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Kyiv Post

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UKRAINE'S GLOBAL VOICE • SINCE 1995

Getting electricity in Ukraine simpler and faster



Mikheil Saakashvili

Opinion

The ease of connection to electricity networks is one of the key aspects of

business and economic freedom. In Ukraine, this process is so overwhelm-

ingly complicated and costly that it alone has been dragging us down the World Bank's Doing Business ranking. In 2019, out of 189 countries analyzed on an annual basis, we were 128th best country for getting a connection to electricity networks. We haven't moved up since 2016.

Our excessive bureaucratization of key regulatory processes and lack of transparency have been detrimental to our economy, our businesses, and our people. As we seek to rebuild the economy after COVID-19 and improve our global standing, we need to integrate a complete-

ly radical pro-business narrative into every branch of government. The Office of Simple Solutions and Results (OSSR) has been working tirelessly to uproot the soviet socialist approach in Ukraine, and making it easier for businesses to get connected

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Hard Divide

Russia rips families apart by closing Donbas

AFP



Ukrainian border guards check people at the crossing point near the town of Shchastia in Luhansk Oblast on Nov. 10, 2020. While Ukraine has opened all checkpoints between the government-controlled and the Russian occupied territories in the war-torn east, the Kremlin side has kept almost all of its checkpoints closed, effectively keeping millions of people hostage.

See story on page 8



World in Ukraine: India

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President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) and Ivan Bakanov, head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), attend a Verkhovna Rada meeting on Aug. 29, 2020. Bakanov, a loyal protegee of Zelensky, has been accused of blocking reforms of the SBU to reduce the powers of the powerful law enforcement agency with 40,000 employees. The Soviet KGB successor agency is known for its secrecy, abuse of powers and wide mandate for law enforcement, including economic crimes.

SBU infighting exposes need for drastic reform

By Oleg Sukhov
sukhov@kyivpost.com

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) had a bad enough reputation before it announced an assassination attempt in its upper ranks.

Yet the Jan. 23 statement that former deputy SBU head Dmytro Neskromny plotted to kill the agency's internal security chief Andriy Naumov exposed the depth of the agency's degradation.

Analysts believe that this is a case of officials fighting over corrupt revenues and spheres of influence within the SBU. Some are skeptical that a murder attempt actually took place, seeing the announcement as a big farce.

Either way, the SBU has dodged anti-corruption reforms and is following in the footsteps of its predecessor, the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB). It is impossible to control the integrity and income of the agency's employees due to its secretive nature.

The agency's authority to investigate economic crimes gives it many opportunities for corruption and extortion. SBU employees refuse to publish asset declarations, which makes it easy for them to hide illegal income streams from scrutiny.

The only way to change the situation is with a thorough reform of the SBU, according to legal experts and anti-corruption activists. The agency must be stripped of its power to conduct economic investigations.

"(SBU officials) have become part of the system of organized crime," Olena Shcherban, a legal expert at the Anti-Corruption Action Center (ANTAC), told the Kyiv Post. "This is more proof of the need to reform (the SBU)."

The first step in this direction was taken on Jan. 28, when the Rada approved an SBU reform bill in the first reading, and created a new agency that would take over the SBU's power to investigate economic crimes.

The SBU did not respond to a request for comment for this story.

Alleged plot

The SBU on Jan. 27 charged its ex-top official Neskromny with the attempted murder of Naumov, head of internal security.

The agency alleged that Yury Rasyuk, a consultant at the SBU's anti-terrorism center, served as intermediary for the plot.

Rasyuk has been arrested, while Neskromny remains at large. According to a Telegram account that claims to belong to Neskromny, he has fled to Europe.

The SBU said it detained Rasyuk while he was trying to pay an alleged hitman. According to the investigation, the officer offered \$50,000 for the assassination, which involved several organizers.

The security service on Jan. 27 published audio recordings allegedly implicating Rasyuk and Neskromny in the assassination attempt.

The Telegram account claiming to belong to Neskromny attributed the case against him to his conflict with current SBU chief Ivan Bakanov. According to the account, Neskromny is planning to release compromising information about Bakanov.

"When I was fired from the SBU, I was planning to hold a news conference and tell the public about the negative procedures that started at the SBU when Bakanov became its head," according to a post on the Telegram channel.

Who is Neskromny?

Neskromny has a mixed reputation.

Some argue he has anti-corruption credentials.

While serving as the deputy chief of the SBU's anti-corruption unit in 2015, Neskromny took part in the arrest of two top prosecutors. These so-called "diamond prosecutors" were proteges of Viktor Shokin, the prosecutor general at the time.

Their arrest was seen as a major blow against high-level corruption.

Yet both Neskromny and anti-corruption unit chief Viktor Trepak were later fired from their jobs. Trepak said this was a backlash from the corrupt establishment.

Neskromny went on to serve as the first deputy head of the SBU and chief of its anti-corruption unit from November 2019 to March 2020, when he was fired.

Mykhailo Podolyak, who runs communications for President Volodymyr Zelensky's deputy chief of staff Andriy Yermak, argued that Neskromny was a protégé of Andriy Bohdan, Zelensky's former chief of staff.

In September 2019 Neskromny gave Zelensky recordings implicating Yermak and his brother Denys in alleged corruption, according to sources cited by the Ukrainska Pravda online newspaper. Neskromny was fired not long after that, prompting speculation that his exposure of the Yermaks contributed to his dismissal.

In March 2020, Geo Leros, a lawmaker from Zelensky's Servant of the People party, published videos showing the chief of staff's brother, Denys Yermak, selling state jobs on



Agriculture minister denies \$250,000 theft from partner

By Denys Krasnikov
krasnikov@kyivpost.com

A U.S. farmer has accused Ukraine's next agriculture minister, Roman Leshchenko, of an alleged \$250,000 theft.

Leshchenko, who will begin his role on March 1, denied the accusation. He said that the American, Kurt Groszhans, has committed a much worse crime and he will see him jailed for it.

The former business partners worked together in 2018. Groszhans came to Ukraine to grow crops and hired Leshchenko to direct his business.

It took six months for their relationship to sour. Now, Groszhans is accusing Leshchenko of large-scale theft, while the newly appointed minister accuses Groszhans of making him work for a company that evaded taxes and smuggled illegal genetically modified seeds from the U.S. to Ukraine to grow here.

Evidence obtained by the Kyiv Post from both sides shows that both Leshchenko and Groszhans are gearing up for a long legal battle in the United States.

This battle is taking place during a crucial moment for Ukraine's newly-restored agriculture ministry.



Roman Leshchenko, the new agriculture minister of Ukraine, speaks with the Kyiv Post on Jan. 27, 2021. U.S. farmer Kurt Groszhans has accused Leshchenko, 32, of a \$250,000 theft, something Leshchenko strongly denied. To the contrary, he told the Kyiv Post that the American committed a crime that Leshchenko wants to see him jailed for.

The land market reform will come into effect on July 1, opening the free trade of Ukraine's farmland for Ukrainian citizens. It will replace

the decades-old system under which people couldn't sell their land and had to lease it.

If Leshchenko can prove in court

that he's innocent and Groszhans committed crimes, it will clear his reputation. But if Groszhans proves he's right, this may tarnish not

just Leshchenko's name but also Ukraine's international image.

"I am calm," Leshchenko told the Kyiv Post on Jan. 27. "The truth is on my side. My lawyers and I have dedicated three years to documenting all the facts, prepare. Under oath or lie detectors, I am ready to testify that Groszhans is a person who's engaged in dishonest business practices."

The big quarrel

Leshchenko worked for Groszhans from March to September 2018. Then he left.

Groszhans claims that Leshchenko stopped giving him "proper information" about his company and showed "improper performance" and he replaced him. When Groszhans looked into his company, he said he found that Leshchenko over six months transferred money to Progress LLC, a company that today belongs to his wife.

Bit by bit, Leshchenko appropriated \$250,000, according to Groszhans, who said he knew nothing about the transfers and demanded his money back.

Groszhans said he ended up with no working capital, with barely enough money to live on. Groszhans

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Advertisement

WINNER: STORY OF SUCCESS IN UKRAINE

WINNER

Winner Group Ukraine, one of the leaders of the automotive business, having more than 29-year experience of work in Ukraine.

Among Winner Group's automotive businesses are Winner Imports Ukraine, Ford Winner Automotive, Volvo Winner Automotive, Porsche Center Kyiv Airport, Jaguar Land Rover Kyiv Airport, Bentley Kyiv, Renault Winner Obolon, and Winner Leasing.

Winner Imports Ukraine is the official importer of the world's major brands – Ford, Volvo, Jaguar, Land Rover, Porsche, and Bentley, offers cars, spare parts, and international-standard service in 47 dealership centers in Ukraine.

Apart from its automotive business, Winner also works in construction and maintains commercial and residential real estate. Its companies in this sector include Winner Construction, Winner Facility Management, and Winner Property Management.

As one of the largest taxpayers in its segment, Winner Group Ukraine has returned over \$1 500 000 000 to the state budget as of January 2021.

Winner Group Ukraine employs more than 700 people.

Winner Group's major stages of development in Ukraine:

- 1991 – Ivan Hynansky accepts an offer by Ford Motors to move to Ukraine and represent the Ford brand in the young, newly independent state. Ukrainian by origin, Mr. Hynansky was raised in the USA and owned several automotive dealership centers there.
- 1992 – Headed by Mr. Hynansky, Winner becomes an official dealer for Ford Motors in Kyiv and several other Ukrainian cities. Two years later, the company becomes an official importer of Ford in Ukraine and opens the largest service station for Ford cars in the country.
- 1997 – Winner establishes Winner Construction business and builds the first showroom to sell Ford cars in Ukraine.
- 2000 – For its hard work and high standards, Winner Imports Ukraine was chosen to become an official importer of Volvo cars in Ukraine.
- 2004 to 2005 – Winner repute grows rapidly. It fights for and wins the right to represent the interests of three premium car brands – Jaguar, Land Rover, and Porsche – in the Ukrainian market.
- 2006 – In the capital of Ukraine, Winner opens one of the largest showrooms in Eastern Europe: a multi-brand conceptual car center called 'Winner Automotive' with an area of 8,400 square meters.
- 2009 – Outside of Kyiv, Winner opens a new distribution center. The center prepares 8000 cars for sale every year and is unique in terms of the sophistication of its equipment in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Winner Group moves its headquarters outside of Kyiv.



