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Mounting Costs Of Russia's War

Volodymyr Petrov



An elderly man wipes his eyes as he walks near his house in the Donbas war front village of Hladosove on April 27, 2021. Along with the nearby town of Travneve, this embattled community of nearly 100 residents survives almost completely isolated from the outer world for years. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic eventually swept the town, inflicting severe misery upon nearly a third of the population and claiming two lives. Yet the isolated and destitute community has almost no one to expect help from, except for the rare charities and the sense of mutual support among fellow townspeople.

Isolated Donbas villages ravaged by coronavirus

By Illia Ponomarenko
ponomarenko@kyivpost.com

TRAVNEVE and HLADOSOVE, Ukraine — Oleksandr and Kateryna Osiyaev, both in their 70s, were just another elderly couple trying to survive the war in Donbas.

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Russian citizenships key to the Kremlin's creeping annexation

By Anna Myroniuk
myroniuk@kyivpost.com

Maksym, a resident of Donetsk, received his Russian passport in November 2020, a year and a half after Russia started handing out passports to the people living in the occupied Donbas.

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Kremlin propaganda grooms teenagers for 'Russian world'

By Anastasiia Lapatina
lapatina@kyivpost.com

Children in the Russian-occupied Donbas swallow pro-Kremlin propaganda on a daily basis.

Ukraine is no longer mentioned in

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Biden's Nord Stream 2 waiver prompts criticism

By Oleg Sukhov

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The decision by U.S. President Joe Biden on May 19 to waive key sanctions on Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline in the Baltic Sea has triggered bipartisan protests, as well as dismay from Ukraine and the nation's friends and allies around the world.

"I have determined that it is in the national interest of the United States to waive the application of sanctions on Nord Stream 2 AG, its CEO Matthias Warnig, and Nord Stream 2 AG's corporate officers," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement on May 20.

Blinken added that the action was "consistent with the president's pledge to rebuild relationships with our allies and partners in Europe." The secretary of state claimed, however, that the U.S. would "continue to oppose the completion of this project, which would weaken European energy security and that of Ukraine and Eastern flank NATO and European Union countries."

However, given that the main Swiss-registered company involved in the project and its CEO have escaped U.S. sanctions, the completion of the pipeline seems a certainty this year, absent an abrupt reversal by the Biden administration.

The decision is a victory for Russia and Germany, which lobbied the U.S. to not sanction the pipeline. But much of Europe, aside from Poland and the Baltic states, has not joined in the sanctions push to stop Nord Stream 2.

Defying Congress

Congress passed legislation in January requiring sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which links Russia and Germany through the Baltic Sea and whose construction is currently 95% complete. The \$11.6 billion, 1,230-kilometer pipeline bypasses Russia's main natural gas transit route in Ukraine, doubling existing Russia to Germany transit capacity to 110 billion cubic meters annually.

While Biden imposed sanctions against eight Russian entities involved in the project, the pipeline is likely to be completed soon without broader sanctions.

The lifting of the sanctions came at an odd time. Russia is massing troops near the Ukrainian borders. Russian hackers disabled a major U.S. gasoline pipeline. Evidence shows that Russian intelligence officers poisoned Kremlin opposition leader Alexei Navalny, blew up weapons depots in the Czech Republic and killed a weapons dealer in Bulgaria. Many nations have consequently expelled Russian diplomats in protest.

Warnig's background

One of those who escaped sanctions, Warnig, is a former officer of the Stasi, East Germany's secret police. He is a long-time associate of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin.

Warnig says he first met Putin in 1991. However, the Wall Street



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (L) and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov gesture as they arrive for a meeting at the Harpa Concert Hall in Reykjavik, Iceland, on May 19, 2021, on the sidelines of the Arctic Council Ministerial summit

Journal reported that their first meeting took place in Dresden in 1989, when Putin was a KGB operative there. The two men allegedly collaborated on recruiting West German citizens for the KGB.

Warnig also spied on Germany's Dresdner Bank before he started working for it in 1991, according to intelligence documents cited by the Wall Street Journal.

In 2002–2005, Warnig was the head of Dresdner Bank's Russian branch. At that time, the branch advised the Russian government on the unlawful seizure of the assets of Putin's jailed political competitor Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

Cotton's response

Strong criticism to Biden's actions came from several members of Congress, including Tom Cotton, the Republican senator from Arkansas.

"This refusal to implement sanctions approved by Congress directly benefits — by design — the Russian company building Nord Stream 2 and its CEO, who, you won't believe it, is a former Communist East German Stasi officer and longtime crony of Vladimir Putin," Cotton said. "President Biden's decision to cave on Nord Stream 2 is just the latest show of weakness toward Russia by this administration."

Cotton argued that Nord Stream 2 would "serve as a noose around the neck of Europe's energy supply."

"It will allow Russia to squeeze the sovereign nations of eastern and central Europe into submission," he continued. "You may think I'm exaggerating, but Russia has used energy as a weapon of foreign policy many times in the past."

In 2006 and again 2009, Russia halted natural gas supplies to Europe amid disputes with Ukraine.

"All of Europe could suffer, but Ukraine would be hurt most of all," Cotton said. "This would not only cost Ukraine's economy billions of dollars in transit fees, it would also give Russia the ability to isolate and

starve this proud nation. It's hard to imagine a worse time for this to happen, with Russian troops massed on the Ukrainian border while Russia's dictator salivates over conquering or further partitioning this country."

He also argued that Biden's "actions are directly empowering a dictator who poses the greatest threat to their dreams — a man who rose to power and has maintained it through extortion, murder, and brutality."

"Putin's most recent political rival, Alexei Navalny, was poisoned with a nerve agent and today is rotting in a Russian penal colony," Cotton said. "Navalny's only crime was exposing the corruption and depravity of the Russian state. Yet, President Biden wants to enrich and reward this very regime."

Other responses

Democrat Bob Menendez, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also opposed the waiving of the sanctions.

"I am opposed to the decision by the Biden Administration to waive sanctions on NS2 AG and Matthias Warnig," he said. "I urge the administration to rip off the Band-Aid, lift these waivers and move forward with the congressionally mandated sanctions. The administration has said that the pipeline is a bad idea and that it is a Russian malign influence project. I share that sentiment, but fail to see how today's decision will advance U.S. efforts to counter Russian aggression in Europe."

"This decision has created uncertainty in many corners of Europe and I expect to hear very soon from the administration on its plans moving forward," he continued. "I believe President Biden should do everything possible to accomplish what the Trump administration failed to do for four years: stop the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline for good."

Republican Senator Ben Sasse, a member of the Senate Select

Committee on Intelligence, also condemned the decision on Nord Stream 2.

"Two months ago, President Biden called Putin a 'killer,' but today he's planning to give Putin, his regime, and his cronies massive strategic leverage in Europe," he said. "You can't pretend to be a Russia hawk but then just roll over. It's wrong to roll back a tool that hurts the completion of a core Putin pet project to weaken NATO. Allowing the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline would be a strategic mistake and the administration should rethink this."

Biden's move was also criticized by the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America and Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen.

Previous actions

Gazprom started building Nord Stream 2 in 2018. However, it had to halt the construction in 2019, when Congress introduced the first batch of sanctions against the pipeline. In late 2020, Russia resumed the project but Congress then passed the second batch of sanctions, which applied to companies that provide insurance, testing, inspection and certification services for the pipeline.

In February the U.S. State Department sent a report to Congress, detailing its latest sanctions on companies involved in the pipeline, but failing to deliver the punitive measures expected by Congress.

The report didn't name any new companies as targets for sanctions. It also did not mention any German or other European entities involved in the project, allowing work to continue on the pipeline.

"This Russian pipeline is bad for America and bad for Europe," Cotton said. "If the president wishes to take the reins of international leadership, this is his opportunity. Kill Nord Stream 2 now, and let it rust beneath the waves of the Baltic." 🇺🇸

Zelensky: Lifting Nord Stream 2 sanctions is big defeat for US, big win for Russia

By Olga Rudenko and Oleksiy Sorokin
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Volodymyr Zelensky gave his anniversary press conference on May 20, marking his second year as Ukraine's president.

The press conference took place in a symbolic setting – inside a hangar at the Antonov aircraft manufacturing company, with the Ruslan AN-124 cargo aircraft in the backdrop. The plane was lacking engines and wheels.

During the three-hour press conference, Zelensky hinted at new sanctions against oligarchs, expressed his disappointment with the U.S. expected decision to lift the Nord Stream 2 sanctions, and said that his predecessor Petro Poroshenko was involved in corruption daily.

Here are the highlights of the press conference:

On Rinat Akhmetov

One of the surprises of the press conference was Zelensky's displayed hostility towards Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest man and most influential oligarch.

While Zelensky has recently announced a major de-oligarchization campaign, the only oligarchs who felt it so far are Viktor Medvedchuk, who was stripped of his assets and charged with treason, and Ihor Kolomoisky, whose alleged embezzlement of PrivatBank and state company Centrengo are being investigated.

While he didn't mention Akhmetov by name, Zelensky made clear hints that the state means to cut his influence in two areas that proved very profitable for the oligarch: raise the low iron ore extraction fee that his companies enjoy, and end his energy lobbyism that made regulators prioritize more expensive coal-sourced electricity over the cheaper state-produced nuclear energy.

As a result, the state nuclear energy producer Energoatom suffered losses.

"There are many (influence) groups involved, and not only Ukrainian ones," he said.

Answering a question from Vasyl Holovanov, a TV host on Akhmetov's Ukraina channel, about raising taxes for Ukrainians, Zelensky accused him of manipulation.

"I understand whose TV channel you work for," he said. "You could be asking a question, but (instead) you're passing me information, and I know from whom. Don't manipulate. Regular Ukrainians and small and medium businesses won't be paying more taxes. As for big business, we won't let anyone make 200–300% profits using the natural resources of Ukraine," he said, referencing the low iron ore extraction fee paid by Akhmetov's companies that the government seeks to raise.

Akhmetov's companies pay a 12% iron ore extraction fee counted from the prime cost. The government seeks to link the extraction fee to the market price of iron ore.

On fighting oligarchs

Zelensky revealed some details about the bill that his office and the Security Council are developing that would define the criteria of an oligarch and limit their influence.

However, Zelensky was vague about the bill and contradicted himself, first saying that the draft was fully ready and then, that it's still not finalized.

"There will be no influence on politics, on state officials, on the media. The people who do it will get the label of an 'oligarch.' This will harm their assets abroad, decrease their value. They will be in this register (of oligarchs) and some sanctions will be applied to them."

He said that a person who falls under the criteria will be banned from being a lawmaker.

"The law will give them time to readjust. There won't be a dead end for them. This is a normal law that respects big business," he said.

Zelensky didn't give a direct answer to the question on whether the Security Council will issue sanctions against oligarchs Ihor Kolomoisky and Dmytro Firtash.

"You can expect many more interesting decisions from the Security Council," he said, adding jokingly: "Watch our show every Friday." The council meets on Fridays.

He added that he hopes he won't be facing the oligarchs alone.

"I demonstrated that I have the will (to go against oligarchs). Next, I'll need the support of law enforcement. And I'm hoping I won't end up facing these influence groups alone."

On Nord Stream 2

Zelensky didn't hide his disappointment with U.S. President Joseph Biden's decision to waive some Nord Stream 2 sanctions, and said that he feared that Russia can pressure the U.S. to waive all sanctions, allowing the completion of the pipeline.

