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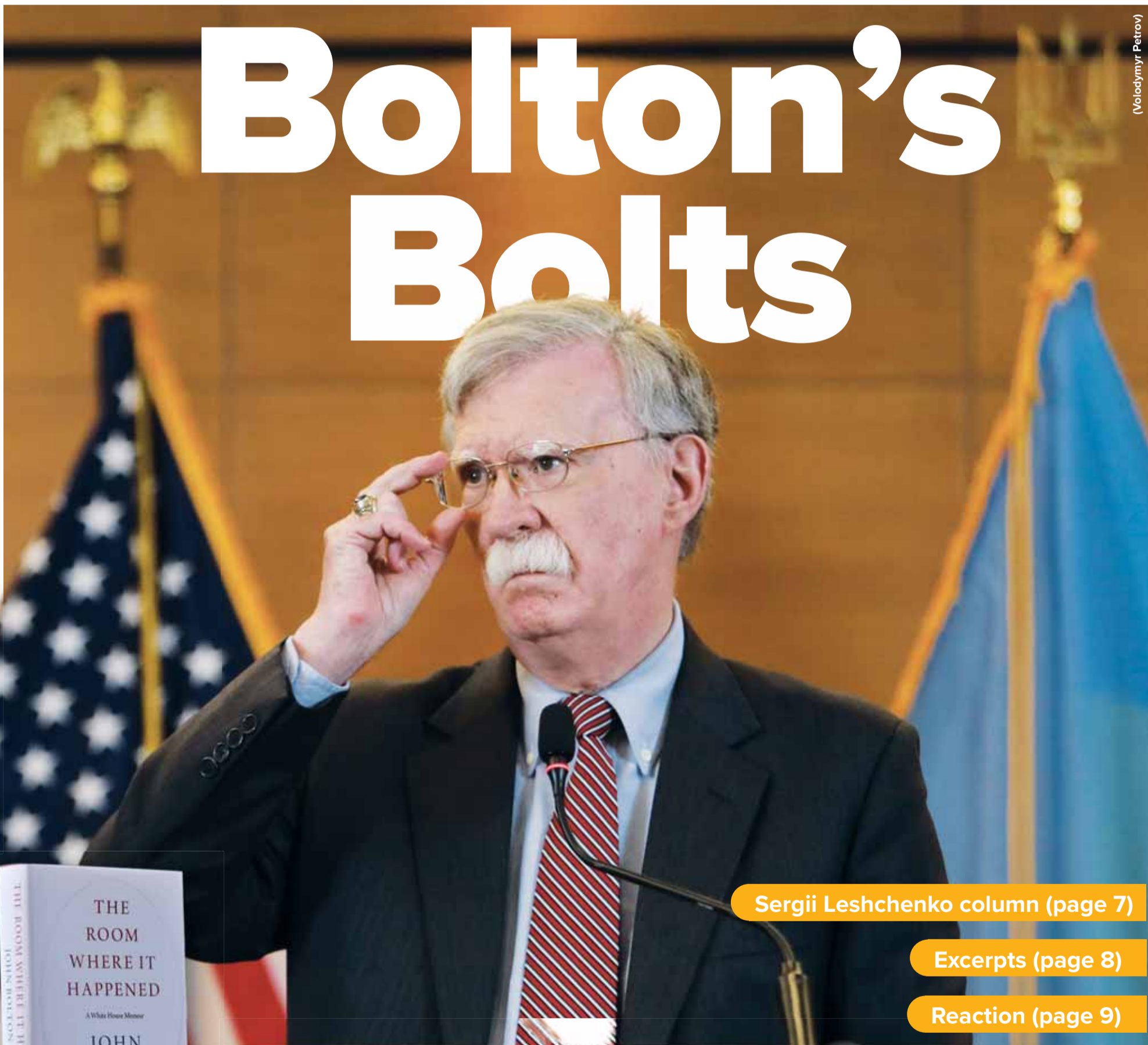
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Kyiv Post

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(Volodymyr Petrov)

Bolton's Bolts

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Then-U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton speaks at a press conference in Kyiv on Aug. 28, 2019. Less than a year later, on June 23, 2020, Bolton released his new memoir, "The Room Where It Happened." The much-anticipated and highly controversial account of Bolton's time in the White House of President Donald J. Trump portrays the American leader as self-centered, uninformed and extremely angry with Ukraine. According to Bolton, when the U.S. delegation to President Volodymyr Zelensky's inauguration on May 20, 2019 returned to Washington, Trump reportedly unleashed a profane tirade in which he said he wanted nothing to do with Ukraine and had no desire to meet with its new president.