- 2014 – Winner conceptual dealership center 'Porsche Center Kyiv Airport', with an area of 7300 square meters, opens its doors. The center provides a full range of services: selling Porsche cars, original spare parts, accessories, and offering maintenance service and repair.
- 2016 – On August 24, the 25th anniversary of Ukraine's independence, Winner signs an exclusive agreement with Bentley, and becomes its official representative on the territory of Ukraine.
- 2017 – Winner celebrates 25 years in Ukraine!
- 2018 – The unique dealership center Jaguar Land Rover Kyiv Airport, with an area of 7500 square meters, was opened. It is an example of the conceptual implementation of the new global standard of arc design.
- 2019 – The largest Bentley concept dealership in Europe was officially opened, located on Boryspil road Kyiv city.
- 2019 – Winner Group Ukraine was chosen to become an official Renault dealer in Kyiv city and the Kyiv region.

Winner Group Ukraine is optimistic about the future and continues to implement the greatest projects. In the upcoming year, its plans include expanding its presence all across Ukraine, increasing its share in the domestic automotive and construction markets.

Ivan Hynansky, CEO and owner of Winner Group Ukraine: "On the path of the formation of the company, we have experienced difficult times more than once, but our journey continues. Ukraine's integration into Europe has opened new horizons and has given Ukrainians hope to improve the standard of living for themselves, their children, and grandchildren.

Today, I see many opportunities and I am sure that my country of origin has a bright future both for business and for people."

Petro Rondiak, Head of the Management Board of Winner Group Ukraine: "In the near future, we intend to increase our presence on the Ukrainian market. I believe in the Ukrainian hard-working people who have chosen the European vector of development and will eventually have a larger market than today. We have no doubt that this growth will actually take place

Vitaliy Kopych, Deputy Head of the Management Board, CFO of Winner Group Ukraine: "We have clearly seen our own development in Ukraine. This is a very dynamic country, and we are optimistic about the positive changes that are taking place in the Ukrainian economy now."

Winner Group Ukraine has been an example of a fair, transparent and socially responsible business in Ukraine for more than 29 years. The key to its success is the five core values shared by each of the company's employees:

1. **Integrity.** Since 1992, Winner has built its business on the principles of honesty and transparency. It promotes mutual respect in its relationships with customers, partners, and its employees.
2. **Continuous improvement.** Winner values a readiness for change, openness to everything new, and the ability to innovate in order to increase the efficiency of the business. Continuous improvement means moving forward!
3. **Professionalism.** Winner employees take their share of responsibility, approach each matter carefully, and can make millions of complex decisions in just 24 hours. This is "Winner-style" professionalism!
4. **People.** The main asset of Winner is people because any business is done with people and for people.

5. **Winning.** This value – translated in Ukrainian as "nepemora" which was used as the basis for the company name. More than 29 years of Winner work in Ukraine were not easy. Thanks to its constant striving for victory, they were successful.

Winner Group Ukraine develops a systematic approach to charity and corporate social responsibility to make a significant and lasting contribution to Ukraine's future. Winner CSR includes two areas – "Charity" and "Responsible Business".

The history of Winner is inseparably associated with the history and the formation of independent Ukraine. Soon Winner will celebrate its first 30 years together with the nation and believes in Ukraine's bright future. After all, Winner is building its business in Ukraine and for Ukrainians!

For more information: <https://winner.ua/en>



EDITORIALS

Corrupt farce

It's clearer by the day that the idea to create a parallel and separate anti-corruption infrastructure in Ukraine was a well-intentioned, but naïve mistake. It has been badly executed, and allowed Ukraine's government and powerful oligarchs (who still rule, by the way) to avoid reform of the main police, prosecutors and courts that still wield most of the power and hog most of the resources – employing hundreds of thousands of people.

Creating an elite, independent, untouchable, incorruptible set of institutions looked good on paper in the euphoria after the EuroMaidan Revolution toppled Kremlin-backed President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014.

The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, or NABU, would investigate high-level corruption. The Special Anti-Prosecutor's Office of Ukraine, or SAPO, would prosecute the cases. The National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption would monitor asset declarations by top officials for signs of corruption.

And, oh, as an afterthought, after realizing there's no credible court to take these cases, the High Anti-Corruption Court of Ukraine was established in 2019, after Petro Poroshenko obstructed its creation for most of his five-year presidency.

But it was all a trap.

These new agencies don't have anywhere near the resources as the old, corrupt and ineffective existing institutions – the Interior Ministry (250,000+ employees), the Security Service of Ukraine, or SBU (40,000+ employees), the State Bureau of Investigation (1,600+ employees), the General Prosecutor's Office (9,000+ prosecutors) and the regular courts (7,000+ judges), with the newly constituted Supreme Court a possible exception.

NABU, the most effective of them all, has been sabotaged by limited powers, inadequate resources and turf battles. It belatedly won the right to use wiretaps as part of its investigations, but still can't execute it because the SBU obstructs it. In the latest outrage, a parliament committee approved legislation that allows the general prosecutor to take cases away from NABU without court approval.

For years, the SAPO was led by Nazar Kholodnytsky, who is alleged to have been corrupt himself, after NABU recordings caught him coaching criminal investigation suspects in avoiding charges. Now there isn't anybody in the role. In any case, the position remains subservient to the general prosecutor.

As for the High Anti-Corruption Court, the early signs aren't good. The court has already made some questionable rulings, and its chairwoman was spotted attending a party thrown by Serhiy Kivalov along with some of the most notorious judges in Ukraine. In any case, the court's effectiveness in stamping out corruption will be limited if investigators and prosecutors fail to bring cases of big corruption.

As the standoff between President Volodymyr Zelensky and the corrupt Constitutional Court shows, these justices will simply undermine the corruption fight by nullifying laws that empowered these new agencies.

The most recent embarrassment to expose the moral bankruptcy of law enforcement involved the SBU. This is the Soviet-era successor of the KGB that operates with no accountability and that seems to exist mainly to enrich its bloated workforce by extorting money from legitimate businesses. The plot involved accusations that an ex-top SBU official and a current agent conspired to assassinate a top commander under Ivan Bakanov, the SBU chief installed by Zelensky, his long-time friend. The only kernel of good news came with an initial vote by parliament on Jan. 28 to move to strip the agency of its involvement in economic activities.

It's possible that these new anti-corruption agencies could still live up to their potential if they were truly independent and given enough resources. But then the old corrupt agencies should go out of existence. To have parallel agencies just invites the turf wars and unclear authority that we've seen.

We've seen enough. If parliament or the prosecutor general or the courts don't sabotage these agencies, they're sabotaged from within. And this just gives the unaccountable and ineffective old agencies more excuses to betray the public interest. Safest bet: No one of any consequence will face charges for any serious crimes by the new or old agencies soon, if ever.

New day

Discontent is rising with dictatorships in Russia and Belarus. The long list of crimes against humanity by Vladimir Putin keeps growing. And finally, there is someone in the White House who understands Ukraine and may be willing to help.

The presidency of Joseph Biden presents Ukraine with great opportunities. One of them is to help the West stop coddling Putin. To those ends, Ukraine would do itself a favor by mounting a credible fight against Kremlin influence within, through the likes of Viktor Medvedchuk, exiled Dmytro Firtash, Andriy Derkach and Oleksandr Dubinsky. All are either sanctioned by the U.S. or, in the case of Firtash, facing criminal indictments. But this quartet or their business interests are unscathed by Kyiv.

Six years ago, Biden told then-Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk that a credible anti-corruption fight means putting people in jail. Since then, Ukraine has had three prime ministers and a change in the presidency, yet no one has faced justice in high-profile murders or financial crimes.

Ukraine should not count on Biden's support if it's not willing to clean its own house. In foreign policy, Ukraine needs to form better alliances and strategies with other victims of the Kremlin.

Ukraine also should not exaggerate its importance to the West. Biden's first phone calls as president followed America's foreign policy priorities. He called the leaders of Canada and Mexico first, quickly followed by Germany, France and NATO, then chief adversary Russia.

When he gets around to calling Volodymyr Zelensky, the Ukrainian president would be wise to be clear about what he wants – and about showing Biden that he's a credible partner.

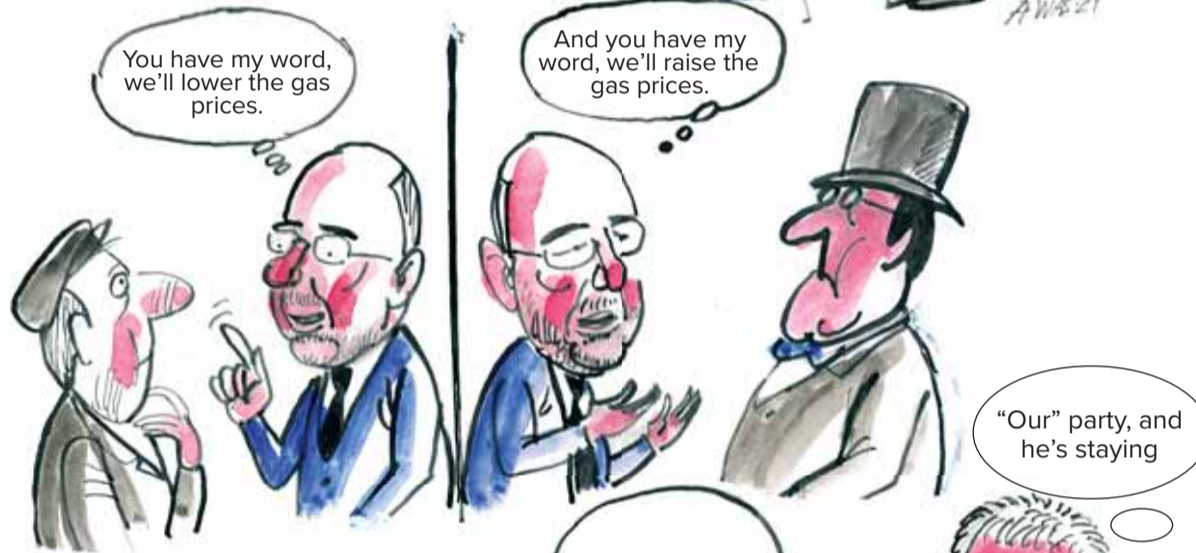
NEWS ITEM:

On Jan. 26, U.S. President Joe Biden spoke over the phone with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Among a variety of topics discussed, Biden has "reaffirmed the U.S. firm support for Ukraine's sovereignty," says the White House. While Ukraine has been a part of a conversation between foreign leaders, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has yet to speak to Biden.



NEWS ITEM:

On Jan. 27, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal's government set the maximum gas price for households at Hr 7 for one cubic meter, 30% below market price. At the same time, the International Monetary Fund demands that Ukraine charge market price if it wants to continue getting loans from the organization.



NEWS ITEM:

On Jan. 25, President Volodymyr Zelensky asked lawmaker Oleksandr Dubinsky to leave the president's Servant of the People faction in parliament following the U.S. sanctions against Dubinsky. The lawmaker, an ally of oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky, denied the president's request and stayed in the faction. Dubinsky is one of approximately 30 to 40 lawmakers who are seen as controlled by Kolomoisky.