"The risk is very high that Russia will pressure the U.S. into lifting the Nord Stream 2 sanctions," said Zelensky. "I think it will be a defeat for the United States, and a personal defeat for President Biden. It will be a serious geopolitical win for Russia, and will lead to a new redistribution of power and influence."

He said that Ukraine will welcome a big group of U.S. senators in June, and will discuss Nord Stream 2 with them.

"It's a big game. The U.S. can do it if they are doing it in exchange for something very serious. And I have to be honest, I'm anxious about this situation," said Zelensky.

On Naftogaz

According to Zelensky, Naftogaz



President Volodymyr Zelensky arrives at the press conference marking his second year in office at the Antonov plant in Kyiv on May 20, 2021.

showed deplorable financial results forcing the government to fire CEO Andriy Kobolev.

"They forecasted Hr 11 billion (\$407 million) losses this year. I'm sure that now there won't be Hr 11 billion losses," said Zelensky.

The president came under fire from energy experts and foreign diplomats for this decision. The experts said the decision to oust the head of a major state company undermines the corporate governance reform.

"Despite the corporate governance reform, the government remains the largest shareholder of Naftogaz," said the president defending Kobolev's firing.

"Naftogaz was told to show at least \$500 million in profits in 2021, and at least \$1 billion in 2022. You'll see, they will fulfill it," he added.

According to Zelensky, such a dire state of the once profitable oil and gas monopolist was a result of the company's questionable investments.

Zelensky said that Naftogaz paid lobbyists and paid for media articles that would promote the company's leadership.

"There are media stories, paid for by Naftogaz, fake stories that say that the Nord Stream 2 sanctions were being reversed because of the change in the leadership of Naftogaz," said Zelensky. "We know (the author) works as one of the lobbyists of Naftogaz. I think he's even the chief U.S. lobbyist for them."

Zelensky could have been talking about Vadym Glamazdyn, who was an official lobbyist for Naftogaz until last week, lobbying against Nord Stream 2. He authored an opinion piece in Europeiska Pravda, a Ukrainian news outlet, tying Kobolev's firing to the easing of sanctions against Nord Stream 2.

On Donbas

A large chunk of questions, unsurprisingly, concerned Russia's war against Ukraine and the Russian-occupied territories of Crimea and eastern Donbas.

According to the president, the only way out of the conflict is to hold talks with the aggressor.

"I insist on a direct dialogue with Putin," said Zelensky.

Asked by the Kyiv Post why Zelensky isn't switching to the long-promised "plan B" to reach peace in Donbas.

"Plan A isn't dead yet," said Zelensky. "We can't risk and just end the Normandy Format."

According to the president,

Germany and France are deeply invested in the current format and Ukraine can't leave the talks without reputational risks even as the format clearly doesn't work.

In early May, Russia announced that it issued over 527,000 passports to residents of the occupied Donbas, cementing its presence in the region.

"We can't influence the issuing of Russian passports in other ways than diplomatically," said Zelensky, acknowledging that Ukraine has little power over Russian decision-making.

Meanwhile, Zelensky's next steps include bringing the U.S. into Ukrainian-Russian peace talks and bringing the question of Crimea back on the table through the Crimean Summit.

"It's not a simple summit. Important documents will be signed there," said Zelensky. "Many foreign countries will be represented," he added, acknowledging that Russia will try to derail the initiative. "Russia is reacting very sensitively to the Crimean Platform."

On Oleg Tatarov

When asked about Oleg Tatarov, Zelensky's controversial deputy chief of staff who was charged with bribery, Zelensky defended him and at the same time tried to distance himself from Tatarov.

"It's up to (Chief of Staff) Andriy Yermak to assess his work," said Zelensky. "But he thinks – and I think so too – that Tatarov is a professional."

Commenting on Tatarov's remarks about the National Anti-Corruption Agency being dependant on foreign forces, Zelensky dodged the question.

"I'm not well informed about what Tatarov said," he said.

When the journalist asking the question reminded the president that his deputy chief of staff called participants of the EuroMaidan

Revolution criminals, Zelensky ignored it.

In a later comment, Zelensky mentioned "controversial people" that he has to work with, without naming them.

"I can't fight against the whole world. This is why I'm holding on to some people with controversial reputations. Because it's hard to fight against a system that was under construction for ages."

On Sheremet murder

In early May, authorities released Andriy Antonenko, one of three people suspected of killing journalist Pavel Sheremet in 2017. They were arrested in December 2019 in a highly-publicized operation, led by Interior Minister Arsen Avakov and endorsed by Zelensky.

But soon, it became evident that investigators lacked evidence, and the three suspects were released from arrest. Antonenko was the last one to be sent under house arrest. He spent a year and a half in jail.

The case became the pinnacle of public dissatisfaction with Avakov. Calls intensified for Zelensky to fire the interior minister who has served since 2014.

The case against the three suspects is being heard in court.

"I don't know if these people (the suspects) are guilty," said Zelensky. "If they are proven to be not guilty, there will be a serious conversation with Avakov."

Zelensky revealed that he's texting with Yana Dugar, one of the three suspects. He showed a few texts on his phone to one of the journalists as proof but didn't say what he was discussing with the person charged with helping murder the journalist.

When asked whether he personally knows or guesses who was behind the murder, Zelensky said he didn't.

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EDITORIALS

Biden wimps out

Ukraine gets daily reminders of its importance – and lack thereof – to the rest of the world. It got another of those unhappy reminders on May 19 from U.S. President Joe Biden who – along with most of the rest of Europe – decided that Germany’s commercial interests with Russia are more important than Ukraine.

Biden sent this message when he bucked Congress and refused to impose sanctions against the Kremlin’s company, Swiss-registered Nord Stream AG, and its CEO, Matthias Warnig, a Germany secret services crony of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin. Those were the only sanctions seen as powerful enough to stop the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which, according to Russia, is just 100 kilometers short of completion under the Baltic Sea and will be operational this year.

At the same time that Biden let the big fish off the hook, the administration sanctioned eight lesser entities involved in the construction and continued to voice opposition to the project.

If and more likely when it’s done, Ukraine’s gas pipelines – historically the main conduit for Russian gas to Europe – will no longer be needed for this purpose. That is the entire aim of Putin’s pet project.

When that happens, the risk of a deeper Russian military invasion of Ukrainian territory (7% of which the Kremlin already controls) will grow. Ukraine has secured a five-year agreement through 2024 requiring Russia to transit at least 40 billion cubic meters of gas through the nation, for a minimum of \$7 billion in transit fees. But the Kremlin has a lousy track record of respecting agreements or international law, and a violent track record of not respecting Ukraine as an independent nation.

Blame should be spread to much of Europe, but since the U.S. position still carries weight in Europe, Biden shoulders the greatest responsibility for ultimately stopping the pipeline. Instead, he capitulated to Russia and Germany, ignoring mandated sanctions called for by Congress.

What Michael Carpenter, former top adviser to Biden, tweeted three years ago is valid today: “All these poor German companies are upset their sweetheart deals with Russian oligarchs are ending and would like the U.S. to ‘de-escalate.’ Cry me a river. Cyberattacks, invading Ukraine, and annihilating Aleppo were the ‘escalations,’ not sanctions.”

Thus far, Biden – whose election the Kyiv Post welcomed – is disappointingly shaping up as a cross between Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama, two of his Democratic predecessors, on the Kremlin appeasement front.

Obama didn’t care enough to visit Ukraine in eight years of office, or lead international sanctions strong enough to dislodge the Russians from Crimea or the eastern Donbas, where they remain seven years after the invasion.

Biden continues to talk tough against Russia but do little. This is just the latest example. Besides the Nord Stream 2 surrender, he naively failed to hold the Kremlin responsible for the Russian-based hackers that disabled a major gasoline pipeline in America. It’s a pattern: He knows Saudi dictator Mohammad bin Salman in 2018 ordered the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, but the administration sanctioned only underlings. The same with Nord Stream 2 – only second-tier sanctions adopted.

The West has it all wrong when it comes to Russia. Putin is watching the cowardice with glee. The suck-up fest between U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Reykjavik, Iceland, is the latest example. Instead of the disastrous “reset” that Biden and Blinken took part in during the Obama era, the mantra today is to seek a “stable and predictable” relationship with Russia. It’s never going to happen. Russia is run by a murderous kleptocrat who is at war against the West.

The West should, instead, adopt the approach championed by U.S. Rep. Mark Green (Republican – Tennessee). He introduced the Restraining Russian Imperialism Act bill on May 12 which sets a deadline for the Kremlin to get out of Ukraine.

“If Russia does not withdraw its military from the Donbas region in one year, my legislation requires the Biden administration to level heavy sanctions on individuals and entities involved in the occupation,” it reads.

The Ukrainian Congress Committee of America agreed: “Instead of issuing waivers for Putin’s pet project, the U.S. should strengthen sanctions and ratchet up the pressure on Russia to leave Ukrainian territory.”

U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez (Democrat – New Jersey), asks questions we’d like answered too, if the waivers stay in place:

“First, what does the administration now expect from Germany after having made this significant concession to exercise the waiver? Will Berlin strengthen its support for Ukraine in the Normandy Format? Will it provide additional assistance to Kyiv in its struggle against Russian aggression? Also, what will the administration do to bolster our relationship with Ukraine?”

Championing refugees

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees – or the UN Refugee Agency – has a big job to do in the world’s hotspots. The agency looks after the down-and-out people that too many would like to forget: refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and stateless people. For the last five years, Ukraine has been fortunate to have Pablo Mateu in charge of UNHCR Ukraine, which spent \$120 million in his time, much of it to alleviate the suffering of victims of Russia’s war against Ukraine in the eastern Donbas.

Mateu is from El Salvador, which has known more than its share of violence and war. The 25-year agency veteran took well to Ukraine. At least 1.6 million Ukrainians have been uprooted by Russia’s war. They needed homes and help. The agency also works on the Russian-controlled side, giving its workers a perspective that very few others get.

Mateu leaves with a capable replacement named – Karolina Lindholm Billing of Sweden. He also leaves with a message: Ukraine should be more welcoming of refugees and asylum seekers. In a shrinking nation of 41 million people, he notes that there are only 2,500 refugees and another 2,500 asylum seekers. Ukraine, he said, should be more welcoming. Immigrants and refugees bring benefits. Ukraine should heed his wise words.



NEWS ITEM:

An entire bus of police officers in black masks and riot gear burst into Closer, one of Kyiv’s most famous clubs and art centers, at 8 p.m. on May 16. It’s not clear what was the reason the police showed up at the former factory. According to Closer’s statement, the police beat up several employees on the territory, conducted an unauthorized search at the 2c1b club, where nothing was happening at the moment, and forced guests of various establishments to leave. The police still haven’t addressed the raid publicly.



NEWS ITEM:

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Ukraine is turning into an “antipode of Russia, into an ‘anti-Russia.’” But what meant to be an insult has been actually perceived in Ukraine as a compliment Oleh Nykolenko, spokesman for Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry, told the Ukrinform news agency that Putin’s words demonstrate that he has trouble understanding that Ukraine is an independent state on its own path.



NEWS ITEM:

An ongoing conflict between Kyiv authorities and the administration of President Volodymyr Zelensky flared up again on May 18, when Mayor Vitali Klitschko said that law enforcement tried to search his apartment. The authorities said the visit concerned a different apartment in the building and was part of an investigation into the counterfeiting of petroleum products. But Klitschko said he believed that it was an attempt to intimidate him amid his standoff with Zelensky’s office.



