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Life During Wartime

Interviews and Profiles



You go to sleep after a busy day, maybe a glass of wine and slow dinner, disturbed about world news affecting your country but feeling secure in your bed, your home, knowing your family is safe and sound, your bank account solid, and your life is on track, peaceful and joyful.

And the next day your country is under attack.

When war breaks out, everyone in the country is a victim. Everyone is horrified, terrified, desperate to act, desperate to protect, desperate for peace. And everyone has a role to play. For lawyers, however, there's a unique role: Your company needs you to assure everything is in order to continue to serve its customers, to assist others to provide relief, to help and secure employees, and to survive no matter what happens.

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As a lawyer, how you behave and how you perform on the fly while taking care of yourself and your family can make the literal difference between life and death. The employees are looking to you and the rest of the executive team for leadership. Does your company have a crisis plan? What will you do if employees decide to flee the country? Are there national laws dictating your actions? What if

your company provides essential services to people affected by war, such as food, water, and logistics/transportation/warehousing? Do arrangements need to be made to enable it to take on the new responsibilities?

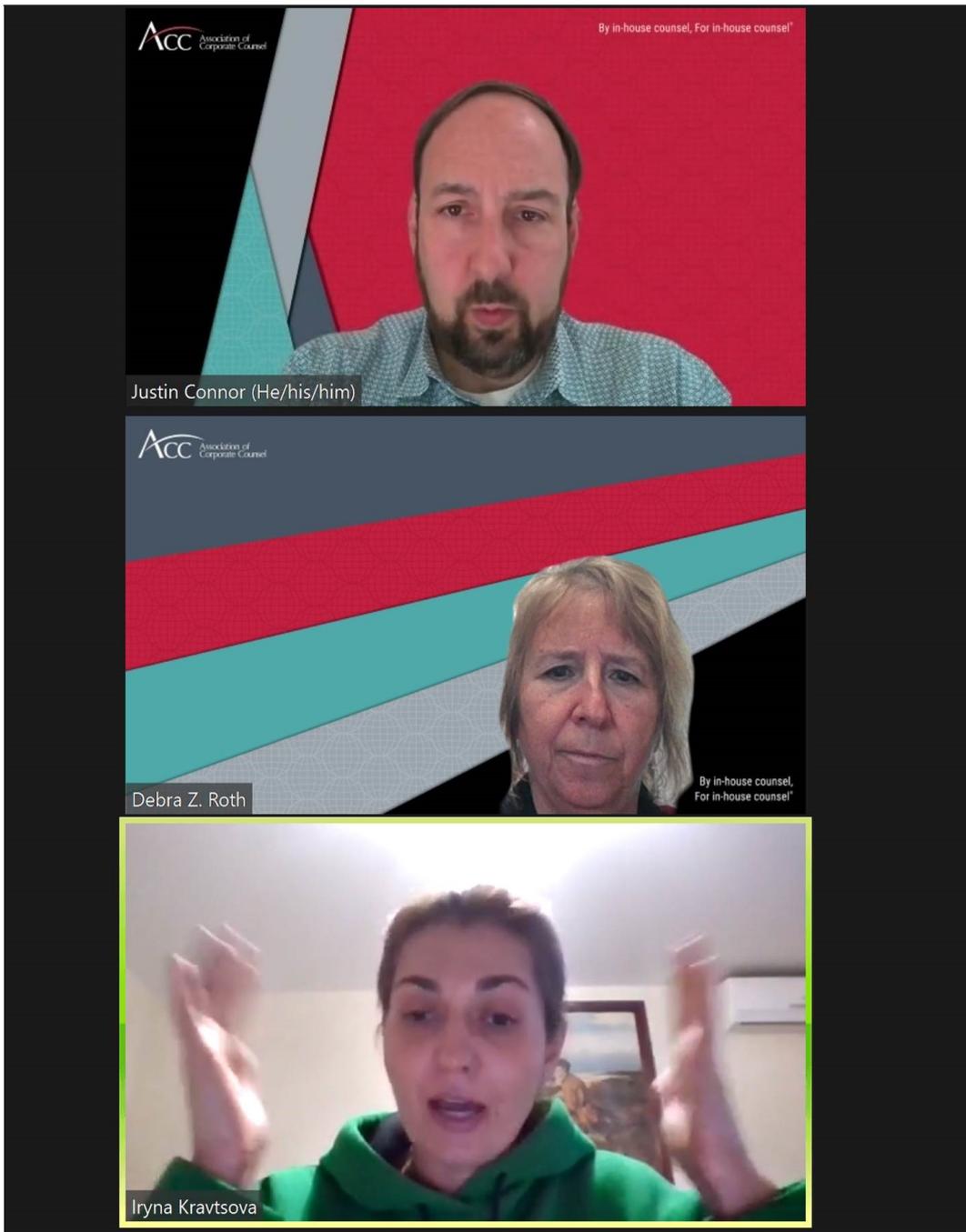
Iryna Kravtsova, general counsel of [Raben Ukraine](#), Kyiv, and founder of the GC Club there, notes that one can never fully prepare for everything, but her company had developed aspects of a crisis plan and a set of regulations that has guided it, along with national law, during this alarming, overwhelming, ever-changing time.

