

Victory Day is May 9. The following day, May 10, is an official holiday in Ukraine

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Kyiv Post

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Akhmetov is everywhere. It's time to stop him



Opinion

Sergii Leshchenko
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In the Soviet Union's last years, when the first foreign shows were allowed on TV, an Italian television drama series about an honest police officer's fight against the mafia won the viewers' hearts. It was called "La

Piovra" ("The Octopus") and showed the Soviet audience how the interests of politicians, the criminal world, and corrupt enrichment were closely intertwined in the West. The octopus was a metaphor for their all-pervading influence and corruption.

When the series premiered, Rinat Akhmetov was in his late teens.

Akhmetov was raised in a cor-

ner of Ukraine no less ridden with mafia than Italy's Sicily. It was a settlement that grew up around the Oktyabrskaya coal mine on the outskirts of the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk.

It was society's rock bottom, where the choice of entertainment was alcohol, drugs and playing cards. Akhmetov preferred cards. At first

he played to have some pocket money. Later, young Akhmetov started winning large sums. He brought in some serious earnings from a resort town on the Black Sea coast of Sochi, which was the epicenter of the card games. Playing for money was illegal in the USSR.

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Another Spring In Trenches

Blinken spends day in Kyiv, offers US support

By Oleksiy Sorokin
sorokin@kyivpost.com

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken came, offered America's support, and left on May 6.

He met with President Volodymyr Zelensky, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, lawmakers and leaders of civil society.

Blinken emphasized US support on two fronts: In prevailing against Russia's war and, domestically, in waging a vigorous fight to root out corruption.

"We see that on Ukrainian borders the amount of Russian troops is the largest since 2014," said Blinken. "We are against Russian actions concerning their attempts to destabilize Ukraine."

Although the Kremlin said it would withdraw its forces that it amassed near Ukraine's border in April, in reality, Zelensky said only some 3,500 troops were withdrawn and some 80,000 troops remain close to Ukraine's eastern border.

Russia's goal remains the same: to slowly strangle Ukraine. As of May, Russia gave out over 527,000 Russian passports to residents of Kremlin-occupied Donbas in an attempt to cement its claims.

But Blinken's visit didn't focus just on support against the Russian

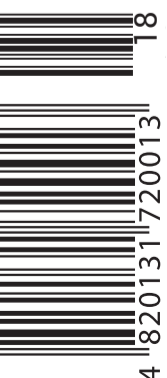
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Ukrainian soldiers with the 10th Mechanized Infantry Brigade dig fresh trenches near the Donbas war front town of Zhovanka on April 28, 2021. As the threat of an all-out invasion by Russia remains, the eastern war zone is locked in a grueling standoff, without the slightest sign of any end to the Kremlin's war. Russia has killed 14,000 people and occupied 7% of Ukraine's territory since it invaded in 2014, following the overthrow of Kremlin-backed President Viktor Yanukovich.

Volodymyr Petrov



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Засновник
ТОВ "БІЗНЕСГРУПП"

Головний редактор
Брайан Боннер

Відповідальний за випуск
Брайан Боннер

Адреса видавця та засновника
співпадають: Україна, м. Київ, 01033,
вул. Жилинська, 68, 2-й поверх.
Реєстраційне свідоцтво
Кв № 23191-13031ПР від 29.03.2018.
Передплатний індекс ДП Преса 40528
Надруковано ТОВ «Новий друг»,
02660, Київ, вулиця Магнітогорська, 1,
тел.: 559-9148
З приводу розміщення реклами
звертайтеся: +380 44 591-7788
Відповідальність за зміст реклами
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Volodymyr Petrov

A Ukrainian soldier smokes a cigarette while he's on watch duty in a front-line machine gun nest near the Donbas war zone town of Zhovanka on April 28, 2021. At the front line, the troops' mission is to keep an eye on enemy lines across the field and hold a finger on the trigger — constantly.

In the Donbas war, Ukrainian soldiers are aware that Russia might attack at any moment

By Illia Ponomarenko
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ZHOVANKA, Ukraine — A chilly spring fog is the morning welcome to Ukraine's troops on the war-front wasteland of the Donbas.

In a maze of trenches cutting through the fields, soldiers of Ukraine's 10th Mountain Infantry Brigade prepare for guard watch.

Distant heavy booms are heard at the right flank.

"120-millimeter shells incoming," soldiers say.

This Ukrainian stronghold, called The Basin, defends what is left of Zhovanka, a deserted small town near the Russian-occupied city of Horlivka, some 570 kilometers southeast of Kyiv.

The thunderous impact is mixed with bursts of machine-gun fire. Ukrainian units farther down the frontline open fire in response to the enemy using heavy mortars prohibited by the Minsk cease-fire agreement.

Here at the front line, the troops' mission is to keep an eye on enemy lines across the field and hold a finger on the trigger — constantly.

It's been this way for years. The war in its eighth year has killed 14,000 people, claiming a dozen military casualties a month.

But now, the tension is higher.

In April, Ukraine held its breath as more than 100,000 Russian troops massed near the eastern border, giv-



Volodymyr Petrov

Ukrainian soldiers talk in front line trenches during a lull in the fighting near the Donbas war zone town of Zhovanka on April 28, 2021. Ukrainian troops at the front line say they see the presence of who they believe are Russian regular military specialists, professional and highly-trained.

ing Moscow the possibility to launch a full-fledged invasion quickly.

When the Kremlin said on April 22 it would pull back its forces, many sighed with relief — prematurely. Russia has never actually retreated and can attack at any moment.

Deceptive silence

The Basin, a square of earthwork roughly 100 by 100 meters in size, warrants its name — at some spots, trench bottoms have turned into hard-to-pass brown swamps. The timber on the bottom is of no use.

"This can even be considered

okay," soldiers say, laughing, as they dive into narrow timbered corridors leading to machine-gun nests. "In early springtime, when the snow melts, folks live here in the world of shit."

'If Russia stops backing this mess, the war will be over in two days'

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The sound of distant fighting dies down, giving ease to the lone stronghold. But this silence is deceptive.

Over the last few months, this section north of Russian-occupied Horlivka, a key industrial center of 300,000 people, has become the most troublesome hotspot.

The deadliest area of this year of the war, the village of Shumy, lies just some 6 kilometers southwest of Zhovanka. There, scores of Ukrainian marines and army soldiers perished in combat.

Overall, 30 Ukrainian warfighters have been reported killed in Donbas in 2021, as the cease-fire established in July 2020 and advocated by Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky steadily degraded.

Today, the front line generally remains in the same location as it was six years ago.

"That's where the bastards are," says a soldier manning an observation point on duty, looking east.

The crosshairs of his periscope binoculars are pointed at a damaged building next to a broken power wire pylon barely visible behind tall dry grass. There, some 300 meters across the wild field, lies the first line of fortifications of Russia-backed militants occupying the southern half of the town of Zaitseve.

"On the other flank, they constantly deploy mortars and anti-tank guns at a school building," soldiers lament. "Come again, what does international law of war say about attacking civilian buildings?"

Different world

The mild spring sun soon dries the brown soil a little, and the world around starts looking less gloomy. High noon is the best time. Shortly after dusk and throughout the night, there is normally no action at all.

Relaxed off-duty soldiers get up from their bunk beds for a plastic cup of cheap coffee, a cigarette, and stew cooked in a dugout potbelly stove.

Some run around the trench lines in a bid to find a spot with a stable phone connection to say a few words to their loved ones at home.

"These are fresh, from a couple of nights before," says a fighter, pointing at two impact holes left by 82-mil-



A Ukrainian soldier carries a gas cylinder to the front line entrenchments through the abandoned Donbas war zone town of Zhovanka on April 28, 2021. Once a quiet suburb close to the city of Horlivka, Zhovanka is now abandoned and ruined. The deadliest area of this year of the Kremlin-backed war in eastern Ukraine, the village of Shumy, lies just some 6 kilometers southwest of Zhovanka.

limeter mortar shells and another huge crater left by a 120-millimeter. Both types of weapons are banned from use by the Minsk Agreements of 2015, but it rarely stops the militants.

A fatalistic, devil-may-care attitude is common. Soldiers off duty don't wear helmets and armor.

In April, as Russia concentrated massive forces near Ukraine and openly threatened an invasion, doomsday tension filled the air.

Kyiv authorities notified the population of air raid shelters, media sounded the alarm, and Western capitals pondered their options in the case of a new Kremlin blitzkrieg.

But for the soldiers at the front line, the worst national security crisis

in years didn't change their daily routine.

"It's a nightmare what happens in this country right now, judging from the news," soldiers often repeat the standing joke. "It is scary to leave the war zone."

But jokes aside, the standing army in the Donbas is confident that even should the Kremlin step in further, it will be given a good fight. And it will inevitably drown in a war it can't win.

"This is not 2014 anymore," the soldiers repeat here.

As soldiers dine and pet their trench line cats, the wind starts bringing a silent gentle buzz from high above. Is this someone's radio set noise or what? But the sound becomes more distinct and closer with every second.

"Damn it, a quad-rotor again," soldiers get up. "Everybody take cover!"

What comes from the blue sky is the recent novelty of the Donbas war: The use of civilian drones — very cheap, small, and hard to notice, especially at night. Each might carry a bomb — normally a 40-millimeter VOG-24–25 projectile, or a hand grenade, simply dropped upon a target.

In this very section of the front line, one of them killed 40-year-old soldier Oleksiy Mamchiy on April 15.

Peace in two days

Before the war, Zhovanka used to be a merry, quiet suburb of Horlivka buried in the green of single-store households and gardens.

The seven years of war have ren-

dered this land uninhabitable until full peace.

Today, Zhovanka is nothing but a post-apocalyptic ghost town almost completely swept off in never-ending artillery duels. The decaying silent streets absorbed by the wild nature now harbor only a handful of survivors, mostly elderly people having nowhere to go.

