

Personal Account of the EuroCOP delegation visit to Ukraine from EuroCOP President Jonne Rinne, September 2025



I want to share with you my experiences from the trip to Ukraine, which took place together with EuroCOP and the All-Ukrainian Trade Union of the National Police from October 2-6, 2025. In addition to me, the Head of The Office Nigel Dennis travelled to Kyiv as part of the EuroCOP delegation. Due to the arrangements for the trip and especially the associated security measures, information about the trip was provided sparingly before it took place and during the visit itself.

During the visit, we travelled to the areas of Kyiv, Irpin, and Bucha. We met with the country's top police leadership as well as representatives of regional associations via Teams. The visit was scheduled with 10-minute precision, and the intensity of the program was illustrated, for example, by the entry in the schedule from 10:00 PM to 7:00 AM marked as Leisure Time for sleeping and recovery. We visited the Irpin bridge, which the Ukrainians destroyed when Russia tried to forcefully advance towards Kyiv through it. The Ukrainians had built a completely new bridge next to the former one, as they claimed that repairing the previous bridge would have been built 'on blood and bones.'

A cemetery of cars, pictured below, was a monument to commemorate the suffering of civilians on the bridge in a situation where they were trying to reach Kyiv but were attacked by the Russians while on the bridge. The Russians bombed civilians trying to leave the city, and there were hundreds of deaths. The seriousness of the situation is illustrated by the fact that the distance from Kyiv to the Irpin bridge is about 30 kilometres, which is almost the same as from the centre of Helsinki to Kerava or Järvenpää. The Russian attack in this direction was stopped at the last possible stage. In Bucha, we were told about the genocide in all its magnitude and about the fate of people in the midst of the genocide. We visited the destroyed churches and were told extensively about the destruction and its stages after the Russian armoured column arrived in the city. As a visitor to the place, hearing about people's fates was a deeply harrowing experience that will never be forgotten.

I want to share a few observations I made during the trip that have so far interested many. First of all, the question of how local police and other civilians we met during the trip view the war. The answer from everyone was that they see the war as their destiny, which they were meant to face. Of course, Ukrainians are grateful for and appreciate Western aid, but ultimately their view is that they themselves are responsible for the war and the battles fought in it. Another observation related to my preconceived notion that reconstruction in Ukraine would begin after the war. It does not. It is already in full swing. New houses were being built, damaged ones had been repaired and were being repaired, and the desire to rebuild what had been destroyed was palpable. The reason for this was that Ukrainians want to show that the country belongs to them, that it is their home, and that they are not going anywhere. Of course, the extent of the destruction, especially in the eastern parts of the country, is certainly greater, but as we know, no area of Ukraine has completely escaped the devastation.

On the night between Saturday and Sunday, one of the largest airstrikes directed at Ukraine since the expansion of the war in February 2022, was witnessed. The air raid alert came shortly after 1am and was issued both via sirens and the mobile phone alert app. At the end of the video, sounds can be heard which, to my understanding, come from the area's air defences that intercepted drones heading towards Kyiv. The night was spent in the bomb shelter located on the ground floor of the hotel, which was attended not only by hotel guests but also by local residents seeking protection. After morning broke and the hosts arrived at the hotel, the locals contacted their relatives and friends to check that everyone was okay. The extent of the attack was illustrated by the fact that during the night the strike against Ukraine included 50 missiles launched from air and land, as well as 500 drones. There were casualties and injuries in this case as well, and afterwards President Zelensky widely condemned the silence of Western countries regarding the incident.

On the day of departure, we had the opportunity to visit the Ministry of Interior's hospital in Kyiv, which receives patients seriously injured in frontline conditions for long-term care. In Ukraine, there are about 100,000 police officers, of whom 8,000–10,000 operate in frontline conditions, meaning they effectively fight on the front lines. The police actively participate in regular policing activities, investigating and analyzing the destruction caused by bombings, as well as in frontline military operations. It was touching to meet fellow officers, some of whom were my age or younger, and who had been seriously injured as a result of the war.

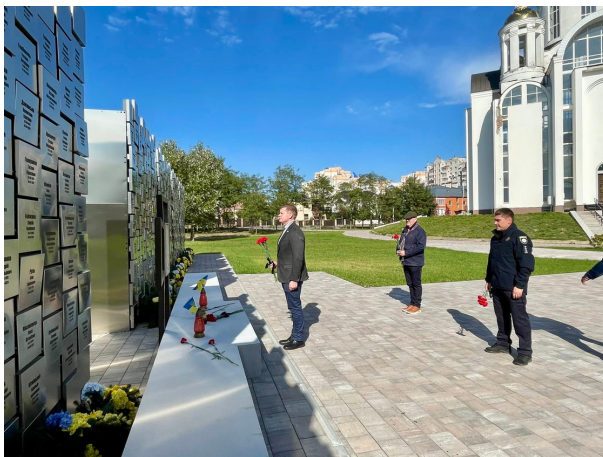
What was remarkable was that they wanted to share experiences with us, even though at first we might have seemed like just one visitor group coming from the West to learn about the conditions. The suspicion toward us was, for understandable reasons, palpable at first, but it dissipated when Gennadii Georgiienko, the chairman of the All-Ukrainian Trade Union of the National Police, explained that the union is part of the EuroCOP family and that we had come so that we could personally report both at home in Finland and in Brussels about the situation and conditions in Ukraine. EuroCOP supports the efforts of Ukrainians and does its part to ensure that Ukraine's situation and the support for Ukrainians are not forgotten. After this, the atmosphere of the visit changed significantly. We were no longer merely strangers or a single visitor group.

On Sunday, we also visited Maidan and I had the honour of laying flowers at the Finnish memorial, which honours Finnish fighters who fell in the country. We were introduced to the city of Kyiv and the lifestyle of its residents during the war. There was an oppressive atmosphere everywhere, as the next airstrike could come at any moment. We were told that if the attack had continued on Sunday, the city would have practically emptied, and people would have returned home to prepare for Monday, when daily life in the country would continue and people would go to work and school.

Finally, I want to share one experience. Wherever we visited, we were told how much Ukrainians appreciate the fact that we arrived in the country despite the risk we were prepared to take by visiting a nation at war. I admit that on the first day, I thought this was a phrase commonly used out of politeness. However, during the visit, it became clear that an attack could start at any moment, suddenly and completely unpredictably, like lightning from a clear sky. The locals' experience was that this risk simply had to be taken, and in their words, it was a 'Russian roulette,' where anyone's fate could come at any moment. Although we had taken exemplary care of security arrangements throughout the visit, it became clear that not everything can be guarded against, despite air-raid warning systems. The risk of being targeted by an attack was always present.

I was asked in advance whether it was necessary to go there and afterward whether the trip was worth it. The answer to both is unequivocally "yes." It's one thing to hear a hundred stories and quite another to witness everything with your own eyes. It's a completely different matter to speak to decision-makers in Finland or Europe referring to what I have heard or been told than to refer to the fact that I have visited the place myself and heard and seen it through the accounts of locals and my own eyes. This is the message that we, as EuroCOP, will strongly convey going forward.

During the five days and three full days of visits, there is time to get to know colleagues and especially the hosts of the visit. The hardest part after the trip was understanding that Ukrainians and colleagues continued to live in circumstances that, despite extensive news coverage, remain very distant for many. I have personally comforted myself with the thought that our work is not behind us, but still ahead. I will do my best to ensure that the situation in Ukraine is not left unclear to the decision-makers I meet as president of EuroCOP. I also gave this promise to our hosts.



Photos from the National Police and All-Ukrainian Trade Union of the National Police