NEWS ITEM:

Ukraine’s parliament on May 18 fired Infrastructure Minister Vladyslav Kryklyi, Economy Minister Ihor Petrushko and Health Minister Maksym Stepanov – all at once. While Kryklyi and Petrushko resigned amicably and had the parliament approve their resignations, Stepanov fought to stay. He reportedly refused to resign, and Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal had to ask the parliament to fire Stepanov.

See these features online at kyivpost.com

Ukraine’s Friend & Foe Of The Week



Friend

Bob Menendez, head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Menendez and his fellow lawmakers are powerful voices in the U.S. legislature against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. They are trying to get President Joe Biden to stop the pipeline by imposing sanctions on German companies.



Foe

Matthias Warnig, Head of Nord Stream 2 AG

Warnig is the head of the entity that’s building the controversial pipeline. He appears to be a Russian stooge, a former East German intelligence officer, who served on the boards of numerous Russian companies.

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

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Ukraine is decisively destroying the caste of the untouchables



Iryna Venediktova

Last week, I notified two members of parliament of Ukraine of suspicion. Viktor Medvedchuk and Taras Kozak are suspected of high treason and attempted plunder of national resources in Kremlin-occupied Crimea.

One of them, Medvedchuk, is now under house arrest. The prosecutor's office is appealing against this court decision and insists on taking the suspect into custody with the right to post bail of about Hr 300 million, or nearly \$11 million. The Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine does not allow for the use of non-alternative detention in custody for crimes against the foundations of national security, as the Constitutional Court ruled, a few years ago. As for Kozak, the court authorized his apprehension for the purpose of compelled appearance for the participation in consideration of a motion for imposing a preventive measure.

I will explain the details of the procedure for notifying of suspicion in order to stop the manipulation by the defense party.

I signed the notification of suspicion on May 11, 2021. According to the rules of the Criminal Procedure Code, the notification shall be carried out on the day when it is drawn up. Therefore, investigators and prosecutors took measures to serve the suspicion on Medvedchuk. In the course of a series of searches, his whereabouts were not established. Thus, the member of parliament was notified of suspicion in accordance with, and in the manner prescribed by, the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine, i.e., it was sent by mail to his last known place of residence and place of work – to the staff of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament. Therefore, he acquired the status of a suspect on May 11, 2021.

On May 12, having arrived on summons for investigative and procedural actions, at the request of the member of parliament and his defense counsels, they were provided with a copy of the notification of suspicion, which was served the day before, for the purpose of familiarization, in order to ensure the right to defense. The compliance of the notification procedure and the substantiation of the suspicion were confirmed by the court during the selection of the preventive measure.

So what are the members of parliament suspected of?

Episode 1

Attempted plunder of resources of the Hlyboka deposit in Crimea and high treason upon transferring the deposit documents to representatives of the aggressor country. In 2014, the Russian Federation illegally annexed the Crimean peninsula, as a result of which our state lost not only its territory but also its natural resources stocks, including

those located in the exclusive maritime economic zone of Ukraine. According to experts, the value of stocks located in the invaded territory is almost Hr 2 trillion, more than \$70 billion.

Among them, there is the Hlyboka deposit located on the pre-Kerch shelf of the Black Sea. Its prospective resources in monetary terms amount to more than Hr 38 billion or \$1.4 billion. Geological exploration of this area began back in 2002. This required significant resources and financial costs.

In 2015, the suspects actually handed over the entire documentary base of the deposit to the aggressor country.

In 2012, Limited Liability Company Novi Proekty, affiliated with the suspects and registered in the territory of Ukraine, received a special permit for subsoil use of the Hlyboka deposit. Having exclusive data and documents on the mineral deposit, which would take the aggressor years to obtain, they actually started the totally illegal process of handing them over to the occupation authorities from about March 2015.

The investigation established that Medvedchuk, together with Kozak, representatives of the Russian authorities and other persons, illegally re-registered the Ukrainian company under the Russian legislation in Russia. At the same time, a "decision" was obtained from the so-called "Arbitration Court of the Republic of Crimea," which allegedly recognized the actual location of the Ukrainian company Novi Proekty LLC at the time of annexation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, although in fact the company was registered in Kyiv.

After re-registration, the order of the government of the Russian Federation granted the company the so-called "license" valid until 2046, with the intended purpose of subsoil use and types of work stated as "geological study of subsurface, survey and production of hydrocarbons."

The only thing that has currently stopped the illegal extraction of Ukrainian resources is partial crossing of the territory of Hlyboka tract with the border of the military training area of the aggressor state. In order to eliminate this obstacle, the president of the Russian Federation was given a letter from the company, asking to change the boundaries of the training area, which, according to experts, was edited personally by Medvedchuk.

What is the essence of this crime? In addition to its formal side, which provides for the very fact of cooperation with the aggressor country and assistance in subversive activities against Ukraine, it is important that without actions of Medvedchuk and his accomplices, according to experts, the process of deposit development and exploitation by the Russian Federation



Russian President Vladimir Putin's friend Viktor Medvedchuk is suspected of treason, an accusation that he denies.



Taras Kozak, Medvedchuk's partner and fellow lawmaker with the 44-member, pro-Kremlin Opposition Bloc, is also a suspect.

would take years and require significant material resources.

Episode 2

High treason involving the transfer of secret data on the Armed Forces of Ukraine to the Russian Federation

According to the investigation, in August 2020, Medvedchuk sent secret information about the location of a hidden military unit of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, its personnel and military training to Kozak, who was in Russia at that time. The information, which is a state secret, has been transferred by him to the secret services of the Russian Federation. Such actions inflict damage to the state's defense capabilities and are subversive activities against Ukraine.

Episode 3

High treason involving assistance in conducting information war through the project Promin

The investigation has also established that the suspects have assisted a foreign state in subversive activities against Ukraine by waging an information war. In 2020, members of parliament took part in finalizing the program Project Promin developed by the Russian authorities, the purpose of which was to gain the opportunity to manage events in Ukraine. The project was aimed at forming a network of agents of influence, the population stratum loyal to the Russian Federation, promoting and lobbying political, geo-economic and other interests of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, taking management, economic, political decisions favorable for the Russian Federation. Again, according to the conclusions of

the examination, handwritten corrections in the text of the program were made by Medvedchuk.

Financing of terrorism?

Criminal proceeding on these facts began in March 2021. The notification of suspicion to the MPs is only a starting point, the investigation and collection of evidence of illegal actions, as well as the identification of all involved persons continues.

In addition to this criminal proceeding, we are working in a number of cases on the facts of possible illegal activities of these MPs, including on financing of terrorism.

Iryna Venediktova is the prosecutor general of Ukraine. She took office in March 2020. She is a former acting head of the State Investigation Bureau and ex-chair of the Committee on Legal Policy of the Verkhovna Rada. ☞

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Fired Kryklii was given 2 years to fix Ukraine's ailing infrastructure

By Natalia Datskevych
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Vladyslav Kryklii was in his early 30s when he became the minister of infrastructure.

The young official took office in 2019, inheriting the mantle of managing — and trying to improve — thousands of kilometers of poor roads, bad railways, and an aviation industry knocked low by the pandemic.

He also had to grapple with over a dozen outdated seaports, weak inland waterways and six giant river locks in critical condition, threatening ecological disaster.

Such a legacy promised endless work for him.

Two years later, Kryklii remained full of energy and ambition to change what he called “the infrastructure wardrobe” of Ukraine. He was afraid of only one thing — that he wouldn't have enough time.

“Time is the most expensive resource,” said Kryklii. “We need to change quickly what should have changed a long time ago.”

He was right about that.

Two weeks after Kryklii spoke with the Kyiv Post, President Volodymyr Zelensky showed him the door; parliament officially dismissed him on May 18.

Leaving office, Kryklii thanked his colleagues for supporting his dreams despite all challenges. “I definitely don't say goodbye to the infrastructure family, it is in my heart,” he said.

Searching for a ‘rock star’

“A state within a state.”

That's what Kryklii called Ukraine's state-owned railway monopoly Ukrzaliznytsia, when he spoke to the Kyiv Post in his last interview as minister.

The country's railway monopoly, which transports 306 million tons of cargo a year, needs an effective chairman like never before, he said. The company ended 2020 with a net loss of \$425 million — the worst result in five years.

The company has changed several CEOs and acting heads over the past two years, making scandals around high-profile layoffs common at the company. Even, now the giant that employs a staggering 250,000 peo-

Oleg Petrasjuk



Then Minister of Infrastructure of Ukraine Vladyslav Kryklii speaks with the Kyiv Post on April 29, 2021 in his office in Kyiv. It was his last interview as minister. Two weeks after Kryklii spoke with the Kyiv Post, President Volodymyr Zelensky showed him the door; parliament officially dismissed him on May 18.

ple doesn't have a CEO.

The Cabinet of Ministers fired the last one, Volodymyr Zhmak, in March after Ukrzaliznytsia's supervisory board dismissed him abruptly. Zhmak was in charge for just six months.

“His mistakes are the reason,” said Kryklii.

Zhmak allegedly lobbied billionaire oligarch Rinat Akhmetov's interests, renting half of Ukrzaliznytsia's freight cars — around 9,000 — to his Metinvest's cargo company, Metinvest Shipping, for a knock-down price.

Metinvest now pays just \$155,000 a day for using the wagons, while the list price should have been \$252,000 a day. The company will enjoy this low price until 2024.

Kryklii believes that the new railway head will have to have a “startup approach” and resist the influence of oligarchs. The new chairman must “be zealous in changing the company,” he said.

“A person who will change the

Ukrzaliznytsia will be a ‘rock star.’ It is a very difficult task as there will be a lot of resistance, and he will have to step on a lot of toes.”

Kryklii said Ukrzaliznytsia plans to have a new head by September 2021.

New rail purchases

There are nearly 280 diesel locomotives in Ukraine and some 1,390 electric ones, but 95% of them are in bad condition.

This year the state will purchase three diesel locomotives and 100 new passenger cars, 3% of today's total amount. “Ukraine hasn't purchased that many new trains in the last decade,” said Kryklii.

He said Ukraine may soon have more electric locomotives, too, with a \$500 million agreement with France to purchase about 50–60 new locomotives from rolling stock manufacturer Alstom. These locomotives will be exclusively for the business.

The idea of launching a large-scale program of privately owned locomotives isn't going to work, Kryklii said.

In his opinion, private locomotives and lower tariffs for the use of railway infrastructure for cargo transportation, something that business has been asking for, will undermine Ukrzaliznytsia's only profitable activity — cargo transportation. Allowing this “will be self-cannibalism,” Kryklii said.

Attracting investment

Rather than trying to put massive effort into reviving Ukraine's 13 seaports on the country's mainland and numerous railway stations, the minister considered long-term concessions as a better option.

Private investors have already won concession projects in two seaports: Olvia by Qatar's QTerminals in Mykolaiv Oblast and the Port

of Kherson by Georgian-Swiss consortium Risoil-Kherson. The total investment promised is \$150 million.

“We pass the steering wheel to the concessionaires,” said Kryklii.

The now-former infrastructure minister named several more objects on the concession menu for 2021: a terminal in the Port of Chornomorsk, the Port of Berdyansk in Zaporizhia Oblast, Izmail in Odesa Oblast, and the Odesa passenger terminal.

Three smaller commercial sea ports — Skadovsk, Ust-Dunaisk, and Bielgorod-Dnistrovsky — were



already transferred to the State Property Fund for privatization.