From a certain spot, one can see a Russian flag fluttering over the enemy lines — while the Kremlin keeps denying its forces' presence in eastern Ukraine, militants are sometimes rather honest about who they are commanded by.

"Yes, this is all about Russia, and nothing else," says Dmytro Voronenko, a young officer who nevertheless is one of The Basin's seniors.

"If Russia stops backing this mess, the war will be over in two

days. I don't even think we're going to go over the top and break the front in this case. We're having no illusions here — most of the local people standing against us over there get enlisted because they can't get a decent job and feed their families."

Ukrainian troops at the front line say they see the presence of who they believe are Russian regular military specialists, professional and highly-trained. For instance, a Ukrainian surveillance camera in the Zhovanka area was knocked out a while ago — in a single sharp sniper shot from a distance of over 800 meters.

"I don't believe militants would seriously want to fight and die for this bullshit if Russia leaves," Voronenko continues. "We would get back home too, with our mission accomplished. But here we go again — another day, another fight." ❄️



Soldiers reassemble Kalashnikov assault rifles in the war zone town of Zhovanka in the Donbas on April 28, 2021. The war against Russia started eight years ago and has killed 14,000 people; today it claims a dozen military casualties a month.

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EDITORIALS

Blinken visit

The warm-up meetings, interviews and statements in London among the G7 ministers and the heavy schedule of meetings on May 6 in Kyiv for U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken foreshadowed a visit of symbolism, show and, perhaps, superficiality.

Whatever was talked about in private, no new commitments, financial or political, were announced publicly during Blinken's day-long visit. "Pressing the flesh and PR event and show of support," summarized longtime Ukraine watcher, London-based analyst Timothy Ash.

So where does this leave Ukraine-US relations?

It leaves Ukraine still hoping for stronger military aid and greater political leadership from the US specifically, and the West in general, to ultimately find safer geopolitical ground as members of NATO and European Union. President Volodymyr Zelensky apparently got no guarantees that the US would take a stronger role in forcing Russia to end its ongoing war, now in its eighth year. And nothing came out of the G7 meeting to give Ukraine any hope of stronger sanctions against the Kremlin soon. To the contrary, Blinken emerged from a May 4 meeting with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas – no friend of Ukraine – with a toothless statement about the US remaining opposed to the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, but no hint of tougher sanctions to stop the completion of the Russian-German pipeline that could deliver a death blow to Ukraine's historic (and profitable) role in transporting gas from Russia to Europe.

And it leaves tens of thousands of Russian soldiers massed on Ukraine's eastern borders, ready to launch a deeper invasion of Ukraine on any pretext – including "protecting" the newly minted 500,000 Russian citizens in Ukraine's eastern Donbas.

It leaves the US, undoubtedly, still wondering what is the best strategy for helping Ukraine to help rid itself of crippling corruption. As Ukraine's 30th anniversary as a nation approaches, it still has successfully prosecuted no one of consequence for corruption. The oligarchs remain more powerful than the state and just as selfish as always. And much progress remains to be done in de-Sovietizing and privatizing the economy as well as creating trusted democratic institutions that will attract foreign investment.

The public mood? In survey after survey, Ukrainians say the nation is headed in the wrong direction – but don't necessarily blame Zelensky for their troubles. So there remains hope that this administration can finally turn things around and make headway on solving the nation's many problems. At least it still has some time to do so as voters, according to polls, are very unlikely to turn to politicians of the past in the next election.

Kurt Volker, the former US special envoy to Ukraine, had it right when he wrote in an op-ed column on May 6: "Even in the best of times, Ukraine has often viewed the West as insufficiently supportive of Ukraine's security and membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions, while the West has viewed Ukraine as insufficiently clear and committed to strengthening the rule of law and rooting out corruption."

He wrote that the two nations share many common interests, "whether it is in pushing back on Russian aggression, implementing reform and strengthening rule of law, or advancing Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration."

The task for the Biden administration, Volker writes, is to "establish that the U.S. and Ukraine are genuinely seated on the same side of the table, facing common problems together, rather than pushing against each other... no hectoring."

He also wisely advises to achieve consensus among NATO members before pushing formal recognition of a Membership Action Plan.

The next big date on the upcoming calendar for Ukraine is a likely June meeting between Biden and Putin somewhere in Europe. Let's hope the two nations, along with European allies, have by then devised more effective strategies and a greater willingness to enact tougher sanctions to get Russia out of Ukraine, once and for all.

Transparency in pay

Ukraine's Western partners talk a good game about how Ukraine needs to be more transparent in public finances.

But they don't always live up to their word. Ever tried to find out the salary of some people who are paid by international governmental institutions? It's very difficult. Some of it is by design. Take the Ukrainian business ombudsman's position. The international donors, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, has decided the salary of the person is a secret. If you are a member of a business or other association, do you know how much the top executive makes? You're entitled to know, but good luck finding out.

Also, it's needlessly difficult to find what top officials and members of supervisory boards in state-owned enterprises are getting paid for their work – even though the companies belong to the public.

Naftogaz provided the most recent example. The 100-plus page financial statement from 2020 does not individually break out the pay of the top 17 officials. It merely says they collectively made \$25 million, double the compensation of the previous year. What does Naftogaz CEO Andriy Kobolyev make? It's not clear, but it's in the millions of dollars yearly.

In an interview with the Kyiv Post, Clare Spottiswoode, the chair of the Naftogaz supervisory board, said the omission was intentional because executive pay is a politically sensitive issue in Ukraine. Our counter-argument is, precisely, which is exactly why the individual pay of public companies should be readily available publicly. To her credit, at least, Spottiswoode said she is paid about \$83,000 monthly (60,000 British pounds) for her work at Naftogaz. Too much or too little? We're not going to make these judgments. We understand the need to pay competitive salaries to attract top talent in demanding jobs. But it should be up to the taxpayers, ultimately, to decide. And for them to make informed decisions, they need to know the finances – and that includes salaries of leaders at more than 3,000 government-owned enterprises. That's called good governance.

NEWS ITEM:
U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Ukraine on May 6 to meet with President Volodymyr Zelensky and show U.S. support for the country. Blinken is the first senior U.S. official to visit Ukraine since President Joe Biden took office on Jan. 20. During the visit, however, the statements were predictable.



NEWS ITEM:
At least 500,000 Ukrainians living in the Donbas have obtained a Russian passport, many of which were issued through a simplified procedure, which were introduced by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2019. Ukrainian officials have called this move a hybrid warfare against Ukraine.



NEWS ITEM:
The government last week suspended the work of the supervisory board of state energy giant Naftogaz to be able to fire the company's CEO, Andriy Kobolyev, and replace him with Yuriy Vitrenko. Although Kobolyev was blamed for mismanaging the company, many believe that bypassing the supervisory board violated Ukraine's corporate governance rules and that the government may now start interfering more in the operations of the company. Naftogaz is Ukraine's largest taxpayer, supplying 17% of state revenue, or \$5 billion.

NEWS ITEM:
Feud between exiled tycoon Oleg Bakhmatyuk and Artem Sytnyk, head of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, has touched new high. UkrLandFarming, Bakhmatyuk's egg producer, produced 1 billion eggs with the marking "Sytnyk, get out!" to supply to local supermarkets. Bakhmatyuk, who's wanted for embezzlement and money laundering, accuses Sytnyk of prosecuting him groundlessly and causing disruptions at his enterprises.

See these features online at kyivpost.com

Ukraine's Friend & Foe Of The Week



Friend

Andrzej Duda, president of Poland
Duda said he will back Ukraine's membership to both the European Union and NATO in a summit in Brussels next month, crucial support coming as Russia looks to escalate, rather than end, its eight-year war against Ukraine.



Foe

Thomas Friedman, columnist at the New York Times
Friedman wrote that NATO expansion is to blame for Russia's destructive behavior against the West. Friedman was wrong on all around. NATO is a defensive alliance that nations sought to join precisely because of centuries of Russian imperialism.

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

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Public-private partnerships are critical to health care reform



Mikheil Saakashvili

Our health care system was hardly prepared for the ongoing pandemic. The hospital resources are crippling, and outrage among Ukrainians hit either by the death of a loved one from COVID-19, or the impossibility of getting proper medical treatment, is growing.

Nearly two-thirds – 64 percent – of Ukrainians are not satisfied with health care reform, and about the same number believes that the government needs to drastically change the way it has been undertaken. The health and wellbeing of Ukrainians are of the highest value and so we need to act now and ensure they have access to the best healthcare services.

“

64 percent of Ukrainians are not satisfied with health care reform, and about the same number believes that the government needs to drastically change the way it has been undertaken.

”

Mikheil Saakashvili

Private insurance and public-private partnerships that have proved to be successful globally could help us go out of the gridlock. The Ukrainian public overwhelmingly believes that medical treatment in Ukraine should be partly paid and partly free which justifies the rationale for the introduction of concessions in health care.

Although the concept of concession as such isn't new in Ukraine, it doesn't allow to attract private investments in the health sector. No medical facilities were transferred through concession last year, and all because the current procedure is extremely complex, bureaucratic and non-transparent.

Killing bribes

The lack of market mechanisms entices corruption that overburdens patients and erodes trust in the system overall. In most public hospitals, patients are still expected to bribe their way to proper services.

Furthermore, the network of health-care facilities is outdated and does not sufficiently leverage modern technology primarily because of the lack of funding. Many Ukrainian hospitals are neither patient nor medical staff-friendly. For doctors to be able to perform their duties and save lives, they need to be provided with the best possible facilities, and public private partnership will effectively solve this problem.

30-year concessions

We at the Office of Simple Solutions & Results propose to introduce a simple and transparent concession procedure for medical institutions that would be conducted through online auctions as opposed to shady schemes. The object of the concession may be one or several health-care institutions performing the functions of multi-specialty hospitals for intensive treatment.