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After coronavirus spotlight, Liashko may join politics

By Olga Rudenko
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In the past three months, Viktor Liashko had two days off.

When the novel coronavirus came to Ukraine in early March, it changed many lives. In a rather singular way, it changed Liashko's.

The 40-year-old deputy health minister became the voice of the coronavirus response in Ukraine.

In the early weeks of the lockdown, his daily briefings were the must-see source for coronavirus updates. Liashko has become the closest that Ukraine has to Anthony Fauci, the leader of the White House's coronavirus task force, and Andrew Cuomo, governor of New York, who are the prominent voices of the pandemic in the U.S.

And although he has since ceded the daily briefings to Health Minister Maksym Stepanov, Liashko remains active in coordinating the government's response to the virus, lifting quarantine restrictions and explaining it all to Ukrainians.

And there is still a lot to explain: Infections are on the rise, with every day bringing a new record — all the while Ukraine is lifting nearly every quarantine restriction.

For Liashko, the coronavirus spotlight has been both a heavy burden and an extraordinary boost for his career.

And he may be ready to use it as a stepping stone: As Ukraine reopens after the coronavirus, Liashko is rumored to be considering running for mayor of Kyiv.

Unexpected spotlight

The first thing Liashko does as he sits down on the bench in Kyiv's Mariinsky Park for an interview with the Kyiv Post is ask the journalist to move further away from him.

For him, it's less about being afraid of contracting the virus and more about leading by example.

For three months now, Liashko has been the voice of the government's response to coronavirus. He went from anonymity to one of the most persistent faces on Ukrainian television.

How did it happen? He was in the right place at the uniquely right time.

When the pandemic hit Ukraine, Liashko had just recently begun his tenure as deputy health minister. His background was in the prevention of infectious diseases. A medic



Viktor Liashko, deputy health minister and chief sanitary doctor, talks to the Kyiv Post outside the Health Ministry's headquarters in the Mariinsky Park in Kyiv on June 23, 2020.

by education, during his career he alternated between state service and the nonprofit sector, promoting vaccination and HIV treatment, among other things.

So when the threat of the new little-known virus loomed on the horizon, and Ukraine's government needed to act, heads naturally turned to him.

He became the main communicator for the government's response in February, when Ukraine was evacuating its citizens from Wuhan, then the epicenter of the virus.

The evacuation of 45 Ukrainians and 27 foreign nationals turned into a scandal

that made international headlines. In the early stage of the pandemic, when there was little understanding of how the virus spreads, or how deadly it is, several hundred locals protested the arrival of the evacuees to their quarantine site in Poltava Oblast, in a town called Novi Sanzhary. Some even threw rocks at the buses carrying the evacuees.

"We understood that there is miscommunication, that people don't understand the problem well, so we

decided to do daily briefings — first to inform about (the evacuation), then about the first case, and so on," Liashko says.

Soon he was officially appointed chief sanitary doctor — a position that didn't exist for a long time. The appointment came in early March — but Liashko doesn't even remember when it happened.

"From the moment that plane with evacuees from Wuhan landed in Ukraine, and until now, it has all been one endless process," he says.

Early success

Ukraine's early response to the coronavirus won praise.

The government started introducing quarantine measures in mid-March, when Ukraine had only a handful of cases, and just before the first death was reported.

When Liashko first heard about the new virus in January, he didn't pay much attention at first.

"It wasn't the first time a virus originated in China," he says.

But when Italy was hit, he realized that Ukraine wouldn't be unaffected. It was Italy's bad outbreak that convinced him and others in the government that Ukraine needs an early lockdown.

