

Talk by Robert Brinkley for the British-Ukrainian Society at Portcullis House, 20 March 2018

“Reflections of an Ambassador”

Thank you for inviting me to speak to the British-Ukrainian Society here at Portcullis House.

The Society is doing a lot of good work arranging talks about Ukraine, improving knowledge of Ukraine in this country and promoting closer ties between Britain and Ukraine, including between the parliaments of the two countries.

I left Government service over six years ago, so my remarks are personal and not on behalf of the Government or anyone else.

Preface

I want to start by quoting a British figure speaking about Ukraine. I invite you to guess when and where this speech was made.

“The chief problem in Europe today is the Ukrainian problem. Of deep concern to this country because of its effect upon European peace and diplomacy, it is at the same time closely bound with British interests of a very vital nature. To an extent unrealized by most people, it has been a root of European strife during the last quarter of a century. That so little has been heard of it is not surprising; for suppression of Ukrainian Nationality has been persistently accompanied by obliteration of the very word Ukraine and concealment of the very existence of Ukrainians.”

Any guesses?

The speaker was Lancelot Lawton, a British journalist. He was giving an address for the Anglo-Ukrainian Committee in a committee room of the House of Commons – a precursor of this Society, one might say – on 29 May 1935.

The Anglo-Ukrainian Committee included members of the House of Lords (Lord Dickinson and Lord Noel-Buxton) and the House of Commons (John Hills, Geoffrey Mander, Col. Wedgwood), academics (Dr G P Gooch, Professor R W Seton-Watson) and others, including Lawton himself.

This address and another by Lawton from 1939 were discovered by Dr Serhii Kot of the Institute of History of Ukraine and published in 2006, with a translation into Ukrainian and forewords by Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk and myself as British Ambassador.

Lawton was concerned to dispel the widespread ignorance about Ukraine, “a nation unknown to the West”. His eyes were open to the recent suffering of the Ukrainian people. He refers to millions of lives lost in the great famine of 1932-1933, whose existence the Soviet Government had denied. He speaks of “the silencing of a nation which by ancient right belongs in the European family of nations”.

His conclusion, still relevant today, is that “some means must be found by which young and small nations can live an independent existence along with older and more powerful nations”.

This was a thought which Sir Winston Churchill echoed, wittingly or unwittingly, at the Yalta conference with Roosevelt and Stalin in 1945, when he said that “the eagle should permit the small birds to sing and care not wherefore they sang”.

My early links with Ukraine

This evening I will speak about my early links with Ukraine, about what makes Ukraine different from Russia, about my continued involvement with Ukraine and then about two features of Ukraine today – defending against aggression and fighting corruption. I will conclude with some thoughts on what the UK and the West should do.

I served in the British Embassy in Moscow in the Soviet period from 1979 to 1982, and again from 1996 to 1999, when it was the capital of Russia. My first visits to Ukraine were from Moscow. In 1980 and 1981 I went by train to Kyiv and enjoyed seeing the sights. They included the Pechersk Lavra – a museum of atheism in Soviet times, St Andrew’s Cathedral and hill, the Mariinsky Palace and the Opera House. I had no idea that just over twenty years later - in independent Ukraine - I would live near the Lavra, work near St Andrew’s, present my credentials as Ambassador to President Kuchma in the Mariinsky Palace and enjoy evenings with friends at the Opera House. But even in Soviet times I enjoyed the pleasant change of air and atmosphere.

In spring 1998 Mary and I took our sons by train from Moscow to Crimea, and on by trolleybus for three and a half hours over the mountains from Simferopol to Yalta. We left behind snow in Moscow for the sunny Crimean coast.

I was in Kyiv again the next year for work reasons, comparing notes with our Embassy there on relations between Russia and Ukraine. In 1997, after years of on-off negotiation, the two states had agreed a bilateral friendship and cooperation treaty, and an agreement dividing the Black Sea Fleet. The friendship treaty, like the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, formally confirmed Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity within its existing borders. This was important, because there had been Russian-supported efforts in 1993 to detach Crimea from Ukraine, which were resolved by granting Crimea the status of an autonomous republic.

In 2001 I visited Kyiv from London. By this time I was head of the UK’s worldwide visa operation, and Kyiv was one of our top twenty visa-issuing posts. The visa section had outgrown its cramped offices on Arsenalna, and I looked at the premises which became the new visa section on Artyoma.