For the railway industry Kryklii's strategy is the same — to attract more private businesses to heal outdated state infrastructure. The ministry is in a hurry to prepare railway stations for concessions in Kyiv, Khmelnytskyi, Vinnytsia, Mykolaiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv and Chop.

According to Kryklii, the state plans to attract around \$100 million in investments for the country's busiest railway station in Kyiv alone.

His favorite example is Austria's railway station in Vienna, where on some days, nearly 60% of visitors come to shop and relax — not to travel.

Revitalizing waterways

Another top priority for the infra-

structure ministry is modernization of the old locks, built during the Soviet Union along the Dnipro River, Ukraine's main water artery.

“They are dilapidated. The oldest one was built in 1961,” Kryklii said. “If a lock breaks, water can flood more than one region, causing an environmental disaster.”

To fix them, every year, the ministry will be taking \$20 million from the State Road Fund. Overall, the major repair will cost some \$120 million for the state.

Outdated locks currently cannot let through enough ships and cargo barges, a type of transport that is gaining popularity among grain exporters as an alternative for road and rail transportation.

Aviation rescue operation

The pandemic brought entire industries to their knees. One of the victims was Ukrainian aviation.

Aviation can survive, Kruklii said, but a few steps should be made first.

The government will lift value added tax for domestic flights, which will decrease ticket prices and attract customers. “After long-heated discussions, we found common ground at all political levels,” said Kryklii. “This is an opportunity to fly more.”

This year Ukraine also expects to sign an “open sky” agreement with the European Union. A common aviation area will add more opportunities for commercial flights for Ukrainian airlines.

Right now Ukraine is building its first airport since 1991 near the city of Mukachevo in western Zakarpattia Oblast, close to the borders with Slovakia and Hungary. Kryklii believes that it will be ready in three years.

No inspectors, no bribes

Digital technologies are the most effective tool to prevent corruption, Kryklii said.

One of his best examples is a joint project with Ukrainian police to launch speeding cameras. “Cameras work, speed is measured, fines are issued,” he said.

The next project on his mind is to spread weight-in-motion systems throughout the country to detect overloaded trucks and protect roads from damage.

There are 41 such systems set up in Ukraine, six of which are located on the entrance roads to Kyiv. By the end of this year, there will be 100 of them, the former minister said.

The mass launch of the weight-in-motion system will also mean inspectors won't be on the roads soliciting bribes. The system will make a lot of inspectors redundant: Instead of about 200 of them, there will be 10–15 techies in a data center.

“There will be no contact (with an inspector). I really like these things, they are the most effective way to fight corruption,” he said.

After Kryklii was dismissed, he didn't specify where he's going next, but it seems he may stay in politics. “Let's leave room for intrigue. Everyone will learn about it one day,” said Kryklii. ☺

Oleg Petrasjuk



An aerial view of a new bridge in Zaporizhia, a city 500 kilometers southeast of Kyiv, is seen on March 23, 2021.

Zelensky — leaner and meaner, or Don Quixote?



Bohdan Nahaylo

I've just watched President Volodymyr Zelensky's press conference on the second anniversary of his inauguration as the sixth president of independent Ukraine.

I leave it to reporters and analysts to provide the details. Here are my general impressions and thoughts.

The press conference itself, its open nature, and the readiness of the president to face around 100 journalists — friendly, hostile, domestic and foreign — was a reaffirmation that democracy, however incomplete it might still be, is alive and flourishing in Ukraine.

Nearly 30 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this cannot be said about most of the new independent states that emerged from it. Ukraine's orientation remains unambiguously European and Western, that is antipathetic to the Eurasian, or rather "Russian world" model, that Russia's President Vladimir Putin seeks to impose on his neighbors.

The press conference also confirmed that Ukraine does indeed have — like him or not — a very original and unconventional leader. A political maverick of sorts. Self-confident, strong-willed, with his own peculiar style alternating between studied tact and shooting from the hip.

Two years on, we saw a leaner, meaner, Zelensky. But still idealistic and crusading, as in the character Holoborodko that he played as a sophisticated comical actor in the satirical series "Servant of the People" which won him fame and made his stab at the Ukrainian presidency possible.

After the bumps he's received and lessons he's supposed to have learned, Zelensky does not seem to have lost any of his initial zeal for his declared mission: to be the architect of meaningful change. To construct a new "dream" country, as he put it at the beginning of the press conference, without pausing to consider

whether this sounds naive or not.

Speaking without notes, the president took questions on a broad range of subjects, from the obvious domestic issues to those connected with foreign relations, and especially the conflict with Russia. Although some of his responses were vague or evasive, he nevertheless displayed an impressive mastery of his vast presidential brief and was seldom short of words.

Overall, it was another virtuoso performance by someone who had until recently been dismissed by many as a political incompetent, if not illiterate. There seemed to be little that was pure rhetoric from a politician with dramatic skills playing to the national and international audiences, but rather a genuine attempt to convey what he thinks and wants.

President Zelensky was confident, even upbeat. He apologized for little, and his key message seemed to be that with his having declared war on the oligarchs, the country has turned a corner. Acknowledging that considerable problems had been encountered with dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, he stopped short of acknowledging any mismanagement. In short, he maintained that better, if still difficult, days are ahead.

Indeed, he was in a fighting spirit and did not mince his words as to his main message. "I will bring to an end the epoch of the oligarchs," he declared. It is not simply about introducing new laws aimed at clipping the wings of the oligarchs, but putting them in their place, if they cooperate, as businessmen but stripped of their current nefarious influence over the media, politics, and economics, and legal system. The battle to achieve this, he declared, has been launched and there will be no going back.

So far, the main target has been the oligarch fifth-columnist Viktor Medvedchuk. But Zelensky made it



Volodymyr Petrov

Volodymyr Zelensky speaks during a three-hour press conference on May 20, 2021, at the Antonov aircraft manufacturing company in Kyiv, marking his second anniversary as president.

clear that Ihor Kolomoisky, Dmytro Firtash, Rinat Akhmetov and Petro Poroshenko would not be overlooked.

He advised the journalists to be patient and that his campaign against the oligarchs, including the new radical legislation that he has proposed for this end, will soon produce other significant results.

Zelensky acknowledged that he had made some mistakes with his appointments and the way in which his political party had been hastily cobbled together. He asked for understanding and to be excused.

The president expressed the hope that the experience had brought lessons that will be heeded and that an "evolutionary cleansing" of the Servant of the People party has thereby been set in motion.

When asked if would consider bringing in "experienced" former prime ministers such as Yulia Tymoshenko, Volodymyr Groysman and Arseniy Yatseniuk, to help his team, he replied, basically, thank you, but no thank you.

Summarizing his vision of the

task ahead, the president said that a new modern country needs to be built, without corruption, based on principles of equality, a credible legal system, thriving business operating within the law, and a strong defense capacity to withstand external threats. A country that people would want to remain in, or move to, rather than leave, as remains the case.

The president acknowledged indirectly that his hopes to end the war with Russia had proved illusory but stressed that he would continue to do everything possible in this respect, including seeking a direct involvement of Washington and, if necessary, a one-on-one meeting with Putin.

Zelensky answered questions for about three hours, often under direct or implicit attack. Clearly, this was a long time even for him. In the second half of the event the strain and fatigue began to show: he was more visibly irritable and at times brusque.

Nevertheless, even as his closest aides watched nervously from

the back of the audience, Zelensky managed to hold his own and came across as a resolute, uncompromising, figure determined to push ahead with his mission.

At times, he himself hinted that he understood the virtually Quixotic nature of the task he has set himself. "I can't fight against the whole world," he said, exasperated, at one point. "It is difficult to wage such a battle in a country with corruption built in at all levels."

Does Zelensky fully realize the formidable power of the very real windmills that he is tilting at and whether he and the Sancho Panzas in his administration and parliament are properly equipped for this decisive trial of strength?

I came away hoping they are, but nevertheless somewhat unsure. But, as Zelensky would probably say, there is no alternative and no more time to be lost. So fingers crossed, and onward.

Bohdan Nahaylo, an author and journalist, is a frequent contributor to the Kyiv Post. 🇺🇦

Zelensky takes on Akhmetov, Poroshenko, Klitschko and more during press conference

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"If I knew who the killers were, I would have done everything, even beyond what the law allows, to have them arrested immediately," he said.

Surprisingly, Zelensky answered positively when asked about one specific agency's possible involvement in the murder.

"Yes, I think there is a possibility that the counterintelligence unit (of SBU) was involved," he said, not going into detail.

On Poroshenko

Zelensky didn't miss a chance to attack his predecessor, Poroshenko.

He said that Poroshenko was trying to strike a deal with Zelensky — he didn't specify what it was.

"He's not trying anymore," said Zelensky. "They all want to make deals with me. It's a staple in Ukrainian politics."

Poroshenko "did many things that are really horrible. We know what he did and for whom. I know that it was happening every day. It's a nightmare, what they were doing. I don't

want to talk in detail about their dealings, their business, how they used artificial blockades to make money. There was a lot of everything. The most horrible thing about Poroshenko is that a human being is nothing for him — and he doesn't even understand it."

On Klitschko standoff

Asked about the ongoing investigations into alleged corruption of top officials from the Kyiv City Council close to Mayor Vitali Klitschko, Zelensky denied that the investiga-

tions aimed to undermine Klitschko as a political competitor.

"My chief of staff doesn't take bribes, so we aren't competitors," said Zelensky, likely referring to Klitschko's associate Artur Palatnyi, who is under investigation.

He added that Klitschko's circle should blame themselves for the investigations.

"They shouldn't have stolen money from the budget," he said.

Charges against Klitschko's associates weren't yet made public.

"In the past, people on my

team wanted Klitschko gone. He approached me, and I said, 'Ok, keep working, but these people around you who are reportedly stealing money from the budget, they need to go,'" said Zelensky. Klitschko allegedly didn't follow the advice.

Zelensky said that Klitschko has been trying to talk to him lately.

"He keeps texting me, calling me, coming to the administration without an invitation to meet me," said Zelensky.

Klitschko denied it later, saying he would never come anywhere uninvited. 🇺🇦

Pablo Mateu wraps up 5 years of helping Ukraine's down and out

By Brian Bonner
bonner@kyivpost.com

In a nation with a population of 41 million people, Ukraine has only about 2,500 officially recognized refugees and another 2,500 asylum seekers, says Pablo Mateu, the departing representative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Ukraine.

"That's peanuts compared to the population of this country," Mateu told the Kyiv Post in a May 18 interview. "This is a country that is draining. A lot of Ukrainians are moving to Poland, Italy, Israel. They are moving to many other countries. This country has demographic problems. Where are the people going to come from? Countries with demographic problems attract immigrants."

He thinks that Ukraine should consider welcoming many more refugees, migrant workers, and asylum seekers from around the world. In countering "the anti-refugee rhetoric" in some nations, where politicians play on fears, Mateu likes to remind about "all the good things that immigrants and refugees can bring to your country."

As it is now, the bureaucratic impediments and lengthy process for seeking asylum in Ukraine send a discouraging message that these people are not welcome. "It takes a long time to be recognized as a refugee," he said. Syrians and Somalians, in particular, are rejected "almost systematically," while Afghans fare a bit better but still face lots of rejection.

By contrast, Mateu noted, Ukrainians are largely welcomed abroad, especially in other European nations suffering from demographic issues of their own and a shortage of workers. The more that Ukrainians are exposed to people of different cultures, religions, and races, they will become "more open to living next to someone who might not look like them."

\$120 million spent

These were among the parting words of wisdom from Mateu as he wraps up a five-year assignment in Ukraine and prepares to take a long vacation in his native El Salvador, a Central American nation of 6.6 million people intimately familiar with war, violence, and poverty.