While Ukraine didn't go as far as some countries that banned their people from leaving home without a good reason, it did stop nearly all public transportation, domestic and international travel, schools, restaurants and entertainment venues for three months.

It proved useful: Ukraine avoided an early outbreak. In Italy, the virus has killed over 34,000 people so far. Ukraine just crossed the 1,000 death mark and ranks 81st among all countries in terms of cases per

one million of the population, as of June 25.

Liashko says he wouldn't have done anything differently. Everything was done exactly right, he claims.

"We did everything that needed to be done, everything that could be done with the resources and knowledge we had at the time," he says.

"I had no idea the quarantine would last for so long," he adds.

Denying mistakes

While Liashko is understandably proud of the success of the government's early response to the pandemic, he is equally unwilling to concede to the criticisms of its later actions.

The widespread criticism concerns flaws in the government's communication about the lifting of quarantine measures.

One example came on May 23, when Stepanov said at his morning briefing that Kyiv wasn't ready to reopen the metro due to the high number of new COVID-19 cases. Just about an hour later he backed down: Actually, Kyiv was ready and could open its main transportation channel.

It brought suspicions of political intervention, because Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko supported re-opening the metro.

But Liashko defends the ministry and tries to explain the quick change of opinion — albeit, not too convincingly.

"After the minister said the metro couldn't be re-opened, we recalculated the indicators (the infection rates) using the latest data on the number of cases," he says. "And the new indicators showed that Kyiv was fit for reopening."

The same thing happened in early June, when restaurants in Ukraine were allowed to open for indoor



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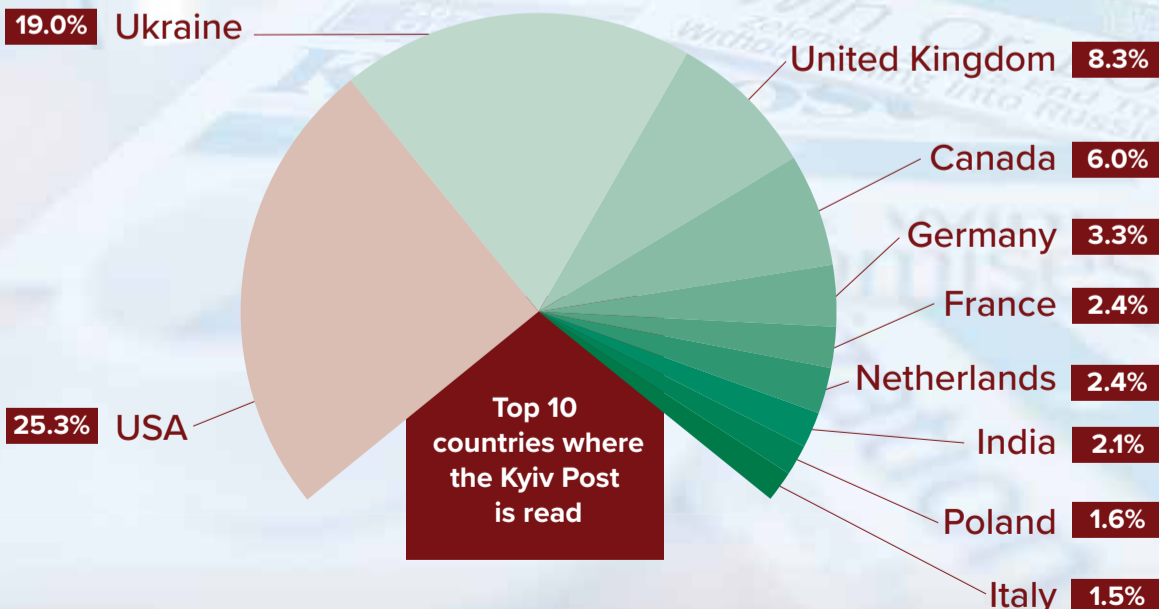


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EDITORIALS

Hating Ukraine

In his new memoir, former U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton paints a grim picture of U.S. President Donald J. Trump.

In Bolton's account, Trump appears to be deeply biased against Ukraine and unleashes a profane tirade against the country when a U.S. delegation returns from President Volodymyr Zelensky's inauguration in 2019.