NEWS ITEM:

A schoolteacher from Varash, Rivne Oblast, a city of 45,000 people 380 kilometers west of Kyiv, successfully appealed a Hr 17,000 fine (\$650) for not wearing a mask in school. The teacher, a Christian believer, said that God forbids her to wear a mask.

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Ukraine's Friend & Foe Of The Week



Friend

Marco Mendicino
Canada's minister of immigration and Ukrainian colleagues have started a working group that will hopefully lead to visa-free travel to Canada for Ukrainians.



Foe

Klaus Schwab
The executive chairman with World Economic Forum in Davos has again granted Russian dictator Vladimir Putin a speaking platform in an attempt to whitewash a record that includes invasion of sovereign nations, war crimes and likely use of banned chemical weapons in attempted assassinations of political opponents.

Feel strongly about an issue? Agree or disagree with editorial positions in this newspaper?

The Kyiv Post welcomes letters to the editors and opinion pieces, usually 800 to 1,000 words in length. Please email all correspondence to chief editor Brian Bonner, at bonner@kyivpost.com. All correspondence must include an email address and contact phone number for verification.

New day in Washington should be a wake-up call for Ukraine



Myron Wasyluk

A few hours after President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris took oaths to execute their duties and defend the U.S. Constitution, the United States Senate met in full session to swear in three new Democratic senators — two from the state of Georgia who won special elections on Jan. 2, and one from the state of California, replacing Kamala Harris. By the end of Jan. 20, the executive and legislative branches of power officially reverted to the control of Democrats, at least for a period of two years until the next legislative election in 2022.

By tradition, Biden will have a 100-day honeymoon period from inauguration day to launch his programs, staff more than 3,000 executive positions, and take over the reign of his vast executive powers. Fifteen executive orders signed on Jan. 20 show that Biden will move quickly to reverse many of President Donald J. Trump's programs — beginning with rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement and World Health Organization, to mandating wearing masks on all federal property, and ending the travel ban on Muslims. His first 100-days will certainly not be without crisis and one of the most important ones is the COVID pandemic and the economic relief Americans are anticipating from the federal government.

When it comes broadly to U.S. foreign policy, no radical changes are expected immediately. The Senate, on a 78–22 vote, easily confirmed Secretary of State Anthony Blinken on Jan. 26. In a Jan. 19 statement, Blinken said: “We’ll engage the world as it is, not as it was. A world of rising nationalism, receding democracy, growing rivalry with China, Russia, and other authoritarian states, mounting threats to a stable and open international system, and a technological revolution that is reshaping every aspect of our lives, especially in cyberspace.”

Blinken condemns Putin

During the hearing question and answer session, Blinken pledged to continue the Trump administration's direction with regard to China by stating “President Trump was right in taking a tougher approach on China.” On Iran, Blinken said the administration's intention would be to reenter negotiations on a nuclear deal with Tehran. And with regard to Russia, Blinken said “it was extraordinary how frightened Putin is of (Alexei) Navalny,” continuing that “attempts to silence that voice is something we (the United States) strongly condemn.”

As the U.S. administration begins to re-engage with the world, so to have world capitals expressed readiness to work with the new leaders in Washington. Ukraine is no exception with President Volodymyr Zelensky tweeting that he is looking

forward to meeting in Kyiv with U.S. President Biden in the near future. Regardless of the newness of the administration and some of its faces, American foreign policy is very much grounded in strategic interests and priorities and success is measured by how bilateral partnerships proceed and what progress is actually made on mutually agreed points of interest.

For United States policymakers there are at least two points that stand out with regard to Ukraine and the Zelensky presidency, which will need to be addressed in Kyiv before any meeting with high US government officials.

British intelligence

The first concern has its roots during an official visit to the United Kingdom by Zelensky in October 2020. Then, Zelensky held an unannounced meeting with the head of British intelligence, Richard Moore, at which three messages were conveyed to him.

First, attacks by Ukrainian authorities on anti-corruption bodies with-

“

It's politically immature to believe President Biden will visit a Ukraine still mired in corruption and struggling with reforms.

”

Myron Wasyluk

out any defense from the President's Office were troubling.

Second, the situation in the Donbas and Russia's actions.

Third, intelligence leaks from within Zelensky's official and informal entourage were making their way back to Western capitals. Moore was instructed to hold the meeting with Zelensky by Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Similar concerns were raised with Zelensky by Americans in the summer of 2020. And more recently by G7 ambassadors in Kyiv in December 2020.

Kolomoisky's case

Given the U.S. district attorney's indictments against billionaire oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky, many in the West are concerned over the domestic attacks on Ukraine's anti-corruption authorities, especially the lack of cooperation by the Ukrainian side on helping bring the oligarch to justice. Of graver concern is the public U.S. support for the supply of lethal weapons to Ukraine while at the same time intelligence leaks continue around Zelensky's office. This has repercussions in NATO capitals and



From left, Doug Emhoff, US Vice President Kamala Harris, US First Lady Jill Biden, US President Joe Biden on Jan. 20, 2021, Inauguration Day outside the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

with Western partners like Israel. The issue raised is one of trust.

Stalled IMF loan

Second, multilateral funding is of course an important geopolitical instrument used by Western governments. It cannot go unnoticed in Washington, D.C., and other Western capitals that Ukraine has within the last year not been able to reach an agreement with the International Monetary Fund on economic reforms that would unleash a new tranche of funding.

Yet, at the same time, Ukraine continues to successfully sell government bonds on the international capital markets to cover budget deficits. In financial terms, there is nothing wrong with selling bonds. However, the fact that IMF money remains blocked shows the West that official Kyiv is not very keen on meeting its own economic reform commitments. And that is something that does concern Western governments because it sends a signal to the international business community that Ukraine may not be a very promising destination for foreign direct investment.

A matter of trust

It's easy to see how Ukraine's leadership could be so positively taken with Biden's inauguration, the lineup of stars from Lady Gaga to Jennifer Lopez, among others, and the awe-inspiring firework on the Washington Mall. But for Ukraine's strategic relationship with the United States to be put on a new and priority level, Kyiv has a lot of homework to catch up on. Not wanting to engage with Trump during the election period is no longer a reason to do nothing. Given Republican concerns over the role of Hunter Biden, it's politically immature to believe President Biden will visit a Ukraine still marred in corruption and struggling with reforms. Events in the West will begin to change

rapidly with a new Washington administration. One thing remains perfectly clear and that is that neither Washington nor Western governments will reward unstable and do-nothing governments that cannot

be trusted and do not keep their own promises.

Myron Wasyluk is director of international cooperation for the Growford Institute, an independent think tank in Kyiv.

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Zoom
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2 February 2021
3 pm EET

Lviv City Council

The BUCC in 2021 is holding a series of Webinars on **Regional Development in Ukraine** with presentations on investment possibilities and government support.

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The Webinar will also cover the UK's new GBP 2.5 bln facility for UK-Ukraine trade and investment.

The event will be held on **Tuesday, 2 February 2021 at 3 pm EET** as a 60-minutes Zoom Webinar with a Q&A session, with presentations by:

- (1) **Andriy Sadovyi** – Mayor of Lviv;
- (2) **Roman Staretsky** – Head of the Investments and Projects Office at the Lviv City Council, Promoting «Invest in Lviv. Your new business destination in 2021»;
- (3) **Vadym Tabakera** – Deputy Head of the Economic Policy Department of the Lviv Regional State Administration;
- (4) **Peter Wickenden** – First Secretary, Energy Policy, and Acting Country Director for the Department of International Trade (DIT), British Embassy, Kyiv;
- (5) **Mark Laird** – CEO/Founder, Central Plains Group (CPG) (previously founded and was CEO of CFG through to its successful acquisition of Mriya Agroholding);

hosted by **Bohdan Nahaylo**, British-Ukrainian journalist, and **Bate Toms**, BUCC Chairman.

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REGISTRATION:



Zelensky's last chance to defeat corrupt judiciary



Halyna Chyzhyk

Ukraine desperately needs judicial reform. For almost two years of Volodymyr Zelensky's presidency, nothing was actually done to clean the system from corrupt judges who seem to become more powerful amid a weak president and his team. Thus, 2021 will be a defining year that will show whether Zelensky will combat the judicial mafia or be defeated by it.

What is going on?

The most scandalous Ukrainian court — the District Administrative Court of Kyiv (DACK) — remains a threat as the president delays its liquidation while the High Council of Justice (HCJ) covers up for corrupt judges.

Seven judges of DACK including its head Pavlo Vovk and his deputy Eugenyi Ablov are now under investigation by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine for creation of a criminal organization, bribery, illegal decisions, and attempts to seize state power.

Despite that the HCJ, the main judicial governance body in Ukraine, has refused to suspend them.

Instead of condemning judges' behavior, the HCJ accused NABU of organizing a smear campaign against the judiciary.

Still the High Anticorruption Court (HACC), unlike the rest of the judiciary, remains the only institution not involved in covering up for Vovk and his accomplices.

Only over the last couple of weeks, DACK canceled the lustration of the former head of the investigative department of the Interior Ministry. This official, during the EuroMaidan Revolution that deposed President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014, legalized a nine-story building as a four-story building with a mezzanine and forbade the General Prosecutor's Office to search a high-profile suspect abroad.

However, the Pecherskyi district court of Kyiv may steal DACK's thunder — it has its own Judge Vovk

(Serhii) and a series of scandalous decisions.

For example, the Pecherskyi court invented a scheme allowing corrupt officials to change investigative authority and remove NABU from the case.

Although only the HACC is authorized to make decisions regarding cases investigated by NABU, the Pecherskyi Court considers and decides on claims asking for a change of the investigative body.

The scheme was already employed in the cases of agricultural magnate Oleh Bakhmatyuk, DACK judges, Burisma owner Mykola Zlochevskyi, and deputy presidential chief of staff Oleh Tatarov. Interestingly, decisions regarding the cases of the DACK judges and Tatarov were made by Judge Serhii Vovk.

The High Council of Justice could easily stop the mayhem by holding judges accountable, but it covers up for them instead. Shockingly, on Jan. 18, 2021, the HCJ refused to consider a claim against the Pecherskyi court Judge Serhii Vovk who urged PrivatBank to pay \$350 million to the Surkis brothers' companies. Despite the fact that the Supreme Court had ruled on the illegality of Vovk's decision, the HCJ refused even to open disciplinary proceedings regarding a judge.

Also, the HCJ celebrated the end of 2020 in its own way — by initiating the appointment of more than 50 judges who did not pass the qualification evaluation.

Despite the fact that the High Qualification Commission of Judges had not considered the negative opinions of the Public Integrity Council regarding the judges, the HCJ bypassed the constitutional requirements and recommended the appointment of the judges.

