

Ukraine: criminal group within the Prosecutor General's Office

Marcin Jędrysiak

On 4 September, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) searched the office of Prosecutor General Ruslan Kravchenko. On the same day, the agency announced that it had carried out Operation Carthage, targeting an organised criminal group operating within the Prosecutor General's Office. According to NABU, in 2025 prosecutor Serhii Kropyva, head of the cybercrime department at the Prosecutor General's Office, and his associates established a criminal organisation that took bribes from 'businessmen' running illegal call centres in return for promising not to interfere with their activities – a form of protection known as *krysha*. The proceeds were subsequently laundered through purchases of real estate and jewellery or by transferring money to an account held by a relative. The group allegedly obtained up to \$24 million a month through this scheme.

Prosecutor General Kravchenko allegedly provided Kropyva with protection, but he has not been charged so far. He has also announced an internal review of the Prosecutor General's Office and polygraph testing of staff in the relevant units responsible for investigations into call centres. Kropyva has been suspended from his duties and remanded in custody, with bail set at 120 million hryvnias (\$2.7 million).

The scandal has discredited the leadership of the Prosecutor General's Office and, more broadly, undermined the power structure shaped by President Zelensky. At the same time, by moving against the Prosecutor General's Office, which is subordinate to the government, the anti-corruption agencies have demonstrated their increasingly prominent role in the country. Their actions could accelerate a genuine crackdown on illegal call centres, which have long been a major source of illicit revenue.

Commentary

- **The scandal has exposed the vast scale of corruption in the Prosecutor General's Office and weakened President Zelensky's position.** The ruling camp appointed Kravchenko prosecutor general in 2025 because it could control him, a choice repeatedly criticised by the opposition and anti-corruption activists. The government probably anticipated NABU's move: on 1 September, Zelensky said that illegal call centres had to be shut down, and the following day submitted a draft law to this effect. From August onwards, the Prosecutor General's Office itself had been reporting the closure of some such call centres and giving these operations extensive publicity. However, the campaign targeted only selected centres, often those linked to Oleh Tatarov, deputy head of the Presidential

Office, indicating rivalry within the ruling camp over access to illicit revenues. Consequently, the case has discredited the Prosecutor General's Office, becoming yet another scandal at the highest levels of government within just a few months (see '[Ukraine: another corruption scandal within Zelensky's inner circle](#)'). This will undoubtedly damage the president politically, further eroding his near-monopoly on power in Ukraine.

- **Illegal call centres are a major source of illicit revenue in Ukraine.** They operate like organised businesses, complete with managers, training systems, ready-made call scripts, fake websites and forged documents. Their employees have defrauded both Ukrainians and citizens of other European countries and Russia by impersonating banks, technical support services or law enforcement officers. They have directed victims to fake investment platforms, thereby gaining access to their bank accounts. The EU and the UK have been pressing the Ukrainian government to shut them down. According to the Swiss NGO Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, as many as 1,500 such centres operate in Ukraine, employing some 60,000 people. Their combined turnover may be as high as \$12 billion a year, equivalent to 5.5% of Ukraine's GDP. The fee for protection provided by law enforcement agencies was around \$10,000-20,000 a month, but unofficial reports in the Ukrainian media suggest that it rose to \$24,000 after Kravchenko took office. Dissatisfaction with this 'price hike' likely prompted one of the call centre managers to alert NABU to the scheme.
- **The NABU operation has strengthened the position of Ukraine's anti-corruption agencies.** The timing of the move against the Prosecutor General's Office was intended to prevent the government from creating the impression that it had been genuinely combating this criminal activity. In this way, NABU has also weakened the position of the Prosecutor General's Office, which, together with the Security Service of Ukraine, had been used by the Presidential Office to attack NABU and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (see '[Rivalry between state services: the fight for control over combating corruption in Ukraine](#)').