

# Life in Ukraine

**Evgeniy Vlasenko**

*Vice President, MSL State Lottery Ukraine*



**PGRI INTRODUCTION:** The miracle of strength, faith, and fortitude of the people of Ukraine inspires awe and admiration in everyone around the world. The resistance has been more effective than anyone imagined it could be. Now, as we move into the next chapter of prolonged conflict, we can see that with a little help, the Ukrainians may actually defeat Russia in this iconic battle between good and evil, against barbaric tyranny and in defense of democratic freedom. The impacts of the decisions and actions taken now by global leaders will have long-term global consequences. We are deciding now if we want to forge a conflict-ridden co-existence with a militarily aggressive and expansionist dictator (like Hitler) or a world in which respect for national sovereignty and human rights is still valued. For the last eleven years, Evgeniy Vlasenko has led the MSL Ukrainian State Lottery. He served on the EL Executive Committee 8 years until 2021 and is a personal friend to myself and so many others in our industry. We connected on Zoom for a video interview which is posted on PGRItalks.com.

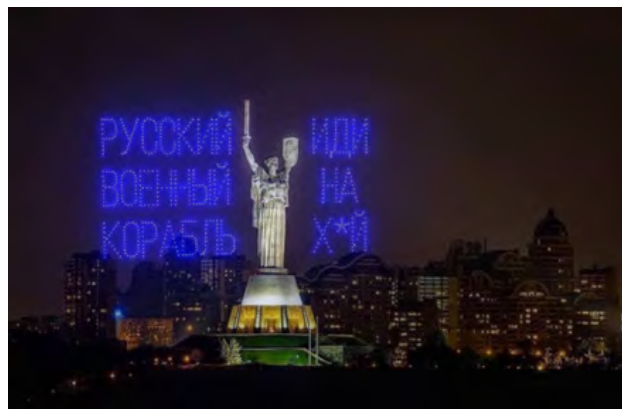


**Paul Jason:** Please tell us about your life. Is everyone completely absorbed in the resistance, in fighting the Russian invaders, and fighting to survive? What is everyday life like for you and your MSL Lottery colleagues?

**Evgeniy Vlasenko:** There has been no war in Ukraine since 1945. That's 77 years... My mom is 77. And now, after all these years of peace, she faces war when she is 77 years old. Along with her, this war changed lives of 43 million people of Ukraine. On Feb 24, when Russians started to bomb Kiev, Kharkov and other cities and their ground forces started invading, all our lives were divided into Before and After the war. I thought I was a pragmatic man and did not believe that Russians could start a war against Ukraine. I was wrong. They have a mentally sick leader admired by the majority of Russians and after 22 years of his rein he has reshaped the Russian population into his own image, 75% of whom support this war.

Amidst others, some MSL people were

forced to move from their places, some lost their homes, some stayed under occupation and some of them stay in occupation and work as volunteers, risking to their lives. Some of our colleagues are in the front-line defending Ukraine. For security reasons I cannot open their names before our victory. They are real heroes.



**Are there still MSL Lottery offices in Kyiv? Do they continue to be lottery operations, initiatives, or work to do?**

**E. Vlasenko:** For personal and business security reasons, top management of MSL is located now in different geographies to enable sustainable control over the

company even in the case of serious military escalation in one area or another. Our communication infrastructure, including the central computer system, its reserve site and the web site – work stably. I want to thank Tuv Nord, our auditor for WLA/ISO security certification, that for all six years of our joint work together, they were not only good auditors but good advisers who shared a lot of best practices with us which are helping us greatly today, even during the war. MSL is now able not only to operate under daily missile attacks but has managed to design and release a new lottery game.

The proceeds from this new lottery are intended to support our Army. It is called D.A.R. (G.I.F.T. – Grant It For The Army). It is a terminal instant game and a charity lottery and soon it will become available online too. All cash after payout will be donated to the best possible good cause that we have today – the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Unfortunately, the retail infrastructure of MSL has been damaged by the war. We lost



a lot of equipment from our retail outlets in the combat areas. Many shops are closed. As well, we had to discontinue two of our most popular draw-based games and we are thinking now about how to restart them in a new format. People are short of money and there are fewer visitors at the shops.

On the one hand, our business is suffering. On the other hand, it is a miracle that it is still active despite this severe and awful war when Russian barbarians are destroying the Ukrainian economy, including oil refineries, railways, highways, factories. They steal our agricultural machines and production and bring it all to Russia. They blow up the warehouses that store fertilizers and grain and mine the fields to disrupt the sowing season.

**What is Putin's end-game? What does he hope to gain by destroying Ukraine, murdering its non-combatant civilians in violation of international law and the most basic standards of morality, and turning the whole world against Russia?**

**E. Vlasenko:** Russian chauvinism is the ideology of Putin's regime multiplied by imperialistic ambitions. It is even more dangerous than Nazi ideology, because it is more cynical and mentally distorted. Putin's end-game was declared by him some time ago when he said that for him the border of Russia is along the line where the Berlin wall used to be.

But I hope that his end will be similar to Hitler. Actually, since 2014 in Ukraine we call Putin the "putler".

**The key message is this:** the real reason for this war in Ukraine is that Putin does not want for Ukraine to exist as an entity, neither the Ukrainian language nor Ukrainian culture. And if Ukrainians are not ready to become Russians, the Kremlin is ready to kill all of us and destroy everything on our territory.

And this is the basis of Russian chauvinist ideology.

If they could succeed in Ukraine they would expand the invasion to the Baltic countries and Poland and after that all other former Soviet-block countries. They will continue until the Russian flag is raised in Berlin. This is their plan, not because I say so but because

Putin has said so, on many occasions and in perfectly clear terms. Those who understand this are helping Ukraine in its defense against Putin's Russia.

