

Ukraine's courts, lack of rule of law create a tough climate for Dutch businesses

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World in Ukraine: The Netherlands

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Free To Be

May will start out very merry because Kyiv authorities decided to ease the lockdown in effect since March 20 — the third of the pandemic. What to expect?

Volodymyr Petrov



A boy poses for a picture with his dog in front of some flowers at Fomin Botanical Garden in downtown Kyiv on April 14, 2021. As Kyiv prepares to lift its strict lockdown on May 1, local residents and visitors will have the run of the capital, just in time for the spring holidays. See accompanying story on page 1 for details.

Vitrenko in, Kobolyev out at Naftogaz

By Alexander Query
query@kyivpost.com

In a surprisingly swift move, the government installed acting energy minister Yuriy Vitrenko as the new CEO of state-owned oil and gas company Naftogaz on April 28, according to Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers.

Vitrenko's appointment came as a surprise for Naftogaz head Andriy Kobolyev, who learned about his firing from the media.

Kobolyev criticized the government's decision, claiming it ignores all corporate governance reforms in Ukraine.

"In 2014, Ukraine firmly decided

→ page 2

Just in time for spring, Ukraine's coronavirus infections falling, vaccinations rising

By Olga Rudenko
rudenko@kyivpost.com

The start of May is finally bringing some good news to Kyiv.

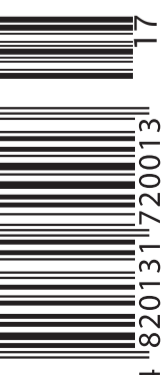
The six-week lockdown ends on May 1, in time for Easter and traditional May holidays.

"The situation in Kyiv improved by every measure," Health Minister Maksym Stepanov said on April 27.

It's not just Kyiv. Ukraine is beginning to exit the third wave of the pandemic, according to Stepanov.

The daily number of new cases that peaked in early April, reaching

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Mailing address:
Kyiv Post, 68 Zhylianska St.,
Kyiv, Ukraine, 01033

Advertising
tel. +380 44 591-7788
advertising@kyivpost.com

Editorial staff
tel. +380 44 591-3344
news@kyivpost.com

Subscription & Distribution
tel. +380 44 591-3344
subscribe@kyivpost.com

Employment Advertising
tel. +380 44 591-7788
advertising@kyivpost.com

Adnan Kivan
Publisher

Brian Bonner
Executive Director/Chief Editor

Olga Rudenko | Alyona Nevmerzhytska
Deputy Chief Editor | Commercial Director

News Editor
Igor Kossov

Business Editor
Denys Krasnikov

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Photo Editor:
Pavlo Podufalov

Video Editor:
Austin Malloy

Chief Designer:
Vladyslav Zakharenko.

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Natalia Datskevych, Olena Goncharova,
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Yana Mokhonchuk, Anna Myroniuk,
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Cartoonist: Anatoliy Vasylenko.

Kobolyev, 7 years at helm, vows to appeal his firing

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that it's the state and Ukrainians who would benefit from state ownership — not politicians close to the cash flows. Yesterday's government decision has thrown all this in the trash," Kobolyev said.

Kobolyev said he would appeal his dismissal in a farewell message to his team on Facebook. "We are still ready to fight against all this," Kobolyev said.

But others, including corporate governance expert Andriy Boytsun, said that the government led by Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal followed the law.

"The Cabinet of Ministers played by the rules, but the rules are bad. They're not consistent with good corporate governance," said Boytsun, who has served as a consultant on corporate governance to state-owned enterprises, including Ukraine.

Since 2015, Boytsun said he's advised the government to change the law and give exclusive powers of hiring and firing CEOs to the supervisory boards of state-owned enterprises, but successive governments have refused to give up these powers.

At the same time, Boytsun said, he can understand the government's frustration. At the end of 2020, Naftogaz told the government it will have a net profit of nearly \$400 million but ended up losing \$684 million — a swing of more than \$1 billion. The company had total revenue of \$7 billion in 2020.

"The debate today is an indication of progress" in improving corporate governance of state enterprises, Boytsun said. "But we're still not there yet."

Big losses

Kobolyev was ousted the day after Naftogaz reported the financial losses of \$684 million in 2020, its first since 2015.

Naftogaz's net income in 2020 dropped massively compared to 2019 when the company made \$93 million in net profit. However, the company still managed to pay \$5 billion in taxes in 2020, making it far and away the country's biggest taxpayer, supplying 17% of state revenue.

The cabinet justified its decision by calling the work of Kobolyev and his team "unsatisfactory," adding it



A Naftogaz employee turns a valve at the Shebelynske gas field in Kharkiv Oblast on June 25, 2020. State gas giant Naftogaz lost \$684 million in 2020, according to its financial report published on April 27. Next day after the report was out, on April 28, the Cabinet of Ministers appointed acting energy minister Yuriy Vitrenko as the new CEO of Naftogaz, replacing Andriy Kobolyev.



Andriy Kobolyev

would search for new members for the Naftogaz supervisory board.

Kobolyev, in turn, blamed the COVID-19 pandemic for the losses. He said the COVID-19 crisis hurt gas consumption and consumers' ability to pay for it, reducing demand.

Kobolyev also blamed the government for enforcing gas prices of \$0.25 per kilowatt, about 30% below the market rate.

Key facts about Naftogaz

Revenue: **\$7 billion** (2020)
Net loss: **\$684 million** (2020)
Year founded: **1991**
Number of employees: **68,000 people**.
Number of partner distributors: **44**
Production of natural gas: **20.2 billion cubic meters** (71% of production in Ukraine)
Imports of natural gas from Europe: **9 billion cubic meters** (Naftogaz is the only importer)
Ukraine's proved gas reserves: **1.1 trillion cubic meters** (second largest in Europe after Norway)

Sources: Naftogaz, European Business Association

Aliona Osmolovska, Naftogaz's director for relations with government regulatory bodies, also blamed the company's debtors for the losses,

in a comment for Ukrainian media outlet Kosatka. Heating companies and gas suppliers owe Naftogaz an astounding \$3.6 billion.

"Naftogaz has already paid the state all taxes for gas — rent, VAT, income tax. We also pay interest on loans we borrowed to extract or import this fuel. However, Naftogaz has not yet received payment for it from the heating companies and gas suppliers. Most of these debts have not been paid for over a year, they cannot be explained by a pandemic," she wrote in April 2020.

Veteran Vitrenko

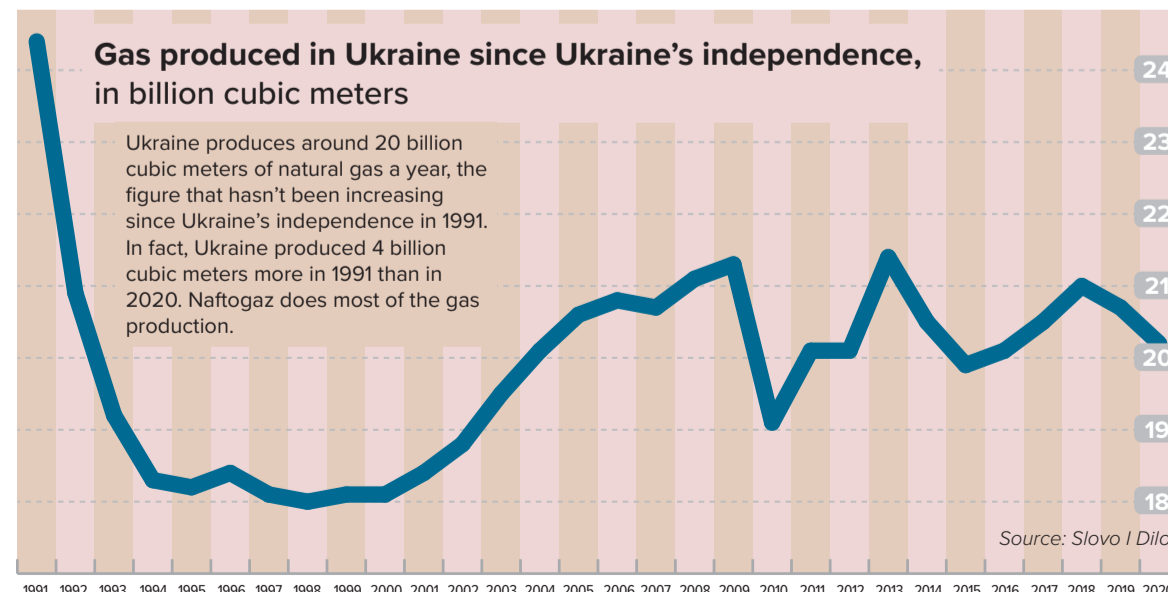
But those complaints didn't stop the government from installing Vitrenko as CEO under a one-year contract. Vitrenko was a top executive of Naftogaz from 2014–2020 and is credited with helping Kobolyev remove corrupt schemes that, under previous presidents, cost taxpayers up to a half-billion dollars monthly to cover.

Vitrenko told the Kyiv Post that he and Kobolyev developed conflicting visions of the future of Naftogaz. He said the dispute came to a head when Kobolyev let Ihor Kolomoisky's favored candidate become CEO of Ukrnafta, the Naftogaz subsidiary in which the billionaire oligarch has a minority stake.

Head to head

In remarks to Interfax-Ukraine news agency, Vitrenko defended his appointment, saying that as a shareholder, the government can and must put an end to ineffectual management.

"The government should be an active owner. Respectively, the Cabinet of Ministers has the right and responsibility to respond to problems in the company," Vitrenko said. "The profit of Naftogaz is dividends, which the state receives, and



Naftogaz's losses, inability to boost production, open way for Vitrenko

page 2 →

the budget counted on them. But it won't get it."