Raben is a European logistics and warehousing services company with its headquarters in Robakowo, Poland, that is helping get food to areas under siege.

ACC's [Justin Connor](#), director of corporate membership and CLO engagement, and Debra Z. Roth, an *ACC Docket* contract editor, interviewed Kravtsova nearly a month after Russia's attack in February 2022.

Note: The following excerpts were edited for readability.

Touching hearts



Iryna Kravtsova, GC,

Raben Ukraine, Kyiv, a month after the war broke out, in a video interview with ACC's Justin Connor, director of corporate membership and CLO engagement, and Debra Z. Roth, an ACC Docket contract editor.

ACC: As we gather today, we must begin with an acknowledgement that today marks the 21st day, three weeks to the day, upon which Russia began its current invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Our hearts are with you, the people of Ukraine, as you all fight fiercely and seek to repel the Russian forces from the sovereign territory of Ukraine. We honor the lives lost, including, according to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the loss of life of 691 Ukrainian civilians and 1,143 other injuries.

Current reports indicate that the war has now resulted in more than 3 million refugees pouring out of Ukraine, while almost 2 million have been internally displaced. [Editor's note: At the time of publication of this article, the number of refugees is now over 10 million, with 3.5 million having fled

the country and approximately 6.5 million internally displaced, increasing dramatically since this interview was conducted.]

We are grateful to you, Iryna, for your time today to conduct this interview with the global Association of Corporate Counsel, and to share your perspective as a Ukrainian in-house lawyer with our 45,000 in-house counsel members worldwide.

First, I am sure that our readers will want to know, how are you, your family, and your colleagues doing right now? Where are you, and what is happening around you?

Iryna Kravtsova: My purpose is to talk to you to about what's going on here because it's hell on earth. And the more people that know about this, the more hearts I can touch, and I think the quicker this war can be stopped. Because what's going on here is simply unacceptable in the 21st century.

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So, how am I doing? And my family? I live in Kyiv. And I left it on the third day of the war because it was very dangerous to stay there. I went to stay with my parents in the central part of Ukraine. They live not so far from Kyiv but still it's safer to stay here. And staying together gives strength to my parents, it gives strength to myself, because together we are much stronger together than apart. I don't worry about them, they don't worry about me, so at least some stress can be taken off.

I can't complain about my current situation because unlike those people who are blocked in the occupied regions, like Mariupol, Chernigiv, the northern region of Kyiv Oblast, I have food, water, electricity, Wi-Fi, a warm bed, and a blanket. We do have air raid alerts very often because of rockets or Russian aircrafts flying above our region but it's nothing compared to Mariupol where Russians constantly throw bombs, attacking the city from sky, land, and sea.

Under constant threat

Kravtsova: As for the situation in Kyiv, it is bad. People who stayed there live under constant threat of rockets, of bombs, they live under the sounds of air raids alerts, many live in the underground and go out from there only to buy food or take clothes from the apartment — if it still exists.

Almost all grocery shops are closed in Kyiv and those that are open have a limited variety of products. When there is a new supply of products into the shop, people are messaging each other about that. In Kyiv, I live in a residential house and chat with our neighbors. Now I see how those neighbors who stayed send messages like: Milk products were delivered to the grocery shop X today, or today you can buy fresh vegetable at the shop Y.

