 17 years in a row, Ukraine has tried to fulfill its international obligation: to create an independent professional organization of advocates (as provided for in PACE Resolution No. 190 (1995) as a condition for joining the EU) and to establish the practice of prior discussion of any changes to the professional legislation with the main subject thereof – single professional organization of the Bar.

The 2012 reform peaked with the adoption of a revolutionary bill, "On the Bar and Practice of Law".

Ten years ago, namely on November 17, 2012, this obligation was finally fulfilled by Ukraine: there were changes in the legislation, and an independent professional organization of advocates was incorporated – the Ukrainian National Bar Association with mandatory membership as a matter of law, which I have the honor to represent here today at the CCBE Human Rights Award Ceremony.

Ukrainian National Bar Association is the first professional organization of advocates in Ukraine's history.

We began its development from scratch, having only a general legislative architecture to guide us; we held the first-ever elections of the national and regional bodies of Bar self-government; they, within their competence, adopted decisions to settle the internal operation matters and ensured protection of the legal profession at large; adopted the Rules of Professional Conduct binding on all advocates.

We trod a long way, and although we are still on the path of institutional growth, we are moving systematically and consistently, fighting for the independence established by the Constitution and the Law. Thanks to this, we are an authoritative and respectful institution of civil society.

In public space, before society and the authorities, the status of a single organization means the ability to communicate as the single voice of the profession. This is important in situations where it is necessary to consolidate against attempts to restrict advocates' professional rights through legislative changes or to resist blatant violations of advocates' rights and mitigate threats to their lives and safety.

For almost ten years, we have managed to create a working mechanism for self-regulation of the profession based on a clear balance of powers, and competence of elected representatives of the Bar self-government, utilizing the fine intellectual and managerial potential of our members for the common good of the nation.

Over the past few years, Ukrainian National Bar Association has developed its own know-how, particularly in digital transformation.

UNBA has radically changed the situation in upholding professional rights and guarantees of legal practice in Ukraine.

One way to explain this may be the fact that at the time of UNBA's incorporation, UNBA became and remains the only reformed institution in the entire justice system. Another vital component to success is the systematic work of UNBA.

UNBA works as a modern transparent organization that publicly reports its activities and supports communication in the professional community and with society, academia, and legal business. We summarize our critical accomplishments in annual reports and regular statistics reports covering activities of bodies of advocates' self-government, including financial indicators.

Our professional community is growing, and this testifies to the prestige of the legal profession. According to the latest data from the Register, there are about 70 thousand advocates in Ukraine.

We created the Higher School of Advocacy, thanks to which the Bar maintains its professionalism. Over ten years, **586,587** advocates completed CLE advanced training, and **4195** CLE training events were held.

Since 2012, we have printed the "Bulletin of UNBA."

Through the efforts of UNBA, its Center for Advocacy and Law Studies, we restore the history of the Ukrainian Bar: we publish thematic reports, annual reports on activities, guidelines authored by well-known lawyers, and academic publications on the history of the Bar.

As of today, UNBA operates 49 committees. Since 2014, UNBA Committees have held 574 round tables and webinars.

Since 2019, UNBA Committees analyzed 161 draft laws and provided expert opinions to the Parliament. Twenty of those were delivered in times of martial law. Our expert opinions may sometimes be versed as warnings for the Parliament against the rule of law violations.

Nevertheless, the year of UNBA's 10th anniversary of incorporation is by far the most challenging for our country and its citizens. We came to defend them.

The military aggression of the Russian Federation against our state demanded us to adjust our professional life. Many of our colleagues joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine and heroically defended our land. Since the beginning of the war, the legal community has suffered losses – there are dozens of dead among advocates.

Ukraine was forced to impose restrictions on human rights by introducing martial law. Many risks fall on many of our advocates participating in various legal procedures. On November 17, 2022, at a meeting of the Bar Council of Ukraine, we were forced to adopt a decision listing justified reasons for the non-appearance of advocates to court hearings of cases, investigative actions, and other procedures during martial law.

"The non-arrival of an advocate upon the court or other authorities' summons, as well as the termination of participation in the relevant procedures, if occurred due to the consequences of the war (air raid alert, lack of electrical supply, inability to use transport, destruction of the territory where the advocate and/or the relevant authority is located, as well as the occupation of the specified territory, etc.) constitutes a justified reason for the advocate's failure to appear ", - as stated in the BCU decision.

Many of our colleagues lost relatives and friends under enemy fire, were left without housing, were injured, need constant treatment and expensive medicines.

We felt what the solidarity of the legal profession means. We felt the firm helping hand of legal communities from across the world.

Thanks to international financial assistance, which comes from the various national Bars from all over the World and personally from individual advocates, as well as CCBE and IBA, we help the advocates in need and their families because the spirit of corporate unity is far from empty words for us.

We have established the UNBA Board of Trustees that transparently and swiftly distribute charitable assistance to affected lawyers and their families. We report to our donors about such distributions.

The leadership of the Ukrainian National Bar Association continues to coordinate assistance to citizens of Ukraine and advocates that find themselves abroad due to circumstances beyond their control. We are currently working on coordination to resolve migration issues in those countries with significant numbers of Ukrainian citizens.

UNBA joined the process of organizing the provision of legal assistance to children and their parents (legal guardians) forced to stay outside Ukraine due to the war.

More than 10 thousand children are currently abroad, and there are frequent cases when they part with their parents/guardians from Ukraine and receive temporary guardians in the host countries.

Ukrainian National Bar Association expressed its readiness to help organize the return of children parted from their parents/guardians) due to differences in the legal regulation of their status in Ukraine and in their countries of residence.

I want to emphasize once again: the relevant **law allowed us to build the bar according to European standards, and over the years, we have done everything to ensure that the Bar self-government is independent from the state, self-sufficient in terms of resources, transparent and open** as an institution, authoritative and professional, as a representative of the entire legal community in relations with the state and society.

UNBA has a lot of ideas and plans ahead. However, today we can confidently say that the creation of the Ukrainian National Bar Association has brought obvious advantages for the entire Ukrainian state and its citizens.

We celebrated UNBA's tenth anniversary of being under martial law. The war in Ukraine is a terrible test for our entire people.

It will undoubtedly change the geopolitical landscape of the modern world, but at all times, the role of the advocate has been and will remain unchanged.

Thank you very much!