According to Vitrenko, operating results were also unsatisfactory. UkrGasVydobuvannya, Ukraine's largest gas producer which belongs to Naftogaz, sold and produced less natural gas and fuel in 2020, while private companies managed to increase production.

He also said that the decision to fire Kobolyev fully complies with the law because, as the shareholder, the government has the right to decide the future of the company.

"The Cabinet of Ministers had all the legal grounds, rights, and opportunities to make decisions and, accordingly, to dismiss the head of the board," Vitrenko said.

After their falling out, leading Kobolyev to dismiss his former partner, Vitrenko lashed out at Kobolyev,

accusing him of being "a parasite on the achievements of others." Vitrenko said he was dismissed because he "told Kobolyev to his face that his shortcomings as a leader undermined the achievements of our team at Naftogaz and discredited reforms."

The column went on to say "the facts prove that Naftogaz's successes do not have to be connected to Kobolyev at all. But the main failures of Naftogaz, as I have already shown, are directly linked to Kobolyev."

"Kobolyev's image is the garb from the tale about the naked emperor," Vitrenko added in his op-ed.

Vitrenko is credited for taking a lead role in successful litigation against Russia's Gazprom that ended in a more than \$3 billion payment last year to Ukraine for violation of gas contract terms. He also negotiated an agreement through 2024 that guarantees Russia will transport no less than 40 billion cubic meters of



Yuri Vitrenko participates in a briefing to announce his appointment on April 29, 2021 as Naftogaz CEO. Vitrenko's replaces Andriy Kobolyev. The pair worked closely at Naftogaz since 2014, turning around the fortunes of the corruption-riddled company. But Kobolyev fired Vitrenko in 2020 after a dispute over the future of the state-owned energy giant with \$7 billion in 2020 revenue.

gas through Ukraine's transit pipelines, even if the Russian-German bypass Nord Stream 2 pipeline under construction is completed. That means revenue of at least \$7 billion in transit fees, he said.

Timothy Ash, a London-based analyst who has followed Ukraine's economy closely for years, said that Vitrenko's elevation to acting energy minister in December 2020, meant that Kobolyev's days were numbered in Naftogaz.

Corporate governance

The government's decision, however, provoked an outcry from Kobolyev loyalists. Before Vitrenko took charge on April 29, the management of Naftogaz called the move "legal manipulation," according to a statement published on Facebook on April 28.

The Cabinet of Ministers dismissed the supervisory board for two days to be able to fire Kobolyev directly without the consent of the board members. This move is "an insult to the basic principles of corporate governance of state enterprises," Naftogaz said. "It is a clear signal to investors... that the state-owned enterprises in Ukraine are unpredictable and that their operations may change depending on the political situation."

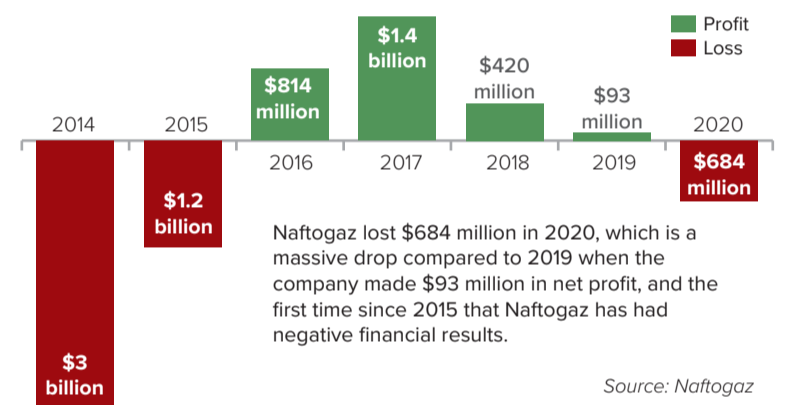
On April 29, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price wrote on Twitter that "respect for corporate governance, transparency and integrity in the appointment of personnel in the energy sector — whether government or state-owned enterprises — is key to maintaining confidence in Ukraine's commitment to reform."

His view was shared by the ambassadors of the G7 countries, including Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the U.K. and the U.S. The diplomats issued a joint statement on Twitter, saying that "effective management of state-owned enterprises, free from political interference, is crucial for Ukraine's competitiveness, prosperity and fulfillment of its international obligations."

Hlib Vyshlinsky, head of the Center for Economic Strategy, told the Kyiv Post on April 28 that Vitrenko's appointment threatens corporate governance reform. "The government wants to bring key state enterprises back under political control," Vyshlinsky said.

For him, it could mean further problems with the International Monetary Fund and setbacks with the European Bank for Reconstruction

Naftogaz financials for last 7 years



Timothy Ash, London-based analyst

"With Vitrenko moving to head the energy ministry, the question was always how long Kobolyev would last at Naftogaz. It will be interesting to see whether we see Kobolyev launching a counter-response. Both are heavyweights in the domestic energy business and have their own political supporters. The big loss posted by Naftogaz for 2020 was the final trigger for the removal of Kobolyev."



Edward Chow, energy analyst based in Washington, D.C.

"The temptation remains for political leaders to manually control the sector, instead of building a modern energy market. The energy sector requires stable, predictable and attractive conditions for long-term investments. In this way, it is different from IT, retail, and consumer goods. The transformation of the energy sector can only succeed with coherent policy, structural reform, and competent governance. Sustaining reform is more important than an individual agenda. Unless the government articulates its plan in this regard, the latest personnel changes only add to market uncertainty and impede urgently needed investments in the energy sector."



Yuri Kubrushko, energy expert

"This is a nonsense situation when during the same day the government fires (in violation of normal corporate governance practices) the chairman of Naftogaz due to losses of the company in 2020 and appoints new minister of energy Herman Halushchenko, vice president of Energoatom, which made huge losses in 2020. This is a good example of double standards in politics and shows that respective staff decisions have nothing to do with results of the companies' operations."



Clare Spottiswoode, ex-chair of the supervisory Board at Naftogaz

"(We) disagree with the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers to evaluate the performance of the company's executive board in 2020 as unsatisfactory. We have... completed the evaluation of this board's performance in 2020 as very good if not excellent, given the context in which it was operating.

The executive board demonstrated remarkable performance in steering the Naftogaz Group through the COVID-19 crisis and highly unfavorable global energy markets. The termination of the chief executive officer by the government in the absence of any engagement of the supervisory board contradicts the requirements of Ukrainian law."

and Development, which financed corporate governance reform at Naftogaz.

The IMF and Ukraine agreed in June 2020 to a conditional \$5 billion loan agreement, but Ukraine hasn't received any money since an initial \$2.1 billion installment because the government has not met its com-

mitments to the fund, including an effective fight against corruption, independence of the National Bank of Ukraine and other issues.

In August 2020, the EBRD provided a 52 million euro loan to UkrGasVydobuvannya to increase domestic natural gas production, but production dropped. ❌

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EDITORIALS

State burden

There was a great outcry over the supposed assault on the sanctity of corporate governance of state-owned enterprises this week when Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal's government sacked Andriy Kobolyev and replaced him as Naftogaz CEO with Yuriy Vitrenko, the acting minister.

It was overblown. Actually, the government — the shareholder of an enterprise with \$7 billion in revenue in 2020 — followed the rules, such as they are, in first removing the supervisory board and then Kobolyev.

The bigger problem, however, is not the many shortcomings of corporate governance in this nation, but rather the state enterprises themselves.

Two of the largest — Naftogaz, the oil & gas giant, and Ukrzalyznytisia, the state railway, lost collectively more than \$1 billion in 2020. It's a staggering amount of money in a poor country.

The situation is not better in the 3,000 enterprises still owned by the state, often for no other reason than to allow corrupt insiders to suck money from them and stick taxpayers with losses. Take, for example, the Kozatsky hotel on Independence Square. It is one of several hotels owned by the Ministry of Defense. Andriy Boytsun, who writes a weekly column on state-owned enterprises, reports that the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine discovered that, from 2015–2019, the hotel's officials used online booking services to channel customer payments to their private accounts rather than hotel accounts. The alleged theft from this one hotel: \$432,000.

Back to Naftogaz. This company has been troubled for decades. Energy has been the source of Ukraine's biggest corruption. While Kobolyev, Vitrenko and others deserve praise for squeezing out some corrupt schemes, others remain.

Let's temper praise for the supervisory board. They were not transparent and many considered the foreigners on the board to be incompetent and picked precisely for their lack of knowledge of Ukraine. They were not independent of management. They seemed more loyal to Kobolyev than anything else.

Take a look at the 2020 financials: The top 17 officials were paid \$25 million in 2020, despite \$674 million in losses. That is double their 2019 compensation, when Naftogaz was actually profitable. To add insult to injury, the pay is not broken out individually.

Oil and gas production has been declining for years. The board let Kobolyev get away with not restructuring Naftogaz or cutting a bloated workforce. Naftogaz kept supplying natural gas, mainly to exiled Dmytro Firtash, without getting paid — costing the state billions of dollars. Kobolyev did nothing to break up Firtash's near-monopoly status in gas distribution — forcing the state to re-regulate gas prices again to prevent price-gouging.

The breaking point in the Kobolyev-Vitrenko relationship, according to Vitrenko's telling, is when Kobolyev sided with Ihor Kolomoisky's choice for CEO in Ukrnafta, the state oil company, in which the rapacious billionaire oligarch has a minority share. Vitrenko also told the Kyiv Post that Naftogaz let some oil field licenses go to billionaire oligarch Rinat Akhmetov.

There's more, but Kobolyev is no model reformer. In our view, Vitrenko deserves credit for pursuing the arbitration cases against Gazprom's contract violations, netting the state \$3 billion. He's also developed a credible plan for boosting oil and gas production, while developing renewables, curbing the dominance of the oligarchs, and establishing a more competitive market that is integrated with Europe.

