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## Missing At War

### Fates of hundreds of soldiers and civilians in the war zone still unknown



Blank spaces with the words "considered missing" are shown among portraits of Ukrainian soldiers killed in Russia's war on Ukraine on the walls of St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kyiv. There are more than 80 of these blank spaces among the 3,000 portraits. (Volodymyr Petrov)

BY OKSANA GRYTSENKO  
GRYTSENKO@KYIVPOST.COM

**ZAKITNE, Ukraine** — Among the tall and fragrant grass in a ravine by a wheat field, Oleksiy Yukov found a fragment of a human rib bone.

Yukov and his colleague from the Black Tulip humanitarian organization, which searches for the bodies of missing people, spent the next few hours combing the site. They uncovered several dozen human

bones, live bullets, syringes, scraps of camouflage, and a sweater with holes from shrapnel and old stains of blood.

Yukov reckoned the remains belonged to a Russian-backed fighter killed near the village of Zakitne, some 640 kilometers southeast of Kyiv, in fighting with the Ukrainian army in the summer of 2014.

Locals told Yukov that three fighters had been left there unburied for several months. Dogs had started

carrying some of the bones away before officials, presumably from Ukraine's SBU state security service, collected the remains.

Yukov decided to examine the site, knowing that state forensics specialists often miss parts of dead bodies and fail to identify them correctly.

"Nobody really cares about this," Yukov said. "And the mother of this guy is probably still looking for him."

There are many such mothers: The three-year-old Russian-instigated war

in eastern Ukraine has already taken about 10,000 lives, according to the United Nations.

And some 1,000 to 2,000 people are missing — neither dead nor alive — according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, which collects missing person reports from families on both sides of the front line.

There are no exact numbers because several government bodies, the Russian-backed occupying

authorities in the Donbas, international organizations, and volunteers count them separately, and they rarely cooperate.

The toll of missing people includes the Ukrainian and Russian soldiers, Ukrainian fighters that collaborated with the Russian-led forces, and civilians. Most went missing in action, were abducted from their homes, or from the streets, or at checkpoints,

more **Missing** on page **10**

Inside:

National 2, 3, 8 – 11 | Business 6, 7  
Opinion 4, 5 | Lifestyle 12 – 14, 16  
Employment/Real Estate/Classifieds 15

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# Caught in crossfire, Ukrainians prod their government for compensation

BY JOSH KOVENSKY  
KOVENSKY@KYIVPOST.COM

**KRASNOHORIVKA, Ukraine** — It was a loud day in Krasnohorivka on May 28.

The Donetsk Oblast city of 15,000 people, 715 kilometers southeast of Kyiv, was shelled in a barrage that battered the hospital, a school and a local apartment building.

Olga Valeryevna, the owner of an apartment that took a direct hit during the shelling, had been living with a friend in a different building since the apartment lost running water.

After seeing photos of the bombardment on the internet, she headed over to the building. Where the third and fourth floor apartments once stood, there was now a gaping hole facing the Russian-occupied city of Donetsk to the east.

"If anybody had been inside, they would have been destroyed," Olga Valeryevna said. She did not give her last name, fearing retaliation from local authorities.

The apartment owner and Krasnohorivka native is now joining dozens of other Ukrainians in suing the government for compensation over homes, land and property damaged during the Russian-backed war in the Donbas.

With help from Right to Protection, a United Nations High Commission for Refugees-funded and Ukrainian-run group that provides legal support and advocacy on behalf of displaced people and others, Olga Valeryevna is part of a group moving to set a precedent under Ukrainian law that could see the government compensate people whose property has been damaged due to the war.

"In some cases, people in these situations can find other sources of housing," said Vladimir Oleksenko, Right to Protection's Mariupol regional director. "In other cases, these people become homeless."

Right to Protection has so far filed around Hr 11 million (\$423,800) in claims over property damaged by the war.

The U.S. Agency for International Development has supported similar litigation, funding the Ukraine Helsinki Human Rights Union in another effort to win compensation through the country's courts, while law firm ILF has done pro bono work in the European Court of Human Rights on the issue.

## Not at war?

Ukrainian citizens, like those in Krasnohorivka, are legally entitled



Right to Protection employee Ruslan Bereteli helps a Krasnohorivka resident prepare documents for a compensation claim on July 4. The town is located around one kilometer from the front line, exposing it to frequent shelling. (Kostyantyn Chernichkin)

→ "Apart from this, I have nothing" — owner of shelled Krasnohorivka apartment

to compensation for property damaged during war. But the government often does not recognize that right, and fails to pay compensation.

"Even if a person wins in a domestic court, the country doesn't have the money to pay him," said Andriy Kristenko, an attorney at ILF law firm who works on compensation cases.

Ukraine could be forced to fulfill its obligation through a victory at the European Court of Human Rights — as the country is a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights, it is obligated to guarantee the protection of its citizens' property during war.

But Ukraine has not officially declared war against Russia or its proxy armies.

Rather, the country enacted terrorism laws in August 2014 that pro-

vided the legal basis for the officially declared anti-terrorism operation. Those laws also contain a provision stating that the Ukrainian government must compensate people for property damaged by the actions of terrorists.

And according to Darina Tolkach, advocacy coordinator at Right to Protection, the anti-terrorism laws only provide "motivation" to convince the court to rule in favor of compensation, but lack a concrete legal procedure for payouts.

"The basic problem for executing these decisions is that the government does not have a line in the budget allocating money for compensation," she said.

Tolkach described a clunky process for getting compensation. Since there is no money in the budget to provide for it, Donbas residents with damaged property effectively sell the rights to their bombed out homes to the government.

"The person with the destroyed land or destroyed house can no longer use the property, and the state provides compensation," Tolkach said.

Right to Protection has two cases that the government has appealed after lower court victories, out of a total of 11 filed in court.

"The idea is to take the cases to the final point and identify the gaps in the execution of the decisions,"

Tolkach said. "If it's not possible to execute, then we will appeal to the European Court of Human Rights."

## Hurdles

Iryna Grigorievna, another Krasnohorivka resident working with Right to Protection, has had her home shelled twice since the war began — once in 2014, and once in 2016.

"During the second hit, everything I had burned away," she said.

As her son lives in Krasnohorivka and her grandchild attends school in the town, she explained, there's little desire to leave.

"We aren't planning to go anywhere," she said.

She is now filing paperwork to collect compensation for the damage. Since the appraisal has not yet been completed, it's not clear how much she stands to gain in compensation. But with four years until she can collect her pension, any help is sorely needed.

Tolkach said that it can take up to eight months to prepare this kind of claim for court. And with a statute of limitations of three years on these kinds of damage claims, that puts the onus on local residents to beat the clock.

"What is needed is a strategy and a very coherent and clear and concrete procedure," Tolkach said.

Should the European Court rule in favor of the Donbas residents, Ukraine will have to find a way to pay compensation to people who live in the Donbas's bombed cities. The country could sue Russia for backing the separatists and receive its own compensation that way.

But that process could take years. For people like Olga Valeryevna, the apartment owner, the reality of shelling means that help cannot come fast enough.

"Apart from this, I have nothing," she said, pointing to the destroyed apartment. ■

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# 3 years after MH17 tragedy, no justice for 298 victims

BY OLENA GONCHAROVA  
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Three years to the day after Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 was shot down over Ukraine, a memorial park with 298 trees, one for each victim of the tragedy, opened on July 17 near the city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

The memorial is close to Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, where the 283 passengers and 15 crew members boarded the doomed flight. Three hours after the plane took off, their bodies started dropping out of the skies in the Russian-occupied part of Donetsk Oblast after MH17 was hit by a powerful Buk anti-aircraft missile fired by Russian-backed forces.

The memorial includes a steel sculpture, in the shape of an eye looking skyward, bearing the names of all of the victims, and the trees, which have been planted in a shape of a ribbon.

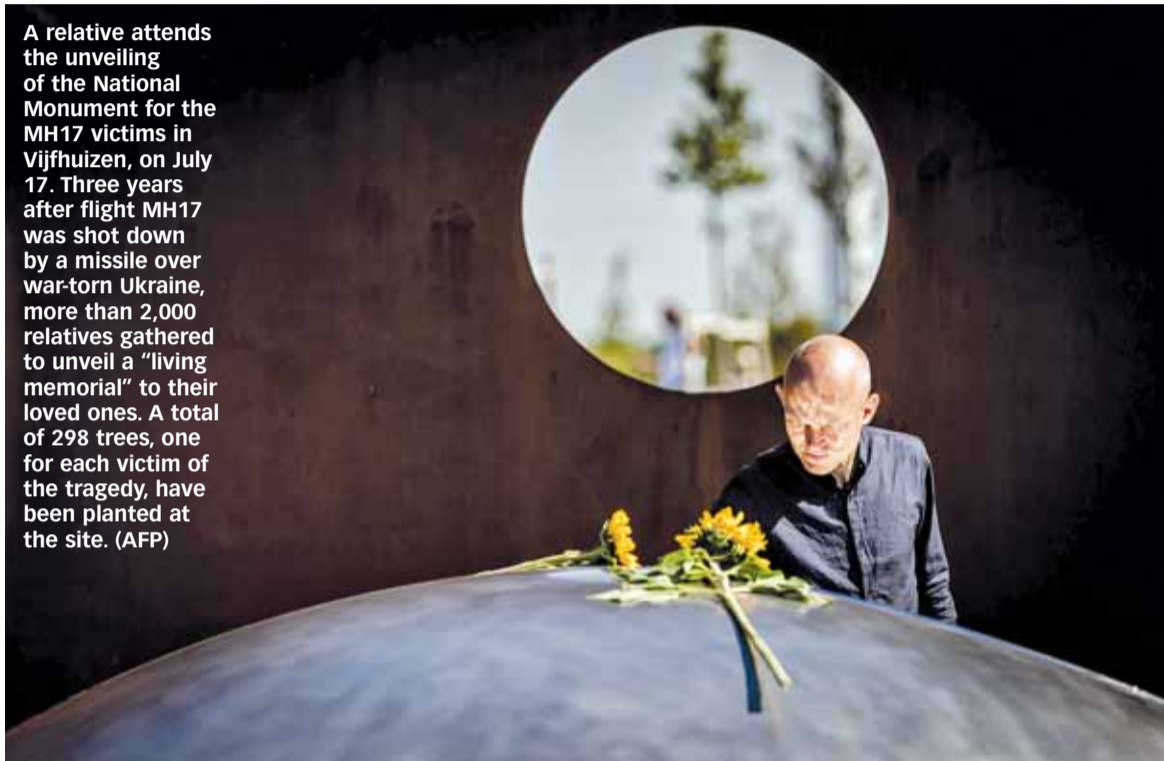
While the memorial aims to bring comfort to grieving relatives, the investigation into the tragedy is still underway, no suspects have been named and no trial has yet begun.

## Suspects

But what is already known by the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) — made up of investigators from Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Ukraine — is that the missile was fired by Buk unit 332 from part of the Donbas that was under the control of Russian-backed forces. The JIT is looking for two potential suspects known by the aliases of Orion and Delfin, whose voices are heard in wire-tapped phone conversations the team has obtained.

The open-source investigation team Bellingcat has released further information in reports that indicate that the Buk unit that shot down MH17 belonged to Russia's 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade, based in Kursk.

A relative attends the unveiling of the National Monument for the MH17 victims in Vijfhuizen, on July 17. Three years after flight MH17 was shot down by a missile over war-torn Ukraine, more than 2,000 relatives gathered to unveil a "living memorial" to their loved ones. A total of 298 trees, one for each victim of the tragedy, have been planted at the site. (AFP)



On the third anniversary of the tragedy on July 17, Bellingcat issued a 73-page report on MH17 that summarizes the evidence of who was responsible for the mass murder of MH17's passengers and crew, as well as showing how Russia has attempted to muddy the case with misinformation.