At the first days of war, my neighbors even were discussing where it was possible to buy bread. If there was no bread at all, then those who had at least one loaf of bread at home, cut it into a few parts and shared with neighbors.

It's really a very tough situation in Kyiv and in some regions of Ukraine, especially those occupied by Russia. People have to stay in the basement all day and all night.

A huge humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding in Mariupol — in the south of Ukraine — where 300,000 peaceful people have lived in basements for more than 20 days already. They have no food, no

water, no medicine — nothing. The city is under attacks that do not stop. Dead bodies are laying in the streets and, because of the constant attacks, no one can bury them. Russian occupants don't agree on humanitarian corridors to evacuate people nor provide first aid and products needed by those who can't leave.

This city is full of tragic life stories and I hope that one day all the world will listen to every story as it's something that everyone should know in order to respect and treat peace and humanity as the most precious thing in life.

Like the [story of a six-year-old girl who died of dehydration](#). Her house was destroyed, her mother was killed, and poor child stayed under ruined house til she died because she didn't have even a sip of water. Can you imagine that? This is the 21st century! This is Europe!



Iryna Kravtsova, Raben

Ukraine GC

Still in business and helping others

ACC: I imagine that your company, Raben Ukraine, in the business of logistics and food distribution, must be extremely busy right now, given how critical what you do is to the relief effort. What's happening now with respect to Raben Ukraine and how is the company operating given the fear and everything you just described happening?

Kravtsova: Raben Ukraine and Raben Group help a lot of its employees. Everyone who wants to leave Ukraine are given shelters in the countries where Raben is operating. Notwithstanding how difficult it is for business, Raben didn't stop paying salaries as our management is oriented on people and they understand that people are in a great need now. Regarding business, we do as much as possible to conduct our operations because we do understand that logistic services play an essential role now. If deliveries are stopped, then people won't have food, medicine, and other stuff they need. However, our abilities are limited now as a big part of infrastructure in Ukraine is destroyed and there are active military actions at some regions preventing us from making deliveries or even reaching our warehouses.

But, yes, as a company, we do as much as possible, and we do everything we can to support Ukraine, to support continued business operations, to support those engaged in the defense of Ukraine, to support our economy, and we are not closing our business. We also cooperate with official international organizations that provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

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ACC: Are critical employees able to go into their normal places of work? And I'm curious about technology that supports you. I imagine there's a lot of key technologies that support logistics business like GPS and other platforms — are those functional?

Kravtsova: Yes, employees are able to go to their places of work if it is located in the region where there are no military actions. If the region is under constant attacks or if the place of work located at the occupied region, then they cannot go there. Saving lives — this is our priority.

Regarding IT tools, our company has a lot of them. Before the war we developed and implemented different IT tools that would help not only in our day-to-day work but that would make the operational life of our clients easier.

In-house lawyers in Ukraine who would like to join ACC — complimentary during the war — please [contact us](#).

Using networks to communicate

ACC: I noticed on [LinkedIn](#) that you're the founder of GC Club of Ukraine — I'm curious to know more about the organization, how you founded it, and if it's providing service some support and ongoing connection during this time for its members.

Kravtsova: During many years I carried the idea of creating an informal platform for chief legal officers. I wanted to make a space for those who are in charge of the legal function at the company where we can gather from time to time, have friendly chats, or discuss some issues that are not a business secret but are of interest for everyone. It can even be friendly dinners where we can communicate and have some fun activities. I always had a feeling that we miss this kind of communication as we all usually meet at official events, like conferences, round tables, etc., that

makes our relations rather tough and formal.

The idea is to organize meetings of the club members four times per year, two of which will be organized just to communicate with each other and other two will be directed to develop hard and soft skills. We planned to invite coaches or other professionals to our meetings, not as speakers, but to have a vivid discussion of a certain topic between the invited guest and the members. My goal is to create a space where chief legal officers can relax and say their minds about what they wish but what is not forbidden.

This project is my newly born baby. Unfortunately, I started it December 2021, so we had only one meeting before the war. The Russian invasion ruined our plans to set up meetings but we keep supporting each other online. We have a separate group at one of the messengers where we exchange legal news, case studies, ask questions, and simply support each other. We know where everyone is staying now, so if someone needs help, the one who is near can help. Staying together in such a tough period is very important.