You ask about international law and morality. No space for law and morality for the Russian army when they act like the worst examples of SS troops during WW2.

- Filtration camps

- Deportation of Ukrainians to Siberia and Far East
- Tortures (pictures of civilians shot into back of the head with their hands tied behind and torn off fingernails have been shown to the whole world)
- Holding people on frost without shoes until foot becomes gangrene.

They are specially trained to conduct torture. They hit residential houses, hospitals, schools, everything... They kill simple people, rape women, men, children... These are not traditional military forces, this is a universal evil perpetrated by physical perverts. On the occupied territories they steal laundry machines, water closet bowls, second-hand underwear and used deodorants, actually everything that they are able to carry away. They shoot dogs, horses, and other domestic animals just for fun. Wild people. No, I cannot use the word "people" in relation to Russian soldiers.

**What is the most urgent need of the people of Ukraine right now in your war against the Russia invaders?**

**E. Vlasenko:** To list by priorities, military support is priority #1. If NATO had closed the sky to Russian planes in March the war would finish by now. But at least now, the Ukrainian Army has started to receive all necessary armaments and ammunition. And as I mentioned to you in March,

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Ukraine has enough experienced pilots and Air Defense specialists. What we are short of is weapons, aircraft and such.

Priority #2 is fuel. Russians hit with their modern medium range missiles all oil refineries and many gas storages in the territory of Ukraine. So we badly need petroleum and diesel fuel.

But as well when the economy is in this state of war, food and other goods necessary to stay alive are needed too. Ukraine is a breadbasket of Europe. But Russians have done everything possible to prevent sowing season this year.

Many cities are in ruins so we will need construction materials and financing. But this is later, when our victory is achieved. I believe that after the war Ukraine will be a very attractive country for foreign investments.

**What can you tell us about the uncertain future? What will become of life for the people in Ukraine and MSL Lottery in the years to come?**

**E. Vlasenko:** In 1791 Poland adopted its Constitution, second in the world after the USA. Three years later, Russia invaded Poland and abolished the Polish constitution. Paul, do you see historic parallels? Today, Poland is an independent, modern and developed EU member. Russia is a warhead with a wild population.

After the war Ukraine will stay independent, democratic, and European. Life will be very difficult – we have no illusions about that. But it will be a happy life because our children will not die under Russian bombs and missiles any more. The Ukrainian army will remain one of the strongest in the world and I hope that we will manage to build a Great China wall along the Russian border. Because I personally do not believe that Russia will ever change. We need to stay away from and guard against them to be secure and be protected in the future.

About MSL. We have a 50-year history and experience. We will stay strong and try to build successful lotteries for the benefit of our people and our economy.

I have a dream. This dream is to launch

an international lottery in support of Ukrainian reconstruction after the war. And MSL will invite all our numerous friends, operators of the state lotteries, to become founders of this New Game for Ukraine.

**When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the U.S. and allies pushed Iraqi forces all the way back to the Baghdad city limits. Is there any hope for mounting a counter-attack and pushing Russia back to the city limits of Moscow?**

**E. Vlasenko:** I remember 1990 Kuwait war pretty well. The situation in Ukraine is different. Different ambitions of the invaders: Hussein had regional economic and anti-US ambitions. Putin has global and anti-Ukrainian and anti-NATO ambitions.

Second. At that time, NATO was not afraid of Iraq and USSR that was backing Iraq because the USSR was in a state of decay. And Iraq did not have nuclear weapons. Today the enemy is much stronger. Nevertheless, Russians will be thrown out of Ukraine in “the direction of their military ship”. To which limits? We will see, Russia is big.

**Is there anything else you might like to say or share with your friends from everywhere else in the world?**

**E. Vlasenko:** I want to thank our colleagues from many countries from all around the world that support Ukraine officially and privately. Everybody is doing what they can and we appreciate the ongoing support. You can find a lot of examples of solidarity with Ukraine at EL web site.

I want to thank global lottery community for taking a decisive position to discontinue Russian and Belorussian members in WLA and EL.

In Ukraine we communicate about all those facts at our web site and in social media. MSL employees and our players know about the contributions from the international lottery community for the defense of Ukraine. And we are grateful for this.

As the war continues, we should fight

Russian fascism everywhere where we can. The military strength of the aggressor depends on its economy. Its economy depends on taxes they collect. Taxes decrease when international business leaves Russia. That is why Russia should be isolated. Therefore, together with our world lottery community partners, we have a plan to build an anti-Russian gaming coalition.

Many leading world companies in the sports betting industry have already joined the protest to support Ukraine, including William Hill and Bet 365 which have left the Russian market. Furthermore, LeoVegas, Statscore, DraftKings, Fan Duel, OPAP, Coolbet, Pari Match and many others withdrew betting offers on Russian sports events. PokerStars has also ceased operation in Russia.

But at the same time, Russian business tries to hide, mask, or change their names and use other tools to protect its positions, and even penetrate into new businesses and new geographies. These businesses will sponsor Putin's regime.

I completely agree with President Biden and Senator Lindsay Graham who called Russia a terrorist country and Putin a war criminal. And from my perspective, those who do business with them, pay their taxes, or give them jobs are advocates of the war crimes.

During this time when our businesses are destroyed and our people have to leave their homes, there should be no comfort for any Russian businesses in the world lottery community. The ultimate victory is composed of small elements.

Ukraine will be restored after the war. We will restore our business after the war. We believe that our partners from WLA and EL will help us to launch a modern after-the-war lottery as the governments are ready to support after-the-war reconstruction of Ukraine.

Slava Ukraini! (Glory to Ukraine!) ■