The report documents the route a military convoy including Buk 332 took from Russia's Kursk on June 23, 2014, towards the Russia-Ukraine border, with the convoy last seen in Millerovo, Russia on June 25.

"This Buk, which was first dubbed 'Buk 3x2' due to an obscured digit on the side of the chassis, has many similarities with the one seen in Ukraine on July 17," the report reads.

Eliot Higgins, Bellingcat's founder, hopes that investigators will benefit from the report.

"Our hope is the two individuals

they (the joint investigation team) are interested in, known as Orion and Delfin, will now have renewed attention focused on them," Higgins wrote in comments e-mailed to the Kyiv Post.

The main problems the investigators might face, he said, are to identify "who exactly was crewing the Buk, what orders they had, who gave them those orders, and who decided to send a Buk to Ukraine."

## Buk movement

According to the report, Buk 332 arrived in Donetsk in the morning of July 17, 2014. For six hours before the downing of MH17, Ukrainians went online to discuss a Buk missile launcher slowly creeping through eastern Ukraine.

Just after Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 left Amsterdam, the weapon was filmed heading south out of the

Ukrainian, Russian-occupied town of Snizhne. From there, while loaded on a low-loader, the Buk traveled eastwards through separatist-controlled territory, and eventually reached the town of Snizhne in the early afternoon.

After arriving in Snizhne, Buk 332 was unloaded and drove under its own power southward, out of town until it arrived at a field south of Snizhne and fired the missile that resulted in the destruction of flight MH17.

## Intercepts

The Bellingcat team spent nearly one-and-a-half years investigating Russia's 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade, whose Buk downed MH17 in Ukraine.

"With over 200 soldiers' social media profiles identified, it has been possible to confirm the identity and roles of many members of the

53rd Brigade and their involvement in the June 23–25 convoy that transported Buk 332 to the Russia-Ukraine border," Bellingcat's July 17 report reads.

The team has also identified one of the potential suspects — Sergey "Khmury" Dubinsky, a veteran of the Russian Armed Forces who served as the head of intelligence for Igor "Strelkov" Girkin's separatist forces in 2014. Through intercepted phone calls, the report says, it is clear that Dubinsky is one of the key figures in the procurement and transport of the Buk missile launcher that downed MH17. He tells the separatist soldiers where to take the Buk and which fighters should be in the convoy with it.

A video obtained by News Corps Australia in 2015 shot by Russian-backed fighters themselves, shows them examining the site of the plane wreckage, which they initially thought was of a Ukrainian fighter jet. The video records their dismay as they minutes later discover the personal belongings of the passengers and realize that the aircraft was a commercial airliner.

"Who's opened a corridor for them to fly over here?" one of the fighters asks on the video.

A day before the tragedy, Russia banned all civil aviation flights from its airspace adjacent to Ukraine at an altitude of 16,150 meters and below, an altitude that corresponds to the Buk missile system's maximum firing range. It was much higher than Ukrainian airspace restriction, which was set at 9,754 meters for civilian aviation, reads the 2015 Dutch Safety Board report.

In response to Dutch inquiries, Russia said that it closed its airspace in order to coordinate with the restrictions imposed by Ukraine earlier, but failed to comment on the mismatch between the altitudes. ■

  
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Editorial

# State of delusion

The tragedy of Russia's war on Ukraine in the Donbas has always been mixed with absurdity: There are nonsense Kremlin denials that it sends its regular troops into Ukraine to fight; there are bizarre claims by Russia's proxies that squads of female Polish snipers, or drugged-up Ukrainian super soldiers, or African-American mercenaries are being thrown into battle against them; and there are continuing preposterous lies from the Kremlin and its Donbas proxies that Ukraine was taken over by neo-Nazis in a coup.

This ludicrous list was added to on July 18, when Oleksandr Zakharchenko, the leader of the Russian proxy forces in Donetsk, proclaimed the existence of a new country called "Malorossiia."

This new state, he said, would have its capital in Donetsk, while Kyiv would become a "cultural capital." This state would replace Ukraine, (which he absurdly described as a failed state, on the point of economic collapse), and would include all of Ukraine's current territory, apart from the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory of Crimea.

And Malorossiians would, of course, inherit Ukrainians' rights to visa-free travel in the Schengen Area.

Zakharchenko's proclamation sounds even more risible to those who know a bit about the history of Ukraine. "Malorossiia" or "Little Russia" is an old term long used by Russian nationalists and imperialists to undermine the idea of Ukrainian statehood and identity. As such, it is offensive to most modern Ukrainians. The idea is a complete non-starter.

Yet as soon as Zakharchenko made his proclamation, Ukraine- and Russia-watchers started to speculate online about what the implications of this development were, and where this inane and half-baked idea might have come from.

Could it be another dark scheme out of Moscow, presumably hatched by the sinister Kremlin mandarin Vladislav Surkov, to sidestep the Minsk peace agreement? Or worse: could it presage another military onslaught on Ukraine by Russia's proxy forces?

Well, no. For one thing, the Kremlin's other proxy statelet, centered on the Russian-occupied city of Luhansk and in control of about a third of the territory of Ukraine's Luhansk Oblast, said it had known nothing of Zakharchenko's attempt to proclaim "Malorossiia" into existence. They even said they would stick to the Minsk process, and refuted Zakharchenko's claim that a delegation from Luhansk had been at the meeting in Donetsk to summon a long-dead state from the grave.

Had "Malorossiia," (like its predecessor "Novorossiia") been a Kremlin project, the Russians presumably would have told their other proxy statelet in Ukraine about it. The Luhansk statelet, was, after all, supposed to have been part of it.

Then Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman of Russian President Vladimir Putin, refused to comment on the proposal, saying more time was needed to study it, adding that the Kremlin remains committed to the Minsk peace process, which Zakharchenko's new state flatly contradicts.

Moreover, a few hours after Zakharchenko's proclamation, the probable source of this nonsense came to light.

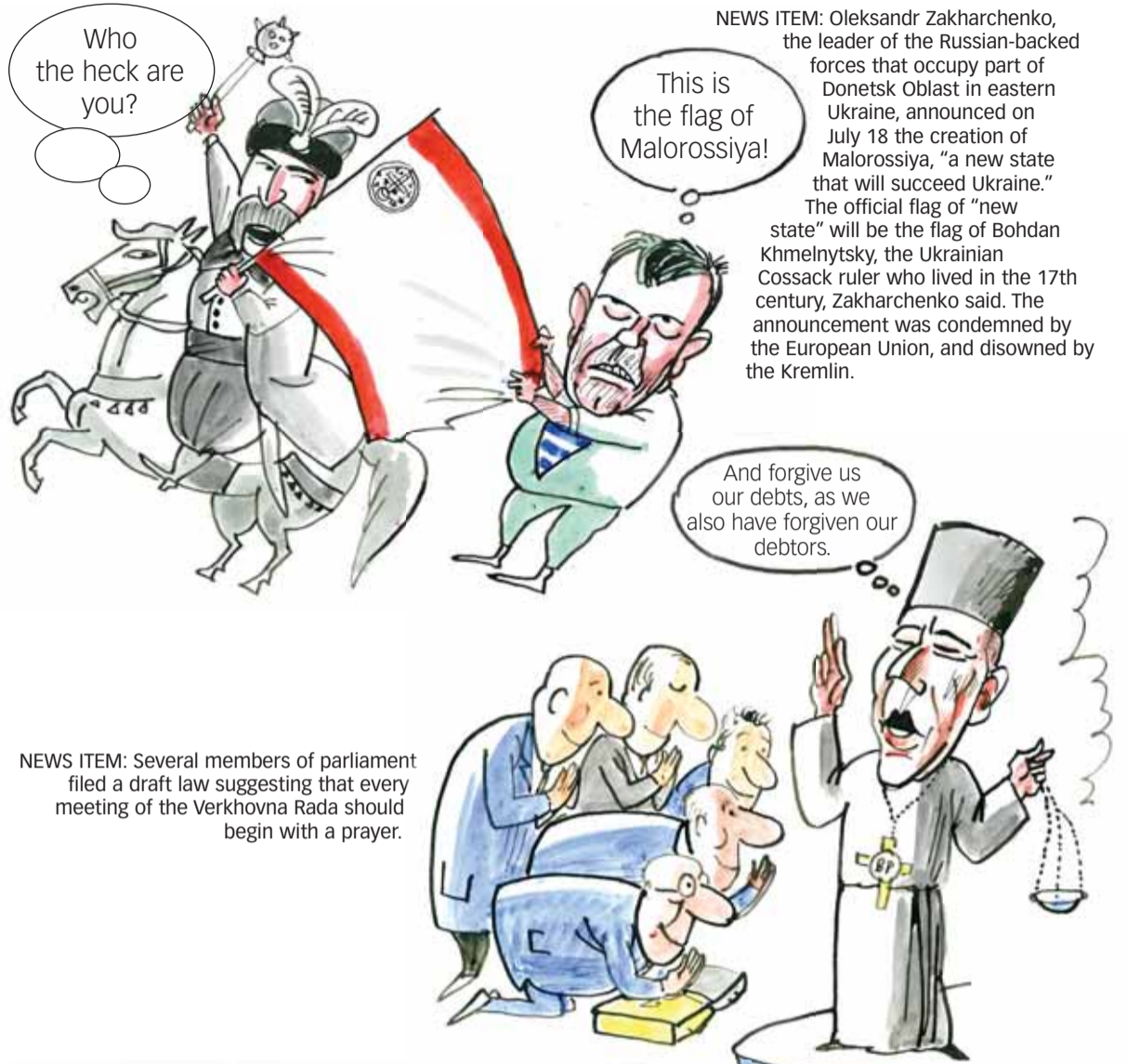
Aric Toler of the Bellingcat open-source investigations outfit uncovered an interview published that day by Komsomolskaya Pravda with Zakhar Prilepin, a Russian writer and nationalist who heads a battalion of Russian proxy fighters in Donetsk.

In the interview, Prilepin says he and unnamed associates came up with the idea of "Malorossiia" in order to "surprise" Moscow, Washington, and Kyiv. He then said, falsely, that his idea is in accord with the Minsk process – something other nationalist Russian politicians in Moscow would not even assert.

And in the interview, Prilepin sketches out other foolish ideas that Zakharchenko included in his proclamation. Toler concluded, and we agree, that Prilepin, not the Kremlin, was the one who thought up this harebrained scheme.

This silly episode illustrates one thing clearly, however. While Zakharchenko and his counterpart in Luhansk Ihor Poltnitsky were installed by the Kremlin, they are not, as Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko says, mere puppets of the Putin regime. They are perfectly capable of coming up with really dumb political initiatives all by themselves. Zakharchenko also appears delusional about the true state of affairs in Ukraine. Moreover, the rift between the proxy statelets of Donetsk and Luhansk is obvious.