The concession period will be 30 years, and concessionaires will be obliged to make significant improvements to the concession object within the first year and a half after winning a tender. Additionally, concessionaires will also be responsible for providing free healthcare services for patients (not less than 80 percent compared to the year previous to that in which concession took place) that are provided by the



Volodymyr Petrov

COVID-19 patient Vasyi wears a helmet supplying him with oxygen at Kolomyia District Hospital in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast on March 16, 2021.

concession objects.

To preserve jobs, after the reform, concessionaires will have to keep the hospital staff and increase their salaries. The societal benefits will be enormous. Under public-private partnerships, hospitals will be returned to the national property after the concession expires.

Global trend

Concessions in health care are widely used globally. The concessionaires will need to invest the amount of Hr 2 million per bed in the hospital which is twice more than the estimated cost of designing a bed in a

modern hospital. According to the Ministry of Regional Development, that is Hr 820,000. That will allow us to improve the quality of hospital facilities.

Concessions will allow us to have modern well-equipped hospitals that do not have shortages of medicines. The quality of services provided will also improve, and it will be possible to receive additional medical services legally for an additional fee. We should ensure that the supply matches the Ukrainian patients' demand.

We have been working on this reform for a long time and recently

we had the opportunity to present the above-explained concept to the Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on National Health, Medical Care and Medical Insurance Mykhailo Radutsky. I look forward to working more closely with Ukrainian parliamentarians on bringing this reform to life.

Mikheil Saakashvili has been the chair of the executive committee of the National Reforms 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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Sergii Leshchenko

Ukraine suffers losses as Akhmetov fortune grows

page 1 →

Akhmetov's other hobby was boxing. He didn't serve in the Soviet Army because of a chronic illness that he earned while trying to urgently lose weight to get to the right weight category.

The coach motivated Akhmetov with promises that he would be an Olympic champion. And he really became a champion – not in sports, though. He came first in oligarchic competitions, building an empire from shattered Soviet enterprises, inventing nothing except the eternal engine of corruption – the more you invest in politics, the more you can enrich yourself at the cost of the state.

Now it may change. The policy of de-oligarchization, announced by President Volodymyr Zelensky, should curb the appetites of the oligarch who has put himself above the interests of the state.

In 2019 and 2020, Akhmetov, through lobbyists, persuaded the authorities that his business was barely making ends meet. By threatening mass layoffs at his enterprises, he canceled the government's plan to increase rent payments for the iron ore that his companies extract. Also, the state-owned Ukrzaliznytsia failed to raise tariffs on the transportation of iron ore, which is sent by railway to Ukraine's ports to be sold on the Chinese market.

As a result, it was Ukraine's state budget that barely made ends meet in 2020, while Ukrzaliznytsia suffered losses of \$426 million.

And how was Akhmetov's year? His net worth grew three times, according to Forbes, and he bought his son a villa on the shores of Lake Geneva.

Time to pay?

The rumor has it that the villa purchase made an impression on Zelensky, who had every reason to feel deceived.

Apart from the luxury real estate, Akhmetov's surplus profits, instead of being paid to the budget, paid for his TV channels and the army of politicians he grows to replace the current government.

Zelensky plans to launch a large-



Ukrainian billionaire Rinat Akhmetov, the country's richest oligarch, meets with the management of Zaporizhstal metallurgical plant, one of the many enterprises he owns, in Zaporizhzhya on May 16, 2013. Akhmetov has invariably been one of the most influential people in Ukraine for at least two decades.

scale campaign to curb Akhmetov's appetites and impose fair payments to the state budget on him.

These include introducing new environmental tax rates for coal-fired power plants, a land tax for iron ore mining companies, and an excise tax on the sale of green energy. The most painful for Akhmetov will be a new approach to calculating the rent for iron ore mining. If Zelensky's plan is implemented and rents begin to be levied on the value of ore in the Chinese market, where it's sold, it could cost Akhmetov at least \$1 billion.

His loyal lawmakers

The adoption of these new rules of the game requires parliament's



Lyudmyla Buimister, a lawmaker with the Servant of the People faction



Oleksiy Kucherenko, a lawmaker with Batkivshchyna



Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, a lawmaker with Batkivshchyna



Miners of the Oktyabrskaya mine work at a depth of 1,140 meters in Donetsk in 2003. Rinat Akhmetov grew up in the mining settlement near this mine.

vote. To stop this undesirable scenario, Akhmetov uses an extensive network of his agents of influence. Although the oligarch no longer has his own pocket faction in parliament, lawmakers from all factions are ready to defend his interests. Recently, for the first time, the names of puppet lawmakers who work as mouthpieces for the oligarch were made public. They included Lyudmyla Buimister from Servant of the People, Oleksiy Kucherenko, Mykhailo Volynets and Valentyn Nalyvaichenko from Batkivshchyna and Oleksiy Honcharenko from European Solidarity.

This list was made public by the head of the National Commission for Energy Regulation Valery Tarasyuk.

He imposed the maximum possible fine on the oligarch for deliberate sabotage of coal accumulation at power plants. The fine was only Hr 5 million (\$180,000). But this is the first time that the energy regulator went against Akhmetov.

They didn't have to wait long for Akhmetov's pushback: Kyiv District Administrative Court issued a ruling that requires the government to dismiss members of the National Commission for Energy Regulation, including Tarasyuk.

The above mentioned five lawmakers are only a part of Akhmetov's informal lobby in parliament. Within



Mykhailo Volynets, a lawmaker with Batkivshchyna

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Sergii Leshchenko

Akhmetov's enablers are sprinkled everywhere

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the ostensibly ruling 244-member Servant of the People faction, his interests are defended by an informal "group of Illia Pavlyuk." This group unites mostly single-seat constituency lawmakers from the border regions of Ukraine. Pavlyuk, a businessman widely believed to be involved in smuggling, which he denies, isn't a lawmaker himself, but he delegated his nephew to parliament.

Another group loyal to Akhmetov includes independent lawmakers led by the oligarch's business partner in Metinvest Vadim Novinsky. Another former business partner of Akhmetov, Serhiy Taruta, is now a deputy from Yulia Tymoshenko's party. In Petro Poroshenko's party European Solidarity, lawmakers Oleksiy Honcharenko and Mykola Bondar were spotted voting in Akhmetov's interests.

His talking heads

Some of the most vocal Akhmetov's supporters are among retired politicians who are present every week on the oligarch's TV channel and



Arseniy Yatsenyuk, a former prime minister



Serhiy Taruta, a lawmaker with Batkivshchyna

promote political formats that are beneficial to him. The frontman of Akhmetov's TV empire is former Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, who has been demoted to the level of the oligarch's messenger on sensitive issues.

A few weeks ago, according to my sources, Yatsenyuk reached out to Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovy, whose family owns Channel 24, which aired a series of stories about the oligarch's schemes. Yatsenyuk reportedly said that either Sadovy stops giving a platform to Akhmetov's critics, or the oligarch's media will start attacking the mayor of Lviv.

Indeed, as if on command, Akhmetov's TV channels, which had not been interested in the situation in Lviv for months, began to "attack" both the city and Sadovy.

Yatsenyuk's spokeswoman Olga Lappo denied that he threatened Sadovy.

Another asset in Akhmetov's toolbox is another former prime minister, Volodymyr Groysman. It was Groysman who turned a blind eye to the corruption scheme Rotterdam Plus. Named after the energy hub in the Netherlands, the coal formula was a scheme that made Ukrainian energy consumers overpay Hr 39 billion (\$1.4 billion) in 2016–2019, according to the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, known as NABU. And now Groysman is a regular guest on the oligarch's TV shows.

Akhmetov's channels are also promoting former lawmaker Oleh Lyashko and former presidential candidate Ihor Smeshko.

Akhmetov's press pool also includes Dmitry Gordon, whose YouTube interviews with politicians and celebrities have millions of views. Recently, Gordon said on Akhmetov's Ukraine 24 TV channel that Akhmetov is not an oligarch. I found a TV interview that I did with Gordon two years ago, where he said the opposite. What has



Vadim Novinsky, an independent lawmaker and Rinat Akhmetov's business partner



An employee operates at the Metinvest's Coke Plant on Oct. 30, 2019 in Avdiivka, an eastern Donetsk Oblast city located 730 kilometers southeast of Kyiv. The plant is one of many in Rinat Akhmetov's business empire.

Kostyantyn Chernichkin



Oleh Lyashko, a former lawmaker, head of the Radical Party



Oleksiy Honcharenko, a lawmaker with the European Solidarity party



Volodymyr Omelyan, a former minister of infrastructure, member of the European Solidarity party

changed during this time? Nothing, except that Gordon was apparently offered a format of cooperation with Akhmetov — he became an "exclusive guest" on Akhmetov's channels. He appears there two to three times a week, and almost nowhere else.

Former Minister of Infrastructure Volodymyr Omelyan is also a frequent guest on Akhmetov's shows. His role is to attack Ukrzaliznytsia's supervisory board, which I am a member of, because the board is demanding a tariff increase for the transportation of iron ore and coal by rail, Akhmetov's main product line. A similar role is played by ex-lawmaker Boryslav Bereza, who was even given the opportunity to host a TV show on Akhmetov's channel.

Loyal organizations

In addition to recruiting "talking heads" from among the current or



Volodymyr Groysman, a former prime minister

former politicians, Akhmetov defends his interests through various associations and NGOs.

One of them is the European Business Association, where the Infrastructure Committee regularly makes statements in favor of the oligarch, while refusing to accept Ukrzaliznytsia as a member.

One of Akhmetov's NGOs is the All-Ukrainian Energy Assembly, headed by Ivan Plachkov, a former energy minister who headed the supervisory board at Akhmetov's Kyivenergo company.