Bolton's book is both a confirmation and a revelation.

We already knew that Trump is no fan of Ukraine. His actions have demonstrated this, and his former special representative to the country, Kurt Volker, admitted as much in an interview while he was still on the job. But Bolton's memoir drives home how Trump's feelings about Ukraine are on the verge of open hatred.

"I don't want to have any fucking thing to do with Ukraine," Trump rages, alleging that Kyiv tried to take him down. On Zelensky, Trump says, "I have no fucking interest in meeting with him."

And Trump has tried to avoid doing anything to help Ukraine and never invited Zelensky to the White House. Trump contends that Bolton is making it all up. That seems unlikely for a career official with extensive ties to the Republican Party. Moreover, Bolton's account jives with the broader picture.

Trump is a full-time foe of Ukraine. He conditioned nearly \$400 million of aid on the country opening a politically-motivated investigation into his opponent, ex- Vice President Joseph Biden — something Bolton confirms. He was willing to drag bipartisan support for Ukraine through the mud to improve his own re-election prospects.

He believed the conspiracy theory that Ukraine was behind Russian hacking of the 2016 presidential election and used this as grounds not to support Ukraine, even when it was in U.S. interests to do so. Virtually every decision during Trump's tenure has been driven by re-election concerns, Bolton writes.

Trump is strangely enamored with Russian dictator Vladimir Putin. Bolton believes that Putin can play Trump like a fiddle. The Moscow tyrant seems to have convinced the White House occupant of the absurd notion that Ukraine is an obstacle to friendlier U.S.-Russia relations.

Ukrainian leaders should take note. No one should expect anything good from him. Those Ukrainian politicians pushing the Ukrainian election interference conspiracy need to recognize that they are fueling a fire that was explicitly set to burn their own home down. To play Trump's political games is not just bad policy; it is anti-Ukrainian.

While Trump remains in office, Ukraine's leaders must proceed with extreme caution, aiming to benefit as much as they can from ties with the United States while not getting dragged into Trump's dangerous domestic brawls. They must try not to set off this landmine while also recognizing that there is little that they can do to defuse it. And they must continue to build strong ties with other American officials and politicians, both Democrats and Republicans. Bipartisan support dating back decades has been Ukraine's salvation. With luck, it will get easier after November.

Down with dictatorship

Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko is using the full force of his police state to remain in power. after 26 years.

Protesters are chased down and beaten, opposition leaders are arrested and tortured. But there is no more fear in the eyes of the people. They compare Lukashenko to a cockroach with a moustache and carry slippers to protests with which to "crush the cockroach."

At some point, Lukashenko jumped the shark, transforming from a powerful autocrat to an aging, soon-to-be-retired clown. He has only himself to blame.

Lukashenko has been in the news since March. When most European countries were imposing strict lockdown in the wake of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, Lukashenko was describing the pandemic as a psychosis.

Doctors recommended social distancing and staying home. Lukashenko recommended vodka, the sauna and a military parade amid the pandemic. Belarus turned into a coronavirus hotbed, with even the official statistics noting that the country has more cases per capita than Italy and Spain.

Lacking basic protective equipment, doctors died on the front line. Meanwhile, on TV, Lukashenko advised people not to overreact and claimed medical workers are well-equipped.

The stability that Lukashenko sold to the public is gone.

With each new step Lukashenko has taken, it seems that he is betting against himself. Lukashenko promised no one would die and, when morgues filled up with people who died from pneumonia, the out-of-touch dictator began mocking the dead.

Now, the presidential elections — which European officials usually describe as a farce — have turned into an active protest.

With no real chances of defeating Lukashenko, people gathered on the streets in support of change. After the police began cracking down on those demanding change, new protests erupted demanding the release of those held prisoner.

It's odd that Lukashenko didn't know how this would end.

In November 2013, Ukraine's Berkut riot police stormed the peaceful protest camp on Maidan Nezalezhnosti in central Kyiv, brutally assaulting a few hundred demonstrators. Officials claimed that the protesters were blocking the mounting of a Christmas tree.