ACC: I know from your website that you have 500 employees at Raben Ukraine. Are you the sole in-house counsel or do you have a team?

Kravtsova: I'm the only one. When you have a sole role in the company, it's important to optimize your work as much as possible so you could manage to do everything and in time.

[View ACC's collection of legal resources about Ukraine and sanctions.](#)

Constantly changing legislation

ACC: You mentioned a little bit about your organization. How is the organization seeking to support its employees at this time and pay its salaries? What other types of challenges are you facing right now?

Kravtsova: Our company didn't leave the Ukrainian market. We provide services at the territory where we physically can operate. The company pays salaries and that is already a great support.

There are many types of challenges we are facing right now. Those are challenges that everyone has to go through as a person as you need to decide whether to leave or stay, and what to do next. But it's difficult to plan anything as the situation is out of your control.

Another challenge relates to business as business owner need to decide whether to close operations, relocate them, if possible, or just bear losses.

For lawyers, there is a challenge with new legislation being adopted all the time. Ukrainian legislation regulates business activities and life of people in peaceful time. When the war started, our normal life and normal business activities were interrupted. For this particular case, there were not regulations. First of all, there were many questions related to HR matters and to tax issues. What to do if the person had to leave the place of work cause of military activities? What to do if the person left Ukraine at all? How to file reports to the tax authorities if there is no possibility to reach office but your notebook and all documentation is there? What to do if you need to replace general manager but the state authority that conducts corresponding registration doesn't work?

And those “what” and “how” are numerous. Some of those questions are already regulated by new legislative norms but others still need to be answered. A separate topic for discussion is fulfillment of contractual obligations.

Reacting fast

ACC: And given your status as one of the biggest logistics companies in Ukraine, were there any changes or things you saw in terms of demand or business facing the company that gave you any sense of the impending invasion coming from Russia? And how has it affected the ability to continue to get out food to the people of Ukraine?

Kravtsova: No one expected Russia to start the war on Ukraine. Before the war, everyone here treated the possibility of Russian invasion like the possibility of seeing alive dinosaurs somewhere in New York. But, unfortunately, it happened and it drastically affected everyone.

As I mentioned, we do everything that we can to deliver goods to the regions where infrastructure is not ruined and where we don't have active military actions and regions that are under control of Ukrainian military forces. Our operational team does a great job as they need to track safety roads and the best ways to deliver goods as this is the matter of lives of our drivers and safety of the cargo.

The screenshot shows the Raben website's navigation bar with a red background and white text. The main navigation items are: ABOUT US, SERVICES, IT SOLUTIONS, INDUSTRIES, CUSTOMER ZONE, CAREER, and NEWS. Below the navigation bar is a breadcrumb trail: Raben Group / News / News Details. The main content area features a large blue and yellow banner with the word "UKRAINE" in white text on a red background. Below the banner are social media icons for LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. In the bottom right corner of the banner area, the date "2022.03.02" is displayed.

In connection with the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine, we regret to inform you about the temporary suspension of all services provided by Raben in the country affected by the fighting. In addition, the transport of all shipments entering/leaving Ukraine or requiring transit through this country is suspended until further notice. Moreover, we are also suspending shipments to/from/through Russia and Belarus.

At the same time, due to the dynamic development of the situation and the possible sudden return of employees of Ukrainian nationality to their homeland, there may also be disruptions in the European supply chain. We are making every effort to ensure that the effects of the current situation are as little severe as possible.

Nowadays, our highest priority is to ensure the safety of our employees and drivers cooperating with us. We stand in solidarity with our Ukrainian colleagues and the entire Ukrainian Nation. While using our capabilities and resources, we undertake concrete aid activities.

We will keep you informed about any changes related to the provision of services in the eastern area and about any possible difficulties in other regions.

Developing a crisis plan

ACC: One of the things that comes to mind in this time is crisis plans. Did you have any company-wide crisis plan in place prior to the invasion and did it have any plan for how to respond to an invasion and has that been helpful?

Kravtsova: In fact, even if you have a crisis plan, even if it's the most perfect one, it won't protect you from war — especially if you have fixed assets. For example, buildings or factories or shopping malls — you just can't take them into your pockets and leave with them.