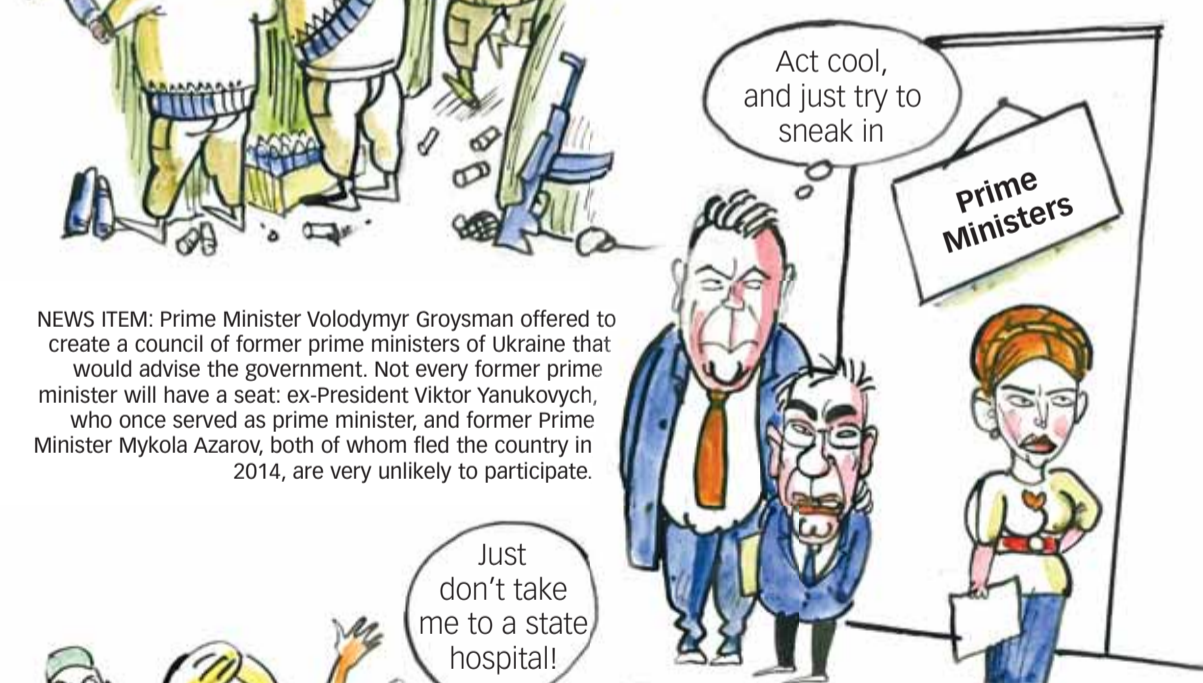
These are weaknesses that Kyiv could, with smart diplomacy, exploit.



NEWS ITEM: Several members of parliament filed a draft law suggesting that every meeting of the Verkhovna Rada should begin with a prayer.



NEWS ITEM: Lawmaker Yevhen Deydey, who is under investigation on corruption charges, said he was wounded in the war zone in Donbas on July 14. Earlier that week, the parliament refused to strip Deydey of his legislative immunity on prosecutors' demand.



NEWS ITEM: Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman offered to create a council of former prime ministers of Ukraine that would advise the government. Not every former prime minister will have a seat: ex-President Viktor Yanukovich, who once served as prime minister, and former Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, both of whom fled the country in 2014, are very unlikely to participate.



NEWS ITEM: Olga Bogomolets, a lawmaker with President Petro Poroshenko's Bloc, was hospitalized in Feofania, a special hospital that treats top-level public servants, after being taken ill in the Verkhovna Rada on June 13, just as parliament was about to consider legislation on health sector reform that Bogomolets, the head of the Health Care Committee of the parliament, opposes.

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**Reformer of the week**

**Yehveniiia Motorevska**



(hromadske.ua)

Yehveniiia Motorevska, a member of the Public Integrity Council, on July 18 criticized the High Qualification Commission's disregard for the council's vetoes of candidates for Supreme Court jobs – candidates the council deemed to be corrupt or dishonest.

The High Qualification Commission, a governing body of the judiciary, had ignored 56 percent of vetoes by the Public Integrity Council, a civil society watchdog, on 133 candidates by the time it finished considering the vetoes on July 17.

The commission ignored 81 percent of the vetoes it considered during interviews with candidates in April to May, and overrode 75 percent of the vetoes that it considered in June to July.

One of the overridden vetoes was that of Valentyna Symonenko, head of the Council of Judges. Symonenko's ex-husband has a business in Crimea, while her sister is an official who works for the Russian occupation government on the annexed peninsula, Motorevska said.

Another candidate supported by the High Qualification Commission is incumbent Supreme Court Chairman Yaroslav Romanyuk, who backed the Jan. 16, 2014 laws that cracked down on civil liberties.

The commission, which denies accusations of wrongdoing, has often ignored information on judges' undeclared property, their lawless decisions and participation in political cases.

– Oleg Sukhov

**Anti-reformer of the week**

**Olga Bogomolets**



(Olga Bogomolets/facebook)

Olga Bogomolets, head of the Verkhovna Rada's health care committee, had failed to sign up to a health care reform bill ahead of the Verkhovna Rada's last day of work on July 13, effectively blocking the legislation.

Acting Health Minister Ulana Suprun's reform aims to eliminate loopholes for graft in the health care system, make budget money "follow the patient" and introduce international best practices for treatment. Instead of signing the bill, Bogomolets went to Kyiv's Feofania Hospital for treatment on July 13, prompting comparisons with State Fiscal Service Chief Roman Nasirov, who was brought there on the eve of his arrest in a graft case in March. But on the same day, Bogomolets voted for a bill that would give President Petro Poroshenko effective control over the Constitutional Court, triggering speculation on whether she was voting herself or someone was using her voting card.

Another opponent of the health care reform, Bogomolets' deputy on the committee, Oleh Musiy, attended a rally on July 13 in front of the Health Ministry in protest at Suprun's proposals. A demonstrator with a poster of ex-President Viktor Yanukovich's Party of Regions was seen at the protest. Dmytro Gurin, an advisor at the Health Ministry, published a video of a woman that he said had distributed money to the protesters.

Musiy and Bogomolets, as well as Borys Todurov, the head of Kyiv's Heart Institute, and Poroshenko Bloc lawmaker Glib Zahoriy have been accused of using their government connections to promote their business interests in the healthcare industry – charges that they deny.

– Oleg Sukhov

**VOX popul**

WITH REGINA DICKSON



**Should Ukrainian members of parliament have immunity?**



**Ksenia Nazimko**

*IT worker*  
"I think it's best to remove immunity, because in the light of the recent events

people are demanding more from members of parliament. Most MPs obviously don't like this, because they were involved in very serious business, and it was very often illegal, but it benefits Ukraine and all citizens that pay taxes."



**Gulnara Beridze**

*Financial department head*

"I think that we probably don't need to keep immunity. The

things that we fought for, for a very long time, was that everyone would be on equal terms, that's why I think that we probably don't need to keep immunity."



**Shadi Al'lababidi**

*Tech company CEO*

"I think MPs shouldn't have immunity. I think they need to

be accountable to the people. Especially in a democratic society. The whole point of MPs having immunity was to protect them from wrongdoing. But there's no incentive for them to represent the people or not do something bad."



**Zhenia Sekor**

*Missionary*

"I don't think there should be any immunity, because we're so corrupt and all that, that it's just unnecessary. We don't live in a country that needs it, in my opinion. I think that in some situations it's needed, but definitely not in our country."



**Lilya Kartifuzova**

*Doctor*

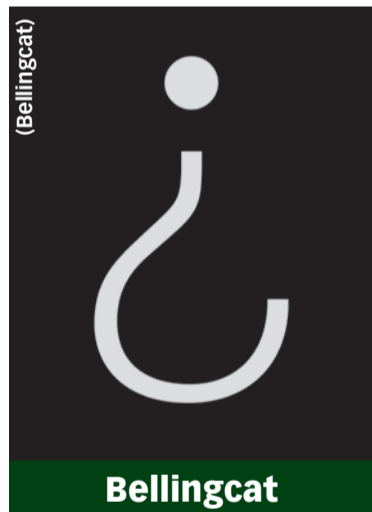
"I think that if people have nothing to hide and everything is good in their life, then they don't

need immunity. But if a person is unclean, either they have immunity or don't have it, they still must get what they deserve. Everything in life must be balanced. That's why I think that it's best to take immunity away from them, so that everything would be honest and open."

– Euan MacDonald

**Ukraine's Friend & Foe Of The Week**

*Editor's Note: This feature separates Ukraine's friends from its enemies. The Order of Yaroslav the Wise has been given since 1995 for distinguished service to the nation. It is named after the Kyivan Rus leader from 1019-1054, when the medieval empire reached its zenith. The Order of Lenin was the highest decoration bestowed by the Soviet Union, whose demise Russian President Vladimir Putin mourns. It is named after Vladimir Lenin, whose corpse still rots on the Kremlin's Red Square, 100 years after the October Revolution he led.*



The third anniversary of the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over Russian-occupied territory in the Donbas was marked with a somber ceremony near Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, where the ill-fated aircraft took off on its final flight on July 17, 2014.

For the families of the 298 people who died in the skies of eastern Ukraine on that day, it has been a painful journey of recovery from grief. But they have been helped on their way by a team of online researchers, who may have done more than anyone else – Dutch air-crash and police investigators included – to uncover what befell MH17, and who was responsible.

The team, called Bellingcat, was launched on July 15, 2014, just two days before the shooting down of MH17. Its founder, UK activist Eliot Higgins, had since March 2012

established a reputation as one of the foremost online investigators for his work on videos from the civil war in Syria.

Within hours of the shoot down, Higgins, together with team at Bellingcat, began online investigations of photographs and video coming out of eastern Ukraine connected to the MH17 tragedy. On Nov. 9, 2014, they issued a 35-page report detailing where the Russian-backed forces in the Donbas obtained the sophisticated Buk anti-aircraft missile system that was used to shoot down MH17.

By combing through hundreds of photographs, videos and social media posts, Bellingcat established the route of the Buk system from its base at the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade in Kursk, Russia, down to southern Russia, and across the border into Ukraine.

With the help of other researchers, the team found the probable launch site of the missile in Russian-occupied territory.

Much of the information uncovered by Bellingcat has been submitted to the Dutch criminal investigation into the MH17 tragedy, and many of their findings have been confirmed in reports subsequently released by the Dutch Safety Board and the Dutch-led Joint Investigation Team.

So Bellingcat is our friend of the week, and collectively wins the Order of Yaroslav the Wise for uncovering the truth about MH17, and for countering the lies and disinformation about the tragedy put about by Ukraine's foe, the Kremlin.

– Euan MacDonald



**Jean-Claude Juncker**

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker is no stranger to gaffes. At the European Union's Riga summit on May 22, 2015 he greeted Hungarian Prime Minister with the words "the dictator is coming" and "Hello, dictator!"

After shaking Orban warmly by the hand, Juncker then slapped the Hungarian prime minister on the cheek. Rather hard.

But apart from clownish antics, what Juncker says has also frequently gotten him into trouble.

Recently, on July 4, Juncker caused controversy by describing European Union parliament lawmakers as "ridiculous." He was angered by the fact that only about 30 of the parliament's members had turned up to hear a speech by Malta Prime Minister Joseph Muscat.

And only on July 13, at the EU-Ukraine summit in Kyiv, Juncker caused a stir by apparently single-handedly altering EU policy on

Ukraine by accepting a plan, put to him by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, to abandon the idea of setting up an anti-corruption court, and instead set up anti-corruption panels in the current, unreformed courts.

The establishment of an independent anti-corruption court in Ukraine was one of the conditions set by the EU and the International Monetary Fund for the granting of further financial aid to Ukraine, and Juncker's apparent back-track mystified and then angered Ukrainian civil activists and reformers, as well as corruption watchdog Transparency International.

Activists had thought that the EU was behind them and the plan to set up the anti-corruption court, which would be a body independent of the influence of the president or other politicians. Juncker's off-the-cuff announcement threw all of that into doubt, and forced the EU to issue a clarifying statement.