Mateu led the 120-member mission in Ukraine for the UN Refugee Agency that has raised and spent \$120 million — roughly \$24 million a year during his tenure — to help the nation's 1.6 million people displaced by Russia's war, as well as attend to the legal and other needs of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and stateless persons.

The work involves providing material assistance, such as livelihood grants to refugees and asylum seekers, as well as cash support to some displaced persons and the rehabilitation of houses in the eastern Donbas on both sides of the war front. But a lot of the work involves ensuring legal rights and protections for the dispossessed people that the agency serves.



Pablo Mateu, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative in Ukraine speaks with Kyiv Post on May 17, 2021.

The UNHCR is one of the few international relief agencies that have permission to work on both sides of the contact line — in the Donbas areas controlled by the Ukrainian government and those run by Kremlin-backed proxies in eastern Ukraine.

On the other side

Consequently, Mateu has made many trips to Russian-supported Donetsk and Luhansk before managing to build trust with the de facto authorities and convince them that the UNHCR mission is "strictly humanitarian" and "we are there to help alleviate the consequences of the conflict."

In Donetsk, the authorities are "more straightforward" than the ones in Luhansk, where UNHCR encounters more restrictions. There have been "a few situations where colleagues have been summoned to go and explain what they're doing, but not that many." An example of a recent problem: A convoy unloading building materials to repair houses in Donetsk was running late, so authorities blocked it from crossing back into the Ukrainian government-controlled side. It took most of his Friday night, but he and colleagues were able to work their contacts so that the convoy could return home the next day.

Mateu treads cautiously when asked whether it's clear the Kremlin is controlling everything in the occupied territories. He said that while the Russian Federation supports the de facto authorities there and that the UNHCR calls on Russia for help in resolving problems that arise, he is not sure whether the Kremlin's intervention is always decisive. "It's difficult to say," he said.

When he first visited the Donbas, the Russian-supported areas were suffering economically more than they are today, at least visibly.

"In 2016, it was quite depressing.

There were very few vehicles on the road, many shops closed, a lot of damaged buildings," he recalled. "Now it's slightly different. There are vehicles on the road, people on the streets, new businesses that have opened up." Still, "people tell us the situation is not good economically — very few employment opportunities, lot of elderly persons because a lot of young people have moved to the government-controlled side of Ukraine or gone to the Russian Federation to look for jobs. Donetsk is a beautiful city. The center looks very nice with restaurants and bars. As you start going towards the suburbs, the situation is different. The roads are in a state of disrepair. They are now making an effort with funding from the Russian Federation."

By contrast, on the Ukrainian government-controlled side, "the roads are really much better. They have been repaired. There are parks, businesses, restaurants. They realize that on this side, things are improving and (the Kremlin-backed authorities) probably realize they have to do something on the other as well or people will leave there."

As for when Russia will end its eight-year war, which has killed 14,000 people, Mateu says it's anybody's guess. "It's complex and highly political," he said.

Grandson of immigrants

It took a while for him to decide on a career path, but some defining experiences led Mateu on the path to humanitarian aid work.

First of all, there's his multilingual, multiethnic make-up. His paternal grandparents are from the Catalan region of Spain, while his maternal grandparents hailed from Italy. Both sets emigrated to El Salvador — the paternal side because of the Spanish Civil War, the maternal side because of poverty.

He also draws from Salvadoran bloodlines, making for "a rather

unusual childhood. We were basically raised with three different cultural streams. Food was a combination of Spanish, Italian and Salvadoran food. We were eight children, always had a crowded house. It was good to grow up in a big Catholic family."

His upbringing made him conscious of how immigrants are treated in El Salvador. He noticed that immigrants from Europe, like his family, were more welcomed than others.

"If the grandparents were from the Middle East or Asia, maybe the welcoming wouldn't have been so positive," he said. "There was discrimination against the Middle East. In Latin America, they're called 'Turks' — a pejorative term — because when they started arriving they had passports from the Ottoman Empire. Asians — people call them Chinese, even though they may be Korean and Japanese. It shows discriminatory practices. Not everybody was welcome."

His education at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, sealed his career choice. He studied the situation "in different Latin American countries that were forcing people to leave and took an interest in refugees." He did summer research in Belize, working on a development project for Salvadoran refugees where he learned about "some of the barriers to integrating refugees and people from other parts of the world."

He joined the UNHCR more than 25 years ago. His career has taken him to missions in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia and Latin America.

"That makes me a generalist," he said. "For me, it's an advantage; others see it has a limitation." He realizes the United Nations is a "very particular, very bureaucratic" organization where "you have to watch what you say and how you say it."

El Salvador

His homeland is "a very violent country." He compares his people to Lebanese, who are "friendly and welcoming, but also prone to violence." There are many reasons for El Salvador's condition. "We are an overpopulated country. It's been a very unjust country. We have a lot of people who are extremely poor and people who have money. There is a lot of social exclusion which can lead to violence."

He said criminal street gangs became popular because they "provided some sort of inclusion." He said gangs are "attractive to young people who don't see a way out, either because they don't have the means to continue studying, or they cannot find gainful employment. You go into a system that provides an income even if that income is earned in a very illegal manner."

And El Salvador suffered a terrible civil war, from 1979 to 1992, that killed more than 75,000 people. The nation only gained its independence from Spain on Sept. 15, 1821.

Mateu said that while some blame Spanish authoritarianism or American imperialism for El Salvador's problems, "more recently we have come to terms that a lot of our problems are of our own making. There is more recognition that we have to find solutions and cannot blame other people for our problems."

Next step

Mateu will leave Ukraine later this month, "going home to rest" and waiting to see where the UN Refugee Agency sends him next. At home to greet him in San Salvador, the nation's capital, are his 86-year-old mother and four of his siblings; two other siblings are in America; one died.

While he could retire, he believes he "still can contribute to the organization," in work that he finds satisfying, helping people who need help. "When I went home in the evening, I felt that I accomplished something that day."

He leaves thinking well of Ukrainians, saying he recommends that his international colleagues hire them because "you won't regret it." During his life journey, he's pick up six languages — Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, French, Italian and English. But he regrets not getting a handle on the Ukrainian language, saying the knowledge would have made him more effective.

He has his fan club in Ukraine and those who will miss him.

On Facebook, ex-Canadian Ambassador to Ukraine Roman Waschuk wrote: "Pablo is kind, balanced, and unflappable. Just the guy you want in your corner as a refugee or internally displaced person." Wrote longtime expatriate Paul Niland: "A great shame that Pablo is leaving Ukraine. I've got to know him over the last few years and am sad to see him go." 🇺🇸

Ambulances don't come to the Donbas village of Travneve

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They held on in their little old house in Travneve, a small Ukrainian-controlled village near the Russian-occupied city of Horlivka, 600 kilometers southeast of Kyiv.

Living with a war in their backyard was hard. Thankfully, armed clashes between the Ukrainian army and Russian-led militants that started in 2014 thinned out over the years.

But recently, new trouble came to the war-weary village.

In late March, Kateryna suddenly fell ill. Her neighbors did not know what to do — ambulances don't come to Travneve, which is a 10-minute walk away from occupied territory. The villagers did all they could to bring the old woman to the nearest clinic but she did not survive for more than a few days.

One after another, the people of Travneve started developing a severe cough, muscle pain, shortness of breath, and high fever. From medical leaflets left by international organizations, they realized it was COVID-19.

After sweeping through the world for over a year, the coronavirus pandemic has finally made its way to this remote place at the edge of the war. In a matter of days, the disease hit more than a quarter of the local population and claimed two lives.

Now, together with the nearby village of Hladosove, this community of nearly 100 people is one of the worst zones of infection in the region. As of late April, it had 30 active COVID-19 cases.

The war has cut these and many other villages off from emergency medical care and government support. In their isolation, the people of Travneve and Hladosove have almost no one to depend on except each other.

Road of life

Getting to Travneve requires a decent crossover vehicle.

The dirt trail runs south through lonely fields and wood lines, briefly interrupted by rare hamlets. The closer it gets to the front line, the less life there is until there's nothing but a dull wasteland. Mud and potholes ensnare vehicles. The path is flanked by dozens of signs painted with red skulls and the words "Halt! Landmines!"

This is the only way into town. Locals call it "the road of life," even though it can kill them.

In fact, this trail does not officially exist. Only a couple of years ago, Donetsk Oblast authorities decided to create a path through the wild fields contaminated by unexploded munitions.

The village of Travneve consists of just one lane of simple single-story houses. Some gates are marked with a sign that the house is inhabited.

The village has no general store, access to public transport, healthcare, or phone connection.

This desolation is due to the fact that Travneve is part of the Horlivka municipality and, before the war, relied on the city's amenities. Now the city is in the hands of Russia-



Social workers with United Nations-supported charity Proliska provide an elderly woman with humanitarian aid in a Donbas front line village of Travneve on April 27, 2021.

Volodymyr Petrov

backed militants. The pre-war roads linking the village with the Horlivka suburbs are blocked by the front line and landmine belts.

"The (central) lane is empty," points out Inna Chizh, a local woman.

"In a more ordinary time, we all try to get out in the street, see each other, have an active social life. But now, everyone is staying indoors all the time. People are afraid. They hope to wait out the disaster."

Chizh is the town's only social worker, supported by the United Nations-related charity Proliska. She's in her 40s and is considered part of "the youth" in the village where almost everyone is at least 70-years-old — the age group most vulnerable to COVID-19.

The Donetsk Oblast has reported over 84,000 COVID-19 cases, including 1,900 deaths, since the pandemic outbreak in early 2020. This doesn't include the territories occupied by Russian-led militants.

Until recently, the disease had spared the remote isolated towns. Many believed that the global pandemic would not come for them.

In late March, one year after the pandemic hit Ukraine, COVID-19 finally came to Travneve and Hladosove. After a routine community meeting, over 20 people fell sick within just three days.

Apart from usual COVID-19 symptoms, many couldn't walk due to severe leg pain and faintness. Others suffered renal impairment. Community life became paralyzed in an instant, which was disastrous for people who could not rely on ambu-

lance services or even phone calls.

Those who had relatives in the rear managed to hire vehicles and evacuate the sickest people. But local doctors fighting the third and most severe wave of the disease were being forced to choose which patients to save.

Two people died. The virus didn't stop there.

Painful solitude

On April 18, the nearest hospital in the town of Svitlodarsk, 10 kilometers to the east, saved the life of an 80-year-old woman from Travneve, having given her its last reserve bed.

Another hospital in the regional center of Bakhmut, was also overwhelmed.

Many people in Travneve and Hladosove who weren't lucky enough to get a hospital bed had to endure the disease at home, often by themselves.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, a doctor from the nearest medical station in the village of Novoluhanske used to visit the town at her own initiative every several weeks. But she, too, got sick and was hospitalized in Kharkiv.

Social worker Chizh and a handful of local women had to take care of the sick, even though Chizh also had pneumonia.

The supply shortage didn't help. Most essential drugs were delivered by charity workers through "the road of life."

Chizh and her assistants, who never had any medical training, had to administer antibiotic injections

prescribed remotely by doctors in the rear.

"We walked from house to house, asking our sick and healthy people to stay home all the time," Chizh.

"I leave a pack of drugs and food at a window, and that's it. As it is written in COVID-19 brochures, there needs to be as little social contact as possible."