We had a crisis plan. All Crisis Committee members know what to do in unpredictable situations. But we have warehouses, so whatever you do, you can't protect the building from a bomb that falls on it. If the war started with prior notification, it would be possible to take goods from the warehouses. But it started unexpectedly, so there is no chance to take goods from the places with active military activities, even though your crisis plan is written in a perfect way, as no one risks the life of a person.

... We have warehouses, so whatever you do, you can't protect the building from a bomb that falls on it.

ACC: As the GC there, do any lessons come to mind that you would want to share with other general counsel worldwide with respect to planning for the unexpected in the role of general counsel, particularly for a critical infrastructure provider like a logistics company, during a time like this?

Kravtsova: The war is an unusual, unexpected situation. When talking about war, you do not evaluate only business risks but you think how to save lives. This situation differs much from what we had during quarantines due to COVID-19. When it was COVID situation, the work and business could be rearranged and organized in the way allowing you to work from home safely.

But with war, it doesn't work this way. When the war starts, your top priority is to save your life and lives of your beloved ones. And only after the person feels himself more or less safe, he starts thinking of other life aspects, among which is work. Here I should note that when you're a manager, you equally think of saving your life and saving business. When I was leaving Kyiv, the first that I took was not a bag with clothes, but my notebook.

Surely as a lawyer I could say that everyone needs to think of how to protect statutory documents, seals, and other important documentation. Back in time I would say that these documents have to be kept in a fireproof safe. But looking at the huge holes in the ground that are left after the bombs, I'm not sure that any fireproof safe endures it. The only relevant thing is to have a backup with the help of IT and to have not only physical archives of documentation but electronic ones.

... As a lawyer I could say that everyone needs to think of how to protect statutory documents, seals, and other important documentation

The war gives life lessons. It makes you to review your personal values. I strongly believe now that everyone in the world should review his values now till it's not too late. War shows that values that were priceless before are meaningless now and vice versa. If you don't have inner values, you have no life. Unfortunately, people nowadays forgot about this.

... Many international companies that claim they have high ethical norms, now show opposite. And it seems that many companies implement ethical norms in order to gain more profit as their ethics exist only on paper.

Regarding business, we all can notice that many international companies that claim they have high

ethical norms, now show opposite. And it seems that many companies implement ethical norms in order to gain more profit as their ethics exist only on paper. These companies claim to protect children and women rights; they say they act against violence when at the same time they refuse to leave the market of the country-aggressor that entered another country, killing children, pregnant women, destroying everything, and spreading violence. So staying at the market of such country isn't believed to be a sponsorship of such violence as the company pays taxes into the budget of the country-aggressor?

ACC: Is there anything you would advise, like revising contracts, such as for employees in the Ukraine?

Kravtsova: Looking back, I don't think that I would change something in our inner procedures or labor contract because everything was in line with legislation and everything worked in the way it had to be during peaceful time. As of now, there are changes in Ukrainian legislation. For example, if the person leaves Ukraine because of military actions, the company has to keep a place for him. But the company may not pay him his salary. This is new. Everyday we have new legislative norm that fill in gaps caused due to the war. We follow all changes in order to be able to reflect them on our business activity where it is needed.

... If the person leaves Ukraine because of military actions, the company has to keep a place for him.

Inspiring leadership makes a difference

ACC: How has senior leadership, like your CEO or other senior leaders, have been able to communicate this time and if you heard inspiring messages of support from your CEO?

Kravtsova: We feel great support from our senior management team. Mr. Raben, who is the owner of the company, made a clear video message, encouraging all Ukrainian employees. Again, it's a great support that employees are not left alone. If they run from war and want to leave Ukraine, they do not stay in streets but are given shelters.

We feel great support from our senior management team.

My direct manager – who is our CEO – Raben Group general counsel, and our regional director are calling and messaging me all the time asking whether everything is fine as I'm in Ukraine right now. This is a great support.

How to help

ACC: Since Raben is doing humanitarian work, is there a donation page?

Kravtsova: Raben Ukraine doesn't have a donation page. We cooperate with organizations that donations can be made to the [International Federation of Red Cross](#) to help victims in Ukraine and companies, like Raben Ukraine, who are, in turn, helping others with aid, delivery, storage.