The trouble is, as Transparency International pointed out, anti-corruption panels as suggested by Poroshenko and apparently approved by Juncker would hardly be independent – they would be staffed by old, corrupt judges of the unreformed system, who would be susceptible to the influence of corrupt politicians.

Naming Juncker Ukraine's foe of the week is a bit harsh, but perhaps awarding him the Order of Lenin would make him realize that the issue of corruption in Ukraine is no laughing matter, and not something for improvised policy-making.

– Euan MacDonald



**Order of Lenin**

# Ukraine makes it easier, but pricier to employ foreigners

BY BERMET TALANT  
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Turkish citizen Erdeniz Ünvan divides his time between Kyiv and Istanbul.

Discouraged by political and economic calamities in Turkey, he and his partner recently decided to open an office of their IT training and consultancy firm in Kyiv and transfer some of their clients, mostly from Middle East, Europe, and Turkey, here.

He was surprised at how quickly he was able to set up a company and get work and residency permits in Ukraine: It took him 34 days, including a week in Istanbul to get an immigration visa.

"I used to work in Europe, and there it takes several months. Ukraine definitely has an advantage," Ünvan said.

And in a bid to attract even more foreign investment, Ukraine has amended its legislation on the employment of foreigners, with the changes coming into force on Sept. 27.

And for company founders and shareholders like Ünvan, the new law offers a big perk — a work permit valid for up to three years, rather than just one, as at present.

Other special categories of foreigners eligible for an extended work permit are IT and creative professionals, and graduates of the world's top 100 universities.

And those who invest at least 100,000 euros into a Ukrainian com-



A passenger presents his passport for checks at Kyiv's Boryspil International Airport in this file photo. With changes to legislation that take effect from the end of September this year, foreigners should find it easier, and quicker to get a work permit in Ukraine. (Ukrinform)

pany will enjoy the right to obtain a temporary residence permit without a need to be employed.

However, while lawyers praise the new amendments for simplifying the process of hiring foreigners by reducing bureaucracy, and for granting perks for business owners

and investors, they say the changes also impose an additional financial burden on employers hiring foreign workers.

According to the State Migration Service in Ukraine, 81,710 foreigners were registered as staying temporarily in the country in 2016.

## Less bureaucracy

The amendments reduce the list of documents required to obtain a work permit in Ukraine by half. In particular, foreigners seeking a job with a Ukrainian company will not have to submit university degree certificates, a medical form, or a police clearance form.

Employers will not need to justify why they are hiring a foreigner and not a Ukrainian worker. Instead, they have to submit a draft employment contract.

Another important improvement is that the employment centers of the State Labour Service of Ukraine will allow applicants to resubmit incorrect or missing documents, instead of having, as now, their application rejected.

"If an authorized body finds a mistake in any document submitted with an application for a work permit, an employer has seven business days to resubmit the correct version. Hitherto applications with any kind of mistakes have been automatically rejected," Vasyl Cherednichenko, a partner at Kyiv-based EXPATPRO law firm, which specializes in immigration, told the Kyiv Post.

## Complications

But while getting work permits has become easier, prolonging them has become more expensive.

It used to be free of charge. But with the new law coming into force, prolonging a permit will cost the same as the initial issuance: Hr 6,496 (\$250) for one year, and Hr 9,744 (\$375) for three years.

The price is pegged to the official subsistence minimum, and so will go up, because the government plans to increase the official subsistence minimum in December from Hr 1,624 to 1,700 (\$65.50).

Moreover, a company must provide evidence that it employs three Ukrainian citizens or has paid Hr 160,000 (\$6,168) in corporate income tax before its foreign employees can get their temporary residence permits extended.

Finally, the new law introduces a minimum salary requirement for a foreign worker, which is 5–10 more than Ukrainians have to be paid.

According to the new law that comes into force at the end of September, foreign nationals who work in non-governmental or charity organizations and educational institutions in Ukraine must earn at least Hr 16,000 (\$616). Those who work for private companies must be paid at least Hr 32,000 (\$1,233).

This requirement doesn't apply to special categories such as IT and creative professionals and graduates of world's 100 best universities. Their salary can be as low as the Ukrainian minimum salary of Hr 3,200 (\$123).

Still, the sums look generous for Ukraine, where the average monthly salary is Hr 7,000 (\$270), according to the State Statistics Service.

"It's also unclear how the new requirements will apply to foreigners who were hired earlier," Cherednichenko of EXPATPRO said.

## Tax evasion

The Ukrainian government has been fighting the shadow economy for years, particularly the widespread practice of paying salaries off-the-books to avoid taxes.

Anyone who is employed in Ukraine is required to pay an 18 percent individual income tax and a 1.5-percent military tax on their salaries. In addition, every company pays a 22 percent social security, or payroll, tax on each official employee's salary.

Thus, both employers and employees find it mutually beneficial to declare less than the employee really earns.

"On the one hand, the new legislation allows companies to hire whomever they want. On the other hand, they have to pay foreign employees high salaries, and therefore, more taxes," says Cherednichenko.

"I think it will be difficult for some businesses like English language schools," he said.

The manager of a private English-language school in Kyiv told the Kyiv Post on the condition of anonymity that they would not be able to comply with the new salary requirements.

"It's already hard enough to attract qualified teachers who are native speakers. We're a private language school, and we can't offer international-level salaries, let alone pay all taxes on those salaries," she said.

She disclosed that they had worked with some foreign teachers who didn't hold work permits and were therefore paid in cash.

"We also have foreigners who are officially employed, but their salaries on paper are lower than the amount they actually receive," she said.

"It's not a rare practice in Ukraine." ■



## 'Who killed Pavel?' Journalists demand justice for slain colleague

Hundreds of journalists, activists, and friends of murdered journalist Pavel Sheremet came on the morning of July 20 to the intersection of Ivana Franka and Bohdana Khmelnytskoho Streets in central Kyiv — the site where Sheremet was killed in a shocking car bombing exactly one year before.

Sheremet was driving to work on the morning of July 20, 2016 when a bomb planted under his car exploded. He died at the scene. Immediately after the murder, President Petro Poroshenko and other top officials said that solving the case it was "a matter of honor."

However, one year later, the murder remains unsolved. The police have no suspects, and no arrests have been made in connection with the case. To mark the passing of a year since the killing, Sheremet's friends and colleagues marched from the scene of the murder to the Presidential Administration, and then to the Interior Ministry headquarters, demanding justice. In the photo, Interior Ministry's spokesman Artem Shevchenko talks to the journalists near the ministry headquarters on July 20. (Volodymyr Petrov)

# Ukrainian tech startup turns online time into digital cash

BY DENYS KRASNIKOV  
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Newly founded Ukrainian tech company Nimses wants to turn all the time that people waste online into pure profit.

The plan? A smartphone social media application that creates one unit of a privately developed currency for each minute that the user spends online.

Nimses' founders see the massive amount of time that people spend online — young people spend up to nine hours a day on social media — as a potential gold mine.

"We have digitized every minute of people's lives and created a new value that has never existed before," said Nimses Chief Marketing Officer Andrii Sirchenko in an interview with the Kyiv Post.

The application features geolocation - it tracks the user's location and allows them to interact with other users within a 2-kilometer radius.

## Next generation

Nimses grew out of sociological research into how people interact with the internet.

According to Sirchenko, the internet was initially created to be the world's data hub, but turned out to be a platform for a younger generation "already born with smartphones" and "used to having conversations online."

For them, he says, the online and offline worlds have already merged into one.

"Humanity has created an environment of data exchange: we've never been so close to each other in terms of communication. Yet we've turned inward," he said.

Instead of communicating, people compare themselves with online images of other people on the web and try to create a beautiful image themselves, addicting themselves to online forms of approval, such as "likes" on Facebook, Sirchenko said.



The Nimses smartphone application locates all people with the same app within a range of two kilometers and shows their profiles: photographs, the amount of nimses (the app's virtual money) they have and a message box. The app was officially released on June 1 and has had 2 million downloads in former Soviet countries since then. Now the startup plans a worldwide rollout, including in the United States. (Oleg Petrasniuk)

"We check 'likes' all the time; they're important for us because they mean 'I know that you know that I have something, or I've been somewhere,'" Sirchenko said, adding that in reality, those likes represent both time and attention.

## Time as currency

Sirchenko's vision is to monetize modern people's need for approval.

Eight years after the idea appeared, Nimses has created an app, in which

every minute equals one digital coin, called a nimse.

Sirchenko claims that all the other cryptocurrencies which currently exist are nothing but financial bubbles with no real world value except for the trust that users place in them.

Since the nimse is pegged to a minute of internet use, Sirchenko argued, it has real-world value.

## A life's worth

Spending a long life entirely on the internet — 95 years or 50 million minutes — would earn a user 50 million nimses.

People, however, can get nimses via other approaches. Receiving "likes" grant users nimses.

The Nimses developers claim that 1,000 nimses are worth \$1, but this assessment is subjective.

In Kyiv, the currency is beginning to gain some traction.

Green 13, a cafe and restaurant, sells vegan rolls for 10,000 nimses. The cafe's owner, Volodymyr Evlakh, said that the first buyers who paid with nimses came in 20 minutes after he announced on Facebook that he would accept the currency as payment.

Kyiv restaurant Pizza Place in turn offers a pizza for 4,320 nimses and coffee for 1,440. Most of the Kyiv venues that decided to accept nimses, however, sell only a limited amount of goods paid with them per day.

An online store called Nimses Goods is also in the works, where people will be able to buy food,

clothes, footwear, and more using the online currency. It also plans to launch Nimses Music, which will work as a music streaming service paid for by the digital money.

## Spread

The startup has gotten 2 million downloads in the CIS, and is now moving to expand to western countries like the United States.

The startup made its smartphone application available on iTunes and Google Play for most of the former Soviet Union in February, but the official launch, according to Sirchenko, happened on June 1, when people started to share promo codes on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Currently, the startup operates in Ukraine, Latvia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Belarus, and Lithuania.

In Ukraine, many called the app an alternative to Russian social networks, the most popular of which — VKontakte and Odnoklassniki — were banned and blocked in Ukraine as part of the sanctions measures against Russia starting May this year.

The Nimses app was trending on iTunes in the region, but in July, started to fade away. Sirchenko blames the hitch on the company turning off all of its marketing tools to focus on a worldwide launch.

"Apart from (different) languages, there is a different internet culture in each region," Sirchenko said.

The Kyiv Post's IT coverage is sponsored by Ciklum. The content is independent of the donors. ■

## Where you can spend your nimses in Kyiv

 Pizza	
<b>Pizza Place,</b> 20 Boholiubova St.	4,320 nimses
 Falafel	
<b>Green 13,</b> 2 Bessarabska Square	10,000 nimses
 Coffee	
<b>Cuba Coffee Brew Bar,</b> 1/2 Sofiivska St.	400 nimses
<b>KavaBulki,</b> 6 outlets	5,000 nimses
<b>Whitebeard Blackbird,</b> 40 Vozdvyzhenska St.	2,700 nimses — espresso, 2,900 nimses — latte
 Beer and cider	
<b>I:T it,</b> 13 Mykhailivska St.	3,500 nimses — cider 4,500 nimses — beer

Source: minfin.com.ua

In Kyiv, the virtual money developed by Nimses is starting to gain some traction, with a number of businesses now accepting a limited amount of the currency per day as payment.



Nimses CMO Andrii Sirchenko talks with the Kyiv Post on July 7 in Kyiv. The idea to create the geolocation-based social network Nimses grew out of sociological research into how people interact on the internet. (Oleg Petrasniuk)

# Nature reclaims the tainted lands of the Chernobyl zone

BY WILL PONOMARENKO  
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**CHORNOBYL EXCLUSION ZONE, Ukraine** — Overnight on April 26, 1986, the world's worst nuclear disaster happened some 90 kilometers north of Kyiv. Reactor No. 4 of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded during a failed reactor experimental test, causing a cloud of radioactive fallout to pollute vast swathes of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. Within days, fallout particles were also appearing in Europe, America, and Asia.

