



## Why Sidewalks Matter: What You Can Do For Your Community

Well, another one bites the dust. Recently former Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk announced his resignation, due to his lack of popularity that in no small part derives from his perceived inability to crack down on corruption. Political turmoil hasn't escaped us more locally either, as Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyi has had his feet held to the fire for his poor handling of violence at a LGBT conference staged in the city last month. Yes, while Ukrainians have never been known to trust their political leaders, it seems that support for elected officials has reached an all-time low. Two years after the EuroMaidan protests were supposed to usher in a new era of transparency and honest government, two-thirds of Ukrainians still view corruption as a serious problem and more than 1 in 5 say they've personally witnessed a bribe in the last two years. So what is an average Ukrainian to do about it all?

### *The Differing Sets of Rules in Ukraine*

As anyone who has spent any amount of time in Ukraine knows, there are two different kinds of rules – rules that you can break, and those you can't. I recall the story of patronising a certain swimming establishment and had a good chuckle over seeing the phrase "severely forbidden" on the list of rules. After explaining to my Ukrainian friends that forbidden is word that just can't be quantified, they thought about it and – over a half hour later – explained to me that in Ukraine, things CAN actually be "severely forbidden". In their words, "In Ukraine, some things are against the rules, while others are REALLY against the rules". Take, for example, smoking on a train. By law it is illegal; but does that stop anybody? Bribes are also against the law; but they aren't just accepted – they are often expected. But what does this have to do with anything?

### *The Problem with Ukrainian Drivers*

If you've had the supreme fortune of sharing the roads and highways with Ukrainian drivers, you'll surely know where I'm headed here. From driving on the wrong side of the road, to not having lights on when driving at night, to reaching insane speeds of up to 200 km/h,

to parking wherever four tires can rest, driving in Ukraine is not for the faint of heart. There are several problems when it comes to driving in Ukraine – everything from having (or being able) to pay bribes to get out of a ticket to purchasing a licence without ever taking (or passing!) a driver's exam – there really is no shortage of things to complain about. Yet maybe the most infuriating problem is the complete lack of courtesy that drivers show toward each other. Those that have spent any time on the road I'm sure can recall a time (every time?) when a line of cars decides to speed up when they see the light change to red. These scoundrels end up getting caught in the intersection, blocking traffic from every direction getting anywhere, and holding up all of their fellow drivers. It's a selfish move to be sure, and perhaps indicative of a larger problem in the country.

### *What Does Your Sidewalk Look Like?*

A friend of mine offered me a very interesting piece of advice: "You can tell a lot about a country based on its sidewalks", he says, "You see, a sidewalk is a community issue. The federal government won't fix your sidewalk. It's up to committed citizens to see that it's done." Unfortunately, in Ukraine, that's not always the case. While individual apartments may be beautifully renovated and modern, stairwells, building exteriors, and yes, even sidewalks, often leave much to be desired. Sure it's easy to lambaste Ukrainian politicians for their failures, shortcomings, or even criminal actions. But if we want to make a difference, maybe it's better to look inwards, at ourselves. Am I one that races through a yellow light only to find myself blocking traffic? Have I paid a small bribe to anyone recently? Is my sidewalk outside in good condition? We can't let the politicians get off the hook. But we also need to be holding ourselves to account in the same manner.

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