Especially outrageous is the fact the HCJ recommended Viktor Kytsiuk, who had not even entered the evaluation procedure. Last but not least, the HCJ started to use disciplinary proceedings to blackmail HACC judges considering high-profile cases. In particular, the HCJ



Activists hold a banner with combined portraits of President Volodymyr Zelensky and his deputy chief of staff, Oleh Tatarov, demanding to prosecute Tatarov for bribery, on Dec. 28, 2020 in front of the High Anti-Corruption Court of Ukraine.

opened disciplinary proceedings against HACC judge Andrii Bitsiuk who decided on the extension of the terms of pre-trial investigation of the DACK case, under the claim of Pavlo Vovk attorneys.

Furthermore, on Jan. 13 the HCJ brought another HACC judge Tymur Khamzin to disciplinary responsibility for the decision in the DACK case.

What about reform?

In his interview with the New York Times in December 2020, Zelensky announced huge judicial reform in the future. This would be the new president's third attempt in reforming the judiciary, with the first two attempts failing.

Firstly, the implementation of law No. 193-IX on the reboot of the High Qualification Commission of Judges (HQCJ) and the cleaning out of the HCJ was sabotaged by the HCJ, and then canceled by the Constitutional Court. The president's second initiative on the relaunch of the HQCJ (draft law No. 3711) is now being sabotaged by the members of the Parliamentary Committee on Legal Policy. MPs have been considering the draft for more than six months already and have not even voted on it in the first reading.

On Nov. 5, 2020, the Rada returned draft No. 3711 for repeated first reading after the Venice Commission published a very critical opinion on it.

However, MPs managed to rewrite the president's draft in a way that contradicts the recommendations of the VC and keeps judicial clans control over the HQCJ. The role of international experts in the process of selecting of the HQCJ members is minimized due to the latest version of draft No. 3711 introduced at the Committee's meeting on Jan. 14. Meanwhile, the former HQCJ composition was dismissed in November 2019, so the selection and evaluation

of judges have been blocked since then. Unfortunately, MPs seem not to care about this fact.

Also, it is discouraging that MPs continue to do nothing to address the Constitutional Court crisis. They neither consider draft laws aimed at preventing the Court from canceling pro-European reforms nor initiate amendments on the competitive selection of judges of the court.

Finally, the most desired reform — the reform of the HCJ — is being sabotaged by the Zelensky team. The Presidential Office, where the judicial reform is led by Andrii Smirnov, delays the draft law on the HCJ renewal which had to be adopted by the end of October 2020 according to the memorandum with the IMF. Moreover, Smirnov also blocked the promotion of the draft law on the HCJ prepared by the Ministry of Justice in September of the previous year.

At the same time, Smirnov imitates the reform by relaunching the Commission on Legal Reforms established by Zelensky in August 2019.

Ignoring the draft concept of judiciary reform prepared by the working group in 2019, Smirnov initiated the discussion from scratch by presenting a new draft concept to the renewed commission in November 2020.

The document suggests strengthening the HCJ without ensuring the integrity and accountability of its members. Given the previous experience, many discussions will be conducted before the document is adopted. Thus, while on its face this strategy may seem to suggest reform, it is in fact trying to kill it.

What's next?

Corrupt judges and their patrons in the HCJ feel free to do as they wish as the president and parliament are not able to introduce effective reform and ensure its prop-

er implementation. As the judicial mafia grows stronger each day, the president loses control over his own party and administration.

Having endless fruitless conversations about future judicial reform as the president suggests with establishing another "reform council" is not a solution. We know we need the reform of judicial governance bodies in order to ensure the proper cleaning out and renewal of the entire judiciary. We also know that integrity of future members of the HCJ and the HQCJ can be ensured only with the involvement of international experts and civil society in the process. Without a doubt, we also need to ensure the integrity of the Constitutional Court judges.

We knew it two years ago but time was wasted on discussions, giving compromised judges another chance.

The good news is that reform is still possible.

What is needed is the adoption of the draft laws on the HQCJ and the HCJ ensuring the crucial role of international experts in the process of selection of future members of both bodies and the new procedure on the competitive selection of the Constitutional Court judges. The sooner the relevant legislation is adopted the better. This also should be the priority for the international partners who closely follow the topic. They should not tolerate new rounds of meaningless discussions on future strategies and approaches.

Now it is time for the president to take personal responsibility for the reform and stop relying on his team which covers up for the judicial mafia. Zelensky should switch from statements to actions if he does not want to repeat the fate of his predecessors. Otherwise, street justice will take over.

Halyna Chyzhyk is an expert on Ukraine's judiciary with the Anti-Corruption Action Center in Kyiv.

Volodymyr Petrov



A mock wanted notice of controversial Pavlo Vovk, head of the Kyiv Administrative District Court, in Kyiv on Dec. 1, 2020.

Oleg Petrasjuk

Mikheil Saakashvili: Electricity is basic need for business

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to electricity networks, has been one of our priorities.

The procedure for connecting to the electricity grid is complex, bureaucratic, and time-consuming. In some cases, it can take years. To be more specific, on average, it takes 267 days, or about 66 weeks, to get electricity in Ukraine. For aspiring small bakeries or production rooms (shops) that is a real quest for survival. By comparison, in Russia, it takes only 38 days. Ukrainian entrepreneurs are overburdened by the system that seeks to block their activities from the start or entice corruption.

At the same time, the cost of connecting to electrical networks for business is one of the highest in the world. This negatively affects the overall position of Ukraine in the ranking, slows down business development, and reduces the investment attractiveness of the country as a whole. The reform that we put together would help us substantially decrease the cost of connection: for standard connection – by 20–25 percent, and for non-standard ones (more used by businesses) – by 30–40 percent.

Aside from that, currently, applicants need to submit 17 documents to get a connection. Our top priority should be to ensure that grid connection services are provided to companies in the shortest possible time and in the most convenient and simple way. This will help strengthen Ukraine's competitive advantages and its attractiveness to foreign investors. Under our plan, only one document – an application as such – would be required.

When procedures, rules, and reg-

ulations are clear and understandable, starting a business is easier not only for large companies but also for smaller ones, which have less capital and resources. One of the major challenges is the complex and bureaucratic procedure for the registration of land rights required to place energy facilities makes it extremely difficult to place energy facilities. Combined with non-transparent and time-costly coordination processes among interested parties, these cancerous areas are among top reasons why we lag behind advanced countries.

The first step would be to reduce the number of intermediaries in the process and create a "single window" for issuing data and getting approvals from authorities and local government, municipal services and enterprises. This move, in particular, would help us reduce corruption risks: a large number of steps and complex processes make the system conducive to corruption. Prospective businesses should be treated as value creators by the government system, and the latter should be focused on enhancing their role as such by not putting brakes on their development.

The pursuit of transparency is ingrained in the reform we propose, and for that reason, the state should guarantee open access to urban databases and other source data. This also ties into the urgent need for clarity and cost-efficiency. In our information age, monopolizing access to government data that is instrumental for business activities is completely backwards and unjustified.

Now, in order for the getting electricity reform to be successful, government officials need to be brought

“
The procedure for connecting to the electricity grid is complex, bureaucratic and time-consuming.
”

Mikheil Saakashvili



Oleg Petrasjuk


A man rides a bike next to electric power transition lines in Kyiv Oblast. Mikheil Saakashvili, chair of the executive committee of the National Reform Council, believes the ease of connection to electricity networks is one of the key aspects of business and economic freedom and this process is overwhelmingly complicated and costly in Ukraine.

to responsibility if they fail to cooperate with the business. This is why we propose to introduce administrative responsibility for failure to ensure data access. This would create a much-needed and long-overdue environment of liability and cooperation. Bureaucrats need to feel like it is in their self-interest to help businesses get electricity faster, and the suggested responsibility clause will leave them no choice.

We are grateful to have worked with the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Energy and Housing and Communal Services and the National Commission for State Regulation of Energy and Public Utilities on put-

ting together a comprehensive and innovative draft law. If passed and implemented, it will reduce the time needed to get electricity from 270 days to 97 days and cancel unnecessary bureaucratic procedures. It is one of those reforms that has been unilaterally endorsed by all stakeholders which is extremely rare for Ukraine. Our Doing Business ranking would immediately improve, as well as our global standing and economic wellbeing of Ukrainian businesses and consumers. We can and will become Georgia or Estonia in terms of business-friendliness if we commit to working together to liberalize the getting electricity procedure.

I would like to finish off by stressing the importance of political will and cooperation. In October last year, President Volodymyr Zelensky supported our getting electricity reform concept during the National Reforms Council meeting, and there is every reason to hope that the nine circles of hell businesses need to go through to get electricity connection will become history soon.

Mikheil Saakashvili has been the chair of the executive committee of the National Reform Council since May 7, 2020. He served as governor of Odesa Oblast from May 30, 2015, to Nov. 9, 2016. He was president of Georgia from Jan. 25, 2004, to Nov. 17, 2013. 

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Coca-Cola invested EUR 10 million in the modernization of a high-speed production line

Coca-Cola HBC Ukraine continues to increase its production capacity, having modernized the CAN-line at its plant in Kyiv region. This affirms the company's focus on innovation and the importance of the local market.

The modernization has boosted efficiency by 80% – the line's capacity is now 90,000 cans per hour. The project cost EUR 10 million and took 5 months to implement. The new CAN line's new high-tech equipment will improve productivity without increasing energy consumption, reducing CO2 emissions per unit of output and optimizing the resources used.

Coca-Cola's plant in the Kyiv region currently has 11 production lines that make beverages in cans, Tetra Paks, PET and glass bottles.



Coca-Cola's Kyiv plant has been in operation for over 20 years. The company employs more than 1,300 people. The plant produces a wide range of beverages: sparkling soft drinks, juices, water, energy drinks and ready-to-drink tea. The company also procures raw materials from local suppliers for its beverage production.



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Coca-Cola HBC
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Russia shuts down occupied Donbas, rips families apart

By Oleksiy Sorokin
sorokin@kyivpost.com

Editor's Note: People mentioned in this article live in Russian-occupied Donetsk or have relatives living under occupation. Donetsk, a city with a pre-war population of 1 million people located 750 kilometers southeast of Kyiv, is now controlled by militants under Russian command. Human rights abuses including kidnappings, illegal detention and torture are well-documented. To protect the people sharing sensitive information, the Kyiv Post is not publishing their surnames.

In early August, Darya found out that her grandmother, who raised her from birth, had died. Darya's first thought was to rush to the western Ukrainian city of Lviv to say one final goodbye.

But she couldn't. Darya lives in Donetsk, a city in eastern Ukraine that has been occupied by Russian-separatist forces since 2014.

Before the war, the 1,000 kilometers from Donetsk to Lviv equaled a 15-hour train trip. Now, they might as well be on different continents.

Since March, Russia has de facto closed all crossing points between the occupied eastern Donbas and the Ukrainian government-controlled territory.

"I (officially) have the right to freedom of movement, yet today I'm a hostage, I have no rights," said Darya.