It took the Soviet authorities three days to start evacuating 115,000 civilians from 188 cities and towns within a 30-kilometer area around ground zero.

The new exclusion zone was closed off by Soviet troops — and up to 600,000 people, mostly soldiers and scientists, were engaged in the deadly post-accident cleanup and building a concrete sarcophagus over the extremely radioactive destroyed reactor.

More than thirty years after, the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant and its exclusion area still attract attention from all around the world — and legends have grown around it.

## The forest land

Video games, movies, and sci-fi books often present the zone as a gloomy, withered land with killing zones of radiation, anomalies, abandoned towns and rusty factories inhabited by monsters, human mutants, and looters.

However, visitors to the zone do not encounter radioactive desert, but rather a thriving land of rich forests and meadows in the Ukrainian region of Polesia.

Notwithstanding that the nuclear fallout still affects the local environment, the Chernobyl zone is now a



Tourists look on July 9 at a memorial devoted to all of the settlements evacuated from the 30-kilometer exclusion zone around the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant after the disaster there in 1986. (Volodymyr Petrov)

much more hospitable and beautiful place than many people imagine it to be.

Its air is fresh and clear, and its rivers are clean and well stocked with fish — it took only a few years for nature to return after the humans fled. Lots of rare animals, such as Mongolian wild horses or European elk, and also boars, foxes, and wolves, have found a home and their natural habitat there.

After three decades of abandon-

ment, nature has regained much of its dominion in the zone — and absorbed the empty human settlements. The streets of Zalissyia, a village situated just a couple of kilometers away from the Chernobyl Plant, have turned into dense forest, with old ruined houses barely visible among the trees and high grass.

As the years go by, the exclusion zone has become a national nature park. It is also a good business — at least 10,000 tourists from all around

the globe visit the area each year, according to Ukraine's state agency on the zone's management.

## Fighting the fallout

Not many buildings in villages like Zalissyia have remained intact, says Serhiy Myrnyi, a disaster liquidator turned tourist guide. A qualified chemist and ecologist, he served as radiation reconnaissance squad commander in the Chernobyl Zone in the summer of 1986.

"All the things around were polluted with radioactive fallout," Myrnyi remembers.

"Young soldiers, mostly Soviet army draftees, were taken here with simple spades in their hands to load the contaminated top layers of soil on trucks for further disposal. Usually, it worked out, and the radiation intensity decreased tenfold. However, in many cases it didn't, so many houses were demolished, with the excavators buried deep in the ground right there."

At some places along roads and forest paths, one still can find radiation signs marking the old dumping pits.

Since the disaster, the radiation levels in the area have decreased a thousandfold, primarily thanks to the people who sacrificed their health and lives during the decontamination efforts, Myrnyi says. Besides, most of the isotopes that were ejected from the burning reactor on the night of the disaster, such as strontium-90, cesium-137, iodine-131, have already decayed away over the past thirty years.

However, there are some certain spots where the background radia-

tion is still high.

One of them is a lone old tree near an abandoned kindergarten building in the ghost town of Kopachi. Just approaching the tree makes a dosimeter start beeping indignantly — the radiation level here is 5 microsieverts per hour — very high.

"My theory is that one of my fellow liquidators shook the fallout dust from his clothes on this tree after doing his job back in 1986," Myrnyi says. "If you take just a couple of steps back, the radiation level goes back to normal limits again."

Same thing happens at some corners near the kindergarten building walls — thirty years ago, fire trucks watered the roofs in order to wash down the fallout ash, and the radiation still traces the paths by which the contaminated water streamed down from above.

## The protection dome

The radiation background levels in most of the zone are generally acceptable, Myrnyi says. Even the famous Red Forest, situated just west of the power plant, the trees of which died within 30 minutes of the disaster, is now healthy and planted with young strong pines.

The heart of the exclusion zone, the sadly remembered nuclear reactor No. 4, rises high over the regrown woods. Today, it is covered with a gigantic silver-colored arch that can be seen from far off — the so-called New Safe Confinement, built over the old Soviet concrete sarcophagus. With a height reaching 108 meters, the structure is the world's biggest



A child's bed is seen on July 9 in what was a kindergarten in the Chernobyl exclusion zone. The kindergarten is one of the sights on a tour of the zone taken by thousands of tourists every year. More than 30 years after the disaster, trees and plants are starting to cover former areas of human habitation. (Volodymyr Petrov)



# Chornobyl zone wildlife thriving 30 years after disaster forced humans to flee

Chornobyl from page 8

building of this kind, designed to protect humankind from new radioactive leaks from the reactor's ruins for the next 100 years.

It is almost done — the French consortium Novarka funded by the International Chornobyl Shelter Fund says it will complete the work by the end of 2017. Up to 1.5 billion euros have been spent on the project, and right now the giant confinement seems to be working: right next to ground zero, a dosimeter records a radiation level of 1.09 microsieverts per hour. The employees of the Chornobyl Power Plant even walk around the area without any special protective clothing.

The whole complex of four nuclear reactors completely suspended operations in late 2000, but there will be enough work for there for coming generations of nuclear power engineers — the decommissioning of the plant will take until 2060.

The plant itself is also far from being a dead zone. Just a couple of hundreds of meters away from the Confinement, there is an artificial cooling pond with an impressively large population of catfish. Tourists love feeding them with bread slices taken from the plant's canteen, and the fish rush to an old rail bridge across the pond when they sense humans coming. The dogs living at the plant are the same: used to the constant presence of crowds of people, they also demand treats. Many of

them stay close to places still inhabited by humans to escape the packs of wolves roaming the wild forests.

Although the danger is minor, the Chornobyl workers recommend sticking to the simple rules in the exclusion zone: do not eat in the open air, avoid touching animals, and undergo radiation decontamination before getting back indoors.

## Back in the USSR

Even Prypyat, a ghost city of huge apartment blocks, asphalted avenues, and concrete squares some two kilometers northwest of the plant, has failed to resist the resurgence of nature.

Before April 1986, the city had a population of 50,000 — mostly



Tourists walk through a forest growing on the site of a football field in the abandoned city of Prypyat in the Chornobyl exclusion zone on July 9. (Volodymyr Petrov)

Chornobyl workers and their families. It was totally evacuated in a day, soon after the blast. No one was ever allowed to return home.

The once-lively city has turned into a pine wood over the years, and only small patches of cracked asphalt and concrete still recall the human presence here. The city stadium's football field is now lush woodland pocked with small mounds of

earth — left by wild boars digging for morsels. The well-known observation wheel, seen in lots of video games, can only be reached via forest paths. In summer, one can walk through the central avenues of Prypyat without even noticing the huge nine-story apartment blocks just tens of meters away, behind dense green walls of trees.

The city's former downtown square is one of the few parts that are still recognizable.

Although damaged by time and weather, the central buildings — the famous Polissya Hotel, the sports complex, the Prometheus cinema and the city restaurant, still bear many reminders and details of the Soviet-era — time there stopped in 1986.

In the square, there was even a Western-style supermarket, the only one in the city — an enormous luxury by Soviet standards. Old cash tills, price labels, and small metal shopping carts still can be found in the dust there, among broken glass and junk.

"Prypyat used to be a rich city, the home of nuclear physicists," Serhiy Myrnyi says. "People used to come

here from Kyiv and Belarus — to buy goods they couldn't get anywhere else."

Experienced guides of the zone advise against walking inside the buildings in Prypyat — apart from being dangerous due to decay, they are often still seriously contaminated by radioactive fallout.

Time goes on, and the ghost city continues to turn back into forest, but one of its buildings still bears an unseen mark of the heroism of the Chornobyl disaster responders.

The radiation levels in the city's hospital basement are still unusually high. It was this hospital that received the very first victims among the liquidators of the Chornobyl blast, on that night in late April in 1986 — the first fire-fighting team. They had become mortally ill with radiation poisoning a few hours after working near the burning reactor.

Not knowing what to do with the firefighters' uniforms, which were giving off intense radiation, the medics simply buried them in the building's basement.

Thirty-one years later, the spot remains the most radioactive place in the city. ■



Tourists feed catfish living in the artificial cooling pond near reactor No. 4 of the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant on July 9. (Volodymyr Petrov)

# 26 YEARS OF UKRAINE'S INDEPENDENCE

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# More than 1,000 people still missing in Donbas war zone

Missing from page 1

during the bloodiest periods of the war in 2014 and 2015.

But the war still rages on, and even in 2017 people are continuing to go missing.

In early June, a colonel from Ukraine's National Guard, Oleksandr Boiko, went missing in action near the town of Zolote in Luhansk Oblast, the press service of National Guard reported.

Searches for missing people are mainly left up to their families, who often become victims of mistakes and fraudsters. They lose health and money in the process, living only with the hope that they will someday find their loved ones.

"For the families of the missing there's no peace until the moment they find their relative," Fabien Bourdier, a delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross on missing people, told the Kyiv Post. "Time doesn't help you. The lives of these families go on between hope and despair."

## Blank spaces

The walls of St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kyiv have over 3,000 portraits of Ukrainian soldiers killed in the ongoing war. But there are more than 80 blank spaces among them, with the words "missing" or "still not identified" or "parents don't acknowledge the death of their son."



Oleksiy Yukov and his colleague from the Black Tulip humanitarian organization, which searches for the bodies of missing people, uncover a dead body – presumably that of a separatist fighter – near the village of Zakitne in Donetsk Oblast. (Anastasia Vlasova)

Soldier Vitaliy Remishevsky, who fought in the 95th airborne brigade, went missing in Donetsk airport in late January 2015. The army declared him killed in action. A page on Wikipedia about him indicates that his body was identified by DNA tests.

But his wife Oksana Remishevskaya said she has never seen the DNA match for her husband. Neither she received his body to bury.

"I keep on lighting candles for his health in church, and hope someday he returns to us," she said.

Many relatives are skeptical about the DNA identification of the dead

bodies because of frequent errors in the process. Up to 1,000 dead bodies of both soldiers found on battlefields, and civilians found in bombed out ruins, still remain unidentified, Bourdier said.

The unidentified bodies of Ukrainian soldiers have been buried in military cemeteries in the cities of Dnipro and Zaporizhzhia. There are also unmarked graves of civilians and soldiers from both sides in almost every city in the Donbas, Black Tulip volunteers say.

## Money making

Remishevskaya said she had received

phone calls from her husband's mobile number back in 2015. A man with a voice she didn't recognize demanded that she pay a ransom for her husband, but after the caller found out that she has three children, he told her to "keep the money for them."

Olena Sugak, whose son Ruslan Sugak went missing after the Battle of Ilovaisk in August 2014, paid about \$600 to people who called themselves "volunteers" and promised to look for her son in the separatist-controlled area. Nothing ever came of it.

Oleksandr Kudinov, a human rights activist who helps the families of the missing in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense, said he knows several cases of people being abducted in the war zone for ransom, or to steal their property.

Donetsk businessman Oleg Shevandin disappeared at a separatist checkpoint when he was driving a Toyota Highlander in May 2015. In May 2016, his car was found on the border with Russia, being registered using forged papers supposedly issued in Mariupol. Oleksiy Shevandin, the son of the missing businessman and owner of the car, is still looking for his father, Kudinov said.

## No exchange

Kudinov said he had helped to release dozens of people from captivity in 2014, many of whom had been counted as considered missing. But the process of prisoner

exchanges practically stopped from the spring 2015 after it was linked to the Minsk peace agreement's Contact Group negotiations between Ukraine, Russia, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Minsk, Belarus.

