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Ukraine taps lobbyist to cement SpaceX deal for satellite launch

by [Mikayla Easley](#)

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[Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Oleg Urusky / open source](#)

Ukraine has hired the CEO of a Florida-based solar energy company to advance President **Volodymyr Zelenskyy**'s plans to launch a satellite into space.

Vice Prime Minister **Oleg Urusky** joined with **Enerkon Solar International** CEO [Benjamin Ballout](#) to conduct “**pro bono commercial lobby support**” in the US, according to new lobbying filings. The contract is with New York-based **Diplomatic Trade Ltd.**, which is **affiliated with Enerkon and also run by Ballout**.

The firm will help organize “**commercial meetings**” for Urusky during his visit to the United States later this month, including with **Elon Musk**'s **SpaceX**, Ballout told *Foreign Lobby Report* in an email. Urusky heads the Ministry of Strategic Industries, a new state office established by Zelenskyy last summer to focus on industrial development, defense and high-tech industries.

Ukraine [began](#) talks with SpaceX in December to launch its Sich 2-1 satellite into orbit by the end of 2021, which marks the 30th anniversary of independence from the Soviet Union. SpaceX recently agreed to launch the satellite for \$1 million, Ukrainian media [reported](#).

The satellite would capture regular and near-infrared images of Earth and monitor its magnetic field. Urusky wrote in a Feb. 1 [Facebook post](#) that having its own satellite would benefit Ukraine's economy and national security.

“The presence of such spacecraft,” he wrote, “will not only help solve a wide range of tasks, both in the interests of the economy and security agencies, but also save the budget funds spent today on purchasing services provided by such vehicles abroad.”

The revival of Ukraine's domestic space industry is seen as essential for national security, according to an [analysis](#) by **Alla Hurksa** of the **International Center for Policy Studies** in Kyiv. The country continues to battle Russian-backed separatists in the eastern Donbass region and faces intense military pressure from Moscow.

“If Ukraine is able to successfully implement the program and provide stable financing, the country will be able to eliminate its dependence on foreign providers and will receive a powerful orbital grouping of remote-sensing satellites that should greatly enhance the technical capabilities of Ukrainian intelligence,” Hurska wrote in an April 2020 piece published by the Jamestown Foundation. “For example, remote-sensing data received from the Sich-2-1 could determine the buildup of enemy forces in a specific area, their composition and size, and approximate combat readiness.”

Ballout said that **Enerkon** is also developing **solar energy and hydrogen electrolysis projects in the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exclusion zone as part of the relationship with Ukraine**. The company will be working with the state-owned **Ukrainian Road Telecommunication Systems Company** for the projects.

The agreement comes as Ukraine is looking to turn around a crisis in its once-booming renewable energy sector.

As part of its Ukraine work, **Diplomatic Trade** is also tasked with attracting investment from companies such as **Cisco Systems, Nokia, Erickson**, and others as potential partners to develop the country's 5G network, according to a March 5 [press release](#) announcing its lobbying filing.



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Mikayla Easley is an editorial intern at Foreign Lobby Report. She is a graduate student at the University of Missouri researching U.S. media coverage of Russia. In the past she's worked at the Columbia Missourian and Vox Magazine as a reporter and editor, covering state government, public health and public safety. She is also a proud University of Michigan alumna.