Russia's decision to isolate the Ukrainian territory it occupies has caused severe hardship for the approximately 2 million people living under occupation. Ukrainian citizens in parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts are cut off from their relatives, reliable medical assistance and social security services. This isn't what Russia promised.



Workers of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine accommodate people stuck in no man's land near the Novotroitske crossing point in September 2020 after the Russian-led militants denied them entry into the occupied zone.

In December 2019, the leaders of Ukraine, Germany, France and

Russia — known as the Normandy Four — met in Paris to discuss a peaceful solution to Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine.

The heads of states agreed to open three new crossing points between Ukraine's government-controlled territory and the Russian-occupied parts of Donbas.

Instead, a year after the meeting, Russia has closed all five existing crossing points. Now, to travel between Donetsk and government-controlled areas, a person must receive a special permit from the militants to be allowed to pass through the crossing point.

According to Darya, it's practically impossible to receive that permit. She asked for one in August to attend her grandmother's funeral, and was denied. She had to watch the funeral via Skype.

"We don't know the exact reasons behind the militants' reasoning," said Veronika Artemchuk, coordinator at Donbas SOS, a non-government organization that helps people living on both sides of the war.

The only way out is to use a long, expensive and illegal route through Russia, which few can afford.

COVID-19 isolation

Darya's case is not unique. In January 2020, over 250,000 people crossed the contact line each week. In January 2021, less than 1,000 people

are allowed to cross each week.

Officially, the militants keep two checkpoints open, one near occupied Luhansk and one near occupied Donetsk. The Donetsk one works two days a week, for several hours.

Only people in critical conditions are allowed to leave the occupied territories.

Everyone the Kyiv Post was able to talk to has been denied exit, despite deaths of family members, medical conditions, or the need to return home to the government-controlled territory.

The Russian-led militants systematically erased all traces of Ukraine from the region. Ukrainian television, radio and print were banned during the early stages of the war. Ukrainian-language signs were demolished. Ukrainian mobile carriers were shut down and Ukraine's currency, the hryvnia, was substituted by the Russian ruble.

Now they are ripping families apart. The border closure cut Darya and her youngest child off from their family.

Soon after the war started in 2014, Darya's family fled the occupied region. However, Darya and her then-husband decided to move back to Donetsk within a year.

"Our house was built by my father,



Ukrainians in Russian-held Donbas are cut off from rest of nation

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a miner. If I leave today, the house will get ransacked," she said.

Part of her family stayed in the free part of Ukraine.

"My oldest son told me that he won't return until they stop shooting," said Darya. "They never did, so he never returned."

Darya gave birth to her third child and stayed in Donetsk, working as a saleswoman. She often visited her two other kids, parents and grandmother in Ukraine's western Lviv Oblast. Darya last visited them in 2019.

It all came crashing down in March. The militants have kept the border with government-controlled territories sealed since then.

No rights

In mid-March, the Ukrainian government imposed a two-week lockdown after the country recorded its first COVID-19 death. The five existing crossing points between the government-controlled territory and occupied parts of Donbas were temporarily closed.

According to Ukraine's Border Guard Service, the checkpoints only permitted people traveling home to their place of registration. The drastic measures came out of the lack of information on the pandemic's severity in occupied areas.

In response, Russian-led militants shut down the crossing points completely, citing the same reason. People traveling to the occupied region were forced to sleep in no man's land in tents provided by human rights groups.

Ukraine's quarantine was lifted in late May. However, the occupants kept the crossing points closed. Some think it's because they wanted to keep infected people out — due to the low capacity of their laboratories and hospitals.

"There's some logic to the decision," says Artemchuk from Donbas SOS, meaning that they want to keep people out. "The situation with COVID-19 (in the occupied Donbas) isn't good, people can't get a test, they can't buy proper medication."

However, the militants didn't close anything else — there were never any quarantine restrictions in the occupied territories.

"Bars are open, clubs are open, the border with Russia is open, the only thing closed is the crossing points into Ukraine," said Darya.

"Everyone knows (the militants) are just making money on it," she added, meaning that people have to pay the local carriers who take them through Russia.

Darya's latest attempt to get out of Donetsk was in October when her father was hospitalized with

COVID-19. Darya said she was once again denied the right to exit.

The illegal route

Unable to get to Ukraine through checkpoints, some choose to go through a much longer and illegal way — through Russia.

The Russian-led militants don't guard the border with Russia, making it the only way to flee the occupied territory. It's illegal.

Iryna, who lives in Donetsk, was one of the people who took the long way into government-controlled territory. She had to travel over 1,700 kilometers to get from Donetsk to Kharkiv through Russia so her daughter could get a higher education. Before the war, a trip between Donetsk and Kharkiv was 300 kilometers and less than four hours.

Iryna and her husband used to live in the U.S. In 2011, they returned to their hometown of Donetsk to open a business. When the war began, Iryna gave birth to her second child. Soon their business was ransacked, leaving the family without money to leave the region.

Iryna said that the militants kept her husband in a cell for two months because of his U.S. passport, which they found suspicious.

In 2020, Iryna's older daughter finished high school in Donetsk and the family decided that it would be better for her to continue education in Kharkiv. The crossing points were closed, forcing the family to travel by car through Russia. Iryna said it was a tough experience, which she's not ready to repeat. She is now back in Donetsk.

She says there are local carriers who offer to take travelers from Donetsk to government-controlled territory, through Russia, for \$120 one way. For locals in Donetsk, it's a lot of money.

The militants "are simply doing business on travelers," she adds, echoing Darya's words.

People without money or a car can't make the trip. According to Artemchuk, before the shutdown, locals used to cross into the free territories frequently to get qualified medical assistance or social services including pensions, visit family and work.

Darya, who lives only five kilometers from the government-controlled territory, said she can't afford to travel thousands of kilometers through Russia.

The trip would be illegal. Ukraine doesn't permit crossing the country's border bypassing official crossing points. The Border Guard Service is required to fine violators for Hr 1,700 (\$80). But Iryna said she wasn't fined.

According to people who take the long route, Ukraine's Border Guard Service tends to overlook the infrac-



President Volodymyr Zelensky (L), French President Emmanuel Macron (C) and Russian President Vladimir Putin attend a Normandy Four meeting at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Dec. 9, 2019.

tion. People have often succeeded at appealing their fines in court, citing the right to freedom of movement.

The Border Guard Service declined to comment on the issue.

Since recently, those traveling from the occupied territories through Russia run into another complication. In January, Ukraine's Health Ministry marked Russia as the COVID-19 "red zone" country, meaning that people coming from Russia have to self-isolate for two weeks.

Russian sabotage

The situation in Donbas goes directly against agreements reached in Paris. Over the past seven years, Russia has actively sabotaged peace negotiations, prolonging the war and exporting misery.

Ukraine has fulfilled all requirements for a new Normandy Four meeting to take place, said Ann Linde, chair of the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE).

"At the Paris summit, there was an agreement on a new meeting of

leaders under several conditions," said Linde in a recent interview with a Ukrainian news outlet. "Ukraine has fulfilled all conditions, Russia, unfortunately, hasn't yet."

These conditions include willingness to swap all prisoners, disengage armed forces in three designated areas and build three new crossing points.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, who was elected on a promise to end the war, went to great lengths to try to do so. In September 2019, Russia and Ukraine swapped prisoners for the first time in three years. Two more exchanges followed.

In 2020, Ukraine agreed to withdraw troops from three more points, after already having withdrawn troops from three locations in 2019.

Ukraine has also completed the construction of two new crossing points, which are equipped with social services offices, Ukrainian banks, coronavirus testing stations and washrooms.

Russia-led militants have done none of that.

In late-April, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told the press that he doesn't see the point in holding another Normandy Four meeting. Russia's position hasn't changed since then.

On Jan. 12, Zelensky's chief of staff Andriy Yermak met with Russian representative Dmytro Kozak in Berlin. Mediators from Germany and France were also present, with the meeting being labeled as the Normandy Four advisory meeting.

After the meeting, Kozak told the Russian state media that "solutions to almost no issue have been found."

Since the Kremlin launched its war nearly seven years ago, Russia has actively tried to give Russian-controlled militants official status in the peace negotiations and label Russia's war against Ukraine as a civil war.

With negotiations stalled, about 2 million people are kept hostage in eastern Donbas and are not allowed to leave.

"There's nowhere to run," said Iryna. "No one is waiting for us." ❦

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Leshchenko's falling out with US farmer mired in legal claims

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couldn't invest in growing crops, lost two years of yields and now lacks the capital to keep farming.

Leshchenko dismissed all Groszhans's claims. He said he resigned when he found out that Groszhans was allegedly smuggling illegal seeds and fertilizers to Ukraine from the United States, and growing genetically modified soybeans in Ukraine against the law.

Leshchenko said he didn't want to be involved in this kind of business and stepped down. The future minister showed the Kyiv Post his voluntary resignation letter dated September 2018.

Firing an employee by allowing them to resign voluntarily is common in Ukraine. It's done this way because it's legally easier and helps avoid damaging employees' reputation.

"He fooled me," Leshchenko said, adding that he didn't know that seeds were genetically modified or smuggled because Groszhans insisted he would sow and work the fields himself, something Groszhans denies.

What happened to the money?

Leshchenko said the partners agreed in advance to use Leshchenko's company, Progress LLC, to run Groszhans's business in Ukraine. This company would pay salaries and buy fuel. The minister said Groszhans would get a notification every time Leshchenko transferred funds.

According to Leschenko, Groszhans took offense to his departure and accusations and decided to harm him by demanding money. He said the American started legal action and threatened him with publicity only after he became a state official. Before that, "threats" were only sent to him unofficially via emails, messengers and personal meetings.

The money transfers from Groszhans' company to Progress LLC did take place. According to

Ukraine's Civil Code, an executive cannot transfer funds from a company he does not own to himself or his own company.

WhatsApp crossfire

Leshchenko and Groszhans seemed to use messenger app WhatsApp for most of their communication from April 2018 to the end of February 2019, until their lawyers took over.

The texts reveal what looked like genuine surprise on Groszhans' part when he found that Leshchenko was transferring money to his own company. While discussing other issues after Leshchenko left the company, Groszhans suddenly texted "You also took money out of my account for your company without my knowledge."

Leshchenko replied that he was doing his best to manage the business and that he made all of Groszhans's transactions official by using his own Ukrainian company. But then, he seemed to agree to return the money: "Everything will return back officially," he wrote in a message.

A month later, after Groszhans insisted on seeing his money, Leshchenko wrote "I will transfer everything, don't worry about it."

The conversation lasted for several more months, with Leshchenko saying he couldn't return all the money because he was "bankrupt." Eventually, he paid nearly ₴ 1 million, about \$35,000 today.