Some 132 Ukrainian prisoners are being held in the Russian-occupied zone, according to lawmaker Iryna Gerashchenko, Ukraine's humanitarian representative at the talks in Minsk. But the Russian-backed occupying authorities say they have less than half of this number.

The real number of Ukrainian prisoners is unclear, since international humanitarian organizations have been able to make only a few visits to prisons in Makiyivka in Donetsk Oblast and the city of Luhansk, both occupied by Russia. The human rights activists claim that there are many other sites where the prisoners are being kept by the occupying authorities.

"The places of detention are often changed," said Kudinov. He added that searching for missing people was practically impossible without cooperation from both sides.

## Not enough searching

As of June 1, the official number of people missing in the war zone was 494, the National Police told the Kyiv Post. Some 102 people went missing in the war zone in 2016 alone.

The number only includes Ukrainian soldiers and civilians that Ukrainian police are officially looking for.

But the families of the missing accuse the police of doing little or nothing.

According to Vyacheslav Kryvopalenko, his grandparents went missing in the war zone in November 2014. The two pensioners, from the city of Slavutych, in Chernihiv Oblast, had driven to the war zone to bring warm clothes and medication for the Ukrainian soldiers but went missing there in November 2014.

"The SBU told me it's a police job, but the police said it's up to the SBU to look for them," Kryvopalenko said. "For almost three years since then, I haven't seen any results. The police detective even refused to show me the criminal case on this issue."

Kryvopalenko filed a lawsuit with the European Court of Human Rights in the winter of 2015, complaining that Ukraine's law enforcement bodies weren't searching for his grandparents.

The SBU itself was also accused of abducting dozens of people back in 2014–2015. One of them, Mykola Vakaruk, a miner from Donetsk Oblast, said he spent nearly 600 days in secret captivity of the SBU, being held so as to be exchanged for Ukrainian soldiers. Then the SBU secretly released him in July 2016 thanks, as he believes, to reports by international organizations about secret detainees.

SBU spokespeople failed to respond to requests from the Kyiv Post for comments on this story.

## Missing: Galyna and Anatoliy Obruch

*Galyna Obruch, 65, and Anatoliy Obruch, 67, retired volunteers, went missing after they traveled on Nov. 12, 2014, from their home in the city of Slavutych in northern Ukraine to eastern Ukraine, with clothes and medication for Ukrainian soldiers. They were reportedly arrested by Russian-backed fighters in the city of Donetsk, but the occupying authorities in control of the city have not confirmed this.*

*Their story was told by their grandson, Vyacheslav Kryvopalenko, 27, in Kyiv. He has been looking for them since they disappeared. The following are his words, recorded and translated by the Kyiv Post.*

My grandparents were much involved in the EuroMaidan protests – they came there from Slavutych every week. My grandma worked in a kitchen, and my grandpa helped as a Maidan guard.

They worried a lot about the annexation of Crimea. My grandma is Russian by nationality, and she started arguing with her sister Nadya because of all that.

When the war in Donbas started my grandparents vowed to help our soldiers.

They loaded their KIA Cerato car with medicines, warm clothes, blankets, biscuits, pasta and also some homemade canned vegetables and set out on a journey. It was Nov. 10, 2014, when I saw them in Slavutych for the last time.

They told me they would take their stuff to Mariupol, the city where they met each other, and hand it over to local volunteers. I didn't know then that they had rather different plans.

## Last conversation

My grandma called me on Nov. 12, 2014, at about 2 p.m. She told me they were at a Ukrainian checkpoint, that all was fine but she couldn't talk for long and promised to call me back in the evening.

I called them both at 5 p.m., then at 6 p.m. but without any response. Then me, my aunt and my sister were calling them for the next three days, every 20 minutes. Then we reported them as missing to the police and the SBU security service.

It was only in June 2015, when the police gave us a printout of their phone conversations, (that I found out) that my grandma had actually called me on Nov. 12 from the city of Donetsk, on Hurova Ave. They arrived there in the morning, the mobile signal records showed.

Apart from calls to family members, they called two unknown phone numbers. I called them and found out the real story.

## Risky trip

My grandparents had decided to help some soldiers from Slavutych

that were fighting in Pisky, near Donetsk airport.

They contacted a man in Donetsk called Serhiy and asked him to guide them to Pisky. When they met up, Serhiy told them it was too dangerous and tried to guide them out of the (Russian-occupied) city. And on the way out, on Hurova Ave., he told me they were arrested by the Oplot battalion.

They saw a license plate of a car issued in Kyiv, and my grandparents also had a Ukrainian flag in their car. Serhiy said they were accused of being the spotters for Ukrainian army. My grandma tried to calm them down, telling them she was ethnic Russian herself.

The fighters took Serhiy to jail and handed over my grandparents to the MGB (the Russian occupation authorities' security service.) Serhiy told me he spent one month in prison before being released. He didn't know what had happened to my grandparents.

I called him back in a year, early in 2016. I tried to make him understand our grief. In May 2016, during our last conversation he told me: "You don't need to look for them. They are no longer alive." He didn't explain to me what happened.

## No search

There were four changes in the

police detectives in charge of this case over the years. I wanted to complain about the police and prosecution, but they even didn't show me the criminal case regarding the search for my grandparents.

Instead, there were more than 20 cases of fraudsters demanding money from me for information about my grandparents. I gave information about those fraudsters to the police and SBU. But the police found nothing.

In the winter of 2015, I filed a lawsuit with the European Court of Human Rights, complaining that Ukraine's law enforcement bodies weren't searching for them.

## Uncertainty

My grandparents went to Slavutych after the Chernobyl catastrophe and worked at the nuclear power plant. Just like my grandfather, I'm an atomic electric engineer.

I want to have some clarity on what happened to them. If they're alive, then I want to be able to get them back. If not, then I want at least there to be a grave to visit.

This uncertainty is painful. I even try not to go to Slavutych, because I may accidentally pass by their windows and start remembering them.

– Recorded and translated by Oksana Grytsenko

# Activists reckon bodies of 1,000 people now lie in unmarked graves in east

Missing from page 10

Bourdier of the International Committee of the Red Cross there is insufficient cooperation between the police, who are responsible for searching for missing people all over the country, and the SBU, which is responsible for investigating killings and abductions in the war zone.

Bourdier said Ukraine should form a single government body that would coordinate all missing person searches and the identification of remains.

In fact, the creation of a special commission on missing people is envisaged in two draft laws submitted to the parliament at the end of 2016 – the first by a group of pro-government lawmakers, and the second by reformist lawmaker Mustafa Nayyem.

Tetiana Berehova, an officer of

the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, said Nayyem's draft law is closer to international standards. In particular, it includes holding the police themselves responsible if they carry out "abductions by force."

However, Nayyem's draft law has less chance of being passed than the pro-government lawmakers' one, Berehova said.

## Unfound and unburied

Yaroslav Zhylykin, the head of the Black Tulip mission, points to Ilovaik, Amvrosiivka, and Shakhtarsk on a map. He says a lot of dead bodies of Ukrainian soldiers probably still in these Russian-occupied cities.

But since his organization is presently not allowed to work in the Russian-occupied area, they can now only inspect burial sites in frontline cities.



Daryna Remishevskaya, 13, stands in her home in the village of Holoskiv in Khmelnytskyi Oblast in western Ukraine, holding pictures of her mother Oksana and father Vitaliy. Vitaliy went missing in 2015 in the war zone. (Anastasia Vlasova)

"Most of the bodies we find now are those of civilians who were abducted at checkpoints and killed right there," Zhylykin said.

He believes that there are still around 1,000 bodies in unmarked burial sites.

Near a checkpoint in Sloviansk, once a separatist stronghold, Yukov shows the spot where his team found a dead body bearing a tattoo of the 45th Russian paratrooper brigade. He said he believed the body was

that of a Russian soldier from a special operations group who was killed there in 2014.

In Yampil, a small town in Donetsk Oblast, which experienced fierce fighting in late June 2014, local resident Liudmyla Yakovenko showed Yukov three graves, slightly to the side of the cemetery, which are believed to belong to Russian-backed fighters killed there in clashes in June 2014. The middle grave has the inscription "Unknown man."

Yukov took pictures of the grave and took down information about it. He next plans to check with the police and morgues.

He is also thinking about where to look for two residents of Yampil who were abducted by Russian-backed fighters from their homes in 2014.

"After seeing the war and piles of corpses, I realized it doesn't matter who these people were. They all deserve a proper burial," Yukov said. ■

# Missing in action: Ruslan Sugak

**KHRYSTOPHORIVKA, Ukraine** – Ruslan Sugak, 32, a soldier from the Kryvbas territorial defense battalion, went missing on Aug. 29, 2014, during fighting near Ilovaik, Donetsk Oblast. His name is in Ukraine's list for prisoner exchanges, but Russian-backed forces in the Donbas have not confirmed that he is in their captivity. Sugak has a wife Maryna, a daughter Nastia, 8, and a son Denys, 6.

Sugak's mother, Olena Sugak, 53, told her son's story at her home in the village of Khrystophorivka, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, 400 kilometers from Kyiv. The following is her story, recorded and translated by the Kyiv Post.

In late April 2014, (Ruslan) was called up to the army. On May 26, the day after the presidential elections, they took the military oath and were sent to the war front.

They were not supposed to be on the frontline – the territorial defense battalion was formed to defend the Kryvy Rih area because there were fears that (Russian dictator Vladimir) Putin might invade here.

## Burned by fire

He (Ruslan) told me (his unit) had been based near Zaporizhzhia, and then in Sloviansk and after that Saur Mohyla in Donetsk Oblast.

On Aug. 12, 2014, he came home for three days of leave just before the birthday of his daughter Nastia.

I've always wanted my son to be a real man, but not the way it happened.

He was 29 but his eyes were those



Olena Sugak, 53, whose son Ruslan went missing in action in August 2014, stands in the yard of her house in the village of Khrystophorivka of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. (Anastasia Vlasova)

of an 80-year-old man. I felt like I was speaking to an elderly person. He told me: 'Mom, the land is burning there.' We couldn't understand what he meant.

His friends called him late at night and said he should hurry back as something serious was beginning. (After his leave was over, Sugak rejoined his unit in the southeast of Donetsk Oblast.)

He was calling me by phone every day. His checkpoint was in Krasnopillia. He said they had captured so many separatists they didn't know where to keep them.

Together with other moms, we went to the military prosecution in Kryvy Rih demanding that they bring our boys out of that hell. They told us there was a talk of a green (evacuation) corridor, and promised

that on Monday our sons would be back home.

But Ruslan had no faith in the green corridor. There was hopelessness in his voice. I asked him to save his life by all means.

Then a grim day started. At 7 a.m. I saw medical helicopters heading to Dnipro. Other moms started calling me and I realized that everything was awful.

We were calling to the military commanders, to hotlines, but with no response.

Then the soldiers started returning home to Kryvy Rih, many of them had lost their vehicles. Volunteers and truck drivers were giving them a lift. After Ilovaik, the Kryvbas battalion took the motto "Burned by Fire."

## Mistake

On Sept. 1, (2014) I was at the funeral of a boy who was serving at the same checkpoint as my Ruslan. I received a call from an aide to Volodymyr Ruban of the Officer Corps. They told us my son was alive, but wounded and in captivity.

Then we were told in the military enlistment office that Ruslan had been released and was on the way home. We rushed to Dnipro, to Ruban's center. My daughter, daughter-in-law and I were waiting for the released soldier. When these boys arrived they were all scared, black as miners and wearing some scraps of clothes. There had been a mistake. There was another Ruslan among them. We bowed our heads and returned home.