The larger problem remains: Ukraine needs to get rid of most of its poorly run and poorly governed state enterprises — and quickly.

Baby steps

Ukraine has long missed out on a source of tax revenue that underpins most local government services in the West — from parks to police to roads and more. It's called the property tax. In some Western municipalities, it brings in more than half of the budget. In Ukraine, property taxes barely bring in 3%. Ukraine has just recently started to impose this tax.

But instead of assessing the value of a property, it is doing so based on square meters — at a ridiculously low amount. Those living in a hovel on the far end of the distant Troeshchyna neighborhood will pay the same amount per square meter as a luxury flat. People in rural areas with lower incomes will pay the same as a mogul who owns a dozen empty apartments in the center of Kyiv.

Flats under 60 square meters and houses under 120 square meters are exempt from property taxes. But even in larger properties, owners have to pay just 1% of the legal minimum salary for each additional square meter, depending on the city.

The state loses out on billions of dollars as a consequence. This inequity makes the tax burden more regressive and less progressive. A tax system based on the ability to pay is the fairest way to go, and a healthy mix of property, sales and income taxes are the surest way to do so. Local taxes also encourage greater civic involvement and oversight of government spending. Adequate property taxes also encourage owners to use their assets productively, rather than allowing them to sit idle for speculation.

While property valuations are more difficult to do in Ukraine, where buyers and sellers often conspire to hide the true sales price, it's not impossible. Professionals know the market prices well. A minimum per-square-meter price could be established that would be defensible and that should be widely accepted.

Ukraine needs to get better at collecting taxes in general. It's simply too bureaucratic, and tax authorities and small businesses waste too much time on paperwork for small bits of money, while the wealthy remain several steps ahead, evading billions of dollars in taxes through complex schemes and shell companies abroad.

Two big steps towards justice are fairness in raising money for government spending, and effectiveness in the spending itself. Ukraine has a long way to go in both areas.

NEWS ITEM:

President Volodymyr Zelensky believes that the Vatican could be the best place for his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin to talk about peace in eastern Ukraine. "The venue of the meeting should inspire trust among both parties," Zelensky said on April 28. That followed Putin's suggestion on April 22 for Zelensky to come to Moscow to talk about peace in Ukraine.



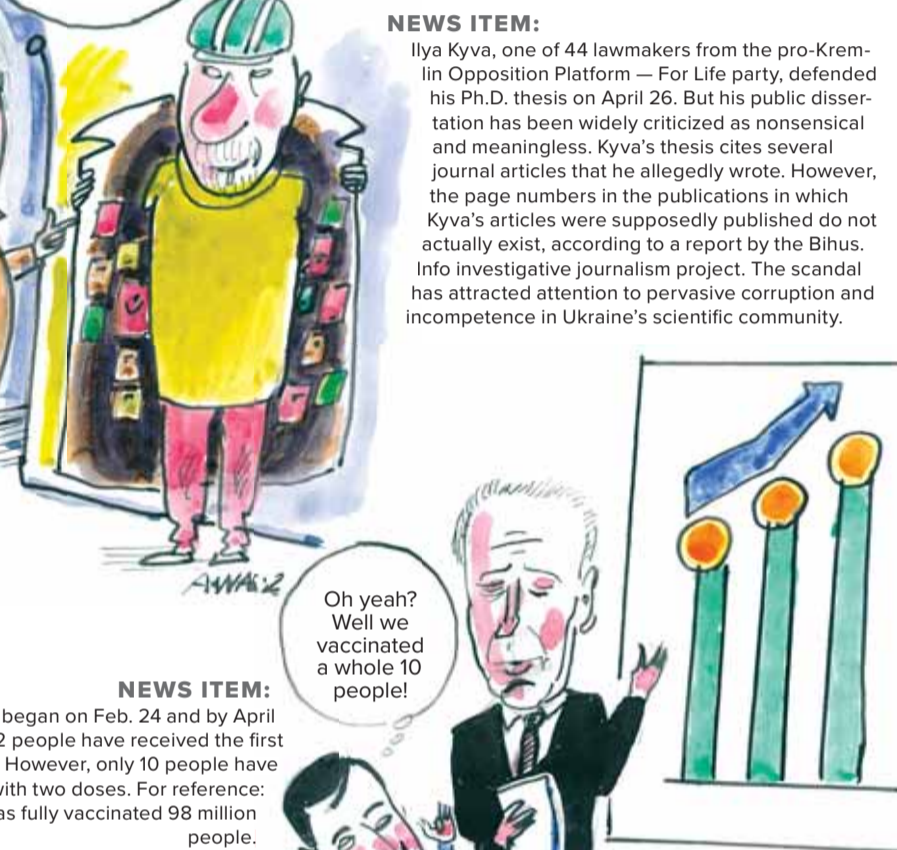
NEWS ITEM:

Ilya Kyva, one of 44 lawmakers from the pro-Kremlin Opposition Platform — For Life party, defended his Ph.D. thesis on April 26. But his public dissertation has been widely criticized as nonsensical and meaningless. Kyva's thesis cites several journal articles that he allegedly wrote. However, the page numbers in the publications in which Kyva's articles were supposedly published do not actually exist, according to a report by the Bihus. Info investigative journalism project. The scandal has attracted attention to pervasive corruption and incompetence in Ukraine's scientific community.



NEWS ITEM:

Vaccination in Ukraine began on Feb. 24 and by April 29, a total of 629,182 people have received the first dose of the vaccine. However, only 10 people have been fully vaccinated with two doses. For reference: The United States has fully vaccinated 98 million people.



NEWS ITEM:

TV presenter Serhiy Prytula said he would like to head the 20-member Voice party, which he currently represents in the parliament. The current head of this political force, Kira Rudyk, didn't like it. She hinted that Prytula is unreliable, pointing out that, over the last year and a half, he wanted to do many things: to be in the Kyiv City Council, become the mayor of Kyiv, return to show business, create his own party and now he wants to head Voice. "Running a political party isn't the same as performing at clubs and stadiums, it is systematic, hard work, which isn't really as fun as it may seem," Rudyk said.



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Ukraine's Friend & Foe Of The Week



Ekaterina Zakhariyeva, Bulgaria's foreign minister

In the latest diplomatic row between Bulgaria and Russia, Zakhariyeva said Bulgaria would expel a Russian diplomat who was allegedly behind four ammunition depots blasts in the country in 2011–2020.



Heiko Maas, Germany's foreign minister

Maas has publicly opposed helping Ukraine with military support to fight Russia's war in the Donbas. He's also called for better relations with Russia. We wonder how he'd feel if the Kremlin occupied a large part of Germany again and kept threatening to take more territory.

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

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Seeing progress in COVID-19 fight, Kyiv eases restrictions

page 1 →

20,000 cases a day, went down to about 12,000 in late April.

The other important metric, the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients, went down from 48,000 in early April to 36,000 in late April. In Kyiv, the decrease was even more rapid – from 5,000 to 3,000 people.

Yet another reason for optimism came from a spike in COVID-19 vaccination.

After having been inoculating a meager number of 15,000 people a day on average, Ukraine unexpectedly vaccinated 70,000 people on April 28, giving hope that the country's vaccination campaign is finally taking off.

Restrictions lifted

The end of the lockdown lifts almost all quarantine restrictions in Kyiv: Restaurants and cafes open up, but have to close at midnight; stores, malls, cinemas and gyms reopen; public transport is accessible to everyone; schools and kindergartens reopen.

Some restrictions remain. Mass gatherings indoors are limited to give each visitor at least four square meters of space. Mask wearing remains mandatory in all public spaces and public transport.

It was the third time that Kyiv shut down to curb the rising infections, after two nationwide lockdowns in March-May 2020 and January. The capital, with the rest of Ukraine, also saw weekend lockdowns in November.

In January and November, lockdowns yielded a decrease in the number of daily infections. In March-May 2020, the lockdown slowed the spread of the virus to Ukraine and allowed the health care system to prepare for the inflow of patients. Still, it came close to collapsing a year later.

As Kyiv eases restrictions, nine Ukrainian regions remain under lockdown: Kyiv Oblast, Zhytomyr Oblast, Zaporizhia Oblast, Mykolaiv Oblast, Poltava Oblast, Sumy Oblast, Kharkiv Oblast, Khmelnytsky Oblast and Chernihiv Oblast.

As much as it is welcome by those tired of restrictions, the timing is controversial.

The lockdowns in big cities, including Odesa and Lviv, are being lifted as Ukraine goes into a holiday-heavy period. May 1 and May 9 are official holidays, and Orthodox Easter is celebrated on May 2. Ukrainians will have two long weekends: May 1–4 and May 8–10.

Many expected that the lockdown in Kyiv will be prolonged to cover the May holidays. Lifting the restric-



A couple kisses on Khreshchatyk Street in downtown Kyiv on April 10, 2021. While many people are jubilant to see the end of the lockdown, they've been encouraged to not let their guard down to prevent another surge of infection. Ukrainians have also been encouraged to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

tions may lead to more infections as people get together to celebrate.

Additional risk comes from the fact that many Ukrainian families will head to the cemeteries on May 8–9 for the remembrance days that come one week after Easter. In 2020, authorities closed down cemeteries and rescheduled the remembrance days to avoid crowds. But this year, there are no limitations in most of Ukraine.

Optimism for vaccine

After dragging its feet for two months, Ukraine's vaccination campaign may finally be taking off.

Although Ukraine started vaccinating its citizens on Feb. 24, it gave the first doses of the vaccine to just 629,182 people, as of April 29. Only 10 Ukrainians received the necessary two doses.

The gap is due to the fact that the main vaccine Ukraine is using is AstraZeneca. For it, a 12-week gap between the first and second doses is recommended.

It means that the number of fully vaccinated people will start rising rapidly in mid-May, 12 weeks after Ukraine started vaccinating its citizens.