Ukrmetallurgprom Associations and the Federation of Transport Employers are in charge of Akhmetov's favorable rents and tariffs. The latter is headed by former lawmaker Orest Klympush, the father of the current lawmaker from Poroshenko's party Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, who was also spotted promoting Akhmetov's narratives about the electricity market.

Akhmetov's interests also extends beyond the Atlantic. BKS & Associates was registered as a lobbyist for his business, and Akin Gump maintained the purity of Akhmetov's reputation in the Western press. In order to dispel suspicions about his criminal past, Akhmetov hired a detective agency Kroll. Bruce Jackson, head of the NGO Project for Transitional Democracies, also worked for Akhmetov.

By the way, it was Akhmetov who brought Paul Manafort to work in Ukraine, advising his then partner Viktor Yanukovich on this political technologist. He, in turn, was rec-

ommended to Akhmetov by Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska.

Preparing for a fight

Akhmetov is not going to give up his interests without a fight.

Lately, he's been growing his influence both in politics and in media.

In addition to Ukraine and the newer Ukraine 24 TV channels, the list of media weapons used by Akhmetov may soon include Nash (Ours) TV channel, which he doesn't yet own but reportedly controls.

Moreover, a new party is also in the works, according to Ukrainska Pravda. The party will target the same political niche as Yanukovich's Party of Regions, which Akhmetov sponsored — the working class of Ukraine's southern and eastern regions.

Akhmetov's ally, businessman and veteran politician Borys Kolesnikov has confirmed that he is launching a new party, called Ukraine Is Our Home.

All of this is oligarchy in its pure form — the use of media, paid politicians and lobbyists to win favors for business. These favors cost the people of Ukraine billions of dollars every year.

For those who become his allies, Akhmetov guarantees a puff piece on TV and a fat paycheck. But unruly officials who dare to go against him will be intimidated and attacked on TV.

The year 2021 must become the last year of Akhmetov's domination. Otherwise, the oligarchic system will gather strength for revenge and inevitably strike a blow to the back of Ukrainian democracy. ☹️

Blinken highlights dangers of Russia, oligarchs & corruption

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aggression.

Ukraine's reluctance to deliver promised judicial reform, curb the influence of oligarchs, institute cor-

porate governance and prosecute high-level corruption has caught the attention of the U.S.

"Ukraine faces twin challenges: aggression from outside coming from Russia, and in effect, aggress-

Blinken visit is return to his ancestral homeland

By Oleksiy Sorokin
sorokin@kyivpost.com

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was "glad to be back in Kyiv" as he came to Ukraine on May 5 with an official visit.

Blinken has visited Ukraine as a top government official numerous times under President Barack Obama.

Yet Blinken's connection to Kyiv goes deeper than official visits.

Blinken's great-grandfather, Meir Blinken, emigrated from Kyiv in 1904. He was accompanied by his wife Hanna and sons Solomon and Maurice Henry, a prominent backer of Israel's independence and grandfather of the current U.S. secretary of state.

According to documents found by Voice of America news outlet in Ukrainian archives, Blinken's family was initially from Pereiaslav, a city of 27,000 people located 90 kilometers southeast of Kyiv.

In the early 20th century, Blinken's family, then spelled Blinkin, appeared in the records of Kyiv's residents. Back then, Kyiv was the seventh-largest town in the Russian Empire, home to nearly 250,000 people.

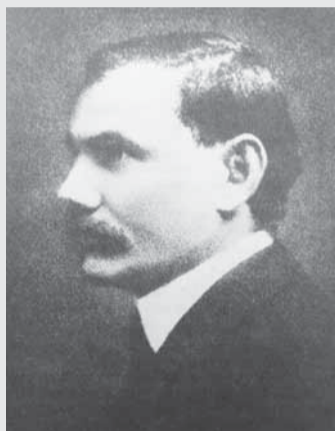
The trip to the U.S. played out well for the family: Starting off in the U.S. with just \$10, Meir Blinken's family went to produce many renowned intellectuals.

Meir Blinken became an acclaimed Yiddish writer, dubbed by one Jewish life magazine "the Kurt Cobain of Yiddish lit." In 1908, he published a book called "Weiber," one of the earliest Yiddish books to explicitly engage with women's sexuality.

Maurice H. Blinken became a prominent scholar and one of the early supporters of an independent Jewish state.

After World War II, Maurice Blinken founded the American Palestine Institute which initiated and financed a report by several economists called "Palestine: Problem and Promise," which argued that an independent Jewish state was economically viable.

The U.S. eventually supported the creation of the Jewish state in Palestine in 1948.



Meir Blinken



Efrem Lukatsky / AFP

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (C) and Metropolitan Epiphanius (L), head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba lay flowers at the Wall of Remembrance memorial for the Ukrainian soldiers who were killed in the war with Russia in Kyiv on May 6, 2021.

ion from within coming from corruption, oligarchs, and others who are putting their interests ahead of those of the Ukrainian people," said Blinken. "And these two things are linked because Russia also plays on that internal aggression, using corruption and using individuals to try to advance its interests as opposed to those of the Ukrainian people."

What didn't happen

Blinken had an eventful day in Kyiv, the city from which Blinken's great-grandfather Meir Blinken emigrated in the early 20th century.

The main message was clear – the U.S. will help Ukraine prevail in its ongoing defensive war against Russia.

With Kuleba and Metropolitan Epiphanius, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Blinken laid flowers to the National Wall of Reemergence dedicated to Ukrainian soldiers killed during the ongoing Russian invasion.

"In their photos, we see the lives of those people, and we think about their parents, their brothers and sisters," said Blinken.

However, Ukraine wants more

than empathy – it wants weapons and tougher sanctions.

Zelensky said he wanted Ukraine to receive a NATO Membership Action Plan at the alliance's summit in June. However, Blinken didn't publicly support Ukraine's NATO aspirations during his visit.

He also didn't publicly mention the issue of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, although Zelensky told the press that he had discussed it with Blinken.

"We know that in Europe unfor-

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Blinken tells civil society leaders: Fight corruption & US will help more

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Unfortunately there are different opinions on this issue, but we are grateful for U.S. support on this issue and for the implemented sanctions," Zelensky said.

Ukraine is expecting the U.S. to kill Russia's \$11 billion gas pipeline project that would bypass Ukraine in delivering gas directly to Germany. So far, the U.S. has only sanctioned some companies involved in the construction, delaying but not stopping the project.

Zelensky also reminded Blinken that Ukraine has invited Biden to take part in the celebration of 30 years of the country's independence on Aug. 24. Biden visited Ukraine six times as vice president for Barack Obama.

Blinken arrived in Kyiv by way of London, where he met with G7 foreign ministers, a gathering where

threats from Russia and China featured prominently on the agenda. There, Blinken reaffirmed that the U.S. is "closely watching" Russia's actions in Ukraine and ready to impose tougher sanctions if the Kremlin takes more aggressive steps against Ukraine.

Some of those tougher actions were signaled recently by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State George Kent. In comments to the Financial Times on May 3, he said that sanctioning the holders of dollar-denominated Russian debt will put pressure on the Kremlin by limiting its ability to borrow money at attractive interest rates.

"Pressing the flesh and PR event and show of support. Not sure what specifically new we are seeing from this," wrote Timothy Ash, a senior strategist for BlueBay Asset Management Company.



President Volodymyr Zelensky and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken greet each other during their meeting in Kyiv on May 6, 2021. Blinken is the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit Ukraine since President Joe Biden took office on Jan. 20.

Presidential Press Service

Domestic challenges

The U.S. caution in delivering major promises to Ukraine isn't surprising. Ukraine has struggled to keep up with its part of the bargain — moving forward with reforms in key areas.

"There are powerful interests lined up against reform and against anti-corruption efforts," Blinken said. "Those include external forces like Russia but also internal forces like oligarchs and other powerful individuals who are pursuing their own narrow interests through illegitimate means at the expense of the interests of the Ukrainian people."

Effectively combating corruption is one of the most important tasks, crucial to improving the lives of the Ukrainian people, Blinken said.

"So we talked about a number of areas where this work is so important: corporate governance, transparency, the integrity and independence of the anticorruption bodies, the judiciary, and we had a very good — a very good exchange on all of that," he added.

After meeting with government officials, Blinken held an online

roundtable with the leaders of Ukraine's civic society.

Among the few people invited were Mykhailo Zhernakov, head of Dejure, a legal non-profit and Daria Kaleniuk, the executive director of the Anti-Corruption Action Center. Both have been critical of Zelensky's record.

"Blinken's main message: The level and the quality of support to Ukraine from the U.S. is directly correlated with the quality of the conducted reforms in government and concerning anti-corruption," wrote Kaleniuk after the meeting. "And the marker by which the reforms are judged is (cooperation with) the International Monetary Fund."

According to Ash, Ukraine is far from completing the required political and economic benchmarks to receive the desired stand-by arrangement from the IMF. One of such benchmarks is the judicial reform.

In early March, despite strong protests from anti-corruption activists and foreign diplomats, Ukrainian judges have chosen their

own overseers. The Congress of Judges filled four vacant spots on the High Council of Judges, the judiciary's main governing and oversight body.

"The system of selecting the Council members needs to be radically changed, so that the members are not elected by the judicial mafia and politicians, but rather are elected by members of non-government watchdogs and independent international experts," Zhernakov wrote about the decision.

On May 5, the Venice Commission sided with Ukraine's civic society demanding to reform the High Council of Judges.

Another issue that Blinken discussed both with civic society and with Zelensky is the controversial firing of Andriy Kobolev from the state-owned monopolist Naftogaz which signaled the absence of independent governance of state-owned companies.

"The secretary of state isn't hiding his shock from the destruction of Naftogaz's corporate governance," said Kaleniuk. ☪



President Volodymyr Zelensky (C) visits the front line in the Donbas in Donetsk Oblast on April 9, 2021. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. is "closely watching" Russia's actions in the eastern Donbas and ready to impose tougher sanctions.