Ukraine is not Russia

I really started to understand that Ukraine is not Russia when I learned Ukrainian in early 2002, in preparation for my posting to Kyiv. I soon found out that Ukrainian is not just a dialect of Russian, although they are both Eastern Slavonic languages, and that much everyday Ukrainian is quite distinct from Russian.

The Ukrainian intellectual Yevhen Hlibovytsky and the Nestor Group spent two years researching attitudes in Ukraine, before the 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity. This research concluded that most of Ukraine exhibits the values of Southern Europe, in contrast to the Eastern European values of Russia, which were shared by some people in the Donbas and Crimea. In Eastern Europe there is respect for a strong state, with a strong leader and what the Russians call “the vertical of power”. In Southern Europe, however, the most important thing is horizontal networks of family and friends. Governments are regarded like the weather: they come and go. (The interesting exception to this general finding was the city of Lviv, where values were more like Central Europe.)

This bears out what most of us know about Ukraine: it has a strong society but a weak state - plenty of lively voluntary and community groups, but immature state institutions.

Mary, who is a Scot, helped me to understand that, just as Scotland is not England, Ukraine is not Russia.

One evening in the early 1980s Mary was helping to escort out of the British Embassy in Moscow a group of Soviet Pentecostals who had rushed into the courtyard after the end of a film show in Cultural Section. As they walked out of the Embassy the KGB were waiting to bundle them into cars. Mary escaped by shouting “Ya Anglichanka!” But she then had to live with the guilty thought that she should have shouted “Ya Shotlandka!”, although it might not have been such an effective “get out of jail free” card!

Many English people think that Scots are just the same as them. Many Russians share Putin’s view that Russia and Ukraine are “one nation” and that Ukraine is part of “the Russian world”. But Ukrainians, at least the overwhelming majority of them, are very clear that they have their own national identity. Scots, too, are quite clear that they are not English. In both sets of relationships there is an asymmetry of attitudes, which can be summarised as “big brother – little brother”, sometimes explicitly on Russia’s part.

That helps to explain why President Leonid Kuchma, by no means an anti-Russian figure, wrote a book which was launched at the Moscow Book Fair in 2005 with the title “Ukraine is not Russia”.

Incidentally, Kuchma deserves credit for his restraint during the Orange Revolution of late 2004, when some of those around him - as well as President Putin in Moscow - were urging him to use force to break up the encampment on the Maidan, and he refused.

Experts on the former Soviet states in the UK and the West more widely – academics, business people, diplomats, journalists – have mostly learned about the region through Russian sources and absorbed, often unwittingly, the Russian point of view. This is hardly surprising. Throughout the Cold War the few of us who had the opportunity to live in the Soviet Union were mostly based in Moscow. It is only in the last 25 years that there have been more opportunities to live elsewhere in the region and to understand better the viewpoints of Russia’s former colonies. Much does look different from the other end of the telescope.

Against this background, the Russian information machine had an easy run at the outset of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine four years ago. There were just not enough people in the international media who could critically assess and counter myths, such as the claim that Ukraine is divided between Ukrainian-speakers and Russian-speakers (in fact most Ukrainians are bilingual) or that Ukraine was being taken over by “fascists” (in presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 extreme nationalist candidates won less than two percent of the votes).

For too long Russia got away with the pretence that it had nothing to do with the illegal occupation of Crimea (until Putin admitted that he had engineered the annexation using Russian special forces) or with fomenting and fuelling the conflict in the Donbas, which has cost over ten thousand lives and forced over two million people to flee from their homes.

In 1991 no less than 92% of Ukrainians voted for independence, with majorities in every region of the country, including Crimea. The figures have fluctuated a bit, but ever since then opinion polls have shown a majority for an independent Ukraine in every region. Shortly before unrest was stirred up in the Donbas in 2014, polling showed that only a minority in Donetsk and Luhansk regions favoured separating from Ukraine or joining Russia. Opinions towards Russia in Crimea were divided, but I am deeply sceptical about the declared result of the so-called referendum held in 2014 after Russia had occupied the peninsula and forcibly changed its parliament and government.

My continued involvement with Ukraine

Since I left Government service I have continued to be involved with Ukraine, and I go there several times a year.