The next day, thousands showed up at Maidan, beginning the active phase of the Euromaidan Revolution, which led to the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovich, a far less experienced autocrat.

Lukashenko has already had his Christmas tree moment. The Belarusian dictator will certainly win the upcoming elections. He'll brag about his strong victory on TV and mock his own people who didn't support him. But as everyone in Belarus found out during the pandemic, state TV is lying.

Lukashenko himself will realize that soon. Unfortunately for him, it will be too late.

NEWS ITEM:

Former U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton published a memoir in which he said that President Donald Trump doesn't like Ukraine. Bolton quotes Trump as saying, "I don't want to have any fucking thing to do with Ukraine. They fucking attacked me. I can't understand why... They tried to fuck me. They're corrupt. I'm not fucking with them." As for a meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Trump said, "I have no fucking interest in meeting with him." At the same time, Trump fawned over Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as other authoritarian leaders.



NEWS ITEM:

Hurriyet, the newspaper with the highest circulation in Turkey, published a story about Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenska contracting COVID-19. But instead of a photo of Zelenska, the publication used a photo of another woman, actress Vera Brezhneva, caressing Zelensky. This photo was taken from the 2016 film "The Best 8 Dates" starring Zelensky and Brezhneva.

NEWS ITEM:

Mykola Tyshchenko, lawmaker from the ruling Servant of the People party, arrived at a building in Kyiv where an explosion — likely caused by a gas leak — had destroyed five out of 10 floors. Tyshchenko brought lemons and was handing the fruit to victims of the explosion. Nobody knows why. Before that, several weeks ago, in an attempt to appeal to Kyivans, Tyshchenko posted pictures of sandboxes at playgrounds that he ordered to fill with sand. Some of the sandboxes were overfilled with sand as a result.



NEWS ITEM:

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on June 23 joined a secret Viber group for nearly 18,000 local truck drivers, who coordinated in the messenger to avoid police officers on the roads and thus be able to illegally use the roads that aren't designed for heavy trucks. Consequently, Zelensky posted a video in the group chat in which he called the drivers "bastards".



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Ukraine's Friend & Foe Of The Week



Friend

Paul A. Goble
The Staunton, Virginia, author of the "Window on Eurasia" blog brings a wealth of knowledge to his columns exposing Kremlin lies and crimes. Recent columns have highlighted how Vladimir Putin has become even more aggressive as his popularity wanes among Russians.



Foe

Fabrice Fries
The chief executive of Agence France-Presse leads a news agency (to which the Kyiv Post subscribes) that annoyingly still spells the Ukrainian capital as "Kiev" and calls Russia's war "a civil conflict" in Ukraine.

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In war-torn Syria, Kremlin blocks UN assistance to those in need

By Illia Ponomarenko

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When it rains in Syria, it pours at full blast.

As if at least 380,000 deaths of decade-long civil war, extreme poverty, and economic collapse were not enough, the ill-fated Middle Eastern nation is now facing impeded international aid amid COVID-19 pandemic.

Again, what stands in the way of more United Nations convoys bringing in more medical supplies for suffering civilians is Russia, a top ally of dictator Bashar al-Assad.

Now, apart from never-ending fighting on the ground, a new battle unfolds in the United Nations diplomatic venues: Maintaining and reopening few UN humanitarian lifelines into Syria blocked by the Kremlin, which is interested in exhausting the last rebel-held strongholds into surrender.

For international organizations, it is vital that humanitarian corridors from Turkey and Iraq remain open for aid convoys that would save thousands of lives while the situation daily grows even more gruesome.

And approval awaits only the UN Security Council, meaning that Russia is expected to use its veto again as a weapon of war and kill the initiative.

Aid impeded

In 2019, the Kremlin supported by China scored one more victory over the toothless UN Security Council: It effectively terminated the use of two UN lifelines out of four leading into Syria from neighboring countries, namely Turkey, Iraq, and Jordan.

Russia blocked a UN resolution to renew humanitarian supplies in full swing — in the very heat of fighting for the last rebel-held stronghold of Idlib in northern Syria.