The loneliness of social distancing amplified the locals' isolation. The disease took away what joy the locals took from sharing feelings with their fellow townfolk, many of whom they've known for decades. Those who still have next-door neighbors resorted to yelling to each other from behind a fence, just to socialize.

Some were hit harder than others. When 76-year-old Oleksandr Osyayev lost his wife Kateryna, the townsfolk tried to keep her death a secret to spare his weak heart. But as if sensing his loss at a distance, Osyayev decided to end his life. Chizh, who looked after the man, once found a noose in his belongings and took it away before he could use it.

When 78-year-old Ivan Bondarenko became the second person in the village to die of COVID-19, his son also attempted suicide.

The recent outbreak has already caused more deaths than the war, which in seven years has killed one local and wounded two.

Mutual support

By late April, Travneve and Hladosove still had 30 active cases.

The townsfolk believe the worst is behind them, although many who

recovered are still suffering from long-term effects. Recently, a nurse from Novoluhanske resumed weekly visits to the village.

The community is continuing its self-imposed quarantine.

"What I am really glad about is that we've managed to stay all in this together, even though we had to self-isolate," Chizh says.

"There was no anger against each other, no accusations, no attempt to prioritize self over others. If someone in town had a chance to get a car and take a sick neighbor to the hospital, we did this with no questions asked. In war, we're used to taking care of each other."

Chizh and her family survived COVID-19 in March, in the beginning of the local outbreak. Now she is continuing to visit locals who need help.

She walks through the lane among abandoned houses, making occasional stops to deliver charity aid packs. Her wards answer to her voice from behind rusty porches riddled with artillery shrapnel.

Elderly people living at the edge of war look all the same: exhausted, dressed in tatters, but always smiling and eager to talk.

At every occupied house in Travneve, the social worker gets the same question every day:

"Any news on our chances of getting vaccinated now?"

If they lived anywhere else in Ukraine, they would have had a good chance to get vaccinated. Ukraine is actively vaccinating people above 60.

At the front-line villages with no access to healthcare, the social worker has no answer to give them. ❁

Youth inculcated with idea that Ukraine is home to 'neo-Nazism'

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their textbooks, except when accompanied by the terms "Russophobia" and "neo-Nazism," popular on Russian TV.

Trying to nurture a generation loyal to the pro-Russian regime, the occupation authorities have Russified all education, waging a massive propaganda campaign in schools and beyond.

While this campaign has turned some young people against Ukraine, the occupiers' methods are failing. Tired of war, poverty and isolation, the youth of Donbas is fleeing to the rest of Ukraine or to Russia in search of a better life.

The Kyiv Post interviewed teenagers from the occupied territories of Donbas to see how Russia's efforts to eradicate Ukrainian identity in the region affected their education and hopes for the future. All have requested to not be identified by their full names to avoid reprisals.

Russification

The Kremlin's proxies are working hard to erase all traces of Ukrainian identity from the Donbas, where the war with Russia has already killed about 14,000 people.

Kids living under occupation can no longer study Ukrainian literature,

language, or history. All have been replaced with Russia-related content or social studies about the so-called "People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk" — the self-names used by the Russia-controlled occupation authorities in their pretense at independence.

According to occupation authorities in Luhansk, high schools must try to produce graduates who "accept the traditional values of the civil society of the Luhansk People's Republic" and "recognize their involvement in the fate of the Fatherland."

An education program published by occupation authorities in Donetsk includes subjects like "Donbas Citizenship and Spirituality Lessons" and "Russia in the World."

The goal is to make students see the modern world from Russia's point of view. The citizenship and spirituality class pushes the concept of "the Russian world," according to which, carriers of Russian culture and language are spiritually connected with Russia regardless of nationality.

"Schools here just dispose of Ukrainian textbooks for recycling," Myroslava, a 17-year-old living in Donetsk, told the Kyiv Post.

Myroslava studies physically in a school in Donetsk and remotely in a



A girl waves the USSR flag during a Labor Day rally in Kremlin-controlled Donetsk on May 1, 2016, two years after Russia's military invasion of the eastern Donbas.

school in Ukraine-controlled territory. Like many other young people in Donbas, she is desperate to flee and go to a Ukrainian university.

But to get accepted into a university in Ukraine, students must pass

Ukrainian language and history tests.

The total Russification of schools in occupied territories forces students to study remotely in Ukrainian schools or find private tutors to prepare for exams.

The occupiers make it as difficult as possible for children to flee to Ukraine.

The eradication of all things Ukrainian is accompanied by routine border closures and intimidation during exam season when dozens travel to Ukraine to pass admission tests.

"I notice that my classmates start forgetting the language, it's very difficult for them to talk and write in Ukrainian," Myroslava said.

She remembers how portraits of Taras Shevchenko, Ukraine's most renowned writer, were taken down from classroom walls, replaced by portraits of Denis Pushilin — the self-proclaimed head of the occupied part of Donetsk Oblast.

"It's upsetting that our education is bad and politicized," Myroslava adds.

School bench propaganda

Children are easy to indoctrinate, and pro-Kremlin occupiers use that to their advantage.

The Grade 11 local history schoolbook published by occupation authorities denounces the EuroMaidan Revolution of 2014 that toppled the pro-Kremlin President Victor Yanukovich.

Accusing Ukrainians of xenophobia and Russophobia, the schoolbook describes pro-Russian demonstrations in Donbas on the eve of the Russian invasion but ignores the authoritarian crackdown on peaceful protests and the police violence during the revolution.

The book vilifies American politicians like John McCain and Victoria Nuland who visited EuroMaidan protesters in 2014 and supported their movement.

Ukraine, the textbook says, took a

"new nationalist turn to a Western oligarchic course" in 2014.

"It's hard to believe in another reality when you live in propaganda. Teenagers don't understand politics these days. They believe what they are told," said Anatoliy, a school teacher from the occupied territories of Donbas, in an interview with RFE/RL.

Myroslava said she routinely hears anti-Ukrainian sentiments in school.

"I feel the most pressure when I am in civics or history classes," she told the Kyiv Post.

Her history teacher argued that some Ukrainians were fascists because when he visited non-occupied Ukraine, he allegedly saw people using a ruler to measure facial features to determine whether someone was "Ukrainian enough." It's a lie that combines Russia's anti-Ukrainian propaganda and the 20th-century German Nazi's fascination with craniometry, a science that claims to predict a person's traits and intelligence based on their skull shape.

The same teacher told the class that Ukraine was created by Austria — another invention of Russian propaganda that frames Ukraine as an "artificial" state.

Myroslava said few of her classmates take these lies seriously. Her fellow 11th graders are old enough to remember Russia's invasion of Donbas in 2014 and know how to think critically.

Younger kids, however, are more vulnerable to propaganda.

Primary school kids are taught Christianity in the context of Russia.

The occupation authorities shape the identities of the youth by teaching them "the heroic past of their (Russian) people," tearing them further away from Ukraine.

And many young adults fall for the anti-Ukrainian rhetoric.

TOP 10 KYIV POST exclusives online this week

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'There are few people who enjoy living here' in occupied area

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The Student League, a group of university students organized by the education authorities in the occupied part of Donetsk Oblast, for instance, has actively pursued pro-Kremlin patriotic initiatives.

In May this year, the league, along with two other student groups, created an art installation, "The Land of Heroes." Student activists drew portraits of famous military commanders of separatist battalions in Donbas and self-proclaimed leaders of occupational authorities.

Three months ago, when protests in support of the jailed opposition leader Alexey Navalny swept through Russia, the Student League posted a video address to Russian students. In it, the league's members said that the EuroMaidan Revolution caused a "civil war" in Ukraine, warning students against protesting to avoid similarly disastrous outcomes.

"After the revolution, (Ukraine) was divided into the West and the East. Into those who bought into the lies about European standards of living and those who wanted to stay home, with Russia," one student said in the address.

The Kyiv Post repeatedly reached out to many members of the league, including its chairman, Vladimir Sukhinin, but all refused to comment.

Historical past

Donbas kids learn new traditions and celebrate new holidays created by the occupants, like the Day of the Republic in Donetsk and Luhansk.

Rallies are held on the anniversary of the 2014 "self-rule" referendum,

deemed illegitimate and unconstitutional by virtually everyone but the Russian-backed militants.

"There are all these parades and events on days that celebrate the republic, and we are forced to prepare concerts and shows," said Nastya, a 17-year-old living in Makiyivka, a city on the outskirts of Donetsk.

In Grade 10, Nastya quit her school in occupied Makiyivka and transitioned to remote learning in a Ukrainian education center.

"If you are a part of the school's student government, you have to take part in pro-DNR or Victory Day events," she said. "Few people participate in parades voluntarily, so students are brought in to make it appear crowded and popular."

The difference between Ukraine and the occupied territories is visible during Victory Day celebrations. While the rest of the world commemorates the defeat of Nazi Germany on May 8, post-Soviet states celebrate on May 9. Russia still hosts grand military parades every May 9, while many young Ukrainians prefer to celebrate on May 8, in solidarity with the West.

In occupied territories, Soviet traditions still reign. Children still parade in military uniform alongside soldiers on May 9. Some hold guns, some flowers.

Schools take students to visit local military units and have them write letters to soldiers, thanking them for their "heroism."

Some young people in Donbas accept it as their ideology.

"I am glad that in Donetsk we can freely wear the ribbon of Saint George



Children dressed as pioneers, members of the Soviet-time Communist youth organization, take part in a rally near the Russian-occupied city of Donetsk on May 26, 2016.

and be proud of our historical past," a fourth-year international relations student from Donetsk, who asked to remain anonymous because of security concerns, told the Kyiv Post.

She is an active member of the Youth Diplomacy Centre "Legatus," and a political junkie. On her Instagram page, she quotes speeches of Russian President Vladimir Putin and posts photographs from the "Russian Unity: Protection of Rights and Liberties" forum and various Russian cities.

Having spent her entire life in Donetsk, she now hopes to move to Russia for better education.

The black-and-orange striped Saint George ribbon is a symbol of military prowess and Soviet heroism in World War II. In line with its decommunization efforts, Ukraine banned the display of ribbons and other communist symbols in 2017.

"I love Ukraine deeply, it is my country... but I categorically defy its neo-Nazi tendencies," the student told the Kyiv Post, recalling how she saw a video of Ukrainian teenagers give a Nazi-style salute to World War II veterans. In fact, it was one man, who covered his face with a balaklava and saluted to a veteran in Kyiv on May 9. The video was

incident was picked up by Russian media.

She doesn't think Ukraine has a future within the European community, and thinks Ukraine shouldn't "fight like this with Russia." She also praised Russia for providing social and economic assistance to people in occupied Donbas.

Fleeing isolation

Despite the occupants' efforts, the teenagers that the Kyiv Post interviewed said that "nearly everyone" their age wants to flee the region.

"There are very few people who enjoy living here," said Nastya, who lives in Makiivka. "Regardless of whether they support Ukraine or Russia, everyone hopes to leave."

Even students who actively participate in propagandist youth groups in occupied territories try to find a better quality of life abroad, particularly in Russia.

"Most of my friends left because nothing ever gets better here," said Alexandra from Donetsk.

She is 22, and an active participant of the local movement Republican Youth Student Labor Units — groups of students who voluntarily unite to pursue "patriotic" and social initiatives.

Alexandra said she is no political expert and refused to talk about war.

Yet she eagerly listed the reasons to move out — the daily 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew, low salaries, lack of diversity in consumer goods, bad education, and the fact that Ukraine and other countries don't recognize documents issued by the occupation authorities. A "diploma" issued by the "Donetsk People's Republic," for example, may as well be a blank piece of paper.