The welcome spike in the number of daily vaccinations – from 19,590 on April 27 to 70,468 on April 28 – is linked to the latest delivery of 367,000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccines from South Korea on April 23.

Responding to criticism over slow vaccination, health care officials decided to use the new batch to give it a quick boost.

"We want to use up the whole

batch in two or three days to demonstrate the full capacity of the medical system," said Deputy Health Minister Viktor Lyashko.

At the same time, it means that Ukraine currently doesn't have AstraZeneca vaccines to administer the second doses. Ukraine booked more vaccines from India, but the country, currently battling one of the worst coronavirus crises in the

world, is delaying all export supplies, prioritizing inoculating its own population.

Help may come from the west. Poland, which booked more vaccines than its population needs, will deliver 1.2 million doses of AstraZeneca to Ukraine in May or June.

That's around the same as the total number of all vaccines that Ukraine received so far. 🇺🇦

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Ukraine remains challenging country for Dutch businesses

By Natalia Datskevych
datskevych@kyivpost.com

Ukraine sells a lot of its agricultural products to the European Union — a third of all the country's agricultural exports like grains, cereals and sunflower oil ended up in the EU last year, much of it to the Netherlands.

Ukraine exported agricultural goods worth \$1.4 billion to the Dutch country, part of a bilateral trade valued at \$2.5 billion in 2020.

From the latest statistics — January through November 2020 — the EU's 27 nations bought \$5.8 billion worth of food from Ukraine.

Professor Louise Fresco, a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, said Ukraine is a vital food producer.

"You are blessed with some of the best soils in the world," Fresco said during a press event in Kyiv on April 15. Ukraine will always be one of the countries "making sure that food is available to the poor in the world."

Ukraine, in turn, imported \$740 million worth of goods from the Netherlands, mostly cars, pharmaceuticals, dairy products, vegetables, plants, cocoa and tobacco.



A greenery of Galicia Greenery, a Dutch company based in Lviv Oblast, 550 kilometers west of Kyiv. Initially, the Dutch investors planned to build 15 hectares of greenhouses, but due to the weak investment climate in Ukraine, they built only 0.8 hectares.

would be an additional product to tomatoes. But it never happened and the area was cut to 0.8 hectares with only lettuce to produce.

Investors from the Netherlands currently don't have plans to launch other projects in Ukraine.

"Not so many people want to invest in projects with an over five-year payback period," said Lenchuk.

Meanwhile, Fresco believes that Ukraine still has great potential in horticulture, including greenhouse production. The COVID-19 pandemic, she said, pushed many people to switch to healthier diets.

Dutch trucks

Doing business as a Western European company in Ukraine for 25 years means constant ups and downs, according to Steenstra from EVW Automotive. But even Russia's war didn't force the company to leave the market.

"I cannot remember for the last 15 years any period where there was no risk," said Steenstra.

The sales of DAF trucks are around 1,000 annually in Ukraine. Still, it's three times lower compared to what the company had in 2007–2008. Today, the company's share in the Big Seven club — Scania, Volvo, MAN, Mercedes-Benz, Renault and Iveco — is 10%.

But this year is not an ordinary one.

As the pandemic fueled online commerce, it provoked extremely high demand on trucks in EU countries. Steenstra hasn't given any concrete figures though, because many ordered trucks are still being built.

It takes about nine months to manufacture a truck, he said. "Even if the market in Ukraine places an order for a lot of DAF trucks, we simply cannot produce them."

The company's current growth forecast in Ukraine is much more modest than 15 years ago, when it just started working in the country.

In Eastern Europe, Dutch investors have more confidence in the Polish legal system because it is more transparent. "Not the case in Ukraine," said Steenstra.

Dutch farmers have a similarly cautious attitude to investment in the Ukrainian agricultural sector, even amid the opening of the land market this July.

To make the country more attractive for Dutch farmers, Ukraine has to clarify "what foreign investors can expect," said Reinoud Nuijten, agricultural counselor to Ukraine at the Dutch Embassy in Kyiv. Currently, it is vague how and who can own or lease the land. The "situation is not favorable for foreigners," said Nuijten. 🇳🇱



The Netherlands at a glance

Government type: **Constitutional monarchy**

King: **Willem-Alexander Claus George Ferdinand**

Prime Minister: **Mark Rutte**

GDP, PPP: **\$909 billion (2020)**

GDP per capita, PPP: **\$52,250 (2020)**

Total area: **41,528 square kilometers**

Population: **17.23 million**

The Netherlands foreign direct investments: **\$8.3 billion (2010–2019)**

World Bank's Doing Business Ranking: **42**

Credit ratings: **S&P — AAA (stable), Fitch — AAA (stable), Moody's — Aaa (stable)**

Main economic sectors: **Agriculture, oil and natural gas, IT, electronic machinery, chemicals, fishing, financial services, tourism**

Trade: **\$2.5 billion**

Exports from Ukraine to the Netherlands: **Ukraine exports grain, sunflower oil, wood and wooden products, ferrous metals, clothes, furniture \$1.8 billion**

Imports to Ukraine from the Netherlands: **Ukraine imports pharmaceuticals, electric cars, milk and milk products, plants, vegetables, cacao and cacao products, plastics \$750 million**

Sources: World Bank, International Monetary Fund, State Customs Service

The partnership would be stronger if Ukraine had rule of law.

"The country has opportunities, the country has a skilled labor force — it has everything to be successful," said Jan Steenstra, cofounder of EVW Automotive, the official dealer of Dutch DAF trucks in Ukraine. "But if investments are not protected, it's very hard to make the decision."

Dutch greenhouses

About 14 times smaller than Ukraine and with only 17 million people, the Netherlands distinguishes itself as one of the biggest traders in the world. The Netherlands exported \$675 billion worth of goods in 2020. By comparison, Ukraine's exports reached only \$49 billion — about a third of the gross domestic product of roughly \$150 billion.

Agricultural products make up the lion's share of Dutch exports.

Despite its agricultural successes, particularly in grain production, Ukraine is deficient in other areas. For example, it has to import huge volumes of vegetables like tomatoes and leafy green vegetables — especially during the winter. In 2020, imports of greenhouse tomatoes reached a record 86,700 tons, 21% more than the year before.

An exception to the country's otherwise dismal reality in some areas, Galicia Greenery, a Dutch greenhouse company based in Lviv Oblast, produces around 2 million lettuce bushes annually. The com-

pany sells them to Ukrainian supermarket chains and restaurants.

Founded with the joint investment of FoodVentures and Dutch grower cooperatives Rainbow and Prominent, the company uses aquaponics technology for growing vegetables.

"Salads float in special crates with nutrients in water," Serhiy Lenchuk, director of Galicia Greenery, told the Kyiv Post. "This is Dutch technology."

While the Netherlands has more than 9,000 hectares of greenhouse production, the number of them in Ukraine has halved in just the last seven years — from 500 hectares to 280 hectares.

Main reasons: there's no state support, electricity and gas are pricey and loan rates are high.

"Business should be extremely profitable to pay loans at 12–13% in the national currency," said Lenchuk.

For him, it is much more difficult to run greenhouses in Ukraine than in the Central Asian country of Kazakhstan.

"When the business plan for growing in Kazakhstan or Ukraine is laid out on the same table, investors will choose Kazakhstan," he said. "The attractiveness there is higher and the payback period is lower."

Galicia Greenery invested 5 million euros to start a business in Ukraine in 2015. The investment hasn't yet returned a profit.

In the Galicia Greenery case, the initial plan was to build 15 hectares of hothouses, where the lettuce

Ukrainian delivery Rocket enters Amsterdam, has global ambitions

By Daryna Antoniuk
antoniuk@kyivpost.com

Food delivery service Rocket wants to become a global company rivaling Estonian Bolt Food, Spanish Glovo and American Uber Eats. And it has started its global expansion with the Netherlands.

In April this year, the company's orange backpacks were spotted on the streets of Amsterdam, where it now works with nearly 50 restaurants and continues to connect new partners. For now, Rocket is the only service in the city that delivers food for free.

The Dutch market is competitive: Ukrainians have to work side-by-side with giants like Deliveroo, Uber and Thuisbezorgd. But despite the high competition, the Netherlands gives many opportunities to grow a business, Rocket said.

According to global auditor PwC, it is easy for a tech company to work there because the country has affordable taxes, simple laws and many economic incentives to support innovations.

For ambitious but still unprofitable Rocket, it is a great place to continue its expansion into Europe, the company's press service said.

Dutch market

Like everywhere in the world, food delivery is in demand in the Netherlands as many people stay home and order food online during the lockdown. This trend will continue and will likely become permanent, according to the survey by analyst Deloitte.

There are two most common ways to order food in the Netherlands: either to use one of the delivery service apps or order directly from a restaurant.

Rocket said that many eateries are



A courier of Ukrainian food ordering platform Raketa delivers his order in Kyiv on April 2, 2020. In December, Raketa had to change its name to Rocket as it started operating in Nicosia, Cyprus. In April 2021, Rocket entered Amsterdam and plans to enter new European countries soon.

"dissatisfied" with how local delivery services work and Rocket wants to help them.

To ease the expansion in the Netherlands, Rocket opened an office in Amsterdam and hired new staff there. The core team of nearly 300 people remains in Ukraine.

Becoming international

Turning Rocket into an international business wasn't easy, the company said.

It had to change its name from Raketa to Rocket when it started operating in Nicosia; it had to convert the prices from hryvnias to euros and adjust its app to payment

systems used in different markets.

The legislation and data protection regulation in Europe is also different and takes time to adjust, Rocket said.

The company is eager to go abroad to avoid risks of working in just one country, Rocket's cofounder Aleksey Yukhymchuk said in an interview with Ukrainian media Novoe Vremya.