For the last five years I have been a Senator (that is a member of the governing body) of the **Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU)**. Before I went to Ukraine in 2002 as Ambassador, I was told by a friend in Oxford to go and visit UCU in Lviv, where amazing things were being done. I did visit within a month of arriving in Ukraine, and visited regularly during my posting. Before I left the country the then Rector of UCU, Father Borys Gudziak (now Bishop Borys) said I would come back to UCU one day. And so I did from 2012, first as a visiting lecturer and later as a Senator.

UCU, which is a private university receiving no funding from the state, has raised 36 million dollars since 2010 through its campaign “A new generation for a new Ukraine”. Prime Minister Groysman visited UCU for the first time last month and declared: “I see here Ukraine’s future and want to wish the University continued success, for the level of education and the environment in which you work, that’s what the new Ukraine should look like.” He said this after visiting the new Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Centre, a fine modern building which would not look out of place in Oxford or Harvard.

UCU has been determined to set high standards, both academically and morally, and to show that higher education in Ukraine need not be corrupt. Apart from its traditional humanities faculties, it has the best school of journalism in Ukraine, one of the top three business schools and a cutting edge information technology faculty. A recent rating of university entrants, according to external

independent testing of school-leavers, showed that UCU now attracts the best qualified entrants of any university in Ukraine. I am proud to be associated with this university.

UCU has an affiliate in London: **the Ukrainian Institute**. Three years ago, after Andy Hunder finished as Director of the Institute and moved to Kyiv, UCU asked me to set up a steering committee to consider the Institute's future and to find a new director. So we held a selection competition and chose Marina Pesenti, who has proved to be a very creative and energetic Director. At the end of 2016 the Ukrainian Institute London was registered as a charity, and we managed to raise over £10,000 at a fund-raising event last December. Our object is to advance the education of the public in the UK by providing information and broadening knowledge about Ukraine and Ukrainians, in the realms of arts, language, literature, history, religion, culture and heritage, traditions and current affairs. We provide language lessons, a book club, lectures, panel discussions and film screenings. We are actively working with universities and other partners in London and elsewhere in the UK.

Also in 2015, Chatham House – one of the two best international affairs think tanks in the world - decided to establish a **Ukraine Forum**, to debate and provide insights into internal Ukrainian dynamics in key policy areas. There were two reasons: first that the situation in Ukraine was disappearing from the international media, although we knew that there was still a great deal going on there; and second to provide a forum for debating Ukraine on its own merits, not through Moscow's eyes. Orysia Lutsevych, who had already been a research fellow at Chatham House, expertly manages the Forum and I chair its Steering Committee. Our speakers have included Ukraine's President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Finance Minister and many others, including civil society leaders, academics and journalists.

Last July the Ukraine Forum organised a conference in Lancaster House, the day before the British Government's Ukraine Reform conference at the same place. I have to say that the Chatham House conference was much more lively and interesting, even if we did have fewer government ministers present! Last year Chatham House published "The Struggle for Ukraine", a major report by seven authors which has been well received as an authoritative and objective analysis of the situation. It has had more readers online than any other Chatham House publication!

Defending against aggression

I will now say a bit about Ukraine's efforts to defend itself against a stronger aggressor, and about the struggle inside Ukraine to modernise the country and tackle corruption, the enemy within which saps Ukraine's strength.

Russia's aims are clear enough. It wants to keep its former Soviet neighbours within its sphere of influence and to prevent Ukraine and the others from joining NATO or the European Union. To that end Russia is willing to weaken and destabilise its neighbours, and to use all available means to achieve its aims: political, economic, information, subversion, cyber-attacks and if necessary hard military force.

Since the end of the Soviet Union Russia has instigated “frozen conflicts” in Moldova (Transnistria), Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and now on a much larger scale in Ukraine (parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts). It uses these situations of “neither peace nor war” to keep the host nations off balance. In the case of Ukraine, Russia would like the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic to be part of a federal Ukraine, with a veto over Ukraine’s foreign policy.

Of course the conflict in Eastern Ukraine is not “frozen”. The level of fighting has been reduced. But every day for the last three years, despite agreements to cease firing and withdraw heavy weapons, there have been shelling and shooting along the line of contact, bringing deaths, injuries and all the misery that goes with living in a war zone.

There have been commendable efforts to stop the fighting and resolve the conflict. In particular, the leaders of Germany and France brokered the two Minsk agreements with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine. But in both cases, Russia was able to parlay its superiority on the battlefield into agreements loaded in its favour.