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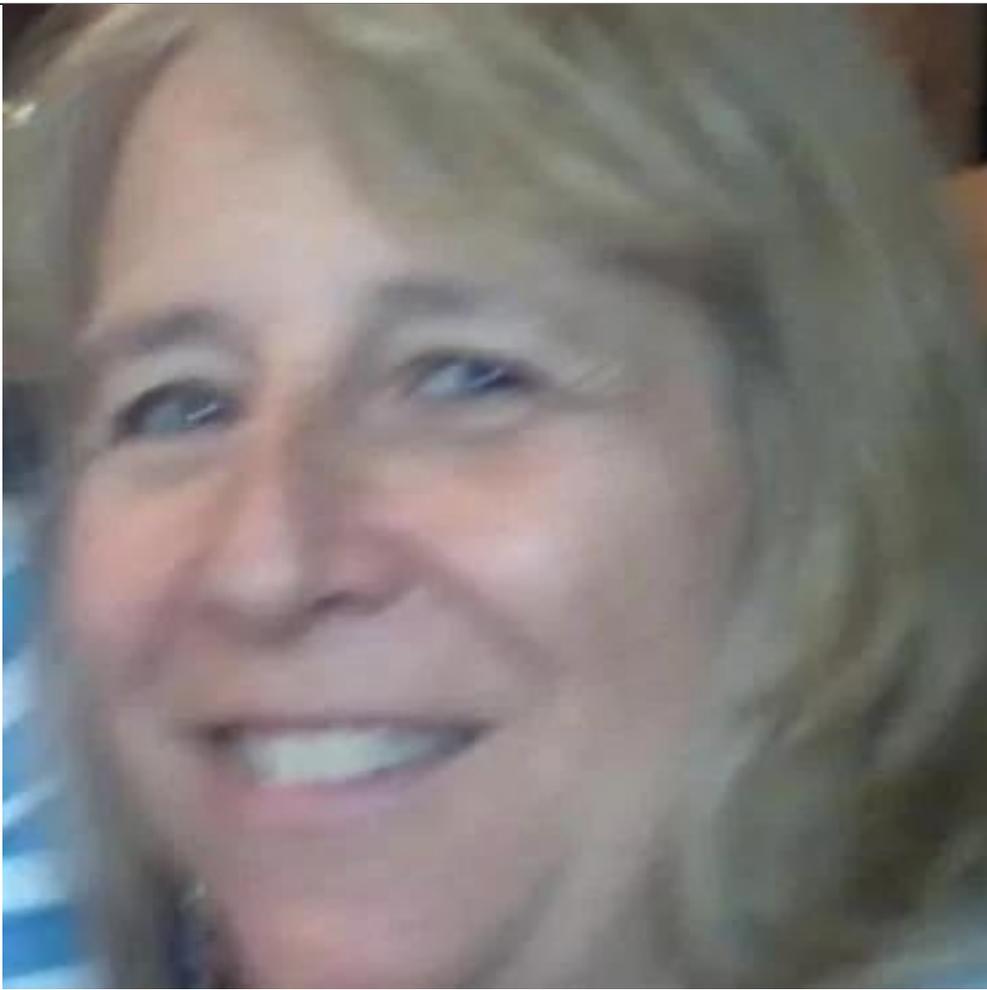
ACC: In honor of your incredible work Iryna, I would like to offer you, on behalf of the ACC, a complimentary, membership in the Association of Corporate Counsel. And I'd like to offer the same for other lawyers in Ukraine during this time to show our support of Ukraine.

Kravtsova: Thank you. I would appreciate it. It will be a great honor and pleasure for me. And I would like to share it with my team as well.

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[Debra Z. Roth](#)



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Association of Corporate Counsel

Debra Z. Roth, an ACC content contractor, has been a journalist, including freelance, and a communications marketing practitioner. Her news stories, features, and editorials have been published in *The Washington Post*, *Newsday*, magazines, websites, and aired on broadcast. And she has led international marcomm for non- and for-profits, including the YWCA USA, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National AIDS Fund (now AIDS United), and worked at PR firms, including the Academy for Educational Development (now fhi 360). Her clients have included the National Legal Aid & Defender Association, US Department of Justice, Georgetown University Hospital, and the Tinner Hill Heritage Foundation.