Rocket's competitors, including Bolt, Glovo and Uber, have already built an international chain and Rocket tries to keep up. The company plans to launch its service in 10 more countries over the year and aims at 15% of market share in each of them.

After the Netherlands, Rocket will probably enter Slovenia, Yukhymchuk said in his interview with YouTube channel Big Money.

Slovenia ranks 37th among 190 countries in the Doing Business ranking released by the World Bank, and for Rocket, the ease of doing business is important. The Netherlands is on the 42th place. Ukraine ranks 64th.

Unprofitable business

According to Deloitte, Rocket is the second most popular delivery in Ukraine after Glovo, which has been operating in the country since 2018.

Apart from Glovo, the company

also competes with Estonian Bolt Food that launched its service in October 2020 and has become popular in Ukraine due to its free delivery and discounts from restaurants.

Spanish and Estonian businesses are valued at billions of dollars and have customers all over the world, while Rocket's valuation ranges from \$50 million to \$100 million, according to Forbes.

To expand, delivery services attract money from investors: Spanish Glovo, for example, raised \$528 million this April, while U.K. Deliveroo attracted \$2.1 billion and is now valued at \$10.4 billion.

Ukrainian Rocket couldn't find money at first because it launched its service at around the same time as Glovo and Uber Eats. Investors said that there was no place in Ukraine for another food delivery business.

Finally, Rocket raised money from private investor Igor Rochlin who now owns 86% of the company, according to database YouControl.

"It was a perfect match: We had the project, software, process, strategy to grow, team and product, while he had a desire to launch a (delivery) business himself," cofounder Stanislav Dmitrik told Forbes.

To serve its customers faster, Rocket opens so-called ghost kitchens that prepare food exclusively for the delivery service. Such kitchens are cheaper than full-fledged restaurants and can prepare foods faster, while being closer to customers.

Yukhymchuk said that Ukrainian company has another ace in the hole to fight wealthier competitors. "We are stronger because we are local and understand the mentality of Ukrainians," he said.

In 2021, the company hopes its strategy will help it to break even in Ukraine and inhabit the markets abroad. 🍌

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WHAT SUSTAINABILITY MEANS AT SHELL

Tackling climate change is the biggest challenge the world faces today.

We have recently announced our Energy Transition Strategy, which describes Shell's approach to becoming a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050, in step with society's progress towards the goal of the UN Paris Agreement on climate change.

In February 2021, we launched our Powering Progress strategy to accelerate the transition of our business, including targets to reduce the carbon intensity of energy products we sell - by 6-8% by 2023, 20% by 2030, 45% by 2035 and 100% by 2050. We have worked to embed this sustainability ambition into our strategy, our business processes and decision-making.

As part of our renewables and energy solutions offer, our ambition is to sell some 560-terawatt hours per year by 2030, which is twice as much electricity as we sell today. We're also working to implement Nature-based Solutions that will enable Shell to invest around \$100 million a year in high-quality, independently verified projects on the ground to help customers meet their net-zero emissions targets.



We aim to provide more and cleaner energy solutions in a responsible manner - in a way that balances short- and long-term interests, and integrates economic, environmental and social considerations.

About Shell in Ukraine

Shell Retail business entered the Ukrainian market in 2007. Shell in Ukraine employs around 1,500 people.

To date, the network of Shell-branded fuel sites consists of 132 stations in 20 oblasts of Ukraine, offering its customers high-quality motor fuel products, including Shell V-Power fuels, diesel & LPG, as well as a solid range of Convenience Retail goods, tasty food & beverages. In an effort to meet the expectations of a growing number of Ukrainian electric vehicle owners, Shell, in cooperation with its partners, installed five electric vehicle charging modules at selected fuel sites.

Shell can and must play a leading role in helping society to meet that climate challenge. In Ukraine we are developing our local Sustainability Plan in line with those ambitions. We believe that by reaching our sustainability goals, we invest into a better world today and tomorrow.



Advancing gender equality permeates Shell's operations



Peter Kerekgyarto

Despite visible progress over the decade, the issue of gender inequality at the workplace remains an open issue disproportionately affecting women around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has further amplified existing shifts in equality of women's and men's rights.

How can companies be best fit to address this problem?

Shell's experience shows that gender quality should permeate the company's operations. Only a long-standing policy of women's empowerment implemented by companies may have positive social effects.

Moreover, businesses benefit from such policies as well.

World & Ukrainian trends

A recent McKinsey & Company report shows that in the oil and gas sector only one third of the total number of employees are women. In STEM industries (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) this percentage is higher – 41%, and in the business sector the percentage of employed women is about 48%.

The Women in Business Report,

conducted by audit and consulting company Grant Thornton, shows that in 2019, the share of women in senior management of business companies worldwide was at an all-time high, but still at 29 per cent. In 2020 this number has not changed.

Ukraine only reflects the general trend in this issue. The Gender Profile of Ukraine, developed by United Nations Development Program, shows that the percentage of women in management positions stands at 23%, business owners at 46%, and their overall employment rate at 47%. In addition, women's rate of salaries is on average 23% less than men's remuneration.

In the energy sector, according to the survey "Women and Men in the Energy Sector of Ukraine", the share of women among all employees in the energy sector of the country remains quite low (at 23–27% in 2013–2017), despite slightly positive dynamics. The structure of employment is also asymmetric – positions still tend to be divided into "female" (specialists, service workers) and "male" (mostly managerial positions). The disparity is also notice-



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The Gender Profile of Ukraine, developed by United Nations Development Program, shows that the percentage of women in management positions stands at 23%, business owners at 46%, and their overall employment rate at 47%. In addition, women's rate of salaries is on average 23% less than men's remuneration.

able in the context of wages: women receive lower wages than men on the same positions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened these trends. Thus, according to European Commission's 2021

report on gender equality in the European Union, the pandemic has hit women particularly hard. Their overrepresentation in lower paid sectors and occupations, such as for instance hospitality, retail, or personal services, make them particularly vulnerable in the labor markets struck by the COVID-19 crisis. Preliminary data on labor market trends shows that the impact of the pandemic's first wave on the labour market was more significant for women than for men, the survey reads.

Business also has its role to play in protecting women's rights and in empowering women's leadership. This is what Shell is, in particular, working on.

Gender equity promotion

Our experience confirms that maintaining cultural diversity and gender balance favorably contributes to competitive advantages. Thus, in Shell Retail in Ukraine, 50% of women hold senior positions, far above the global average of 26%. Such high performance has been achieved through the company's carefully thought-out policy aimed at building a gender-balanced organization that helps attract more women to management positions.

Shell signed the Declaration of the World Economic Forum on gender equality in the oil and gas sector and already feel the effectiveness of this decision in terms of financial performance and the general atmosphere in the company. One of the principles of the Declaration determines 'the establishment of gender diversity and inclusion as a strategic business imperative at all levels of an organization.' The document also encourages the creation of an open inclusive corporate culture and the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men, which promotes the career growth of both sexes.

Shell in Ukraine is proud to having become a member of the United

Nations Global Compact. This new chapter in the history of our company confirms our intentions of becoming a responsible and sustainable business in various aspects from running a safe, efficient, responsible, and profitable business to contributing to positive changes in communities where Shell operates. The UN GC supports companies to do business responsibly by adhering to ten principles that cover, in particular, human rights and labour. We are happy of being listed among those businesses aimed at contributing to global social changes which begin from gradual progress of individual companies.

We are continuously working on achieving, particularly, the United Nations Sustainability Development Goal No. 5 "Gender Equality." This topic is of a crucial importance now, in the pandemic times, when women are facing even more difficulties in a "new reality". According to the UN's findings, women's unpaid care work has increased significantly as a result of school closures and the increased needs of older people. Moreover, women are harder hit by the economic impacts of COVID-19, as they disproportionately work in insecure labor markets. We bear responsibility for taking care of women employed by Shell not only in difficult times, but always. This is our religion; this is Shell's policy which also leads us to signing the UN Women's Empowerment Principles in near future.

Empowering women in business should move from declarations to practical steps which will allow to change a still popular mindset in Ukraine that a woman cannot combine career growth and family care. They also lay the foundation for security for women and testify to the company as a responsible and caring employer.

Peter Kerekgyarto is general director of Shell Retail Ukraine and country chair of Shell Ukraine. ☺

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Dutch businessman roots for local IT talent, but corruption remains a shock

By Liza Semko

semko@kyivpost.com

When Dutch investor Theo Schnitfink made it to Ukraine some 12 years ago to open an office of his software development firm Symphony Solutions, he was amazed with the level of skill of Ukrainian software engineers.

Corruption in the country didn't scare Schnitfink away, but he admits he was shocked when he faced it himself.

Despite all obstacles, in 12 years of working in Ukraine, Symphony Solutions has grown from just eight employees to over 250 today. And Schnitfink highly recommends Ukraine to foreign investors.

Richard Bell, owner of the consultancy firm Next Step Oekraïne, which has helped around 300 Dutch businesses in Ukraine, says there are reasons why foreign entrepreneurs like it here eventually.

"They are interested in Ukraine as a country where you can find qualified people with an affordable price tag," Bell told the Kyiv Post.

Indeed, Ukraine has a pool of 200,000 IT specialists and the average hourly rate for senior developers is around \$35. In the United States, it starts from around \$60, according to Daxx, another Dutch tech company working in Ukraine.

At the same time, Bell adds that the Ukrainian market is by far not the most attractive market for Dutch investors. The lack of rule of law is still the biggest scarecrow.

Moving to Ukraine

When Schnitfink opened the headquarters of Symphony Solutions in



People talk at the Ukrainian office of Symphony Solutions, a software development company founded by Dutch Theo Schnitfink.

Amsterdam in 2008, he had already had expansion to Eastern Europe on his mind. And he chose Ukraine to start it off.