The Minsk agreements were for some time the only diplomatic game in town, endorsed by the United Nations Security Council and used by the EU and the US as a yardstick for whether sanctions imposed on Russia for its actions in Eastern Ukraine should be relaxed, maintained or increased.

The government of Ukraine has tried to carry out its commitments under the Minsk agreements, understanding that it must be seen to have played its part, regardless of whether other parties have played theirs. A law was passed on special status for the regions of Ukraine temporarily outside the government’s control. A constitutional amendment was drafted to provide for devolution of powers to the regions and to pave the way for the reincorporation of the non-controlled parts of Donbas in a federal Ukraine. The amendment was passed by parliament in first reading in September 2015. But there was a price: three people lost their lives in a demonstration outside parliament against the amendment. The parliamentary process stalled.

After all the bloodshed to defend these territories as part of Ukraine, there is now no majority in parliament simply to sign them away. The idea of consenting to elections in the regions not controlled by the government is not politically acceptable in Ukraine until (as provided by Minsk) foreign forces are withdrawn, Ukraine regains control of all its border with Russia and elections are held under international observation. Until then the result of such elections is entirely predictable: they would simply endorse Russia’s placemen.

The Kremlin’s decision last August to accept the idea of a peacekeeping force in the Donbas, after resisting Ukraine’s proposals for such a force over the previous two years, seemed to hint at a possible readiness to find a way out. But the Russian proposal was to put peacekeepers on the line of contact, not on the international border or throughout the occupied territories. In this way they would have contributed to freezing the situation, not resolving it. Several sessions of talks between the US representative Kurt Volker and Russia’s Vladislav Surkov have so far failed to produce an acceptable variant which could lead to a way out of the conflict.

At the outset of hostilities in the Donbas in spring 2014, the armed forces and the security service of Ukraine were in a pitiful state. Under Yanukovych they had been deliberately weakened by corrupt schemes and the placing of Russian sympathisers (including some Russian citizens) in key positions. In the early months much of the burden of defending Ukraine against the pro-Russian forces was borne by volunteers, with funds raised by civil society. The volunteers were a mixed bag, but they did a remarkable job of holding the Russian proxies at bay and buying time while the state of Ukraine regrouped and reorganised its forces. Now Ukraine is spending 5% of GDP on defence (compare that to most NATO states, which do not manage to spend even 2%). Ukraine has substantially increased its forces, incorporated the volunteers into them and reformed the production and purchase of arms and equipment.

Ukraine is receiving help with military training, including from the UK. But Ukraine is fighting alone to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty. It is managing to hold back Europe's largest army. Of course Russia could send in more forces. But that would undermine its pretence of not being involved, would invite more Western sanctions and – most importantly – would mean more dead Russian troops.

Putin and his circle may have been lulled by the ease of their takeover of Crimea, without any bloodshed. They may have forgotten that after the annexation of Western Ukraine by Stalin, Ukrainian partisans fought the Soviet authorities for ten years, until the mid-1950s. The tough resistance in Eastern Ukraine may explain why in late 2014 Russian forces did not, as many expected, force their way through to capture Mariupol – the industrial city on the coast south of Donetsk - and then the coastal strip leading to Crimea, joining Russia to Crimea by land. The cost of fighting their way through and then of sustaining the occupation in a hostile environment would have been very high, not least for the mothers of Russian soldiers.

The Russian leadership also over-estimated the appeal in Ukraine of Putin's idea of creating a pro-Russian "Novorossiia" (New Russia – the name of the region in Tsarist times) in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, an idea which now seems to have been dropped.

Fighting corruption

I turn now from the enemy without to the enemy within Ukraine – corruption.

Corruption is the big issue for Ukraine. It was the key driver of the Revolution of Dignity in the winter of 2013-2014, which sustained the protests after the initial trigger of Yanukovych turning his back on the Association Agreement with the EU. Opinion polls continue to show that corruption is a major concern for people in Ukraine.

These internal perceptions are complemented by the external perceptions tracked by Transparency International, which gives Ukraine persistently low rankings for perceived corruption.

Of course Ukraine is not unique in having a corruption problem. All the post-Soviet states suffer, to varying extents, from the Soviet legacy of lack of trust, institutions including the judiciary which had been bent to the will of the ruling party, and the outlawing in the USSR of private enterprise and trade. In response people developed informal coping mechanisms such as “blat”.