That's how our sorrows started.

## Search

Then I received a call from a boy who told me he had got out of the encirclement together with Ruslan. When they had almost reached Zaporizhzhia Oblast, a safe area, Ruslan stepped on a landmine, so the boy had to leave him and to look for help. When he returned, Ruslan wasn't there.

Then I received information from our friend that according to some former SBU officers in Snizhne, Ruslan was in a hospital there, and then he was sent to Donetsk.

I sent a request to the police to make them search for him. There was no news from either the police or the SBU. We were doing all the searching by ourselves.

One volunteer told me that they had evidence that Ruslan was being kept in a Donetsk hospital. The others said that he had been sent to Russia's Rostov-on-Don. Then that he was in Yesentuki prison in Russia.

## Fraudsters

In the winter of 2015, we paid Hr 10,000 to some people who promised us to look for Ruslan in Donetsk and Luhansk, including prisons and illegal mines. But they found nothing. I think they were the fraudsters.

In the autumn of 2016, were looking at a separatist video and my daughter Yulia recognized Ruslan there by the way he moves.

Ruslan has very distinctive gestures. He is blond, tall, with gray eyes. He would give his last thing to help others.

## Family struggle

My grandson, Dinka, recently came from school in tears because some boy mocked him saying that he has no father. My daughter-in-law tried to explain him that father in is captivity, it's like in a movie.

Nastia writes letters to her father. We don't know what's in her head, we tried to bring her to a psychologist.

I once had a dream in which I touched Ruslan, and he was very hot. Then after waking up, I realized that he was sick at that moment.

I always feel it when he's feeling bad. I can't sit still, and run around the room like a she-wolf looking for her lost cub.

– Recorded and translated by Oksana Grytsenko

Don't miss an opportunity to try Mediterranean cuisine at Ulichnaya Eda (Street Food) festival at the Platforma Art Factory in Kyiv on July 21-23. Apart from food, enjoy music shows, dancing, scooter races and more. See page 16 for more detail.



## Plenty of parks for family fun and days out in Kyiv



### Montenegro and Albania have host of hidden charms

**SVETI STEFAN, Montenegro** – My Montenegro vacation started at a sunny beach with pink pebbles. My feet plunged into the warm, light blue waters of the Adriatic Sea. I swam further, and saw various brightly colored fish, octopuses, and starfish. And there were no stingy jellyfish.

After swimming, I enjoyed the oddest dish I've ever tried – chicken stuffed with minced pork and paradises. "Paradise" is what they call a tomato in the Montenegrin language.

But Montenegro, the newest member of NATO, has even more heavenly things to offer to a tourist on a modest budget: ancient castles, islands, canyons, and a tour to the most mysterious country in Europe – Albania, a state that was closed to the rest of the world for more than 50 years.

Montenegro is a young small country in southeastern Europe on the Adriatic Sea coast, bordering Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, and Albania.

Albania and the six countries of the former Yugoslavia, a socialistic union of states in southwestern Europe that vanished in the 1990s after the long and bloody Yugoslavian conflict, have all been involved in devastating wars of independence.

In 2006, Montenegro became an independent state. Despite its pro-Russian leanings, in 11 years, this country of only 650,000 people has managed to become a member of the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the Central European Free Trade Agreement and is now a founding member of the Union for the Mediterranean.

For a long time, Montenegro was a pro-Russian oasis in southeastern Europe with 250,000 Russian tourists visiting it every year. But after it became the 29th NATO member on July 5, Russia imposed sanctions on it, including an import ban on some goods.

Nevertheless, Russian tourists are still welcomed in Montenegro, "as long as they bring money" to the country, locals say.

Montenegro is an agrarian country that benefits from its location as transport crossroads

more Montenegro on page 13



People watch the paddle boats on a lake in Holosiivskyi Park in Kyiv on June 26. (Kostyantyn Chernichkin)

**BY ANNA YAKUTENKO**  
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Kyiv is a green city. Apart from the acres of woodland on islands in its very center, the Ukrainian capital has 13 parks where one can escape the daily bustle.

Here, one can play ping pong or chess, do yoga, dance salsa, feed ducks, or watch the sun set over the Dnipro River. Check out the Kyiv Post's guide to escaping the summer heat in the city's parks, in and around the city.

#### Mariinsky Park

Mariinsky Park is an 8.9-hectare park in the heart of the city that stretches along the government quarter on the hilly right bank of the Dnipro River, where the buildings of Ukraine's

Cabinet of Ministers, Health Ministry and parliament are located. The park was built 130 years ago together with Mariinsky Palace, which is now the official ceremonial residence of Ukraine's president.

Located on the top of the hill, Mariinsky Park offers a picturesque view of Trukhaniv Island and capital's left bank. The park has a playground for kids and several fountains. One of the park's sights is the Bridge of Lovers – a narrow, wooden-decked bridge where couples leave locks as a token of their love.

Address: 1 Mykhaila Hrushevskoho St.

#### Taras Shevchenko Park

Another park in the heart of the city is the Taras Shevchenko Park, named

after famous Ukrainian poet of the 19th century. The park is located near Lva Tolstoho metro station in front of the main building of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The park boasts benches of quirky designs.

The park is quite small and often crowded. It offers a large children's playground, spacious lawns loved by the yoga practitioners, a small outdoor stage, and chess tables.

O'Panas restaurant, located in the park, serves Ukrainian cuisine. There is also a coffee shop operating in an old streetcar.

Address: 10 Tereshchenkivska St.

#### Holosiivskyi Park

Just a few metro stops south of the city center sprawls the

huge Holosiivskyi Park. It has several large ponds with ducks, a forest-clad hill, and a small amusement park for kids. The park is a part of the much bigger, 740-hectare Holosiivskyi Forest. It is a popular destination for a picnic, but make sure to bring a garbage bag: littering is punished by a fine.

Address: 87 Henerala Rodymtseva St.

#### Druzhby Narodiv Park

For those who like active recreation the large Druzhby Narodiv Park is the perfect option. The park is located on an island between Kyiv's right

more Parks on page 14

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KyivPost

# Volunteers building friendships with children in orphanages

BY TOMA ISTOMINA  
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*Editor's Note: This article is a part of the "Journalism of Tolerance" project by the Kyiv Post and its affiliated non-profit organization, the Media Development Foundation. The project covers challenges faced by sexual, ethnic and other minorities in Ukraine, as well as people with physical disabilities and those living in poverty. This project is made possible by the support of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development and Internews. Content is independent of the donors.*

Twelve-year-old Anastasia ended up in an orphanage after her father died and her mother became an alcoholic. The Kyiv Post is not pub-

lishing Anastasia's full name as she is a minor.

Two years ago she met a new friend, who, step-by-step, has been since helping the girl adjust to the changes in her life.

When 30-year-old business consultant Maria Kvitkovska came for the first time to Anastasia's orphanage in Velykopolovetske, a village about 100 kilometers southwest from Kyiv, she realized "it shouldn't be a one-off visit." She decided to become Anastasia's friend, to support her, and to visit her regularly.

"Children need to have their own, personal adult," Kvitkovska said.

Kvitkovska is a volunteer at My Friend, an initiative launched by the non-governmental organization Detdom.info eight years ago to help children who have been removed



Children from an orphanage make soap bubbles on July 7 during a trip to the Water Museum in Kyiv. (Volodymyr Petrov)

from dysfunctional families and who now live in orphanages.

Aimed at providing individual sup-

port to kids, and to help them to find adult friends to rely on, the project includes over 100 volunteers of var-

ious age and occupations. They visit kids in seven orphanages in Kyiv, Poltava and Zhytomyr Oblasts, organize events for them and help them overcome fears and difficulties.

## Unconditional love

Anastasia is a quiet girl, who loves school for learning new things and dreams of traveling to the United States. Like the other children in the orphanage, Anastasia rarely smiles and is not very communicative. Kvitkovska says that these kids are rather closed because they know that "nobody cares about them and their emotions."

She says that Anastasia is very anxious and scared of everything because there's no adult around who can protect her.

"Sometimes she calls me on the phone up to 30 times in a row,"

more Children on page 16

## World Traveler: Two hidden gems of Europe

Montenegro from page 12

and its attractiveness to tourists. To save an unstable economy from postwar collapse, local authorities decided to introduce the Deutsche Mark and then euro as the currency.

### Hummingbird

The towns of Budva, Kotor, Bar and villages Rafailovici and Sveti Stefan (Saint Stephan) are the most popular tourist destinations in Montenegro. My husband and I stayed in a small hotel in Sveti Stefan, a small village next to the luxury Aman Sveti Stefan — a resort located in a medieval fortress on an island, which was opened in the 1960s and reopened in 2011, 10 years after the war.

The island-hotel is open only for clients who can afford to pay 800 euros per night for a suite and 100 euros per day to use the beach.

We spent our evenings sitting on the beach with cans of the local Nickisko beer, (price: one euro), watching black armored cars entering the Aman Sveti Stefan.

Locals say the hotel is popular among Hollywood stars and Eastern European dictators. Brad Pitt was allegedly seen swimming here in 2013.

We didn't see any celebrities, but met a real hummingbird collecting nectar from a Mimosa tree next to our villa. A double room in the villa cost us 800 euros for the whole week.

Montenegro is in a subtropical climate zone. There are no zoos in the country, but hummingbirds, curly pelicans, lizards, snakes and other exotic animals can be seen not just in Dormitor National Park and Skadar Lake, but also during the tours to Montenegrin canyons, or even in the streets.

And impressions weren't the only thing we were stuffing ourselves with.



Aman Sveti Stefan is a resort located in a medieval fortress on an island near the village of Sveti Stefan on the Adriatic Sea coast. The resort was opened in the 1960s and reopened in 2011, 10 years after the Yugoslav War. (Igor Sudakov)

Montenegrin cuisine offers prosciutto and plenty of seafood at rather cheap prices. The portions are huge, so beware. Once we ordered what was called "a sea plate for two" and they brought us a kilogram of seafood: dorados, giant shrimps, mussels, risotto with squid and octopus — and all for 45 euros.

A lunch or dinner for two costs 30 euros in local restaurants in Sveti Stefan and nearby Budva.

The best Montenegrin souvenir is a bottle of the local Plantage wine. A bottle of semi-dry red or white wine goes for as little as three euros.

### A trip to Albania

When we had had our fill of picturesque nature, medieval architecture, and the cuisine of Montenegro, our guide offered us a trip to nearby Albania, selling it as the most mysterious country in Europe.

Albanians, of course, were unlucky to get one of the craziest dictators Europe has suffered.

Enver Hoxha (Hodga), the leader

of local socialist Party of Labor, who came into power after the World War II, was a fan of the murderous Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, and his ruling style. In fact, Hoxha founded a prison-city and named it Stalin. People were sent to the city-jail for wearing red, traveling, and wearing beards. After Stalin's death, the dictator, unhappy with Nikita Khrushchev's rejection of Stalinism, decided to close off Albania to the world. As the rest of Europe recovered from the war, building new plants and factories, Hoxha was building bunkers.

Confident that the Soviet Union or the U.S. would start a nuclear war any minute, Hoxha ordered the construction of 750,000 bunkers across the 28,748 square kilometers country of three million people.

I saw one of those bunkers in the yard of a small café where we stopped soon after crossing the border.

Hoxha died in the late 1980s, and in 1991 the Socialist regime dis-

solved. The borders finally opened for Europe to see a country of handsome people, but with no traffic rules and with almost no traffic lights, as they existed only in the capital city of Tirana.

Although Albania is an official EU member-candidate, some people here live on just one euro a day.