"I started looking for... the best location and eyed several countries. Ukraine was probably the most interesting country to go to," Schnitfink said. Ukraine's education, its liberal visa policy and cheap labor were favorable, he reckoned.

He chose Lviv, the city of 730,000 people more than 500 kilometers west of Kyiv. The city had good universities, international airport and

its people are similar to Western Europeans.

But the last thing that persuaded to come was support from local authorities: Serhiy Kiral former director of foreign economic relations and investments at Lviv City Council and Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyi helped file needed documents and open the business.

The move wasn't smooth, however. "I had a fight with tax authorities," he said. "They were making my life very difficult for the first year, every quarter when I filed taxes."

According to him, the tax service would make up mistakes in his documentation and ask him to pay a bribe to turn a blind eye. He would always refuse.

Around five-six years ago law enforcement authorities came back to the Ukrainian office to raid it because of alleged tax evasion. Schnitfink calls it "kind of a revenge."

However, what Schnitfink likes about Ukraine is that it has a huge number of great talents, especially in the tech domain, and high quality

of education, even though diplomas can be bought in Ukraine, Schnitfink said.

"Ukraine has a huge potential to grow even more if they focus a lot more on teaching all the children English at school," said Schnitfink.

Overall, he said Ukraine shows a lot of promise, especially in the IT industry and agriculture.

"I would recommend every investor from outside Ukraine to invest in Ukraine. (But) they have to really prepare and know upfront what they can expect," said Schnitfink.

As of now, Symphony Solutions has a broad network of offices around the world with sales offices in the Netherlands, the U.S. and Belgium, as well as delivery centers in Ukraine, North Macedonia and two in Poland.

The company develops software for gambling companies such as Ladbrokes Coral and for wine app Vivino, among others.

Dutch office in Lviv

Schnitfink is proud of the company's offices, including in Lviv.

"I really tried to bring a more of the Western work culture to Ukraine, and our office looks very Dutch for that reason," Schnitfink said, describing the company's meetings rooms that look like small multicolored buildings like the ones in the center of Amsterdam.

However, if Schnitfink started his business from scratch now, he wouldn't open any offices because there's no need for that now during the pandemic, when many work remotely.

"Even after COVID-19 we will never go back to working full-time in offices," said Schnitfink. ☺



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As Russia spreads lies, some Dutch citizens blame Ukraine for MH17 crash

By Anna Myroniuk
myroniuk@kyivpost.com

Dutchman Piet Ploeg lost his older brother Alex when Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 was shot down over Eastern Ukraine seven years ago.

Alex was on the plane headed from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, which was hit by a Russian Buk missile while flying over the Donbas.

Ploeg never had the chance to say goodbye. All 298 people on the plane were killed in the attack. His brother was one of the two people whose remains were never found.

"You know, my parents both died in 2019 and it was very sad that they never got to say goodbye to their son," Ploeg, who also lost his brother's wife and a nephew in the plane crash, told the Kyiv Post. "My mother often dreamed that her son was still alive somewhere. You wouldn't wish such sad last years of your life on your worst enemy."

The Netherlands Forensic Institute is still examining the last bone fragments of the victims and is expected to have results this summer. Ploeg has little hope that his brother will be found.

"So far, nothing has been found and, to be honest, I don't expect anything," he said.

While he has almost come to terms with not being able to bury his brother, he believes the least he can do is to get justice for him.

Ploeg, the director of Vliegcramp MH17, a foundation representing the majority of those who lost loved ones in the MH17 crash, has been proactive in trying to hold responsible parties to account. Ploeg and 400 other relatives of the victims brought a case against Russia to the European Court of Human Rights in 2016.

"We want Russia to admit to having been involved in the downing of flight MH17. We want Russia to apologize to all the relatives and the governments of the victim countries. And we want Russia to contribute, in one way or another, to the reparation



Head prosecutor Fred Westerbeke speaks next to a part of the Russia-made BUK rocket that was fired on the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 during the press conference of the Joint Investigation Team, in Bunnik, the Netherlands on May 24, 2018. The Russia-controlled separatists brought a missile from Russia to the Donbas, according to the investigators.

of the suffering caused to the victims and their families," he said.

However, it is not only Russia who must take responsibility, Ploeg believes. In his view, Ukraine should share the blame.

"After all, if the airspace had been closed, this tragedy would not have happened," he told the Kyiv Post.

Ukraine's airspace

There were sufficient reasons for Ukraine to close the airspace above its eastern regions because of the fighting there, according to the Dutch Safety Board that investigated the MH17 crash.

Kremlin-backed forces had previously shot down Ukraine's military aircraft. With that in mind, Ukraine's government had a duty to warn other countries' civil aviation about

the risks of flying over the area, said Marieke de Hoon, assistant professor of international criminal law at Amsterdam's Free University.

"It has failed in its obligation to close its airspace, which is a violation of international law," de Hoon, who has been following the MH17 trial closely, told the Kyiv Post.

However, Russia's guilt greatly outweighs Ukraine's, which is why the Netherlands government is focused on holding Russia accountable, she said.

"Russia was actually involved in delivering this missile and in actually downing it and, of course, everything that followed," de Hoon said.

According to the law professor, the relatives of the victims are frustrated that no one has taken responsibility for the crash.

Russia denies any involvement despite the ample evidence and has called the investigation politically motivated.

Ukraine actively participates in the Netherlands-led investigation, which also includes Australia, Belgium and Malaysia. But de Hoon believes that this is not enough and Ukraine should stand up and take responsibility.

She wants the Ukrainian government to admit it made a mistake by not closing the airspace.

"Then you do not need to go to court (to sue Ukraine) and everyone would prefer that," de Hoon said.

Holding Russia accountable

Ever since investigations by journalists and law enforcement connected Russia to the downing of the Malaysian plane, numerous lawsuits have been filed against the Kremlin.

Over 400 relatives of the victims filed a complaint against Russia to the European Court of Human Rights in 2016. It was followed by the Dutch government's interstate claim against Russia in 2020. The Netherlands is accusing Russia of downing the plane and failing to collaborate with investigators as required by international obligations. The hearings have yet to start.

As of now, the central trial is taking place in a Dutch court. It started in March 2020 and is set to decide whether three Russian nationals and one Ukrainian are responsible for shooting down the plane. According to the joint investigation team, their names are Igor Girkin, Sergei Dubinsky, Leonid Kharchenko and Oleg Pulatov.

Only one of the four defendants is participating in the trial through his lawyers. The rest are being tried in absentia. Multiple pieces of evidence, including geolocation, phone recordings and witness testimonies point to their responsibility.

If found guilty, they may be sentenced to life in prison. Carrying out the sentence may be problematic as all four are allegedly hiding in Russia.

"As long as the Russian authorities... protect them they are protected," de Hoon said. "There is nothing that the Dutch police can do on Russian soil," she added. There are no international agreements that could help and Russia has veto power in the UN Security Council.

The court may also rule that the four have to pay millions of euros to the victims' families. Depending on how close their ties were, they get from 40,000 to 50,000 euros per person, according to de Hoon.

If the court awards compensation, the Dutch government will pay the victims' families, and then will try to retrieve the sum from the defendants.

In June, the court is set to start hearing the case on the merits. The judges are expected to announce their decision next year.

Ukraine is continuing its own criminal investigation into the MH17 crash and has charged the four suspects separately in 2019, according to the Prosecutor General's Office.

What the Dutch think

People in the Netherlands generally believe that it was Russian-sponsored militants who destroyed the plane — but not always.

Russia has denied involvement, spun numerous versions of what happened and kept accusing Ukraine.

In 2016, pro-Russian groups started spreading conspiracy theories that Ukraine shot down the plane. At one point, they printed the message "Wasn't MH17 shot down from Ukraine?" on rolls of toilet paper and distributed them in Amsterdam.

Spreading anti-Ukrainian messages was an attempt to convince the public to vote against Ukraine at the then-upcoming referendum on an association agreement between the European Union and Ukraine, which the Netherlands held in 2016.

"It was astonishingly filled with lies," said Ruud Meij, a philosopher and an active supporter of Ukraine during the referendum.

The Dutch voted against Ukraine, but only a third of the electorate showed up to the polls.

According to Meij, some people bought the misinformation.

"This referendum definitely harmed the reputation of Ukraine because so much fake news was spread. It was a really fraudulent referendum," said Meij.

Marc Jansen, an expert on Russia and Ukraine and a research fellow in East European Studies at the University of Amsterdam, believes that people who question the official MH17 investigation are a small group.

"With respect to people doubting the JIT conclusions, a lot of them are populists, who think the Dutch public shouldn't interfere in the Russian-Ukrainian relations," Jansen told the Kyiv Post.

Ploeg, who lost three family members in the MH17 plane crash, wants Russia to stop "obstructing the criminal process and putting out false information." ❌



A relative attends the unveiling of the National Monument for the MH17 victims in Vijfhuizen on July 17, 2017. Three years after Flight MH17 was shot down by a missile over war-torn Ukraine, more than 2,000 relatives gathered to unveil a memorial to their loved ones.

Ukraine's envoy in the Netherlands seeks accountability for Russian crimes

By Brian Bonner
bonner@kyivpost.com

Vsevolod Chentsov does triple duty for Ukraine in The Hague, the city of 500,000 people on the western coast of the Netherlands.

Besides serving as the nation's ambassador to the Netherlands since 2017, Chentsov is also the country's representative to the international Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW, which

is headquartered in The Hague. He also looks out for Ukraine's interests in the International Court of Justice, also based in the city.

As he wraps up his duties and gets ready for the next assignment in his 25-year career with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it's fair to say that he has had one of the busiest and most consequential assignments among Ukraine's envoys abroad.