Only two gateways into the country's north were allowed to stay open — the Bab-al-Hawa and Bab-al-Salam crossings on the Turkish border. Moreover, the corridors were mandated to stay operational for the next 6 months instead of 12 months, which had been the case since 2014. International monitors called this a major gain acquired by the Kremlin for the benefit of its Damascus ally.

On Jan. 10, the Security Council finally voted to authorize the limited supplies just hours before a midnight deadline.

"Once again, the UN Security Council is utterly failing the people in Syria," as Amnesty International reacted to the UN's surrender before the Russian pressure.

"But this time, the consequences will have an immediate and direct impact on the lives of millions of civilians already struggling for survival, and in particular in Idlib, where the civilian population is reeling under the Syrian government's fiercest yet round of military escalation."

The organization added the



A Syrian boy looks at Russian and US military vehicles in the northeastern Syrian town of al-Malikiyah (Derik) at the border with Turkey, on June 3, 2020.

Russian-Syrian government forces, with their "surrender or starve" tactics continued impeding all humanitarian action in rebel-held areas, particularly in Idlib.

According to the UN, the Russian-driven January 2020 closure of the al-Yarubiya crossing from northern Iraq decreased medical supplies to neighboring Syria by nearly 40%.

By June, according to the International Rescue Committee, at least 13 healthcare facilities in the country's northeast were "at imminent risk of closure or severe disruption to services, shipments of essential pharmaceuticals," with "other aid deliveries have been cut and millions in dollars of funding for programs has been lost."

Next attempt

Meanwhile, a new deadline for the Turkish gateways, which is due on July 10, is getting closer.

So Germany and Belgium on June 17 filed yet another draft resolution to the UN Security Council in a bid to extend the mandate of Turkish points of entry by at least one more year, and, furthermore, to reopen the al-Yarubiya point into Iraq, for at least 6 months.

The document notes that at least 11 million Syrians need assistance, especially when it comes to the COVID-19 spread in the country, the medical infrastructure of which lies in ruins and effectively invalid.

Official Damascus as of June 25 reported only 242 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 7 death, although few consider these figures credible, given the extremely low pace of testing in the country and its questionable ability to provide the sick with medical care and isolation.

According to Human Rights Watch, an international non-gov-

ernment organization, at least 2 million people in Syria's northeast fell short of medical supplies amid the COVID-19 spread due to restrictions on aid.

"The UN Security Council — including Russia — needs to act quickly to reauthorize medical aid deliveries from Iran to Syria's northeast to prevent further spread of COVID-19 that could devastate the region," the organization's director Louis Charbonneau was reported as asserting on June 19, adding that Russia had failed to compensate the gap in humanitarian supplies caused by the al-Yarubiya closure.

"Failure to renew cross-border aid will cause unnecessary suffering and deaths, and COVID-19 could spread

like wildfire, the official said.

"Surely Russia can't want that."

Chances unlikely

Moreover, the situation grows darker beyond the UN relief effort.

As Syria plunges into a deep catastrophe amid economic downfall and dire lack of food and basic necessities, few international non-governmental organizations are quickly running out of resources to be sent to Syria, according to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

In its June 25 statement, the UN head called upon Russia and the Syrian regime to unblock all available cross-border aid corridors and also to join the international

community in sending all possible humanitarian aid to besieged Idlib, where at least 3 million civilians (with 76 percent being women and children) suffer from diseases and the lack of basic necessities.

The situation in the government-controlled parts of Syria isn't much better.

According to the UN, at least 80 percent of the country's 17-million population survive below the poverty line, while over 11.1 million require humanitarian aid, including 4.5 million depending on basic nutrition assistance from the UN's World Food Program.

"The cross-border operation is a lifeline for millions of civilians whom the United Nations cannot reach by other means," as the Guterres wrote in his statement regarding the upcoming resolution.

Even Turkey, the Kremlin's situational partner in Syria occasionally turning into its major rival and contrariwise, spoke out in support of more UN lifelines into Syria.

Since the last year, Ankara has been advocating opening the fifth humanitarian gate at the Syrian borderline town of Tal Abyad — but this proposal is strongly opposed by Russia, which insists on "protecting the sovereignty of Syria."