When Groszhans kept asking Leshchenko to send more money, the future minister replied "If we are talking about stealing, we need to start from you stealing royal property of soybeans of (U.S. seeds producer) Pioneer from the USA and (smuggling) them to Ukraine. Or manipulating tax reports to the state body (about the profit that you got in Ukraine.)"

"If you continue to terrorize (me), I will put all information to the legal body and you will go to jail,"



U.S. farmer Kurt Groszhans accuses Ukraine's Agriculture Minister Roman Leshchenko of stealing \$250,000 from his company, accusations that Leshchenko denied to the Kyiv Post.

Leschenko wrote.

Groszhans replied: "Yes, and you were the director for all of these things and your fingerprints are on everything. Go for it."

Leshchenko claims his lawyers asked him to deliberately say he was bankrupt and send only \$35,000. This and further payments were supposed to serve as evidence that Groszhans threatened Leshchenko, demanded money and was ready to accept it in a future U.S. court case.

Leshchenko approached Groszhans through his lawyers after two years of disputes and paid back ₴ 5.5 billion (about \$195,000) one week before he was appointed minister on Dec. 17.

Leshchenko paid back in hryvnias. Exchange rate fluctuations explain the discrepancy between the \$250,000 that Leschenko's company received and the total of \$230,000 that he paid back.

Groszhans filed two lawsuits against Leschenko in Ukraine in May and October. He now wants Leshchenko to pay damages of \$485,000.

Leshchenko won one case — the decision was published on Jan. 27 —

but Groszhans's lawyers claim that the court case was "fixed."

Leshchenko's rise

Since concluding the WhatsApp conversation, Leshchenko's political career has soared — he went from farmer to the next agriculture minister. Now Groszhans fears Leshchenko's new position will make him powerful enough to escape justice.

Around the time that Leshchenko told Groszhans that he was bankrupt, his dying father decided to donate over \$60,000 to President Volodymyr Zelensky's presidential campaign. It was one of the campaign's biggest donations.

"When Zelensky said he'd run for president, we decided we would support him," Leshchenko said, tearing up as he spoke about his father, who died at the end of 2020. "We saw Zelensky — and still do — as the only person who wants to change Ukraine, bring structural reforms."

In October 2019, Leshchenko became a non-staff adviser to Zelensky on issues related to land reform. Leshchenko piqued Zelensky's interest by writing him a

letter laying out his vision for reforming Ukraine's land market and later speaking about it during a meeting between farmers, associations and state officials.

"There are many people like me in power today — they had never met the president in the past," Leshchenko said. "Zelensky just opened the door (for us), people who had never been in politics came to power."

In June–December 2020, Leshchenko headed the State Service for Geodesy, Cartography, and Cadastre (StateGeoCadastre).

In December 2020, 242 lawmakers voted for him to become the next agriculture minister. He will take office on March 1.

Leshchenko said he never wanted to become a public official and he only became minister because he managed to convince Zelensky he's worthy and because Zelensky convinced him later to take the role.

In his October interview with four Ukrainian TV channels, Zelensky said he hadn't known about Leshchenko before.

"That chap Leshchenko, I didn't know him until I started my political activity," Zelensky said. "It was difficult even to just appoint him head of the StateGeoCadastre — every day there were threats, cars around, some bandits, some calls."

Leshchenko, who came to his interview at the Kyiv Post's office with two state bodyguards, confirmed that threats against him continue to this day.

He added that Groszhans threatened to sue him only after he began his political activity and became "more vulnerable" to such claims.

Although Leshchenko has repeated several times that he didn't want to become an official and it happened by accident, he had written to Groszhans in 2018 that he "will be in public administration."

Kyiv Post staff writer Alex Query has contributed to the story.



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In first session of 2021, parliament votes for SBU reform, binding referendums, against Vitrenko for energy post

By Oleksiy Sorokin
sorokin@kyivpost.com

After a five-week vacation, parliament gathered on Jan. 26 and began passing crucial legislation.

In three days, parliament passed a law that allows nationwide binding referendums and supported, in the first reading, a draft law stripping the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) of its power to investigate white-collar crime and corruption.

However, the parliament refused to confirm Yuriy Vitrenko as Ukraine's new energy minister.

Lawmakers are now set to vote on a judicial reform bill that has been lambasted by legal experts and anti-corruption activists.

Binding referendum

President Volodymyr Zelensky has long been a vocal supporter of direct democracy. He even held a non-binding opinion poll, labeled as a referendum, during the October local elections.

In October, Zelensky's critics panned him for promoting an opinion poll to get out the vote. Now, the president will have the power to initiate actual referendums.

On Jan. 26, the referendum law got 255 votes, mostly from Zelensky's 246-member Servant of the People faction.

The law specifies the range of issues that can be put up for a nationwide referendum, including amendments to several sections of the Constitution, changes to the territory of Ukraine, "issues of national importance" and the repeal of laws or specific provisions.

A referendum can be initiated by the president, by parliament, or by Ukrainians themselves.

To launch a referendum, a group of at least 60 Ukrainians has to collect the signatures of at least 3 million people in at least two-thirds of Ukraine's oblasts, with at least 100,000 signatures in each. A referendum will be legitimate if at least 50% of Ukrainians above the age of 18 participate in it.

Ineligible issues are ones that contradict international law, the Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and its protocols.

While referendums about "changes to the territory of Ukraine" are allowed, questions that "aim to violate the territorial integrity of Ukraine," as well as its "independence and national security" are banned.

SBU reform

On Jan. 28, parliament voted to move forward with long-awaited



Volodymyr Petrov

Yuriy Vitrenko talks to the Kyiv Post at the newspaper's office on Dec. 25, 2020. The Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, on Jan. 28 rejected Vitrenko's candidacy as Ukraine's energy minister. It was the second time in two months that his candidacy failed to win the required 226-vote majority.

reform of the SBU.

The bill, supported by 285 lawmakers in the first reading, would remove the SBU's right to investigate economic crimes and eliminate all of its investigative powers by 2024.

The SBU reform bill would also cut the number of SBU employees from 27,000 to 25,000 immediately and to 17,000 by 2023.

Ukraine's Western partners have demanded this legislation, which is expected to bring the country closer to NATO standards.

Parliament also passed a separate law creating the Economic Security Bureau, which will now investigate economic crimes instead of the tainted tax police.

The SBU reform bill will now be forwarded to the parliament's national security and defense committee and await a final vote. The Economic Security Bureau law awaits the president's signature.

The bureau's head will be chosen via competition.

The vacant ministry

While the parliament was actively voting for reforms, it voted against Vitrenko's confirmation as the minister of energy.

Deputy Energy Minister Vitrenko, received only 204 votes out of the

required 226 votes to become energy minister and deputy prime minister on Jan. 28.

This is the second time that Vitrenko's candidacy was rejected by parliament.

On Dec. 17, Vitrenko also failed to receive the required number of votes. Only 186 lawmakers supported his nomination then.

Four days later, Vitrenko was appointed deputy energy minister by Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal. As a result, Vitrenko became the acting energy minister.

According to new legislation, he was permitted to hold the position of acting head for no longer than one month.

Previously, Vitrenko served as one of the top-managers of the state-owned Naftogaz gas monopoly and spearheaded the company's successful litigation against Russia's state-controlled Gazprom.

Naftogaz secured a \$2.9 billion arbitration award in a dispute over fees for transporting Russian gas through Ukraine's pipelines.

Judicial anti-reform

Parliament is also scheduled to vote on a judicial reform bill. Unlike the widely-supported SBU legislation, this bill has been lambasted by judicial watchdogs.

Parliament's legal policy committee supported the so-called reform on Jan. 27.

The bill gives the High Council of Justice, the judiciary's main governing body, full control over the selection of candidates for another judiciary body, the High Qualification Commission, and nullifies the role of foreign experts in the process.

The High Council of Justice has been discredited due to numerous corruption scandals and its appointment of tainted judges.

In September, the High Council of Justice unanimously refused to suspend notorious judge Pavlo Vovk, head of the Kyiv District Administrative Court, who faces charges of organized crime, abuse of power, bribery and unlawful interference with government officials. Vovk denies the accusations.

The council's members are also implicated in the Vovk case. In wiretapped conversations released by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, Vovk mentioned the involvement of Andrii Ovsienko, head of the High Council of Justice, in his alleged bargains with the council. He didn't respond to a request for comment.

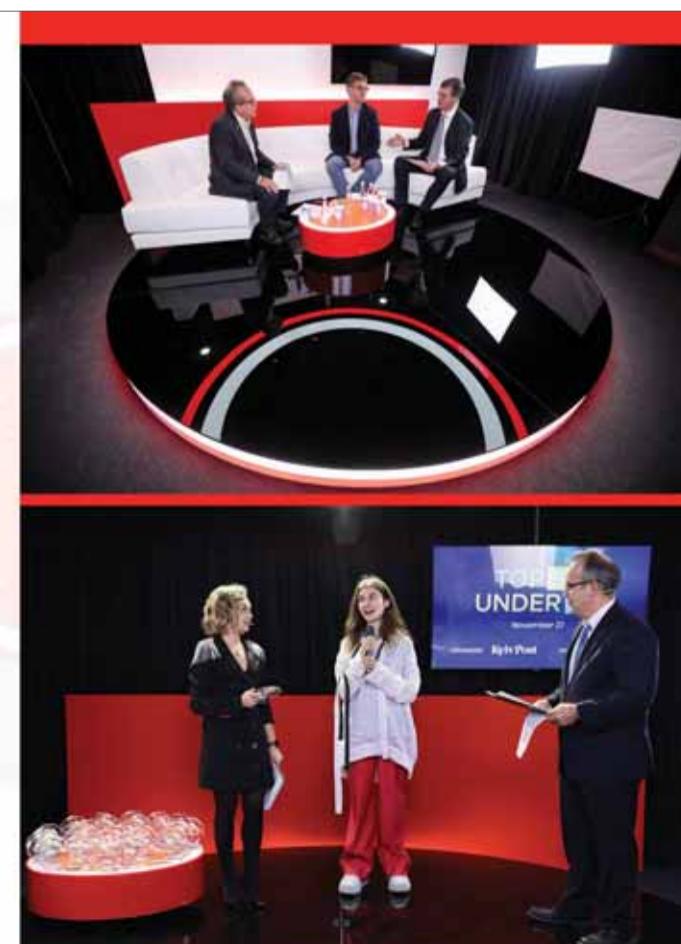
Judicial experts argue that the bill contradicts Ukraine's commitments to its foreign partners. ☹

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SBU's latest scandal reinforces image of an out-of-control agency

page 2 →

behalf of his brother.

The Yermak brothers had not denied the videos' authenticity but Denys Yermak claimed they were taken out of context. Andriy Yermak also dismissed the accusations and lashed out at Leros, promising to sue him.

Meanwhile, Podolyak accused Neskromny of covering up for corruption.