In the transition from Soviet Communism to “wild capitalism” in the early 1990s well-placed opportunists prospered; there were no rules to regulate matters like gas trading; state assets were privatised to insiders at knock-down prices; and there were murky ties between state authorities, businessmen and organised crime. Some companies kept not just two sets of accounts but two sets of offices, in case they were raided.

There was a pyramid of corrupt payments, through which the people at the top came off best. Striking evidence of these emerged at the trial in the United States of former Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko, which traced the offshore accounts and properties belonging to him and his former Deputy Yulia Tymoshenko.

Corruption is a slippery concept which covers a multitude of sins, from grand larceny (in April 2014 the acting Prosecutor General said the Yanukovich regime had stolen \$100 billion from Ukraine) through corrupt judges to petty bribe-taking by officials and policemen.

But we are dealing with perceptions more than hard facts. Those responsible know their corrupt misdeeds are wrong, and try to conceal them.

It can be argued that it was only after the Revolution of Dignity, and in the face of external aggression and economic collapse, that Ukraine got serious about building a modern nation.

The President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and others have stated that there has been more reform in Ukraine since 2014 than in the previous 23 years since independence.

After the Revolution of Dignity civil society activists were determined not to repeat the mistakes made after the Orange Revolution in 2004. Then, having forced a re-run of the presidential election, the protestors packed up and went home. Viktor Yushchenko’s administration was soon back to the bad old ways, despite all the hopes for change which had been invested in him.

This time there has been an informal alliance or “sandwich”, with civil society acting as watchdogs and pressing the government from inside Ukraine, and the international community – with the International Monetary Fund in the lead – applying pressure from outside.

Another key to making progress was the inclusion in government of some 200 bright young Ukrainians (and a few foreigners), with Western education and experience in the private sector. They have acted as reforming leaven, and many still do, within the large and lumbering state bureaucracy.

A notable example was Natalie Jaresko, Finance Minister from 2014 to 2016. A Ukrainian-American who had lived in Ukraine since independence, managing an investment fund, she succeeded in stabilising the economy, restructuring Ukraine's debts and having legislation passed to ensure a balanced budget.

Trade with Russia has declined dramatically, mostly as a result of policy decisions by the two sides.

The most important area has been the gas trade. Until two years ago Russia supplied most of the gas consumed by Ukraine. This trade was a notorious source of corruption, with middlemen siphoning off flows of cash and an opaque pricing and subsidy system. The new government bravely raised gas prices to market levels, with no subsidies, instead providing financial support for the most needy consumers. In the last two years Ukraine met its need for gas without importing any from Russia. This gave it a new strength to deal with the latest attempt last month by Russia's Gazprom to cut off supplies to Ukraine in mid-winter.

Another brave approach has been by the National Bank, which has closed down about 80 of the 180 banks in the country, many of which were serving as "piggy banks" for their owners. Ukraine's largest bank, Privatbank, owned by tycoon Igor Kolomoysky, has been nationalised.

The National Anti-Corruption Bureau is actively investigating cases and has prosecuted the Head of the State Fiscal Service, Roman Nasirov. It remains to be seen whether other high profile figures will be brought to trial. One of the complaints of civil society is that so far no significant members of the Yanukovych administration have been put on trial.

There have been some striking initiatives to show that sunlight is the best disinfectant. All public procurement now has to go through an online system called Prozorro (a play on the Ukrainian word for transparency), with this information accessible to anyone. This is removing opportunities for corruption and saving public money. About 100,000 politicians and officials have been obliged to declare their income and assets. These so-called e-declarations and Prozorro offer a level of transparency seen in very few other countries.

A start has been made on judicial reform. The constitution has been amended to strengthen the independence of the judiciary, and judges are now being vetted and new appointments made, starting from the highest courts. The latest struggle is over the terms for a new Anti-Corruption Court, which the international community and civil society want to complement the National Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecutors.

Creating a strong independent judiciary is crucial to underpin the whole reform process and to make Ukraine more attractive for investment. But it will take time. New, clean, judges cannot be produced from a hat. You cannot instantly make people uncorrupt, but you can put in place means of deterring and punishing corruption which change the balance of incentives.

Cleaning up the judiciary while the courts continue to function is rather like open heart surgery. Ukraine's parliament considered, but rejected - with the agreement of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe - the more radical option of sacking all the judges and starting again.