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Gambling moving out of shadows after legalization

By Alexander Query
query@kyivpost.com

Ukraine's leading gambling operator Parimatch's ads are a common sight in Kyiv. The company's ubiquitous black and yellow colors adorn every corner of the Ukrainian capital, making it difficult to believe that gambling was still illegal a year ago.

Ukraine officially banned gambling in 2009 after a fire killed nine people in a gaming hall, but casinos found legal loopholes to continue operating despite the ban, creating a de facto grey market riddled with corruption schemes.

The grey turned to white when President Volodymyr Zelensky signed legislation last year to legalize gambling in a bid to get rid of the market's shady side and fill the state's coffers.

Most estimates put the value of the Ukrainian gambling black market at \$1 billion, which makes it a promising source of income for the government.

Gambling operators, who were in the grey zone for years, are going all in to be legit. The commission has already issued 18 licenses for \$20 million in total since the beginning of 2021, including to seven high-end hotels in Kyiv such as the Fairmont Hotel overlooking the Dnipro River.

However, gambling operators complain that the law is not sufficient for the industry to become a market. It needs further legislation, technical regulation and proper administration for the market to emerge, they say.

Heavy taxations also creates setbacks for operators, Maksym Liashko, a partner at Parimatch, told the Kyiv Post. "We are waiting for the government to finish implementing gambling as a sphere of economy," Liashko said.

No Vegas overnight

The legal market is "under construction," but the transition is far from smooth. For instance, while casinos have already paid for and received licenses, they can't fully operate because regulations to certify betting equipment haven't been adopted yet.

The law didn't provide for online monitoring of problematic players — those who can get addicted and need psychological help — nor certification of randomizing mechanisms in slot machines.

While Liashko praised Zelensky's team's initiative to legalize gambling, he called on parliament and ministries to "normalize taxation in this sphere and resolve technical issues."

For Anton Kuchuhidze, head of the Gambling Association of Ukraine, these are normal growing pains. The most important thing was to finally get the law in place; the market will appear in time, he told the Kyiv Post.

Ukraine has the potential to become a promising gambling territory for all of Eastern Europe, but it won't turn into Las Vegas overnight. "We have the potential, but we're

still at the first phase of the market. And it's difficult," he said.

This massive potential attracts unexpected players to the industry. Recently, Igor Smelyansky, head of state postal service Ukrposhta, said he'd turn the postal service's historical building on Independence Square into a hotel with a casino.

Smelyansky told the Kyiv Post he had in mind Washington D.C.'s main postal building that became a hotel after being sold to former U.S. President Donald Trump.

"Why not do the same in Kyiv?" he said. "We are converting old infrastructure to a new, modern use. You cannot constantly live in the past."

Hefty taxes

But Smelyansky will need massive investments to convert the building. Under the law, gambling halls are only permitted in five-star hotels, recreation sites outside city limits or gambling buildings specially approved by the government.

To open a casino, businesses have to buy a license valid for five years. Depending on the city and type of building, the cost can vary.

For example, for a five-star hotel in Kyiv with over 150 rooms, the cost is \$10.4 million paid over five years. Every year, the casino must also pay \$30,500 for each game table and over \$2,000 for each slot machine.

The Ukrainian government's licensing fees are the highest in the world, up to \$2 million to open a casino in a 150-room hotel, restricting opportunity to the wealthiest people.

Operators pay 18% income tax as any other businesses, but also the gross gambling tax, which varies from 10% to 28% for different types of gambling.

The tax load oscillates from 28% to 46%, which adds up to 22% of each employee's income.

European countries use a simpler approach: Either expensive licenses

An aerial view of the Dnipro Hotel in central Kyiv on Nov. 30, 2020. Ukraine's gambling and lottery commission has reportedly denied a casino license to Kyiv's central Dnipro Hotel over paperwork issues. This hasn't deterred Alexander Kokhanovskyy, the esports entrepreneur who owns the hotel, to continue his efforts to take part in the newly legal industry.



Oleg Petrasjuk

and low taxes, or cheap licenses and high taxes — but not both.

Because licensing and taxation of gambling is the highest in Europe, it deters investment in the emerging betting market, Victoria Zakrevskaya, a consultant for gambling operators, told the Kyiv Post.

"Ukraine adopted both, which creates an unbearable financial burden on operators at the moment," Zakrevskaya said.

Kuchuhidze agreed: "We have to adopt tax amendments to attract companies."

At the same time, expensive entry and strict regulations ensure the market won't slip into people just putting dirty slot machines in establishments centered around metro stations, like it had been before all of them were shut down in January 2020.

Controversial topic

More than 900 illegal gambling

halls disguised as lottery offices were closed at the beginning of 2020 to put an end to illegal gambling in the country.

Ukrainians still remember slot machine halls surrounding public transport stops in big cities, with their cohort of shady characters spending their last dime in smoke-filled hallways.

Such places shaped the public opinion that the gambling market was something antisocial and dirty, which makes it harder for operators to come out of the woods, according to Zakrevskaya.

"Gambling is not a popular topic in Ukraine," she said.

In the mind of the public, gambling is often associated with poverty or corruption schemes, which makes it challenging for lawmakers to address issues in the industry because it costs them rating points.

After the parliament voted the law in July 2020, former Prime Minister

Yulia Tymoshenko and her 26-member Batkivshchyna faction in parliament strongly opposed the bill and tried to cancel it, saying it would destroy "spirituality" in Ukraine.

Other lawmakers have a different agenda, Kuchuhidze said. Some representatives of the gambling market have vested interests in keeping the market in the grey economy to avoid paying taxes.

Those who want the industry to stay in shadows are close to criminal groups and are used to corruption schemes rather than paying taxes to the government, he said.

"They don't understand how to work without police 'protection,'" he said. "They're from the other world."

Addiction

For Zakrevskaya, the topic of gambling still seems relatively taboo among Ukrainians because it's linked to gambling addiction which explains the reluctance of policymakers to approach it.

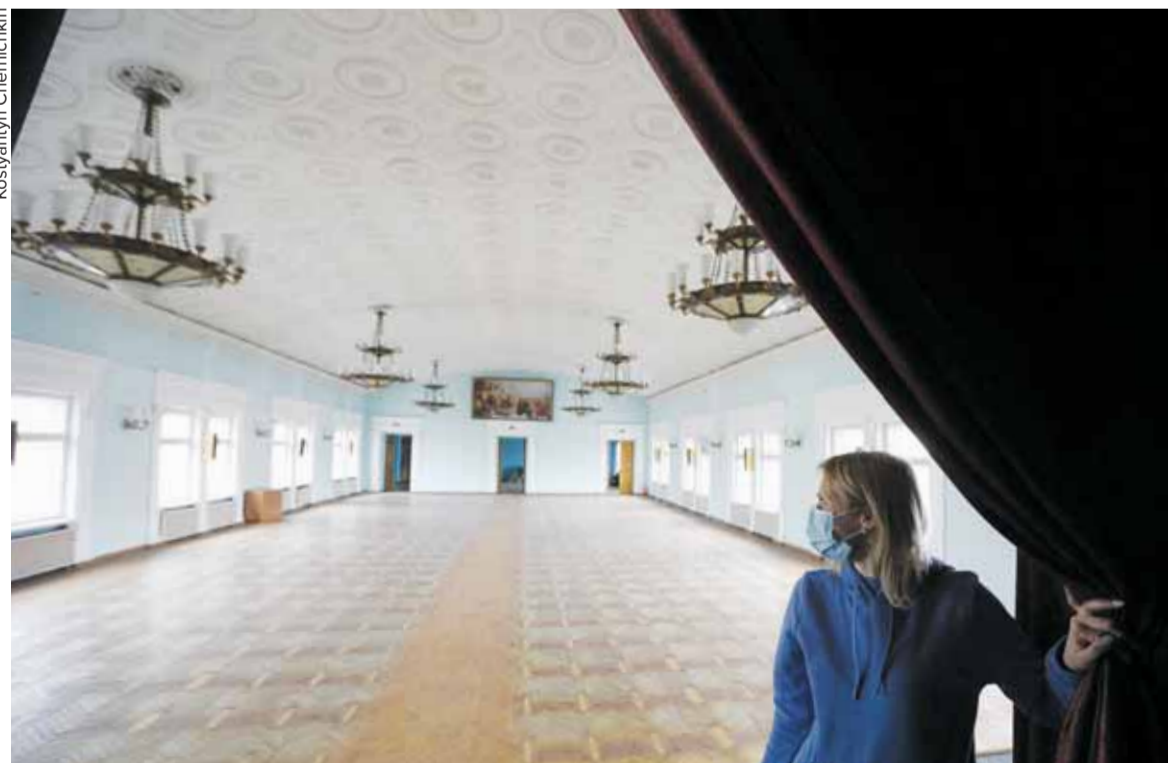
"In our modern society, the government will have to deal with the outcomes of someone losing his household over gambling," she said.

Once legalized, operators have to provide the state with information on addicted players to protect them. Casino operators will also have to provide players with information about medical facilities and organizations that treat gambling addiction.

Unlike illegal gambling establishments, which have been operating in Ukraine for the last 12 years, legal gambling operators will be forbidden to have ATMs or currency exchange offices on their grounds.

The way to implement all these provisions is still vague, however. The regulator hasn't created any register for addicted players so far, Kuchuhidze said.

So far, operators and the state still need to find a way to monitor and help the addicted players, but at least the law is already in place, he said. "This all is just a matter of time," Kuchuhidze said. ☺



An employee of state postal operator Ukrposhta shows the premises of the Central Post Office, located in a historic building in central Kyiv, on April 4, 2021. The head of Ukrposhta, Igor Smelyansky, said in a recent interview that he was planning to sell the building to turn it into a high-end hotel with a casino.