"Neskromny's classic corrupt reputation is well-known but when such a person is under investigation, he turns into a gigantic crusader for the truth and against corruption," he quipped on Facebook.

The alleged target

Naumov has worked at the SBU since 2019, heading its internal security department, which is supposed to monitor corruption and integrity standards within the service.

Zelensky granted Naumov the rank of brigadier general in October.

According to the chief editor of the Censor.net news outlet, Yuriy Butusov, Naumov is the friend and right hand man of SBU head Bakanov. According to Butusov, Naumov has exceptional influence in the SBU and is involved in covering up corruption schemes.

Naumov previously worked at the Prosecutor General's Office and the State Agency for the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, where he was investigated for abuse of power.

In October 2019, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's investigative project Schemes published an investigation into Naumov's assets.



Employees of the Security Service of Ukraine, or SBU, detain one of its officers, Andriy Rasyuk, on Jan. 22. He is suspected of co-organizing an assassination attempt on another SBU official, Andriy Naumov.

According to the report, Naumov's mother bought a luxury apartment in Kyiv in 2019, which Naumov currently uses. She paid Hr. 1.2 million despite the apartment's true market value of Hr 4.5 to Hr 5.5 million. The discrepancy may be a gift that violates anti-corruption law or a tax evasion effort, according to Schemes.

Kostyantyn Uchenyk, who sold her the apartment, has business ties to Valery Khoroshkovsky, the SBU's chief under ex-President Viktor Yanukovich. Koroshkovsky returned to Ukraine and met with Zelensky in 2019, according to Schemes.

Seeds of conflict

Some commentators have described one SBU employee killing another as absurd. Others were skeptical about the possibility of a genuine murder attempt, arguing that it could be a fabricated case.

"This looks like a gigantic farce," Oleksandra Ustinova, a lawmaker from the Voice party, told the Kyiv Post. "When an SBU employee orders the murder of another SBU employee through another SBU employee, and the SBU uncovers it, it looks very strange, to say the least."

The criminal case looks like an

attempt to increase Naumov's influence and make him look like a victim, according to Ustinova.

"This is an attempt to redistribute corrupt revenues within the agency," she said.

ANTAC's Shcherban said that such bitter infighting is a result of the SBU's power to investigate economic crimes, which creates many opportunities for unjust enrichment. Both Naumov and Neskromny worked at units dealing with white-collar crime, she said.

Shcherban said that the only way out of this impasse is a thorough reform of the service.

SBU reform

In March 2020 Zelensky submitted an SBU reform bill to the Verkhovna Rada. The first version, which was drafted by Bakanov's SBU, was heavily lambasted by civil society because it expanded the SBU's powers instead of limiting them.

The bill has since been improved upon and was approved by the Verkhovna Rada in the first reading on Jan. 28.

The latest version would strip SBU of authority to investigate economic crimes and corruption. It would also eliminate all of the agency's investigative powers by 2024.

The draft law also seeks to cut the number of SBU employees from the current 27,000 to 25,000 immediately and to 17,000 by 2023.

Bakanov has obstructed SBU reform from the very beginning and the President's Office has often supported Bakanov's position, Shcherban said. The President's Office did not respond to a request for comment.

The SBU's most radical critics have called for its disbandment and replacement with a new Western-style intelligence service.

Shcherban and Oleksandr Lemenov, head of anti-corruption watchdog StateWatch, argued that SBU employees should be vetted similarly to other law enforcement officials and fired if they do not meet integrity and ethics standards.

Russian infiltration?

The corruption-mired SBU has also been accused of failing to fulfill its main function — to fight the Kremlin's influence.

The SBU has failed to react to the activities of pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine, such as Andriy Derkach and Viktor Medvechuk, Shcherban said.

Analysts argue that the level of Russian infiltration at the SBU remains high. Under Yanukovich, Russian influence got so bad that the top leadership of the SBU took orders from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), according to Sergiy Gorbatak, who investigated the 2013–2014 killings of EuroMaidan Revolution participants.

And yet, Zelensky and Bakanov have given top SBU jobs to Oleksandr Kukxa and Anatoly Kalyuzhnyak — officials who were involved in the crackdown on EuroMaidan protesters.

At the very least, Bakanov should be fired for failing to do his job, Shcherban and Ustinova said.

"Bakanov is currently the main enemy of (SBU) reform," Shcherban added. ❄️



Remembering the Holocaust

People put stones and light candles next to the Menorah monument at Babyn Yar on Jan. 27, 2021, a place where the Nazis shot more than 100,000 Jews between 1941 and 1944, to mark the International Holocaust Victims Remembrance Day in Kyiv on Jan. 27, 2021. This day the Kyiv Jewish Community, joined by lawmakers and EU, U.S. and Israeli diplomats, unveiled the new Garden of Remembrance near the Menorah monument at Babyn Yar.

Kostyantyn Chernichkin

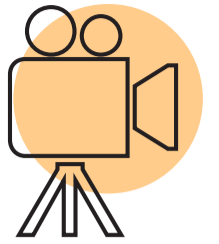
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Artisan bakery Honey and its flawless desserts

By Yana Mokhonchuk
yanamokhonchuk@gmail.com

They look more like little sculptures than desserts.

Glazed mousse spheres, gold-sprinkled eclairs, tarts with a whole caramelized pear on top and colorful macarons are just some of the sweet delicacies enticing from the counters of Honey, a Kyiv chain of artisan bakeries.

And their appearance is no delusion. Having just as impressive taste, the Honey desserts attract around 2,500 customers to three cafes every weekend. Inspired by a French culinary tradition, the chain also serves a variety of breakfasts and main courses, coffee and a selection of wine.

Honey's success of seven years lies in no other but exceptional attention to detail and true dedication to the art of dessert making. Some of their sweet recipes take more than six months to develop until they reach the perfect flavor blend Honey aims for.

"We are perfectionists," Honey's co-founder Anna Zavertailo told the Kyiv Post. "It is important for us that everything is 101%, above the level we expect."

Groundbreakers

By the time the first Honey cafe emerged in Podil district in 2014, the capital's dessert market was dominated by clichés like Tiramisu and Panna Cotta, as well as Medovik and Napoleon, simple layered cakes popular in post-Soviet countries. But Honey's founders, a married couple of Anna Zavertailo, 36, and Stanislav Zavertailo, 41, were set to change that with elaborate mousse desserts, pastry and bakery.

"It was difficult for us to explain to a guest what it was and why there was no Tiramisu," Anna Zavertailo remembers.

The two run a chain of mini coffee shops Coffee Nostra located in Kyiv's business centers until they decided to make Stanislav Zavertailo's childhood dream come true. As a kid, he was a big sweet tooth who admired the dessert-making craft and spent hours baking cakes and pastry along with his mother.

His passion and natural skills automatically put Stanislav Zavertailo in charge of the menu development. His partner, meanwhile, supervised the stuff and worked on marketing.

At first, the two tried to get help from a restaurant consultant but soon realized that all the given advice were overused patterns already saturating the market. And so they embarked on their own journey of culinary discoveries.



Customers of the Honey bakery located in Kyiv's historic center on Yaroslaviv Val Street have a look at a versatile selection of desserts on Jan. 7, 2021. A three-cafe chain that was a pioneer of mousse desserts in Kyiv, Honey is one of the most beloved bakeries in the capital.

Instead of layered and sponge cakes, the couple came up with a number of tender mousse desserts melting in one's mouth that would later become a trend popping up on the menus of numerous Kyiv cafes.

They say they were the first to introduce the French meringue instead of the then-widespread Italian one. The French meringue has twice less sugar, which lets cooks add more sweet stuffing inside a dessert, without messing up the general flavor.

"We broke a lot of stereotypes," Anna Zavertailo says.

The unconventional approach made Honey an instant hit, and in two years, they opened another cafe in the historic center. The biggest Honey to date, located in 300-square-meter premises on picturesque Yaroslaviv Val Street, it is now the chain's most popular spot that can seat up to 100 guests.

A year later, another Honey appeared in a trendy location, Kyiv Central Department Store, or TSUM.

As the demand for their desserts kept growing, the founders increased production and moved it to what they call "the heart of Honey," a separate bakery of 700 square meters. That's where all the desserts are now crafted to be later distributed into the cafes.

"We are constantly modernizing our production, despite the fact that we have very high quality that is second to none in Ukraine," Anna

Zavertailo says.

Craft delights

Building its work on the principles of French cuisine, Honey handcrafts as much of its own products as possible from bread to even meats.

"We do everything we can do with our hands," Anna Zavertailo says.

Their menu offers tempting breakfasts, including all kinds of eggs, avocado toasts, croissants, bagels, granola and syrnyky — Ukrainian cottage cheese pancakes.

But the main focus of the cafe is a selection of desserts. The choice is so versatile, it can at the same time offer 17 flavors of macarons, 10 kinds of eclairs, 15 auteur desserts, marmalade, chocolate candies and cookies — all laid out on the cafe's counters under the glass, illuminated like museum exhibits.

Before making it to the "exhibition," all desserts have a long way to go from an idea to a satisfying, both gastronomically and aesthetically, result. Each one of them is made in seven versions on average before the co-founders pick the final one.

What the couple calls their most anticipated dessert is Alfonso, which took Stanislav Zavertailo nine months to perfect. Resembling a mango with its shape and colors, the tender dessert combines mango compote with tiny layers of cream and sponge, all covered with coconut-flavored mousse.

Another of their recent sweet hits,

Christmas Tree, took a while to reach the ideal combination of flavors and textures.

"One of those desserts that languished for more than a month in anticipation of something special," Stanislav Zavertailo says.

In its final version, Christmas Tree is a mixture of white chocolate and matcha base with tangerine pure, pieces of yuzu and pineapple inside. It looks like a tiny green hill with an uneven and slightly crunchy surface, adorned with a tiny cone on top.

"A cone made of jam turned out to be that 'cherry on the cake,'" Stanislav Zavertailo says.

Aside from all their star recipes, Honey prepares special offers for holidays like Easter bread. The chain also makes whole cakes upon order that impress both with design and unusual recipes. One of them, Pistachio cake, has literally every ingredient made of pistachio including icing, mousse, cream and sponge. Though the chain enjoys a big demand on their hit desserts, Honey doesn't rest on its laurels. The Zavertailos change 15% of their menu every season. "New positions on the menu are our development," Anna Zavertailo says.

After seven years of success, with the constant search for the betterment and unaltered perfectionism, Honey's co-founders keep proving what they once set as a goal — "to show this world that high-quality bakery in Ukraine is possible." ❁

Book Critic

With Elina Kent
kent@kyivpost.com

Fiction book about Donbas war shows grey lives in grey zone

Author Andrey Kurkov was not planning to write about Russia's war in Donbas.

He is considered one of Ukraine's most successful post-Soviet authors, who spent 20 years trying to dissect Ukraine and understand the influence of the Soviet past on the country's post-Soviet people.