Another wide-ranging reform has been the decentralisation of powers to local authorities from central government. This has already increased local authority budgets by some 40%, and the elected local governments will be held to account by their electors for how these resources are spent. There are signs that decentralisation is encouraging the emergence of new politicians in the regions.

The government has announced a privatisation programme for most of the 1,300 state-owned enterprises, but needs to get on with it. They have been a continuing source of corruption.

Important work continues in areas such as healthcare, education and pension reform, but there is a widespread feeling that the pace of reforms has slowed, as vested interests push back and elections approach.

The government of Ukraine is still subject to the same pressures from civil society and international partners to make progress on reforms and tackling corruption. They could help themselves through better communication with both the Ukrainian public and international audiences, advertising positive results and reiterating coherent messages – although communication has improved. Over the next year before the presidential election, the government will need to make the case for the long term benefits of reform, and resist the short term appeals of the populists.

Much has been done to tackle corruption, but much remains to be done. It is difficult and will take time. There is a palpable sense of a continuing struggle in Ukraine between the old ways and the new. This struggle probably goes right up into the mind of President Poroshenko.

He and other politicians in Ukraine are unpopular and distrusted. Some of the criticism is warranted, but in Ukraine's young democracy there is still a tendency for exaggerated hopes to be followed by excessive disappointment.

What is to be done?

So what should the UK and other Western countries do?

First, we need a clear understanding of the situation, with enough expertise in government, in the media and in the academic world to assess claims against the evidence and to distinguish truth from falsehood.

Russian behaviour after the shooting down of the Malaysian airliner MH17 over the Donbas in July 2014, with the loss of 298 innocent lives, was a textbook example. Russia produced half a dozen different, and inconsistent, versions of events, with the aim of confusing and distracting the outside world. In 2016 the Dutch-led investigation demonstrated that the aircraft had been brought down by a Russian missile brought in from Russia. From very soon after the event that had seemed the most

likely explanation. But in the meantime Russia had vetoed in the UN Security Council a proposal for an international tribunal and has evaded being called to account. A similar disinformation and distraction effort is being deployed now after the attempted murder of Sergey and Yulia Skripal.

Second, in the face of Russian violations of international law, the illegal annexation of Crimea and interference in Eastern Ukraine, we need to stay united and firm. Sanctions on Russia should be maintained as long as the reasons for imposing them persist: in particular until Russia withdraws from Eastern Ukraine and returns Crimea to Ukraine.

Of course, particularly over Crimea, on which Putin has staked his own political reputation, this may take a long time. But the experience of the Cold War is that standing firm on matters of principle pays off in the end. From 1945 onwards the West insisted that the Baltic States were not legally part of the Soviet Union, and that Berlin was not the capital of the GDR. It was often tedious to maintain this policy on status, but it preserved our position for the time when the ice started to crack. It undoubtedly contributed to the flourishing of the Baltic States and of united Germany after the end of the Cold War.

We should not be tempted by offers of a deal with Russia at the expense of Ukraine. Ukrainians have the right to determine their own future, not to have it determined for them.

Third, we should continue to support Ukraine, through a long and difficult process of reform and in the face of aggression. The struggle against corruption will not be easy: there are many with an interest in it failing.

We need to keep up the pressure for reforms to reduce and deter corruption. But both Ukrainian activists and international partners need to be realistic and patient, and not to be wearied by the task or succumb to “Ukraine fatigue”.

Fourth, the UK needs to lead by example and look to its own reputation. London has acquired an unenviable reputation as one of the money-laundering centres of the world. Too many of our bankers, lawyers, accountants and estate agents are ready to take the fees but not careful enough about where the money has come from. Our laws against money laundering and bribery must be enforced. At last action is being taken, to create a register of beneficial owners of property, to impose “unexplained wealth orders” and – after the use of nerve agent in Salisbury - to pass a UK version of the US “Magnitsky Act” imposing visa bans and asset freezes on human rights abusers. But the reputational damage to the UK in Ukraine and the former Soviet region will take time to repair.

As for myself, I will continue to do what I can to support this effort. At a dinner for the UCU Senate in Kyiv last month a Ukrainian businessman asked if I was a Ukrainian patriot. “No”, I replied. “I am a British patriot and a friend of Ukraine – a critical friend, I hope.”