

Speech of Nadia Volkova – on the occasion of the 2022 CCBE Human Rights Ceremony

Brussels, November 25, 2022

-Dear colleagues, dear friends,

I am truly humbled and honoured to be the recipient of this year CCBE Human Rights Award. If I were to describe the sentiments I am feeling right now I would say eternal gratefulness for your support which is priceless in these trying times for Ukrainian people, hope and inspiration which give me strength and courage to carry on: carry on helping others to fight for their rights, to fight for their freedom and to fight for their identity.

When I was little it did not take me long to figure out what I wanted to be, it almost felt that I was born with that knowledge: I knew early on that I wanted to be a lawyer and I wanted to make the world a better place. What I did not notice however as I was growing up was that that aspiration was not necessarily taken seriously. For many experienced professionals it did not sound serious enough or concrete enough. And at some point, when I still lacked confidence and I was applying for pupillages after having been called to the Bar of England and Wales I started coming up with other generic answers which were considered “more acceptable” so to speak to explain why I wanted to be a barrister specialising in human rights. But then I realised that my answer although may have sounded broad and vague, it was what it was, it was honest and it was real. I believe that each of us can make their own contribution to make our world we live in a better place. Although I was not accepted into the pupillage, I still found the way to fulfill my aspiration. When the war broke out in Ukraine in 2014 I also had an epiphany when I realised it was not the pupillage that I had to be chasing somewhere in England. I had to be in Ukraine, putting my knowledge and experience to use by helping people who needed it thereby making their lives a little bit easier to live, by defending them, by standing up for them and with them. And this is my way to make this world a better place in that corner where Ukraine is.

I feel deep gratitude to those who have stood by me and supported me throughout, my parents of course, my family, my teachers and professors and even those who made the decision not to offer me pupillage. I am eternally grateful to my team at Ukrainian Legal Advisory Group, without their dedication, hard work and their trust in me, the work that I have done and continue doing would not have been possible; to all my international colleagues who are also my friends who have been a constant source of inspiration and new ideas; to my colleagues at Ukraine 5 AM Coalition with whom we continue on our mission to build a stronger Ukraine regardless of the circumstances. And, of course, to those who decided to nominate me for this award and those who decided that I was worthy. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I want to dedicate it to all the survivors who have trusted me and my team at ULAG to fight for their rights, for their freedom for their identity as members of Ukrainian nation. Getting on this path of legal battles is hard and I admire their strength, courage and determination and I feel it is my duty as a human rights lawyer to do them justice by making sure they get their justice, they have their dignity returned to them and their strength to carry on living and building Ukrainian nation even if others say and do everything to ensure that it does not exist. Ukraine will be reborn and it will be reborn as a better place with better everything, including

its justice system which will be able to protect the rights of its people. There is a long way to go, but we have patience and we have resilience, we the support, solidarity and compassion – this is definitely a good recipe for success.