"I have more connections with Russia just because it's easier to get there," Alexandra said. "Our local documents are not recognized in Ukraine."

Politics aside, the young generation of Donbas is tired of isolation, propaganda, curfews, poverty, joblessness, and the never-ending war.

"Those people (in Donbas) live a very different life, and it's not the life that I want," said Danylo, who moved from Donetsk to Lviv, a western Ukrainian city, in 2014, when the war started.

"I want to call this my home... but the warm feelings didn't prevail over the feelings of shame, sorrow and disgust with what's happening there," he added. "Now you just want to get away as fast as you can." ❄️

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Russia plans to mint 1 million new citizens in its occupied territories

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Now Maksym has three passports: one from Ukraine, one from Russia and one from the self-proclaimed “Donetsk People’s Republic,” the name that Russia-controlled separatist authorities give to the territory they control.

“The more passports the better,” Maksym joked before turning serious. “People do it out of despair. They just do not have another choice.”

Getting a Russian passport was a necessity for Maksym, who asked the Kyiv Post to not reveal his last name, fearing for his safety.

Over half a million people out of the roughly 3 million living in the occupied territory have received Russian passports as of early May, according to Russian authorities.

Many of them did it in the past year.

The coronavirus pandemic and the occupation authorities have made it complicated to travel from the occupied Donbas to the Ukraine-controlled territories. Meanwhile, traveling to Russia remains easy. These circumstances often force Ukrainians in the occupied areas to seek Russian passports.

The Kremlin is very happy to provide them. The Russian authorities have already announced plans to bring the number of the Donbas residents with Russian passports to 1 million by the end of 2021. Ukraine does not recognize these passports and still considers Donbas residents who received them to be Ukrainian citizens.

Russia makes it easy

Maksym was one of those who received the Russian passport reluctantly.

His Ukrainian passport became invalid in 2016 when the photo fell out and he crookedly glued it back on. When that happens, Ukrainians are required to get a new passport. But to do so, Maksym would have to travel into Ukrainian-controlled territory and go to the nearest big city, something he kept putting off.

He hasn’t had a problem until 2019, when his passport attracted the attention of the Russian-backed separatists at a checkpoint. They suspected him of spying for Ukraine

and questioned him.

After the incident Maksym decided to fix his passport, but coronavirus travel restrictions made this much more complicated than getting a new one from Russia.

“No one would have wanted that Russian passport (if not for the travel difficulty),” he said. “In the past, when people needed to renew photos in their passports, they went (to the government-controlled side) no problem.”

Five out of seven checkpoints between Ukraine-controlled and Russia-controlled parts of the Donbas are now closed. Both sides closed them in March 2020 to curb the spread of coronavirus. In November, Ukraine reopened them. However, the authorities of the occupied areas have kept their checkpoints closed, using the pandemic as an excuse.

Only two checkpoints remain open in both directions, Stanytsia Luhanska in Luhansk Oblast and Novotroitske in Donetsk Oblast. The Novotroitske one is open twice a week. Access to both is frequently interrupted and people first have to apply for e-passes to be able to cross for Ukraine-controlled territory and prove that they have a good reason for travel.

Going to Ukraine-controlled territory from Donetsk legally, through these checkpoints, is complicated. Going through Russia is easier, but it’s expensive, time consuming and against the law in Ukraine.

Entering Ukraine requires travelers either to quarantine for two weeks or do a PCR test on arrival and self-isolate until they get the result. Russia has lifted such restrictions for the residents of the occupied Donbas seeking to get Russian passports.

As a result, it’s quicker, cheaper, and simpler to get the documents done in Russia. So that’s what Maksym did.

Passports of desperation

In November last year, Maksym received a call from an officer of the local migration service who said that his Russian passport was approved and ready to pick up.

The officer booked him a seat in the bus that brought him to the neighboring Rostov-on-Don Oblast



People cross the border between Russia-controlled and Ukraine-controlled parts of the Donbas at a checkpoint next to the village of Stanytsia Luhanska in Luhansk Oblast on Sept. 12, 2019.

Volodymyr Petrov

in Russia, about 200 kilometers to the southeast of Donetsk.

“We arrived at the migration service and they kept us in until they were ready. Then they called us one by one, handed over passports, and congratulated us,” Maksym said, adding that he was among over 400 people who also came from Donetsk to pick their Russian passports that day.

He simultaneously received international passports for himself and his two-year-old child. The bus brought him home the very same day.

The same trip to Ukraine via Russia would have cost him at least four times as much, Maksym said, and he would have had to pay a fine from Hr 1,700 to Hr 3,400. Ukraine’s laws forbid crossing the border from occupied Donbas since Ukraine does not control it.

“Unfortunately, the legislation effective today holds people accountable for going from the occupied Donbas to Russia to enter Ukraine from there. After they’re fined a few times by the State Border Service, they think ‘What else can I do, but to get a Russian passport?’,” said Vira Yastrebova, a human rights activist and Director of the Eastern Human Rights Group, a non-profit organization.

Since the beginning of the year, the NGO filed over 240 lawsuits challenging fines imposed on people from the occupied Donbas who entered Ukraine through Russia.

In April, lawmakers drafted a bill that would get rid of the fines.

“We are discussing the possibility of releasing from fines the citizens of Ukraine who cross the border illegally from the temporarily occupied territories during the pandemic,” Ihor Yaremchenko, deputy Minister for Reintegration of the Temporary Occupied Territories, told the Kyiv Post.

“This proposal from the government to, say, turn a blind eye to the violation of the order is understandable from the human point of view and I support it, but from the state point of view, this sends the wrong message. This means that some can break the law and some cannot,” he added.

Russian-sponsored militants keep the checkpoints closed for a reason, Yastrebova said.

“By doing this they, in fact, deliber-

ately break connections between the occupied Donbas and the Ukraine-controlled territory,” she said. “People living in the Donbas became hostages.”

According to human rights activists, Kremlin authorities are taking advantage of the situation to issue as many passports as possible.

One of the goals Russia pursues is to attract more votes at upcoming September elections to Russia’s State Duma, one of the chambers of the country’s parliament with 450 mandates, the experts told the Kyiv Post.

Steps by the Kremlin such as organizing illegitimate elections and issuing passports to locals are “aimed at de facto integration of Ukraine’s non-governmental-controlled areas into Russia,” according to the document the EU shared with member states in mid-May seen by Bloomberg.

More passports, voters

Russia is not hiding the fact that it is about to give voting rights to residents of occupied Donbas with Russian passports.

“These 500,000 people (in the occupied Donbas) who have taken Russian citizenship will participate in the elections to the State Duma,” Andrey Turchak, the Secretary of the General Council of United Russia, the country’s ruling party, told Russian journalists on May 10.

Turchak, however, did not elaborate on how they would organize it. The Russian authorities reportedly considered bringing voters from the Donbas to Rostov-on-Don in Russia.

In fact, Russia has already decided to open polling stations in the occupied Donbas, Eastern Human Rights Group revealed on May 10, citing its sources. This would be a breach of Minsk Protocols, the peace agreements between Ukraine and Russia.

United Russia’s Turchak and fellow lawmakers visited the occupied Donbas on May 10 to take part in the celebration of the so-called republic day, when Donetsk broke away from Ukraine with Russia’s assistance, websites run by unrecognized Donetsk officials reported.

In his interviews with local media, Turchak said that United Russia will help to open playgrounds and give computers to schools of the occupied Donbas.

Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry condemned the Russian lawmakers’ visit calling it “Russian election campaign” on the eve of the September vote.

“The trip vividly illustrates the decline in support for United Russia among the Russian population, which the pro-government Russian party is now trying to compensate by involving residents of Ukraine’s temporarily occupied territories in the vote,” the Ministry’s statement reads.

“The participation of Ukrainian citizens with Russian passports imposed by the occupation administration in the elections to Russia’s State Duma will call into question their legitimacy.”

This creates “endless possibilities for falsifications,” believes Oleh Saakian, a political expert and a co-founder of Dialogue For Peace And Safe Reintegration discussion platform.

“This distribution of passports is also an increase in the electoral base for specifically the ruling power. Only the Kremlin authorities will know how many people actually voted in the occupied territories and how many were faked and who these people really wanted to vote for,” Saakian said.

“This way they can fake half a million to a million votes for particular political parties,” he said, adding that those political projects are run by veterans of Russia’s war against Ukraine.

Among them is A Just Russia – Patriots – For Truth, a political force led by Zakhar Prilepin, a Russian writer and a militant who fought against Ukraine’s army in the Donbas. Another one is Donbas Union of Volunteers, led by Russian native Alexander Borodai, a former separatist leader in the Donbas. His Union has signed a cooperation agreement with United Russia to run for elections to the county’s State Duma together.

“Do we need these elections or don’t we – I cannot understand,” said Maksym, the Donetsk resident.

He still might want to vote in the Russian election, he said.

“I mean someone might use my vote without my knowledge,” he added. “Why would anyone give up half a million votes, even if they are just fictitious.”



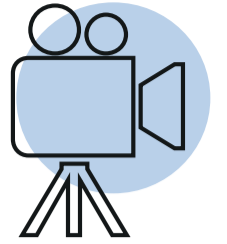
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Podil's creative community takes aim at police brutality

Courtesy



Surveillance camera footage captures a bus full of police in riot gear entering the territory of an art center at 31 Nyzhnoiurkivska St. in Podil district on May 15, 2021. The police raided the hub, which is home to several establishments including a famous nightclub Closer, allegedly beating employees and conducting searches showing no warrant.

By Elina Kent

kent@kyivpost.com

May 15 was supposed to be a relaxing Saturday evening at 31 Nyzhnoiurkivska St., a former ribbon factory that has been transformed into an art and entertainment hub.

Located in the vibrant Podil district, the location is a prime hangout for Kyiv's ravers, art lovers, youths and creatives. That night, two concerts were scheduled for 8 p.m. in two of the hub's popular venues, Closer and Mezzanine, well before the mandatory 10 p.m. closing time demanded by the city's current safety measures to curtail the coronavirus.

But the audience didn't get to enjoy the music. Instead, they saw an entire bus of police officers in black masks and riot gear swarm in and shove to the ground the first man that approached them.

The raid had begun.

Repeated raids

It's not clear why the police showed up at the former factory, which also contains the Savage Food restaurant, the zoft Radio broadcasting station,

the Tsaptsarap tattoo parlor and two more small clubs, Otel' and 2c1b.

According to Sasha Varenitsa, a promoter and music manager who was working the concert at Closer that night, the raid started at about 9 p.m., despite the organizers' explanations that the concert will wrap up before 10 p.m.

Varenitsa wrote on Facebook that the police showed no warrant when they burst into Closer, holding machine guns.

According to Closer's statement, the police beat up several employees, conducted an unauthorized search at 2c1b, where nothing was happening, and forced guests of the hub's various establishments to leave.

Nearly a week later, the police still haven't addressed the raid publicly. The Kyiv Post reached out to the police for comment on the matter but hasn't heard back.

On the same night that 31 Nyzhnoiurkivska St. was raided, several parties were happening illegally, past 10 p.m., with some held in Podil. Although there was some police presence near these events, according to witnesses, none of them faced

the same problems as Closer.

Varenitsa believes it to be abuse of power and selective justice.

"All of Kyiv sparkled with the lights of parties, events and festivals for every taste yesterday," reads his May 16 Facebook post. "In this situation, one word comes to mind: racketeering."