Forbes: Wealthiest Ukrainians get even richer amid pandemic

By Liliane Bivings
bivings@kyivpost.com

The pandemic was anything but a crisis for Ukraine's wealthiest: 76 of the top 100 wealthiest in Ukraine saw their wealth increase over the last year, according to Forbes. Altogether Ukraine's billionaires and millionaires are worth \$44.5 billion, up from \$31.4 billion last year, Forbes Ukraine reported on May 6. The entrance ticket to the top hundred rose by a third to \$125 million.

This year's ranking also saw 14 newcomers. They represent the IT and energy sectors.

In April, Forbes published the list of the richest people on the planet for the 35th time. It includes 2,755 billionaires — the most ever. Among them are seven Ukrainians with a total wealth of \$19 billion, or 0.15% of the total capital of the richest in the world.

And while Ukraine's wealthiest saw better times in 2013, the most successful year for asset gains, growth in key exports of oil, steels, wheat and corn, as well as growth in commodity prices helped those of the list increase their wealth year over year and gave them a comfortable head start in the race for 2022 list of top 100.

The top 100 list can be found online. Here are the top 10 richest Ukrainians in 2020:

1 Rinat Akhmetov, \$7.6 billion
Rinat Akhmetov, 53, the ironworks and energy tycoon originally from the Donbas, remains the country's richest person in 2021, even though his net worth has decreased six-fold since 2013, according to Forbes.

In early 2020, Akhmetov's Metinvest metallurgical holding, which generates approximately 60% of his company SCM Holding's revenue, was on the verge of default. Low steel prices globally in the second half of 2019 caused monthly losses of \$40 million for Metinvest.

Akhmetov was saved by the Chinese economy, which came out of quarantine in need of raw materials. In 2020, Akhmetov's Metinvest company shipped 44% of its iron ore to the Asian market, twice as much as in 2019.

For the first time in five years, the Shakhtar football club, Akhmetov's favorite project, didn't take home any gold medals in the Ukrainian championship. FC Dynamo Kyiv, owned by oligarch Ihor Surkis, won the championship.

2 Viktor Pinchuk, \$2.5 billion
Pinchuk, 59, with his massive assets in the ironworks industry and media, saw his net worth almost double over the past year from \$1.4 billion in 2020 to \$2.5 billion. His main business asset, Interpipe, is worth \$500 million.

According to Forbes, Pinchuk's privately-owned Interpipe, which lost all of its business in Russia during its occupation of Crimea, is weighed down by heavy debts.

Pinchuk also owns Star Light Media Holding which controls nearly 20% of Ukraine's television market.

3 Kostyantyn Zhevago, \$2.4 billion
For the second year in a row, the majority owner of the Ferrexpo mining group, Konstantin Zhevago, 46, cannot set foot on Ukrainian soil. In 2019, the Prosecutor General's Office declared him internationally wanted for embezzling \$90 million through his bank Finance and Credit.

Since then, the businessman has ruled the iron ore empire remotely. Ferrexpo still shows record profits: In 2020, the company's earnings increased by 46% to \$859 million.

Zhevago took advantage of the situation in foreign markets, increasing the supply of raw materials to China. According to Concorde Capital, China's share in Ferrexpo's revenue was 53%, compared to 23% in 2019 and 10% in 2017–2018. The company will earn more than \$250 million in six months, according to Forbes.

4 Ihor Kolomoisky, \$1.8 billion
Despite his drop in net worth to \$1 billion last year, former owner of now state-owned PrivatBank and owner of the Privat Group of companies, Kolomoisky came back this year with an increase in net worth, putting him back in 4th place, up from 8th last year.

The oligarch has faced several setbacks in court over the last year, though. In the latest, a \$6 billion claim by Kolomoisky and his partners against Ukraine ended after the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce declared it had no jurisdiction in the case.

In March, the U.S. State Department imposed sanctions against Kolomoisky and his relatives for involvement in corruption as head of the Dnipropetrovsk Regional State Administration in 2014–2015.



An employee of the National Bank of Ukraine holds a gold ingot as part of Ukraine's gold reserves. Altogether Ukraine's billionaires and millionaires are worth \$44.5 billion, according to Forbes Ukraine.

5 Gennadiy Boholyubov, \$1.7 billion
This last year hasn't been great for Gennadiy Boholyubov, the 58-year-old London-based businessman and former owner of PrivatBank.

In February, the Stockholm International Arbitration Court dismissed a \$6-billion claim against Ukraine filed by the shareholders of oil and gas company Ukrnafta, which includes Boholyubov and Ihor Kolomoisky.

Boholyubov and Kolomoisky also co-own the informal Privat Group of companies, which include ferroalloy plants. Exports of ferroalloy fell by 25% in 2020.

6 Oleksandr and Halyna Gerega, \$1.7 billion
Epicenter K, a leading construction materials and home improvement retailer with 59 stores and over 22,000 employees, didn't let the pandemic get in its way.

In 2020, the company launched its own pharmacy and grocery store chain and announced plans to invest over \$1.2 billion in the company's development in 2021–2022.

In April 2020, Epicenter was embroiled in a scandal when personal protective equipment from

China sent to help Ukraine fight the coronavirus pandemic ended up on the shelves of Epicenter K stores.

7 Petro Poroshenko, \$1.6 billion
The country's fifth president, who is now a lawmaker and leader of the 27-member European Solidarity faction in parliament, continued to increase his net worth in 2021.

In 2021, Petro Poroshenko, 54, declared approximately \$51.2 million in cash. This number of banknotes weighs more than a ton, at least 493 kilograms in denominations of Hr 1,000 and 512 kilograms in one hundred dollars.

Poroshenko's confectionery company Roshen, increased its net profit by 60% in three quarters of 2020, compared to the same period in 2019, to \$86 million.

Petro Poroshenko also became the official owner of the TV channel "Direct".

8 Vadim Novinsky, \$1.4 billion
Originally a Russian millionaire, Novinsky, 56, acquired Ukrainian citizenship in 2012

from then-President Viktor Yanukovich at the request of Petro Poroshenko, then the economy minister.

Rising prices for ore and metal have increased the value of Akhmetov's Metinvest, and hence the wealth of the minority shareholder — Novinsky.

In 2020, he was ordained a deacon in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

9 Oleksandr Yaroslavskiy, \$1.4 billion
Originally from the Donbas, the 60-year-old financial and ironworks tycoon Yaroslavskiy spent

nearly \$10 million on the COVID-19 prevention efforts in Ukraine, according to Forbes.

Compared to his estimated net worth in 2020 (\$725 million), Yaroslavskiy made a lot of money in the last year, increasing his wealth to \$1.4 billion in 2020, according to Forbes. This pushed him up a spot from 10th place last year.

10 Yuriy Kosiuk, \$780 million
According to Forbes, 52-year-old agriculture tycoon Yuriy Kosiuk isn't having the best year. A drop in global prices for chicken and a weakening of the hryvnia caused Kosiuk's holding, MHP, a net loss of \$133 million in 2020.

Last year, Kosiuk was in 6th place with a net worth of 1.1 billion after MHP increased its annual gain by \$2 billion in 2019, bringing in a \$30 million profit, 66% of which belonged to Kosiuk.

At the end of 2020, Kosiuk put up for sale two yachts worth a total of \$172 million.

Despite losses, the board of directors for MHP still decided to pay shareholders \$30 million in 2020. ❦

Life after Yanukovych means back to roots for photographer

By Max Hunder

Andrei Mosienko's career has been sharply divided between his photographs of ordinary workers on the one hand, and his photographs of the politicians, oligarchs and other assorted hangers-on of the Viktor Yanukovych administration on the other.

Mosienko served as one of Yanukovych's official photographers during the ill-fated, four-year presidency that ended in the Kremlin-backed president fleeing on Feb. 22, 2014, to Russia, where he remains in exile, as the EuroMaidan Revolution closed in on him.

But Mosienko remained in Ukraine, despite facing scorn for his association with Yanukovych, and carries on with the job he loves: that of a photojournalist.

The Kyiv-based Mosienko has published two picture books to date, *Havana Kings* in 2011 and *Khlib* (Bread) in 2018. The settings are far apart, one in urban Cuba and the other in rural Ukraine, but the focus remains on ordinary people.

Urban Cuba

Havana Kings is a visual history of a bygone Cuba, one which has begun to fade out of existence due to the pressures of globalisation. It was shot in the waning years of the late Fidel Castro's rule, which ended in 2011, five years before the revolutionary leader's death. In it are the bakers, boxers and others who Mosienko found on Havana's streets. The narrative is bilingual, in English and in Ukrainian.

Rural Ukraine

Bread was a four-year project documenting the process of making the daily staple. His shots take place in village communities across Ukraine.

Mosienko talks of the importance of those engaged in breadmaking: "All life is based on these simple people... ordinary people do (these jobs). They work in the fields, they work in the mill, they work in the flour factories. They make the bread."



Andriy Mosienko holds a copy of "Bread" on April 24, 2021 in a shop selling the staple food on which his picture book is focused. Those interested in buying the book or contacting the author can go to: hlib.mosienko.photo

Kostyanyn Chernichkin

He maintains that there is nothing "as simple, as important as bread."

Started 25 years ago

Mosienko started his career in 1996 at the Eastern Economist and joined *Kyivskiy Vedomosti* in 1999.

In 2005, he was invited by the Yanukovych-led Party of Regions to become their official photographer for the 2006 parliamentary elections campaign. This was the beginning of an eight-year working relationship when his professional fortunes were tied to Yanukovych.

When the Party of Regions won the elections and Yanukovych rose to prime minister, Mosienko became the official photographer of the Cabinet of Ministers. When

Yanukovych won the 2010 presidential election, Mosienko became one of the administration's official photographers. His job came to an abrupt end soon after Yanukovych fled power.

Insider's view

The years spent photographing Ukraine's fourth president allowed Mosienko an insider's view of what went on, who came and went, how the president and those around him behaved.