I was also surprised to find out that it is normal in Albania for a Muslim woman to marry a Catholic or an Orthodox Christian.

The local government is trying to make people happy, though sometimes in odd ways. In the 2000s one of the mayors ordered all the buildings in Tirana to be painted in bright colors.

The local currency is the Lek (one euro equals 150 Lek). The country is famous for its tasty and cheap vegetables and high-quality silver jewelry.

I couldn't help myself, and bought a silver ring encrusted with tourmalines, zircons, and emeralds — for just nine euros.

What I also liked was that the Albanian language doesn't sound like any other in the world. It is an independent branch of the Indo-European language tree, but it sounds a bit like the language of the Dothraki, a fictional horse-riding tribe from the "Game of Thrones" television series.

So I wouldn't say "thank you" for reading this, I would say: "Falënderim!" ■

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# Kyiv's parks offer lots of options for rest and fun

Parks from page 12

Address: 1 Tymiriazivska St.

and left banks and has several areas with beaches, an amusement park, a football field, and a ropes course. One can also rent a bike (Hr 50 per hour), a quad bike (Hr 700 per hour), or a boat with water skis (around Hr 2,160 per hour). Wakeboards are offered for rent for just Hr 250 per day, but the price doesn't include the use of a boat. To get to the park one can take bus No. 101 or trolleybuses No. 30, No. 31 from Petrivka metro station.

Address: 1 Henerala Vatutina Ave, bus stops on Moskovsky Bridge

## Gryshko Botanic Garden

Gryshko Botanic Garden, located near Pecherska and Druzhby Narodiv metro stations, is the biggest botanic garden in the Ukrainian capital. This park is worth a visit at any time of year – depending on the season, one can see lilacs, tulips and roses in bloom, or go to the hothouses to see exotic plants.

The botanic garden is open daily from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., and the hothouses are open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The entrance fee is Hr 40 for adults and Hr 20 for children.

## Fomin Botanic Garden

Fomin Botanic Garden is smaller than Gryshko Botanic Garden, but it is located closer to the city center – near Universytet metro station. The garden is famous for its magnolias, which bloom in spring, but it's also a good place in the heart of the capital to escape the summer heat, as well as to do yoga or exercise. Entrance is free.

Address: 1 Symona Petyuryi St.

## Kyiv Polytechnic Institute Park

Another park not far away from the Kyiv's center surrounds the campus of Kyiv Polytechnic Institute. The park is usually crowded with students, along with dog walkers and families with children. The park itself doesn't have playgrounds or cafes (there are some cafes near the metro entrance), but there are usually mobile coffee vans.

Address: 31 Peremohy Ave.

## Peremohy Park

Peremohy Park, which means Victory Park in Ukrainian, was built to mark the victory of the Allies in



Children ride rented pedal vehicles in Mariinsky Park in central Kyiv on June 24. (Kostyantyn Chernichkin)

the Second World War. It's located on the city's left bank, not far away from Darnytsya metro station. On its 83 hectares, one can find a lake with a small island, an amusement park with a 30-meter Ferris wheel, playgrounds, and an indoor ice rink.

Address: 1 Henerala Zhmachenka St.

## Kyoto Park

Those who love Japanese culture should visit Kyoto Park on the left bank, not far away from Lisova metro station. Kyoto Park is famous for its long alley of Japanese sakura trees, which usually bloom in April. The park has a pond with iris flowers and a minimalistic design similar to a Japanese rock garden, or Zen garden. Japanese lanterns make the park a cozy spot in the evenings.

Address: 1 Kyoto St.

## Park Natalka

Park Natalka, which is located near the Obolonska embankment at the northwest of Kyiv, is in bloom again after having been reconstructed by local activists and the city council. The renovated park has a small football field, a playground for kids, tables for table tennis, deck chairs for rent, and an outdoor dance floor.

Address: 9 Obolonska Naberezhna St.

## Parks outside Kyiv

Pushcha-Vodytsia Park is located at 21 Fedora Maksymenka St. in the northwest of Kyiv. The park is just 12 hectares in size, but it's near the Pushcha-Vodytsia forest, which cov-

ers around 30,000 hectares. One can get to the park by tram No. 12, which departs from Kontraktova Square.

Another popular park is Feofania, which is located in the historical neighborhood near the Kyiv's southern outskirts at 37 Akademika Lebedeva Street. The park, which is on the list of recreation zones protected by the state, has numerous rare plants and flowers, along with beautiful lakes. The park works from 8 a.m. until 11 p.m., and the entrance fee is Hr 20. To get to Feofania Park take minibus No. 548 from Vystavkovy Tsentri metro station. When driving, take the E40 road and turn at Metrologichna Street.

Another popular park, the Pyrohiv Museum of Folk Architecture and Life of Ukraine in the village of Pyrohiv 20 kilometers from Kyiv, has authentic Ukrainian houses from different regions, as well as old-fashioned wooden windmills on a spacious field. The park often holds folk music festivals or celebrations marking traditional Ukrainian holidays. One can also find there Ukrainian food and snacks. To get to Pyrohiv, take trolleybus No. 11 from Vystavkovy Tsentri metro station, minibus No. 496 from Lukianivska metro station, or minibus No. 156 from Bessarabska Square in the city center. ■



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A pigeon lands by a chess board as onlookers watch another game being played in the Taras Shevchenko Park in central Kyiv on July 3. (Oleg Petrasniuk)

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## Artist Talk with Christopher Makos July 21

The day after the opening of the "Christopher Makos: Andy Warhol's Age" exhibition on July 21, the photographer's fans will have an opportunity to attend an open meeting with the artist and ask him questions. Makos is a famous American photographer and artist, whose works have been exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Tate Modern in London.

**Artist Talk with Christopher Makos. July 21. 7 p.m. Izolyatzia (8 Naberezhno-Luhova St.). Free**



(Courtesy of The Warhol Foundation)

July 22



(Oleg Petrasuk)

## Summer Yoga

America House invites yoga lovers of all skill levels to join an open class of summer yoga. The class will be held in English by a certified teacher. Attendees should arrive no later than 20 minutes ahead, wear comfortable shoes, bring a yoga mat, and have a passport or driving license to gain admittance.

**Summer Yoga. July 22. 1 p.m. America House Kyiv (6 Mykoly Pymonenka St.). Free**

# Program for orphanage kids to build long-term friendships

Children from page 13

Kvitkovska told the Kyiv Post.

When children are taken to orphanages in Ukraine, their parents sometimes keep custody and therefore visit their kids occasionally or take them home for weekends and holidays. Although many kids face difficulties at home, including poverty, parents' drinking problems, and lack of attention, they love coming home and always look forward to it.

Kvitkovska says it is because the children's love for their parents is unconditional.

"No matter what happens, children will always love their parents and try to win their love back," she says.

As Anastasia's friend, Kvitkovska is helping the girl rebuild her relationship with her mother. Kvitkovska says that she doesn't want to compete with the girl's parent and that's why she spends time with Anastasia either at the orphanage or at home with her mother.

Anastasia says that Kvitkovska is a good friend.

"She pays attention to me and helps in times of trouble," the girl says.

According to Anastasia, her relationship with her mother has got much better since she met Kvitkovska. Her mother quit drinking and takes Anastasia home every weekend.

"She (Kvitkovska) talked to us a lot and we realized some things," the girl says.

Now Anastasia's mother wants to take her back from the orphanage and bring her home on a permanent basis.

### Selecting volunteers

Alona Hrebennikova, the coordinator of the My Friend initiative, says that after many years of volunteering and visiting orphanages, she realized what children really needed.

"They don't lack cookies and sweets. They lack love, attention, and care," she says.

That is why, apart from organizing cultural and entertainment events and bringing things and food to kids, in 2009 Detdom.info launched the initiative to provide kids with adult friends who support them.

Although it might seem difficult to find a common ground with children who are closed, Hrebennikova says that "it's not that hard to be someone's friend."

However, participating in such a program is a big responsibility for a volunteer. They are carefully selected.

To join My Friend, volunteers have to fill in a questionnaire, undergo an interview and attend a two-day training course held by Hrebennikova and other coordinators on the psychology of children from the orphanages, and how to communicate with them.

Hrebennikova says that it's important to listen to the children, get to know them, determine how to help and then figure out a plan of actions. The help usually includes friendly support, assistance in education, and social skills development.

Organizers also advise not to "buy" friendship: to avoid giving the children presents before becoming friends.

### Friendship that lasts

A friendship built through My Friend is expected to last. In the

same way parents help their kids even when they become adults, volunteers should support their younger friends through their lives.

In its eight-year history, My Friend has helped over 150 children.

Andrii Kuzmych, now a 22-year-old college student, is one of them. When he was 17, Kuzmych lived in an orphanage in Poltava Oblast. Through the program he met a friend, who mentored him and later became his godmother. They still keep in touch, and Kuzmych feels grateful to her and says that he wouldn't have been who he is now without her help.

"She supported me in any situation," he says.

Kuzmych says that the program's volunteers always told him to study, be purposeful and plan his future. Today he goes to the agricultural college in Poltava and says that he wouldn't have entered it if he didn't have these friends.

His personality has changed a lot due to the communication with them, he says.

"They were all different and I learned how to find a common ground with anybody," he said. "I became open and bold."

Kvitkovska says that children growing up in orphanages lack close relationships and can't learn how to build them. That's why she believes that "every child needs a family."

And though volunteers can't replace parents, they help out their younger friends as much as they can, she says.

To become a volunteer or support the project contact the coordinator Alona Hrebennikova via phone 050416 12 48 or send an email to [info@detdom.info](mailto:info@detdom.info). Follow the link for detailed information [www.detdom.info](http://www.detdom.info). ■

## Foals July 27

One of the most popular indie-rock bands in the world is to play its debut concert in Ukraine.

Foals will rock the stage of the Platform Art Factory on July 27. Coming from Britain, Foals have been headliners at the Reading, Leeds, Glastonbury and Latitude festivals, and have performed at Coachella in the United States, and Sziget in Hungary.

**Foals (indie rock). July 27. 8 p.m. Platform Art Factory (1 Bilomorska St.). Hr 790-1,500**



(AFP)

July 21-23

## Street Food festival

Ulichnaya Eda (Street Food) is a food festival regularly held at the Platforma Art Factory. Apart from trying a huge variety of food and drinks, visitors will have an



(Ulichnaya Eda)

opportunity to purchase products at the local food market to cook later at home. Attendees will also be able to dance to DJ sets or relax on the many deck chairs.

**Street Food festival. July 21-23. Friday 6 p.m. - 1 a.m. Saturday 11 a.m. - 1 a.m. Sunday 11 a.m. - 11 p.m. Platforma Art Factory (1 Bilomorska St.) Friday Hr 75. Saturday, Sunday Hr 100.**

July 25



(courtesy)

## 'Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead' (theater screening)

This play by award-winning British playwright Tom Stoppard, performed at the Old Vic theater in London, will be screened in Kyiv. The absurdist, existentialist tragicomedy re-interprets William Shakespeare's "Hamlet" from the point of view of two minor characters: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The production features the famous "Harry Potter" star Daniel Radcliffe as Rosencrantz.

**British National Theatre Live: "Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead." July 25. 7 p.m. Kyiv Cinema (19 Velyka Vasylykivska St.) Hr 175**

## Crystal Castles July 26

Canadian band Crystal Castles is coming to Ukraine for the first time to give a concert in the Sentrum hall.

Crystal Castles will perform the songs from their last album "Amnesty," released in 2016. The band plays electronic music and is famous for their energetic live shows.

**Crystal Castles (electronic). July 26. 9 p.m. Sentrum (11 Shota Rustaveli St.). Hr 770**



(AFP)