Even before taking the post four years ago, Chentsov said he was involved in the ongoing MH17 investigation, the Malaysian Airlines flight shot down July 17, 2014, by Russian-backed forces with a Russian Buk missile, killing all 298 people aboard. The trial of four defendants — three Russians and one Ukrainian — all believed to be hiding in Russia — is under way in a Dutch courtroom.

Chentsov previously served the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as director of the European Department from 2011–2017.

The Netherlands has raised questions about why Ukraine did not close the airspace where the MH17 was shot down. Chentsov said that the independent Flight Safety Foundation reviewed how other nations have acted amid similar conflicts and found that most did not



View of Saint Nicholas Church at sunset with a tour boat in Amsterdam on April 11, 2017.

close their airspace. He said Ukraine did not know of the presence of the Russian Buk missile, capable of hitting targets 5,000 meters above ground. If it had, he said, the government would have acted differently and "could have taken additional measures." He said Ukraine "acted responsibly" after the MH17 shoot-down and that the Dutch parliament, in February, concluded that Ukraine "did nothing wrong."

Chemical weapons

During his tenure in the Netherlands, the importance of the organization trying to stop the use of banned chemical weapons globally has risen.

Syria's dictator Bashar al-Assad, whose main backer is Russia, has used banned chemical weapons several times against his own citizens in trying to crush a 10-year rebellion against his rule. At least 500,000 Syrians have been killed and millions more have fled the Middle Eastern country. The OPCW even won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2013 "for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons."

Russia, more recently, has come under scrutiny by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. It is accused of using the banned Novichok nerve agent against Russian citizens Sergei and

Yulia Skrypal in the United Kingdom in 2018 and against Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny in 2020. All three survived their poisonings, but a UK woman who came into contact with the deadly chemical died. Russia denies any involvement and has refused to cooperate in the investigations.

Russian terrorism claim

At the International Court of Justice, Ukraine on Jan. 16, 2017 filed a claim against Russia, accusing the Kremlin of many international law violations,

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Ambassador of Ukraine in The Kingdom of the Netherlands Vsevolod Chentsov.

BONTRUP UKRAINE INNOVATES WITH NATURE

Partnership focused on long-term sustainable economic growth

With a long history in farming, the Dutch Bontrup family business is keen to innovate with nature to feed society sustainably. Bontrup aspires to create new opportunities for sustainable agricultural production, whilst improving the livelihood of farmer communities in the Ukraine. The Dutch family business owns and operates about 22,000 hectares of fertile soil in the north east of Ukraine.



Svitlana Lakoba, General Manager of Bontrup Ukraine: "Agricultural development is one of the most powerful tools to boost shared prosperity and feed a projected 9.7 billion people by 2050. Agriculture is also crucial to economic growth: in 2019, it accounted for 9 percent of Ukraine gross domestic product (GDP)."

"Almost 15 years ago, we founded the agriculture business in the region of Shostka and Glukhiv. The Ukraine and especially these regions offer great opportunities for innovation in agriculture. It's our ambition, together with our 300 Ukrainian employees to actively grow the business, and at the same time improve and protect the local environment and ecology", Lakoba adds.

Farming for the future

Feeding the world's growing population, while facing challenges such as unpredictable weather, efficient control of diseases and pests, scarcity of natural resources and available farmland, makes the need for innovation in agriculture even more essential. These global trends are influencing the overall sustainability of food and agricultural systems and the Ukraine is in a unique position to positively contribute to this change.

"Bontrup is committed to innovate and invest in sustainable agriculture methods to preserve soil fertility and reduce land depletion. In order to do this sustainably, Bontrup focusses on a number of measures ranging from scientifically proven crop rotation methods, preservation measures focused on soil structure to responsible and sustainable plant protection. This enables us to farm for the future", says Svitlana Lakoba.

The 22,000 hectares in the region of Shostka and Glukhiv are particularly suitable for agriculture and dairy farming because of the type of soil and the favourable climate. The agriculture business focusses on cereals, oilseeds, industrial and fodder crops. The total gross collection of marketable products is on average 80 thousand tons per year.

Bontrup Ukraine operates a highly sophisticated elevator complex for acceptance, completion, shipment and storage of products with a one-time capacity of 50-60 thousand tons.

Crops are sold both in the Ukraine (sunflower, rye) and to foreign markets (wheat, corn, rapeseed). Sales contracts are mainly concluded with the world's leading traders such as Nibulon, Glencore, Bunge, Agroprosperis, Cargill, and leading Ukrainian converters such as Kernel and MHP.



Strong Dutch-Ukraine investment partnership
In addition to the investments by the Bontrup family business, external credit facilities have been arranged. A 7-year financing agreement

was signed with the Dutch Development Bank (FMO) which ends this Summer. To continue the investments a new agreement was signed with the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). The Netherlands Enterprise Agency supports entrepreneurs, NGOs, knowledge institutes and organisations. It aims to facilitate entrepreneurship, improve collaborations, strengthen positions and help realise national and international ambitions with funding, networking, know-how and compliance with laws and regulations. The Netherlands Enterprise Agency is a government agency which operates under the auspices of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy. Its activities are commissioned by the various Dutch ministries and the European Union.

These partnerships help to fund further expansion of the agriculture business in the Ukraine. The expansion plan consists of investments in farmland, machinery (e.g. tractors) and warehousing. The financing is also used to invest in new technologies (high standard dairy farm practices and agricultural farming) in the Glukov region of the Ukraine. From 2014 up to the end of 2025, about UAH 370,000,000,- will be allocated to support farmers in the Shostka and Glukhiv regions.

Innovate with nature together

At Bontrup our vision is to innovate with nature to build and feed a sustainable society. We define sustainability as working systematically to reduce negative and enhance positive impacts on people, society and environment by taking a value chain approach. Being a company eager to make tangible impact, we have decided to invest and innovate in those areas that we master and can actively influence.

In practice this means we systematically aim to reduce our water and energy consumption. Over the years, Bontrup Ukraine has decreased its use of electricity, natural gas, diesel, gasoline and water. In the near future Bontrup will explore options to generate energy from biogas.

Improving the livelihoods of farmer community in Shostka and Glukhiv regions

Bontrup actively contributes to improving the livelihoods of the farmer community in the region

of Shostka and Glukhiv. Initiatives vary from improving the labour market by offering jobs to local residents, supporting education, health and social programmes.



Bontrup works in partnership with local residents and governments, such as village and city councils, to initiate and provide funding for the development of these programmes. Support is provided to educational and medical institutions. Since the start, almost 15 years ago, the 'Bontrup' volleyball and football tournament have become an annual tradition. Over the past three years, about 2.3 million UAH have been allocated for charitable assistance to the population of the villages in the Shostka and Glukhiv regions.

Driven by the shared passion to innovate with nature, Bontrup Ukraine's 300 employees actively work to improve and protect the local environment and ecology.

"Collectively we make it is possible to achieve high yields, optimally using all production potential for the further sustainable development of the agriculture business, and at that the same time to preserve the land and the environment", concludes Svitlana Lakoba.

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BONTRUP | Innovate with nature



Vsevolod Chentsov's 4-year stint in Netherlands coming to end

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including the financing of terrorism, particularly in Ukraine's eastern Donbas, where Russia's war is in its eighth year and 14,000 Ukrainians have been killed.

Ukraine won a major victory on Nov. 8, 2019, when the justices rejected Russia's claim that the court did not have jurisdiction. Ukraine also alleges in the pending litigation that Russia "maintains a policy of racial discrimination and cultural erasure directed against the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian communities" on the Crimean peninsula that it illegally annexed in 2014 following a military invasion.

"A hearing on the merits is far away," Chentsov said. "The court is working in a slow but sure manner."

Bilateral ties

Chentsov said Ukraine's relationship with the Netherlands has gotten closer in recent years. It survived a big scare in 2016, when Dutch referen-

dum voters opposed an association agreement between the European Union, of which the Netherlands is a member, and Ukraine. But the government of Prime Minister Mark Rutte overruled voters and the EU-Ukraine political and economic agreement, enacted in 2016, remains in effect.

"We managed to find a solution to get out of this real problem," the ambassador said. "But it took some time to stabilize the situation to get back to business as usual. The agreement is working."

Bilateral trade with the Netherlands hit \$2.5 billion in 2020, with Ukraine running a surplus of more than \$1 million. Ukrainian exports to the Netherlands amounted to \$1.8 billion, while Ukraine imported \$741 million, according to the embassy.

Notably, the Netherlands is the third largest importer of Ukrainian agricultural products, and ranks first among the 27 EU nations. The ambassador said that "the focus is shifting from commodity trade to



Netherlands' King Willem-Alexander and Queen Maxima take part in festivities as part of King's Day at the High Tech Campus in Eindhoven, on April 27, 2021.

technology exchange and innovation in agriculture, transportation and logistics, medicine, cybersecurity, space exploration, sustainable technologies and a low-carbon economy."

In particular, the ambassador said Ukraine has been trying to encourage Dutch investors and farmers to grow and process food in Ukraine, but concerns over rule of law and the court system are barriers. Farming in the Netherlands is "very intensive" because of lack of land, something Ukraine offers in abundance.

"We are getting stronger and stronger in agritech," he said. "With Dutch experience, Dutch technology and Ukrainian land and IT, we can feed the world together."

Russian obstructionism

Russia has tried to evade responsi-

bility and obstruct the various legal proceedings under way against it, but Chentsov thinks the Kremlin's behavior has damaged its reputation globally, as well as in the Netherlands. He said that Dutch-Russian trade has dropped due to sanctions and investors from the Netherlands are reluctant to do business with Moscow.

Farewells & lessons

Chentsov said that he comes away from his experience in the Netherlands with a respect for its freedom — "you feel it in every step" — and willingness to achieve solutions.

"What I like here and what is lacking in Ukraine is the spirit of consultations — looking for commonly accepted solutions in economic and social affairs, involving as many

stakeholders as necessary, discussing issues until you find a solution and then sticking to it and honoring the agreement," the ambassador said.