Much like Russian dictator Vladimir Putin's passion for winning at ice hockey, Mosienko said Yanukovych developed a similar affinity for tennis.

"He started to play tennis when he

was 50. He just kept doing it. He was not a tennis player at all. The (other) players were assisting him, they were helping him because he was the president. Nobody wanted to disturb him. Everybody wanted him to win." He had regular contact with Yanukovych.

Cuban visit

During Yanukovych's 2011 visit to Cuba, Mosienko asked the Ukrainian president to give Fidel Castro a copy of *Havana Kings*, as well as a print of Irina Pap's photograph of the Cuban leader visiting Kyiv in 1961.

"There was an official visit to Raul (Castro) and the whole delegation was there. Then on Saturday we were supposed to meet Fidel Castro. His security guards didn't allow me to photograph, but I passed the pictures to our security detail, the photographs and my book. So Mr. Yanukovych passed my book to Fidel Castro this way."

Mezhyhirya commute

The photographer also talked about the Russian-speaking Yanukovych's attempts to learn Ukrainian.

"You know how he was studying Ukrainian? It took 19 minutes to drive from Mezhyhirya to Kyiv. After his morning gymnastics, he was sitting in a car, and there was a female teacher who would speak to him in Ukrainian."

Despite the rampant corruption of the Yanukovych era and its violent end in 2014, Mosienko, who is from the eastern city of Dnipro, still sees some good points in the former president.

"He is a real top manager, he is a very complicated person... maybe even many-sided, he had lots of fields of interest," adding that he

"understood the workings of the economy brilliantly."

Mosienko talked of the often-demanding hours which the job required: "It was sometimes a 20-hour (work) day... it was a hard (way to earn one's) bread. It was sometimes 20 hours of work. Mostly it was about 14 hours a day, the days were quite long."

Snapping political stars

However, he says that he thoroughly enjoyed "the possibility to travel and see the world... to see life," as well as to take photographs of figures such as then-U.S. President Barack Obama, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and then-Japanese emperor Akihito.

While working for the presidential administration in 2011, Mosienko published *Havana Kings*, the material for which came from two trips of two weeks each — in 2005 and again in 2008.

Mosienko was captivated by the individual stories he saw in the city's bakeries, beauty parlors, boxing gyms and doorways.

He explains: "Havana is a very simple place. There is a big contradiction in the title, because there is no king in Havana. They have never been kings like (the Royal Family) in London, but they are kings in the sense that when you walk down the street there's always sun, it's always warm... here is your town!"

Mosienko summarizes *Havana Kings* as "a travel book. It's about sun, it's about dreams, and it's about (one's) young years."

Last assignment

Mosienko's last assignment for

Andrei Mosienko



"Girl without Pearl Earrings" from "Bread" (2018), which documented the bread-making process in Ukrainian villages. The photographer, Andriy Mosienko, came to Kyiv from Dnipro as a student "with two dollars in my pocket." He got a job photographing Viktor Yanukovych and then lost it after the EuroMaidan Revolution ousted the president. He started over. "I am happy and proud of my job."

Andrei Mosienko's labors of love: 'Havana Kings' and 'Bread'

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Yanukovich was photographing the February 21st signing of an agreement with opposition leaders for early elections in Ukraine. The next day, the president fled to Russia, via Kharkiv and Crimea. After this, Mosienko decided to take a long holiday, as he had collected lots of unclaimed vacation days in the previous several years. When he came back, he was not relieved of his duties immediately: "I was only fired in summer, in July".

He recalls his last assignment in the job: "It was on the 9th of May, (Acting President Oleksandr) Turchynov was at a ceremony laying flowers at the monument of Eternal Glory."

After the EuroMaidan Revolution that prompted Yanukovich and dozens of members of his administration to flee abroad, Mosienko experienced a fall from grace.

Fall from grace

"The most disappointing moment for me was that all the people who were surrounding me for many years basically stopped calling me and getting in touch right after the events of February," he said.

Former Yanukovich allies, he said, simply wanted to move on and did not want to associate with anybody connected to the administration. "It's a new life, they need new people, new qualities. They don't want to remember the past. They don't want to discuss it. That's people. That's the theatre of politics."

Just a photographer

Mosienko still receives regular criticism for his work with the disgraced former president: "I am constantly tied to this. Because of the fact that I worked with Yanukovich, nobody offered me work. I made 'Bread' with my own savings. I had to find money to get it published, because to print a book one needs a lot of money. I asked lots of people, but many of them answered me 'You need money? Remind me where you worked.' I was not a minister, I was not (former environment minister Mykola) Zlochevsky or (former NSDC head Andriy) Klyuyev. I was not (former head of the Presidential Administration Serhiy) Lyovochkin.

I was just a photographer."

Mosienko says that to this day, people remember who his employer was before 2014: "Now I will finish this material, and they will remind me again where I used to work." He says that "people kept asking me 'Have you got a phone call from Rostov yet?'" A jibe which referred to Yanukovich's new place of residence, the southwestern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don, after his escape in 2014.

Cathartic experience

After his years of photographing Party of Regions big shots, Mosienko found it cathartic to photograph a completely different set of people.

"I remembered my bakers in Havana, and I thought I should do something about Ukraine... I saw a book about rice planting in Italy in the '70s and '80s, and I thought: My God! I live in Ukraine and I haven't done a book about bread."

Traveling country roads

He spent the next four years traveling Ukraine, taking photos of the breadmaking process on small-scale farms, painstakingly capturing the people and tools involved. The end result, *Bread*, was released in 2018.

Mosienko says that the subjects of his photos were delighted that somebody was telling their story: "They were very happy that a photographer from Kyiv came... to photograph them. 'We will be stars, we will be models!' For them it was a funny and nice experience. I would say they are not spoiled with photographs. They are happy."

Finding his passion

Throughout the interview, Mosienko flows with impassioned energy when discussing his photos of villagers, an effervescence which is notably lacking when he is talking about his time working with politicians.

At several points, he flicks excitedly through the pages of his book, pointing with his finger at photos of laborers toiling under the summer sun and narrating: "This guy is now in the army in Odesa, he is serving. This guy I think is still in the village. This is rye. This is not wheat, this is rye. This girl is in Poland now, she works there... she works in a factory



An image from "Havana Kings" (2011) that chronicled ordinary lives on the streets of the Cuban capital.

assembling car window mechanisms."

The photographer also enjoys recognizing motifs from famous artwork of the past in the poses and facial expressions of his subjects.

There is a strong association with Soviet-era Ukrainian painter Tetyana Yablonska's 1949 work, also titled *Bread*. Mosienko was delighted when Gayane Atayan, Yablonska's daughter and a renowned artist in her own right, said of the book: "What a nice echo of mama's work!"

As well as works close to home, Mosienko sees hints of classical European art in his shots: "The face of this guy I photographed refers to the Italian (Renaissance) period. There's a famous sculpture

by Donatello with a similar type of face. They call it condottiere. It's in the town of Padua and it's called Gattamelatta... I call him the Gattamelatta of Odesa," the photographer says of a middle-aged man with sharp, hardened features.

Another picture, one depicting a young woman tilting her head to look at the camera, Mosienko refers to as "Girl without Pearl Earrings," a nod to Johannes Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. "I call it hooks on classics," he quips.

Mosienko is still wrapped up in his *Bread* project. He is currently finishing a behind-the-scenes documentary about the making of his 2018 book.

"This bread story is bigger than me, it's difficult to do, and I find it natural and interesting because you touch real life."

He says that, were someone to ask him to take photos of politicians again, he "probably would not agree. It is a big story, but I am happy it is not the only story in my life." 🍞

To order a copy of "Bread," contact the author at: hib.mosienko.photo or email: fotoamos@gmail.com

TOP 10 KYIV POST exclusives online this week

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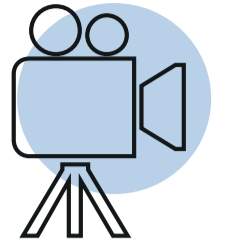
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Lifestyle

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Nikita Kadan's art tackles tough topics

Maksym Bilousov

Ukrainian contemporary artist Nikita Kadan poses for a photograph in front of his artworks. Kadan is one of Ukraine's most celebrated artists who raises sore subjects of the country's past and present through art.



By Daria Shulzhenko
shulzhenko@kyivpost.com

Nikita Kadan raises sore subjects of Ukraine's past and present in the most sophisticated way — through art.

One of the country's most celebrated contemporary artists, Kadan explores Ukraine's historical heritage and its impact, and modern issues like inequality, violence and social injustice.

"Art has a unique ability to show the true state of affairs," Kadan, 38, told the Kyiv Post.

He has been using that power of art for more than 17 years through installations, graphics, paintings and murals.

Some of Kadan's finest and recent works are now available to see at his current exhibition "Stone Hits Stone," which will run at Kyiv's Pinchuk Art Center through middle August.

Though it's one of his few personal exhibitions in Ukraine, Kadan is an artist with global recognition. Some of his works are part of the permanent collection of world-known museums such as Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich and M HKA, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp. His pieces have also been shown at such prestigious insti-

tutions as Mumok, or the Museum of Modern Art, in Vienna, and the Waterside Contemporary gallery in London.

Becoming

It started with books.

Kyiv native Kadan was born into a family of scientists. Although there was a decent choice of books at home, Kadan's attention was drawn to the accidentally found Soviet publications that criticized Western modernist art.

According to the artist, these books paid great attention to Western art on the one hand, but on the other hand, there was some glowing hatred towards it.

"I wanted to do something that would be described that way," Kadan says.

In the years to come, Kadan would study art at schools and studios and enter the National Academy of Visual Arts and Architecture. He would return to the same Soviet books criticizing Western modernism to reestablish his artistic mind after the traditional education.

"Still, when I find myself in museums in different countries, I have a special incomparable feeling when I see the artworks I once saw as a child in those Soviet books," Kadan

says.