Sergey Yatsenko, one of the founders and commercial director of Closer, says that many establishments are open at night but avoid raids because they probably have a deal with the police. "We do not have that," he told the Kyiv Post.

This wasn't the first time the law enforcement raided Closer, as well as Otel' and 2c1b. According to Closer's statement, the police showed up at 31 Nyzhnoiurkivska St. multiple times during the pandemic, sometimes beating the center's employees.

Other venues in Podil have previously complained about police harassment as well. Keller Bar said it was raided by about 70 officers in November, with police breaking its gates and doors, putting visitors' faces to the floor, beating and undressing some of them. Another

bar, HVLV, has been experiencing police disruptions "almost on a daily basis" during the pandemic.

Increased violence

Police harassing people in Podil neighborhood is nothing new, according to Yatsenko.

The Closer director says that officers come to the area from all over Kyiv to search party-goers and "make money."

"They most often stop teenagers, 18-20-year-olds who don't know better," Yatsenko says.

The same day Closer was raided, two minors were roughly detained by police, who, according to witnesses, were listening to music on the street. Video footage published by onlookers shows officers roughly seizing one of the teens and telling him to behave better while hitting him on the head.

Another video shows an officer throwing a packet of something into a teenager's pocket while putting him into the police car. Police later stated that the officer did not throw

City Life

With Daria Shulzhenko
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6 restaurants for outdoor dining in Kyiv

After a long winter and a six-week lockdown, restaurants rushed to take advantage of the first warm days by setting up outside tables to welcome visitors on terraces and patios.

The seats were occupied in no time by Kyivans who missed slow, noisy dinners with friends and romantic dates with a bottle of wine.

The capital's streets are now flooded with outdoor tables and terraces. Yet some of them stand out with their incredible concepts and breathtaking views.

Here's the Kyiv Post's guide to some of the capital's best venues for outdoor dining this spring and summer.

Pure Naive

The wine bar Pure Naive gives visitors a chance to enjoy a picnic right in the heart of Kyiv. Located near the Universytet metro station, the venue offers its guests a seat on the green lawn nearby with a view of the atmospheric Ivana Franka Street. To make the experience as comfortable and pleasant as possible, Pure Naive supplies its guests with pillows to sit on and trays for food and drinks. There are also plenty of tables outside of the bar, where guests can stop by for a glass of wine on a balmy summer day.

Pure Naive serves a decent selection of wines and a great choice of appetizers, such as freshly baked baguettes with various flavors of butter, multiple cheeses, dried tomatoes, olives and more. There is also a great choice of entrées for both vegetarians and meat lovers, as well as desserts and non-alcoholic drinks like lemonades.

25/40 Ivana Franka St. 4 p.m. – 11 p.m. +38050 141 3331

Prychal

The summer terrace of Prychal restaurant is the perfect place to look at mesmerizing sunsets this summer.

The venue boasts an amazing view of the Dnipro River from its right bank, with the summer terrace set right above the water. Its modern design features wooden tables, bright blue sofas and lots of greenery, and can seat about 120 guests. The dimmed lighting adds to the romantic atmosphere when the sun goes down. There is also a little pier available for guests' private boats.

Prychal's versatile menu has

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Summer terraces are back, welcoming city gourmets

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something to offer for all gastronomy fans. The restaurant serves a decent choice of fish and seafood dishes including eight types of oysters, sushi rolls, soups, main courses and more. There is a great selection of wines and alcoholic cocktails to accompany entrées. Prychal also offers a specialty menu for children, making it a suitable place for both family dinners and romantic dates. Apart from the view and the great food, the venue also hosts music shows to entertain its guests.

11 Naberezhne Highway. 12 p.m. – 12 a.m. +38050 383 1212

1957 Coffee Bar

Hidden in the yards of Kyiv's historic Podil district, 1957 Coffee Bar is the renovated Kachorovska Store&Cafe. The venue, a longtime favorite of the capital, has become even better this year: The team has expanded the café's menu and renovated the summer terrace, adding greenery and new tables.

The patio here is a cozy setting in a little green lawn yard with wicker chairs, wooden tables and dimmed lights in the evening. Large white umbrellas in the middle of the yard shield the visitors from rain and sunlight.

Far from the city's fuss and buzz, this place is perfect for some quiet time.

The café was named after the year of the founding of the Kachorovska footwear business that owns it. It now serves alcoholic cocktails and wines,



People enjoy their meal as they sit on the summer terrace of Prychal restaurant in Kyiv. The eatery's terrace offers a pleasing view of the Dnipro River and is among the capital's best places for outdoor dining this summer.

as well as coffee, tea and lemonade. Its menu also includes a variety of appetizers, salads, main courses and desserts.

The 1957 Coffee Bar's terrace is also a great place to enjoy a late

breakfast, which it serves all day long. It has a wide selection of breakfast meals for all tastes, including Ukrainian cottage cheese pancakes called syrnyky, avocado toasts, eggs Benedict, salads and more.

35A Boryshiv Tik St. Mon-Thu. 9 a.m. – 8 p.m. Fri. 9 a.m. – 10 p.m. Sat-Sun. 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. +38097 987 8800

Balmelli Casual Cafe

The summer terrace at Balmelli Casual Cafe might be one of the most romantic places in the capital.

Although it is located in downtown Kyiv, near the Lva Tolstoho Square metro station, its summer terrace is hidden from the capital's bustle in a cozy little yard nearby. Balmelli's terrace is a quiet place with comfortable sofas, lots of greenery and flowers, surrounded by old buildings that shelter it from Kyiv's noise. Bad weather should not stop Kyivans from enjoying the venue's terrace since it's protected from the rain by a large canopy.

The cafe is known for its wide choice of dishes. Here, gourmets can savor a delicious breakfast, enjoy some wine with various appetizers, go with a healthy or junk meal, or try Italian and Asian cuisine. There is also a great variety of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

4A Rohndynska St. 10 a.m. – 11 p.m. +38050 297 4444

Octo Tower

Those looking for a great summer terrace with a view should definitely stop by the Octo Tower, which is not only a sophisticated coffee shop but also a co-working and education space and a photo studio.

One of its minimalistic summer terraces is located on the venue's rooftop, offering a terrific panorama of the capital's busy Mechnykova Street with business centers crossing

the horizon. Guests sipping a cup of coffee here may feel like they've been transported to New York City. There are two more cozy terraces on the tower's second and fourth floors and some outdoor tables next to the entrance, surrounded by tall green trees that provide shade on hot summer days.

Along with its interior and exterior design, the Octo Tower's menu is also minimalistic, offering a decent choice of coffee drinks, both hot and cold, as well as lemonades, teas and cocktails. The venue also serves pastry, desserts, and main courses such as sweet potato cream soup and quinoa bowl with vegetables.

5 Mechnykova St. Mon-Fri. 9 a.m. – 10 p.m. Sat-Sun. 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. +38067 490 2828

Titka Bella

Italian restaurant Titka Bella is among the busiest outdoor dining spots in Podil.

Located on the quiet Horyva Street, the venue has outdoor tables surrounded by greenery, flowers. The colorful umbrellas hanging above the tables protect guests from summer showers and sunlight.

The setting is reminiscent of a welcoming restaurant somewhere in southern Italy, as is the food. Here, visitors can taste a wide choice of "deliziosa" pizza and pasta, as well as bruschettas, salads and traditional Italian desserts such as Tiramisu and Panna Cotta. Titka Bella also has a great selection of Italian wines, all for reasonable prices.

1/2E Horyva St. 11 a.m. – 11 p.m. +38063 957 0009. 📍



Heading for Eurovision grand finals on May 22

Ukraine's Go_A performs during the first semi-final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021, at the Ahoy convention center in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, on May 18, 2021. The performance was good enough to vault the group into the finals round on Saturday, May 22. Ukraine has won two Eurovision contests — in 2004 with "Wild Dances" by Ruslana and again in 2016 with the song "1944" by Jamala.

Podil demands justice, as police violence increases on its streets

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anything into the pocket but rather was returning money that the boy had lost.

These types of round-ups have been happening more often recently, according to Dmytro Buhaichuk, a local artist and musician, who walks Podil's Kyrylivska Street every day to get to his studio.

"This past week every single day people were getting held up or arrested. One day, people were lined up in a row," Buhaichuk told the Kyiv Post.

On May 18, after finishing up a studio rehearsal, Buhaichuk and the drummer from the group said their goodbyes and parted ways. Before they could walk two meters, Buhaichuk was suddenly approached by police, he says.

An officer asked him to walk towards the car, and when Buhaichuk asked what was the reason for the approach, he says he was struck in the head. He fell to the ground and lost consciousness. He would stay there, lying in his own blood, for about three hours.

"He (police officer) was sitting on me, very painfully with his knee between my shoulder-blades, I was lying in my blood, I was scared for my life," Buhaichuk says. "I started to scream very loudly, asking for help."

And the help arrived. A crowd gathered and started to stream and videotape the events.

The police posted an official statement on their website on May 19, claiming that they had spotted two suspicious people, who started to run away upon seeing the officers.

The police says that Buhaichuk resisted arrest, with drugs falling



Paramedics treat Kyiv artist and musician Dmytro Buhaichuk, who received a broken nose from a police officer during his detention on May 18, 2021, on Kyrylivska Street in Podil district. After he was held down for three hours, according to witnesses, paramedics were finally called onto the scene to help the artist.

out of his pocket, which he denies. He's now being investigated for illegal drug possession. If found guilty, Buhaichuk faces up to five years in prison.

According to Buhaichuk, the police group did not give any reason for detaining him until the Patrol Police, which had been called by the onlookers, showed up.

In a May 19 statement, the police said it started an internal investigation into whether the officers that detained Buhaichuk abused their

power.

But that hasn't satisfied the Podil community, outraged by recent police brutality in their district.

Last straw

Buhaichuk's incident became a breaking point for Podil.

The following day, the district's creative community, including Closer, Keller Bar, HVLV and others, released a joint statement condemning the police's actions and announcing a protest. A total of 15 businesses

and organizations eventually joined in arranging the event.

Called "Let's stop the police safari in Podil!" the demonstration will take place near the district's police department on May 21.

The statement lists the police raids and acts of brutality that Podil residents and businesses experienced during the pandemic.

The organizers want to hold the head of the Podil district police, Pavlo Vasylenko, accountable. The group claims that Vasylenko is responsible

for creating the special purpose unit called Kyiv that has been violently raiding Podil recently.

"We, the creative communities of Podil, will not tolerate the arbitrariness of the police," the statement reads.

According to the statement, the Kyiv regiment was formed of former members of Berkut, a notorious riot police force that violently beat protesters during the 2013-2014 EuroMaidan Revolution.

Anna Strashok, the Podil police's press officer, told the Kyiv Post that Vasylenko had no connection to the Kyiv regiment but didn't comment further.

The protesters will call for Vasylenko's dismissal and prosecution of the officers involved in the raids of Podil businesses and Buhaichuk's detention.

"We need to start from the top," Yatsenko said, adding that they see a possibility for negotiations with law enforcement after Vasylenko is removed.

The incidents sparked outrage on social media, with many Ukrainians expressing support for the Podil community and creating protest art.

Nearly 2,000 people have marked themselves as "going" to the protest's event on Facebook, with over 5,400 people marking themselves as "interested," and more agreeing to attend each day.

Buhaichuk said he wasn't comfortable with thousands seeing him being humiliated on video. But he hopes that some good comes out of the brutal attack.

"I hope it resonates and I hope that we put them in their place." 🇺🇦

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