Ukraine, given its challenges of Russia's war and "the inertia of Soviet mismanagement" could learn a lot from the Netherlands' success in setting aside differences and uniting. "This is what I would like our people to learn," he said.

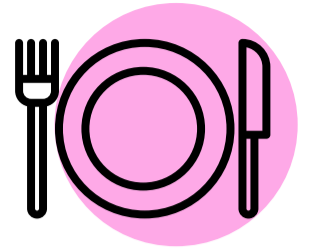
He hopes for more progress, in the Netherlands and in the West generally, in becoming more "engaged in Ukraine" and considering Ukraine as an asset and "not as a problem they have to deal with." He said Ukraine needs support, but will solve its problems on its own. He thinks the nations deserve trust from its Western partners "and I would like to have more of it in our relations." ❦

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Lifestyle

Restaurants in Kyiv will be open again on May 1, after authorities eased the coronavirus lockdown. Summer terraces are under construction, so outdoor dining is coming soon!



Play | Food | Entertainment | Sports | Culture | Music | Movies | Art | Community Events

Oldest buildings to see in Kyiv

By Elina Kent

kent@kyivpost.com

The city of Kyiv dates back, by some accounts, to over 2,000 years ago. But even its oldest buildings have not been around that long.

The oldest standing structure in the city is the 1,000-year-old Sofiyivsky Cathedral, but it was altered significantly by later reconstructions.

The Kyiv Post has put together a guide for those interested in seeing some of the capital's oldest edifices.

Although a few of the buildings on this list don't technically qualify as the oldest buildings in Kyiv, they are still a century old and hold some interest. Their funky floral and creative decor and design attracts numerous visitors.

Urban activists fight to get special status for historical buildings to protect them from developers who would knock them down. While the government sometimes promises to renovate these structures, it doesn't always follow through. The battle is ongoing.

The Oldest Home in Podil

Address: 7 Kontraktova Ploshcha
Built: 1798
Closest metro: Kontraktova Ploshcha, Poshtova Ploshcha

The wooden building on 7 Kontraktova Ploshcha is Kyiv's oldest residential building. It survived the 1811 Great Podil Fire that raged three days and destroyed the majority of Podil, Kyiv's most populated neighborhood at the time.

Before the fire, most of the neighborhood's structures were made of wood. Afterwards, many of them were rebuilt from stone. This building is one of the few remaining ancient wooden buildings in Podil.

It was originally built for the noble family of Leontiy Vyshnevsky, a lover of Tsar Peter I's daughter,



An artist paints the Mansion of Ivan Mykolayovych Tereshchenko located on 34 Taras Shevchenko Blvd. on April 28. His descendants continued to take care of the mansion and in most recent years defended the building from being destroyed to make room for an illegal construction project.

Empress Elizabeth Petrovna. In 1891, the building became home to the Nechayev family of gingerbread makers, whose descendant stills live in the building.

Unofficial tours of the building are conducted by the owner himself, Kostyantyn Maleev, in his free time. Prices are arranged with Maleev directly. The tours are mainly in Russian. He can be contacted at 38 (050) 6723538.

House of Peter I in Kyiv

Address: 6/8 Kostyantynivska St.

Built: Unknown, estimated as early as 1696

Closest metro: Kontraktova Ploshcha

Another old wooden building that survived the Great Podil Fire is the House of Tsar Peter I. Although the building bears his name, there are no official records confirming whether or not the Russian emperor ever used this building as a secret home, as rumor suggests.

However, the building was home to several historical figures. One of Ukraine's best-known Baroque composers, Artemy Vedel, lived in this house during the later years of his life. The building was also home to the founder of the Ukrainian therapeutic school, Feofil Yanovsky, and Doctor Ivan Voskresensky, the stepfather of Ukrainian writer Mikhail Bulgakov.

The Museum of Kamyanytsya Kievsky Viyta hosts Ukrainian and Russian language tours and exhibitions in the building. Tours cost Hr 70 for groups of up to five people and Hr 120 for larger groups. No English tours are available. The museum operates from

11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tours can be scheduled in person, by email at kamyanytsya.viita@gmail.com, on the museum's Facebook page @ KamyanytsyaViita or by phone 38 (044) 545-63-12.

The House of Ivan Mazepa

Address: 16B Spasskaya St.

Built: End of 17th century
Closest metro: Kontraktova Ploshcha

Yet another survivor of the Great Podil Fire of 1811, this building has stood tall for over 300 years. The name comes from the legend that the building was built by famous Cossack Hetman Ivan Mazepa. Although there are no official records that can confirm this claim, it has become widely accepted. The building has been known as the House of Mazepa for centuries.

This ancient Ukrainian Baroque styled home received architectural monument status in 1963 and the building became a museum in the 1990s. With more than 9,000 historical items, the museum dedicates its exhibits to preserving the history and culture of the Cossacks and their Hetmans.

Tours cost Hr 100 for groups of three and Hr 150 for groups of four or more. They're conducted in both Ukrainian and English, but English tours must be scheduled ahead of time so that the English speaking tour guide is available. The museum can be reached at 38 (044) 425 55 49.

Mansion of Ivan Mykolayovych Tereshchenko

Street: 34 Taras Shevchenko Boulevard

Built: 1874

Closest metro: Universitet

This Victorian Neo-Gothic building was created in 1874-1875 by architect Andreas Ferdinand Krauss. It has seen a great deal of history during its long life, including, reportedly, a 1918 meeting where Volodymyr Vynnychenko publicly decided to use armed resistance against Ukraine continuing on as part of the Russian state.

The house was under the Tereshchenko family's care for generations. The first of the Terechenkos



The House With Cats located on 23 Hoholivska St. attracts tourists interested in looking at its Art Nouveau architecture with zoomorphic decor. The two large cats that are responsible for the building's nickname stare back at onlookers, supporting the building's front arched window.

Kostyantyn Chernichkin

Kostyantyn Chernichkin

Check out these places in ancient city

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to own the house was Ivan Tereshchenko, a painter and son of Nikola Tereshchenko, one of the largest sugar industrialists in the Russian Empire. Mykhailo Tereshchenko's (who later became the foreign minister of Russia in 1917) art collection, which was stored in this house, was largely destroyed during the 1917 Bolshevik revolution.

Even though it's a protected landmark, the building was almost destroyed to make room for an illegal construction project between the old house and the nearby Hilton Hotel. It was saved by the quick work of activists in 2017. The ex-deputy of Kyiv City Council and activist Olena Tereshchenko-Yeskina, the wife of Michel Tereshchenko, a descendant of the owner of the estate, and now the mayor of Glukhiv, is one of the building's defenders.

The Contract House

Address: 1 Mezhihirska St.
Built: 1815–1817
Closest metro: Kontraktova Ploshcha

Mezhihirska is one of the oldest streets in Kyiv. After the 1811 Great Podil Fire, the street was reconstructed to connect Podil to the Contract House.

Originally a trading center,



The House of Ivan Mazepa located on 16B Spasskaya St. is one of the few surviving buildings of the Great Podil Fire of 1811, standing in Kyiv for over 300 years. This Ukrainian Baroque styled home is now a museum with more than 9,000 historical items, and exhibits preserving the history and culture of the Cossacks and their Hetmans.

this building also hosted balls that attracted the nobility. On the second floor was the concert hall which saw performances by famous Hungarian composer and pianist Franz Liszt and Italian opera singer Angelica Catalani. Famous visitors such as Honore

de Balzac, Taras Shevchenko, Alexander Pushkin, and Adam Mickiewicz among others attended the grandiose events.

The House With Cats

Address: 23 Hoholivska St.
Built: 1909

Closest metro: Universitet (19 min walk)

Although not considered one of the oldest buildings, this house is over 100 years old. The outer architecture of the house reflects the late Art Nouveau trend with zoomor-

phic decor. Visitors can spot owls, cats, and some chimeras throughout its design. The owls are embedded within its columns and the carved cats look out through some of its windows.

One of the building's famous residents was Stepan Timoshenko, who lived there in 1918. A professor at the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, he co-founded the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Considered to be one of the fathers of modern engineering mechanics, he developed the Timoshenko beam theory and later became a mechanical engineering professor at Stanford.

A bronze plaque with a portrait of Timoshenko was installed on the facade of the building in 1995.

The Chestnut Building

Address: 32 Velyka Zhytomyrska St.
Built: 1911–1912
Closest metro: Zoloti Vorota

Also known as the "the house with snakes and chestnuts," this four-story Art Nouveau house has been standing for 100 years. Reptilian carvings slither throughout the facade's bay window and the stucco ornaments ripple with chestnut leaves.

Architectural activists were promised that the local government would conduct much-needed renovations but for now, the building remains closed. ☹

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In October 2019, Alinea International launched a new five-year project in Ukraine: **Support to Ukraine's Reforms for Governance (SURGe)**. SURGe is a technical assistance project in Ukraine, funded by Global Affairs Canada and implemented by Alinea International Ltd.

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The gift of 100.000 tulips to celebrate the friendship between
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The board of the Tulipfestival would like to thank our partners & sponsors.
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In April and May the historic Maidan square will be covered in a sea of Dutch tulips. The gift is a symbol of the strong friendship between Ukraine and The Netherlands. Over the past 30 years the ties between the two countries became very strong.

The Netherlands is one of the biggest investor in Ukraine and there are many collaborations in the field of economics, culture, science and humanitarian projects.

The festival also honors the memorable role of the fallen hero's during the 2014 revolution by a symbolic 1000 tulips for each of the "Heavenly Hundred".

Emiel de Sévren Jacquet
 Honorary Consul of Ukraine in the Kingdom of the Netherlands

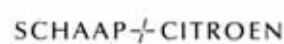
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