Although Kadan had his first exhibition of watercolor drawings in the lobby of an art studio when he was around 12, he considers that his path of a truly contemporary artist has become much later, in 2004, with the foundation of the art group called Revolutionary Experimental Space, or R.E.P.

Artist-activist

One of the most crucial events in modern Ukraine's history — the 2004 Orange Revolution, which ended Viktor Yanukovich's attempt to rig a presidential election — pushed the civic society development. In the rise of the new-generation consciousness, Kadan, along with other 19 artists, formed R.E.P. to raise social issues and give visibility to contemporary artists in Ukraine who had little, if any, of that at the time.

One of the group's projects was setting up a tent art gallery near the National Art Museum of Ukraine. Referring to the revolutionary protesters' tent camp, the project highlighted the museum's inaccessibility to rising contemporary artists and their pieces.

For several years, the group has been shaking the public space in Ukraine and beyond with its art per-

formances and exhibitions.

"One can say that we introduced the model of activist art into the Ukrainian context, or that we were doing some kind of social assessment," Kadan says. "But that would be just generalizing phrases."

The group's projects, however, speak for themselves.

R.E.P. explored some of Ukraine's most problematic social matters like labor migration abroad or the poor performance of post-Soviet cultural institutions.

Their "Eurorenovation" project spotlighted the so-called "simulation of Westernization." For nearly three years, the artists were creating installations where they copied "eurorenovation" — popular interior design in the Soviet apartments, using the imported cheap-looking materials that symbolize Ukraine's desire for quick changes, only "covering its problems" but not solving them.

By the end of 2005, the group changed its structure with only six artists remaining in, including Kadan. R.E.P. still exists, although the members put on hold their group activity in 2016, each focusing on individual work.

It was after the foundation of R.E.P.

6 fascinating hiking routes to explore in Ukraine

By Oleksandra Korzh

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The hiking season will be shorter than usual because of the cooler weather. But it's no excuse to miss out on the adventurous outdoor activity.

According to Nikolay Fetisov, head of the Like to Hike active tourism agency, Ukraine has around 100 hiking routes. Most of them are in the west, located near or across the Carpathian Mountains.

Fetisov recommends that beginners try several hiking routes with professional guides or with the assistance of travel companies first.

"I would advise the newbies to pick hiking equipment and get physical training before going on long-distance hikes," Fetisov told the Kyiv Post.

Experienced hikers, who have explored the Carpathians far and wide might enjoy trips across Polesia, a natural and historical region in the north of Ukraine. Fetisov, however, says that "there is always something left to see" in the Carpathians, recommending to check out the offbeat areas in the mountains.

The Kyiv Post has picked out some of the best hiking routes available in Ukraine.

Trakhtemyriv Natural Reserve

30 kilometers, easy level

Route: Trakhtemyriv village — Mount Poklonna — Mount Makovyshche — Hryhorivka village — Lake Buchak in Buchak village.

About 130 kilometers south of Kyiv, on the peninsula near the banks of the Kaniv Reservoir, there's a tiny village and an ancient Cossack capital — Trakhtemyriv. Hikers can reach it by car or bus and embark on a spectacular hiking trip around the Trakhtemyriv Natural Reserve. The visitors can enjoy the view of 150-meter-long cliffs on the sides of the Dniipro River. A no less fascinating panoramic landscape of the Kaniv Reservoir opens up from Mount Poklonna or Mount Makovyshche, one of the spiritual locations in the reserve. The destination offers a number of other attractions, including an ancient Scythian settlement, the blue water of Lake Buchak, village Hryhorivka located in a river valley and village Buchak that has several archaeological sites of the early Slavic period.

Podilski Tovtry National Park

40 kilometers, easy level

Route: Kamianets-Podilskyi city — Bakota village — Bakota cave monastery — Teremtsi former settlement — Kytaihorod village — Kamianets-Podilskyi.

This hiking route has it all: mountains, water and history. On this adventure across Khmelnytskyi Oblast, 350 kilometers southwest of

History of social issues is vital to artist's creations

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that people started to call Kadan an "artist-activist." The civic activism would remain part of Kadan's life and art.

His "Procedure Room" collection of posters and souvenir plates, created in 2009–2010, depicted the widespread practice of police torture. The raw painted images showed various methods of torture like a cigarette being put out on a woman's breast or a person being strangled in a plastic bag.

The posters were used during the actual protests against police violence in Ukraine and Belarus, where Kadan gave them to the anti-President Alexander Lukashenko initiative back in 2012.

"The support for Belarusian protests seems to me as a matter of honor," Kadan says.

Some of his other works highlighted far-right attacks on Roma people in Ukraine and the public spaces being absorbed by the big businesses.

"All those 'open' secrets that Ukrainian publicity is full of – we see it and we know it but we pretend that it's not happening – they must be represented. They must be said," Kadan says.

In search of roots

Another pivotal for Ukraine uprising, the 2014 EuroMaidan Revolution, which ousted ex-President Viktor Yanukovich, has also left a mark on Kadan's work.

The deaths of at least 100 EuroMaidan protesters, followed by Russia's annexation of Crimea and Russia's invasion of the Donbas, pushed Kadan to "search for the roots," the past events that led

Ukraine to struggles it faced.

"This historical dimension appeared in my work," Kadan says.

His 2014 "Everybody Wants to Live by the Sea" is one such project connecting the dots of the past and present together. Through archival documents, photographs and paintings, Kadan explored the Crimean Tatars' return to the peninsula after the 1944 deportation ordered by the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, and how it's connected to the Crimean Tatars' current struggles as they are living under the oppression of Russian occupants.

His other project "Mutilated Myth" used documentary photos of the 1941 Lviv massacres of Jews and graphic pieces by Polish Jewish artist Bruno Schulz as a basis for large charcoal paintings to reflect on historical memory and the past traumas of Ukrainians.

"For me, quite often the history of art is the key to the history of politics," Kadan says.

Though Kadan has been rewarded with various accolades, including the Pinchuk Art Center Prize, a nationwide prize in contemporary art, he doesn't consider awards and international glory to be his greatest achievements. It is rather his works that make the artist proud.

"Achievements for me relate to completed works but not to the fact that they were purchased or displayed," Kadan says. "If you want to make it as an artist, you need to move the issues of recognition and relevance to the background. If they are at the forefront, they just block the view."

"Stone Hits Stone." Pinchuk Art Center (1/3–2 Velyka Vasylkivska St.) Feb. 27 – Aug. 15. Tue-Sun. 12 p.m. – 9 p.m. Free. ☎

Discover hidden wild lakes, stunning views in these hiking locations



The Dnister River is one of the many gems that can be explored while hiking across Podilski Tovtry National Park located in western Khmelnytskyi Oblast. According to Nikolay Fetisov, head of the Like to Hike active tourism agency, Ukraine has around 100 hiking routes, with most of them located in the Carpathian Mountains in western Ukraine.

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Kyiv, travelers will have an opportunity to explore picturesque Bakota Bay, the banks of the Dnister River, the canyon of the Studenytsia River and Mount Teremi. During the hike, tourists can also visit a cave monastery, drink water from springs, see abandoned fruit tree orchards and the Tovtry limestone ridge.

Skolivski Beskydy National Park

20 kilometers, easy level

Route: Truskavets city – Skole town – Mount Parashka – Hurkalo waterfall – Tustan fortress – Truskavets.

On this route in the Carpathians, hikers will explore one of the highest mountains of Lviv Oblast, 1,268-meter-high Mount Parashka. They will walk through the magnificent forestry Skolevski Beskydy National Park and see the Hurkalo waterfall. The travelers will also be able to enjoy the views of rocky mountains and the fortress city of Tustan built on the cliffs – a place to immerse in the atmosphere of the Ukrainian Middle Ages.

Mount Shpytsi

19 kilometers, easy level

Route: Ivano-Frankivsk city – Maryshevska polonyna – Mount Shpytsi – Mount Rebra – Nesamovyte Lake – Ivano-Frankivsk.

A simple but beautiful hiking route in the Carpathians with a climb to the Mount Shpytsi offers stunning views of the entire Chornohora, Ukraine's highest mountain range. The route lies through the meadows and past the famous Lake Nesamovyte, one of the country's highest alpine lakes located 1,750 meters above the sea level. Another gem of this route is the natural stone mounds that form corridors at an altitude of 1,800 meters.

Lake Synevyr

25 kilometers, medium level

Route: Volovets settlement – Kolochava village – Mount Barvinok – Mount Horb – Mount Nehrovets – Mount Big Hropa – Mount Small Hropa – Mount Pishkonja – Ozirce Lake – Synevyr Lake – Volovets.

Although this route through the Carpathian Mountains is more difficult than the others, the adventures it promises are well worth the effort. Aside from the picturesque mountain landscapes, during the

two-day hike, travelers will discover one of Ukraine's most famous and beloved destinations, Lake Synevyr. Often referred to as "the heart of the Carpathians," Synevyr is the largest lake in the Ukrainian Carpathians that lies through the Pishkonja range in Zakarpattia. A marvelous panoramic view of majestic mountains and grassy slopes opens up from this range. Apart from Synevyr, in the mountains, hikers can also spot a wild lake called Ozirce.

Gorgany mountain range

32 kilometers, medium level

Route: Ivano-Frankivsk – Osmoloda village – Rosohan Lake – Arshytsia Lake – Mshana polonyna – Mount Gorgan Iemskyi – Nimetska polonyna – Mount Velykyi Pustoshak – Myslovka village.

Gorgany is one of the most remote mountain ranges of the Carpathians. The hiking route in that area lies through a century-old spruce forest and past two mountain lakes, Rosohan and Arshytsia, hidden in the depths of the greenery. Tourists can swim in the crystal clear water of both lakes and enjoy the grandeur of the surrounding forest. ☎

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