Kurkov looks back at history to understand what came to be, something that is not possible to do with an ongoing war.

"How can we write about the war that is still not finished?" Kurkov told the Kyiv Post.

But after Kurkov traveled to the Donbas, what he witnessed pushed him to change his mind and write "Grey Bees," a novel about Russia's war in eastern Ukraine and occupation of Crimea and how they affect the daily lives of locals.

Despite the fact the war in Donbas has not ended, many detailed books, essays, and theses have been published about it by soldiers, journalists, activists and regular citizens. But the majority of this content has been documentary. "Grey Bees" is one of the few pieces that are entirely fiction.

The book was published in Russian in 2018 but was recently translated into English. The English version is now available on Amazon for \$11–22 and in bookstores across the United Kingdom, Norway, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Ireland, Italy, France and Germany.

The first half of "Grey Bees" has also been recently transformed into a play in Ukrainian that will premiere at Kyiv's Theater on Podil on Jan. 29, with repeating performances scheduled for Feb. 23 and 24.

Grey zone

Since the winter of 2015, Kurkov had journeyed three times through the Donbas along with his friend who made trips to the region to bring supplies to the locals. There, the author witnessed how people were living in the so-called grey zone, between the Ukrainian and Russian-led forces, that runs along the entire 450 km long line of contact.

Instead of constant fear of danger on its doorstep, he saw the population's apathy. War became the norm. People were ignoring it, treating it like a rowdy, drunk neighbor.

"These people are not political.

Book Critic

Novel takes place in fictional town of Little Starhorodivka of two residents

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Their life is not nice, but they are used to this life, and consider it stable," Kurkov says. "They don't want to live worse than this, and they don't dream of living any better."

The author endows his main character, Sergey Sergeevich, with this attitude. The novel is set in the fictional grey zone town of Little Starhorodivka.

Sergey Sergeevich, or just Sergeyich, is a simple man, a beekeeper and an introvert who finds comfort in his solitary routine. He wakes up, waits in bed until he can find the energy to get up and retrieve more coal for warmth, lies a bit longer in the heat, makes some tea with the minimal resources he has left and thinks about his bees.

"He sort of envies bees," Kurkov says. "But at the same time (he) cares about them and subconsciously uses them as some kind of escape."

He's one of two residents left in town. The other one is his — "vrazhenyatko" — lifelong frenemy Pashka, who lives two streets over.

The frenemy relationship that the two have is quite entertaining to follow. Their "friendship" has become dependent, and as inescapable as the war surrounding their town. There is no way out, so the two of them must communicate. After all, only one of them can bury the other if someone is killed. Yet this fatalistic relationship based on necessity shows its moments of warmth and something more than forced solitude. The two old men seem constantly bothered

and annoyed by one another, yet worry when they don't see each other in a while.

Life in Little Starhorodivka is grey and monotonous, only to be interrupted by the deadly shelling and shooting between forces. The two residents live in a guessing game like battleship, wondering if the next shell will hit their house next. The war's destruction has already taken the church, the main road and the houses of Sergeyich's neighbors across the street.

Despite the looming danger, Sergeyich initially had no intention of moving. He could have joined his estranged wife and daughter who left years earlier for a town in central Ukraine but he didn't.

"He accepts it. He lives four years without electricity and television," Kurkov says. "He even accepts his eternal enemy as almost his friend."

The only factor that makes Sergeyich consider changing his routine are his precious bees. Winter will soon thaw, and he is afraid that the shelling will confuse the bees as they get back to work in spring.

So Sergeyich decides to move his bees to a calmer and warmer place. He eventually travels to Crimea in search of Akhtem, an old beekeeping friend. There, he and his bees again experience the consequences of Russian aggression, particularly the systemic persecution of Muslim Crimean Tatars.

Kurkov made sure to focus on what was going on in Crimea. Like many Ukrainians, he had spent most of his vacations on the peninsula.



"Grey Bees," a novel by Russian-born Ukrainian author Andrey Kurkov, portrays the lives of people affected by Russia's war in eastern Ukraine and its occupation of Crimea. Published in 2018 in Russian language, the book is now available in English.

He would visit Crimea with family during his childhood when it was still part of the Soviet Union, and as an adult when it became part of Ukraine. Kurkov's last visit was in January 2014, one month before the Russian invasion.

"The second half of this novel is, in some ways, my personal farewell to the Crimea that may never exist again," Kurkov writes in the book's foreword.

Ukrainian by choice

One of the largest divisions in modern Ukraine is the most basic answer to the question of what makes something Ukrainian.

The country is a beautiful mix of diversity. People in the west speak Ukrainian, some with Polish or Hungarian influence depending on the proximity to neighboring countries. Many of those in southern and eastern Ukraine spend their entire lives speaking Russian. Yet all are considered Ukrainian.

Sergeyich experiences his own complications of perceived identity in the book. He is from a Russian-speaking town in the grey zone and speaks Russian, but is Ukrainian. He chooses to be. But yet his Ukrainianness is questioned to the point that a Ukrainian soldier suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder chooses to break Sergeyich's

car and windows because he's from the east.

Kurkov has experienced his own grey area of identity. He is considered to be one of Ukraine's most successful authors, but he is in fact Russian-born. Having lived here since early childhood, he has chosen Ukraine to be his home. He speaks and writes in Russian, but his print books are banned in Russia because of his criticism of the Kremlin.

Since the start of the Donbas war, Ukraine has renationalized. The country got rid of Soviet names of streets and cities and started supporting the usage of the Ukrainian language in media, culture and most recently in the service industry.

Kurkov's commentary on the politicization of language has been considered controversial in Ukraine. The author expressed the idea that Ukraine should make the Russian language its own cultural property, in part by setting up a Ukrainian institute for the Russian language.

"It would cut off our Slavists from the Russian Academy of Sciences and provide an instrument for the protection of the Ukrainian Russian language from Russian academics,

who correct everything in their own way and decide what is right," Kurkov said in a 2018 interview with Krym.Realii.

The author's position has provoked a strong reaction from the Ukrainian nationalists for promoting "the Russian world."

"Ukrainian" is a civic identity that isn't based on language. When it comes down to it, it's one huge grey area.

People both from the east and west are Ukrainian. Retirees that don't receive a pension in the war zone are Ukrainian. Children born in the grey zone with no official birth certificates are Ukrainian. These people consider themselves to be Ukrainian, they choose to.

Though a story about war, "Grey Bees" does not focus on military operations and heroic soldiers, but on ordinary Ukrainians, to whom the war brought suffering or forced them from their homes.

Kurkov is powerless to predict when the war will end, but he hopes it leaves the residents of the grey zone alone — "that it goes away, and that the honey made by the bees of Donbas lose its bitter aftertaste of gunpowder." 🍯

The English version of "Grey Bees" by Andrey Kurkov is available on Amazon for \$11–22 and in bookstores across the United Kingdom, Norway, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Ireland, Italy, France and Germany.



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Kyiv Post

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Excellent command of written and spoken English. Fluency in Ukrainian and/or Russian languages.
Deep understanding of Ukraine's political life; background knowledge in Ukrainian politics.
Ability to write journalistic stories in English. Commitment to Western journalism standards and democratic values.
Experience in media or English-language writing is preferable.

For consideration, send a CV, three story ideas and a cover letter to deputy chief editor Olga Rudenko at rudenko@kyivpost.com.

alinea

Alinea International is one of the Canada's leading international development organization. It executes projects for the Government of Canada, as well as the World Bank, United Nations, Asian Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and others.

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- **Strategic Planning / Reform Monitoring Expert.**

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Please, send your applications to: valeriias@alineainternational.com.

for the *Ministry of Justice of Ukraine (civil servant position, category "B3")*:

- **Head of Data Analytics Laboratory.**

Deadline for applications: **February 22, 2021.**

Please, send your applications to: ievgen.mashuna@gmail.com.

For more detailed information about preferred qualifications and skills, indicative duties and responsibilities, as well as applying procedure, please visit website: <https://edge.in.ua/vacancies/>

CLASSIFIEDS

Andrew Sylvester Thornley Deceased previously of 6 Ramilies Avenue, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport, England.

Any person having knowledge of his son Stephen Paul Thornley, please contact Mrs Holmes at Minahan Hirst & Co, 33 Station Road Cheadle Hulme SK8 5AF England

email: karenh@minahan-hirst.co.uk
tel: 0441614858131

Topgames Ltd
(In Voluntary Liquidation)
Company No. (1756895)

NOTICE is hereby given pursuant to Section 204, subsection (1)(b) of the BVI Business Companies Act, 2004 that the Company is in voluntary liquidation. The voluntary liquidation commenced on 26th January, 2021. The Liquidator is Miss Molly Rita Roselie of Anse Baleine, Mahe, Seychelles.

Dated 26th January, 2021
(Sgd.) Miss Molly Rita Roselie
Voluntary Liquidator

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UKRAINE



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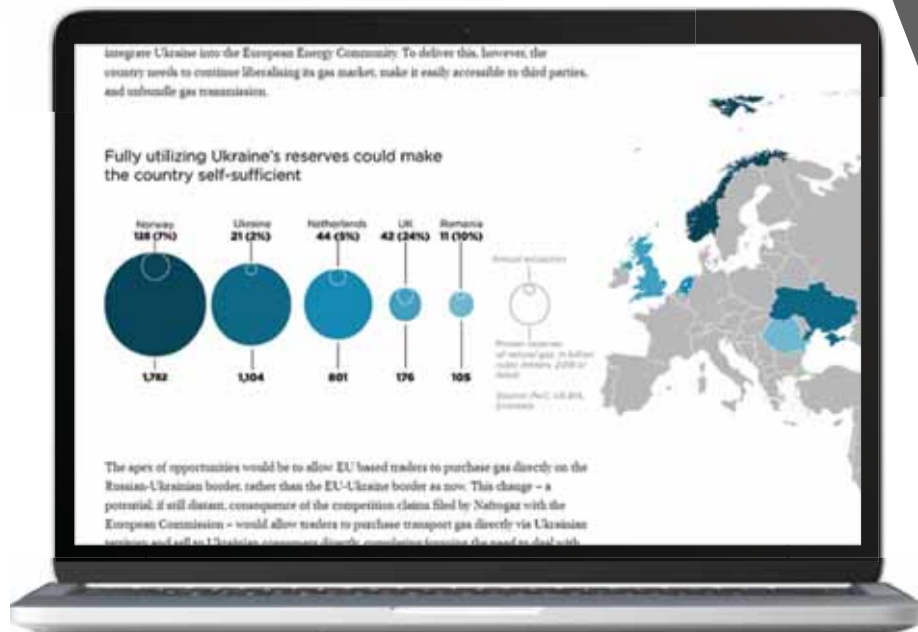
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