As international monitors note, whether the Kremlin is going to give the green light to a new UN resolution on more humanitarian lifelines in the nearest days remains an open question.

However, all the public statements made by the Russian mission to the UN Security Council offer very little reasons for optimism.

"Do not waste your time on efforts to reopen the closed cross-border points," as Russia's UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia asserted in May in response to a U.S. initiative to reauthorize humanitarian traffic from Iraq. 🇷🇺



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Zelensky's judicial bill seen as another failed reform attempt

By Oleg Sukhov
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Since Ukraine received independence in 1991, it has dabbled with judicial reforms many times.

Three decades later, the result appears to be an utter failure: 76 percent of the population distrusted the judiciary, according to a Razumkov Center poll published in February.

"I cannot even count how many failed judicial reforms we had for the past six years," Halia Chyzhyk, a legal expert at the Anti-Corruption Action Center, said at an online event called the High Time for the Real Judiciary Reform in Ukraine on June 23.

It was part of a series of webinars organized by the Zero Corruption Conference, involving the Anti-Corruption Action Center in Kyiv and its partners.

In its current form, the latest attempt at judicial reform seems to be as doomed as previous ones, according to Chyzhyk and other legal experts.

On June 22, President Volodymyr Zelensky submitted a new bill on judicial reform to the Verkhovna Rada.

However, legal experts and anti-corruption activists say that the bill will not lead to any real reform and violates Ukraine's agreement with the International Monetary Fund, the nation's top creditor. The President's Office did not respond to requests for comment.

Deputy Justice Minister Oleksandr Banchuk said at the online event that his ministry had not participated in the drafting of the bill.

"Our plan is (to comply) with the IMF memorandum," he said. "We have to (adhere to) the provisions of this memorandum. It is our commitment and our duty."

Banchuk said he hoped it may be possible to amend the bill to make it comply with the IMF deal. He added that, if this does not happen, his ministry would draft a separate bill complying with the memorandum within several months.

Zelensky's previous judicial reform bill was signed into law in November but it failed to be implemented after the High Council of Justice, the judiciary's top governing body, deprived foreign experts of a major role in the reform, while the Constitutional Court canceled some of the bill's clauses.

Toxic council

The current High Council of Justice, which will determine the outcome of the new judicial reform, has a toxic reputation among Ukraine's civil society. Many of its members face accusations of corruption and ethics violations, which they deny.

According to Ukraine's memorandum with the IMF, Ukraine was supposed to create a commission including foreign experts in order to fire tainted members of the High Council of Justice if they violate ethics and integrity standards.



Judges of the Appellate Chamber of the Supreme Anti-Corruption Court discuss on Nov. 7, 2019 during an appeal against a measure of restraint to the lawmaker Yaroslav Dubnevych.

However, Zelensky's new bill does not envisage such a commission.

Under the new legislation, members of the High Council of Justice can only be fired by a majority of the council itself if the bodies that delegated the members to the council approve of such a decision. This makes the cleansing of the council impossible, legal experts and anti-corruption activists say.

According to the new bill, the High Council of Justice will also prepare rules for hiring new members of the High Qualification Commission, another top judiciary governing body. Judicial experts say that this will also prevent real reform from happening.

Violation of IMF deal

"Instead of strengthening the role of international experts in the process and introducing effective instruments of cleansing the High Council of Justice, the draft law strengthens the council, which sabotaged the reform in the first place," Chyzhyk said at the online panel. "Instead of establishing an independent body for scrutiny of the High Council of Justice, the draft simply suggests that members of High Council of Justice themselves will decide whether to dismiss their peers."

The council has denied accusations of blocking the reform.

Mykhailo Zhernakov, head of legal think tank DEJURE Foundation, agreed with Chyzhyk.

"The timing is unfortunate," Zhernakov said at the panel. "We just signed the memorandum with the International Monetary Fund and two weeks later the president introduces this draft law. It's his signature that's on the memorandum, and the bill does not agree with the lines of said memorandum. (The bill) was not discussed with our international partners and it was not something Ukraine agreed to."

