

POLITICS

Ukrainians reflect on war four years on

Prof: 'There are many reasons why Ukraine can still win this war'



by **Samuel Gelinus**
March 2, 2026



Students Alisa Mikhieieva, Olesia Rozhanska and Yuliia Zaitseva discussed their experience of being students while their homeland, Ukraine, continues to be clouded over by war. SAMUEL GELINAS / Satff Photo



🔊 Ukrainians reflect on war four years on

5:28

1x

Everlit

AMHERST — When the war in Ukraine erupted four years ago, it was just another day for many in the country. Alisa Mikhieieva, a third-year high school student, had exams. Olesia Rozhanska, a self-proclaimed heavy sleeper, woke up late to the news.

But despite an unassuming beginning, the conflict would ultimately upend their lives and bring them, and many other Ukrainians, to the United States. On Friday, Ukrainian professors and students in the area shared their stories at the UMass Isenberg School of Management thanks to a partnership between the Kyiv School of Economics and the university.

The group of three professors and three students said they remain confident their homeland won't cave under Russian aggression despite doubts about Ukraine coming out victorious. In fact, they said, after four years of war, Ukraine has hardly bent under pressure.

"I believe that you should still believe in us, because nobody expected that Ukraine is so strong to resist such a big country," said Nataliia Bychkova, a visiting associate professor of economics at Amherst College.

Myroslav Kryven, an assistant professor of computer science at Amherst College, and self-described numbers guy, said the numbers are showing signs of hope.

"There is a lot of misinformation going on that Ukraine is losing — that's not the case. There are many reasons why Ukraine can still win this war," he said.

Despite years of fighting, Russia occupies approximately 20% of Ukraine's internationally recognized territory and little progress is being made in occupying more of the country.

"If you look at the advancement of Russia, they have not taken a lot of land for a long time," Kryven said. "In fact, they lost a lot of land after they took it at the beginning."

With international aid, Ukraine's economy also continues to function, and the country's defense industry has ballooned by 55%.

“Another interesting fact is that the Ukrainian economy, despite all the horrible destruction, is still growing,” he said. “Now that growth is also due to the support that’s coming from everybody, and that’s why it’s important to continue it.”

Regarding the economy, the professors and students shared how the war has shifted the priorities of researchers and students back home.

For one, the students shared, people are growing up much faster. Young people also are pursuing more “practical” careers like tech innovation and drone technology.

“Everyone is really serious, and it feels like everyone has grown up too quickly because of the war,” Rozhanska, a student, said.

Student Yuliia Zaitseva has also witnessed this among her Ukrainian peers.

“I entered university in 2023. Studying during the war was completely normal for us. From the early start, studying was flexible because you didn’t know what the day will bring and can interrupt your classes,” she said. “You always need to keep safety in your mind. And over time this also changes students because people become more serious and more practical, they become more helpful to each other.”

Economics professor Anna Nagurny, of the Isenberg School of Management, moderated the event which drew about two dozen audience members. She asked the students to contrast their educational experience of being in Amherst compared to back home. The students noted that in Amherst there is a sense of stability that can’t be achieved in a war-torn environment.

The professors said there have been pros and cons for researchers. On the one hand, the country has experienced a substantial “brain drain,” since so many Ukrainian intellectuals have fled their homeland. On the other hand, the war also has brought them into contact with ideas outside the country and fostered international collaboration.



Professors Nataliia Bychkova, Myroslav Kryven and Bogdan Prokopovych talk about their traditional Ukrainian embroidery. SAMUEL GELINAS / Staff Photo

Bychkova noted that a key research objective involves drawing investors and international businesses.

“The main focus of researchers right now is to prove and to show that investment in Ukraine is supposed to be profitable,” she said.

Kryven said that there has been a defense industry boom accompanied by research. Over the past year Ukraine has manufactured four million drones, “and there’s going to be even more next year, and there is a lot of research that also flows into that, engineering components and parts,” he said.

In addition to giving updates on Ukraine in 2026, the group also reflected on the morning of Feb. 24, 2022, when Russia invaded.

Bychkova was skiing when the war broke out. After five days, she would leave the country and head to Europe.

“We were not expecting that war would happen,” she said.

Kryven said, “I remember I was not in Ukraine when the war started. I was actually in the U.S. at the time and the war started in the morning in Ukraine, so in the U.S. it was evening time and I remember checking my phone, checking social media and then I started getting messages from people that I had not heard from for multiple years asking me, ‘Oh, are you OK?’”

He added: “I didn’t even see the news, but at that moment, I realized I have a guess why they are asking. So I checked the news and didn’t sleep that night.”

Bogdan Prokopovych, a senior lecturer in the Isenberg’s Management Department, said he received waves of support.

“Our memory blocks all the negatives, right?” he said. “All the worrying about family and friends. But you know what I remember? I remember actually the outpouring of support... everyone offered help.”

But the war didn’t start out on a quiet note for everyone. On the morning Russia invaded, student Zaitseva went to a shelter with her father.

“The shelter was very crowded — people tried to stay calm while also checking their phones. Some children were crying. Adults also tried to stay calm, but you can feel this fear and [it was] tense in the room. After some time, we heard an explosion and it was quiet, because all the people in the shelter became quiet in a moment.

“And from that morning, much of my life was changed,” she said.