IMF reaction

Emmanuel Mathias, a deputy unit chief at the IMF, did not comment on Zelensky's new bill and said the IMF had not analyzed it yet.

He said, however, that Ukraine would have to strictly comply with specific judicial reform criteria in the IMF memorandum by October to get \$5 billion as part of its current IMF program.

"The test day for the measure that the authorities agreed on is by the end of October 2020," Mathias said. "We will have time to discuss it with the authorities and understand their views. What we will be looking at after October 2020 is just to see whether the memorandum agreed recently is implemented."

He said that, under the memorandum, "an independent commission should be established to pre-screen potential candidates to the High Council of Justice and assess their integrity."

"This commission should be able to perform screening of existing High Council of Justice members," Mathias added. "It will be important to see that at least half of the commission's members will be respected experts with recognized ethical standards and judicial experience. It will be important that the commission should give these experts a crucial and decisive vote in decisions."

He also said that "in case of negative assessment by the commission of existing members (of the High Council of Justice) the commission can publish a recommendation for the dismissal (of council members) to the respective appointing authorities."

"The law should outline the procedures and criteria for the pre-selection process for High Council of Justice candidates and the commission should nominate at least two persons for each vacancy which will be forwarded to appointing authorities designated by the constitution," Mathias said.

Foreign experts

Zelensky's new bill also stipulates that a selection panel comprised of three members of the Council of Judges, a judicial self-regulation body, and three foreign experts would choose new members of the High Qualification Commission of Judges, one of the judiciary's governing bodies.

According to the legislation, foreign experts may be nominated by any international organizations that engage in anti-corruption efforts and judicial issues. The High Council of Justice will then choose any of the nominees.

Chyzhyk, DEJURE and Vitaly Tytych, former coordinator of judicial watchdog Public Integrity Council, argued that this procedure makes it very easy for the High Council of Justice to pick "fake" foreign experts who would rubber-stamp Ukrainian authorities' decisions instead of independent foreign experts.

Under the previous reform bill, foreign experts were to be selected out of the Public Council of International Experts, which took part in the selection of High Anti-Corruption Court judges last year. Its members were praised by Ukraine's civil society for independence and professionalism, and their participation was supposed to ensure the selection of an independent and professional High Qualification Commission.

The new reform bill also weakens foreign experts by saying that the appointment of High Qualification Commission members must be approved by at least two foreign experts. Zelensky's previous bill said that it must be approved by at least three foreign experts.

Venice Commission

Chyzhyk argued that Ukraine's corrupt judiciary had tried to manipulate opinions by the European

Commission for Democracy through Law, or Venice Commission, to block foreign experts' participation in judicial reform.

"In Ukraine, the Venice Commission is used by dishonest judges as a shield against attempts to ensure judges integrity," Chyzhyk said.

She added that Ukrainian judges often distort the European principle of judiciary independence to entrench their corruption and impunity.

However, Thomas Markert, secretary of the Venice Commission, said that the commission "has no problem with involving international experts in the selection of members of judicial bodies."

Markert added that international experts should be used as a filter to pre-select judicial officials but cannot directly appoint them without a decision by the High Council of Justice, which has constitutional powers to appoint and fire judicial officials.

"It is important to have a non-corrupt judiciary," Markert said. "A corrupt judge cannot be independent and impartial."

Vovk's court

The experts also discussed the fate of the Kyiv Administrative District Court, which is notorious for its controversial rulings.

Its chairman Pavlo Vovk and other judges of the court were charged with obstruction of justice in August but the case stalled indefinitely after prosecutors failed to send it to trial by the five-day deadline set by a court in November. The judges deny the accusations of wrongdoing.

Ukrainian anti-corruption activists and legal experts have long called for the court's liquidation.

Chyzhyk called the Kyiv Administrative District Court "the most corrupt court of Ukraine."

Meanwhile, Banchuk suggested that some types of cases should be transferred from the Kyiv Administrative District Court to the Supreme Court to resolve the problem.

Judicial independence

Vera Jourova, vice president of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, also spoke at the panel.

"The COVID-19 crisis must not become an excuse for backtracking on reform achievements and giving in to oligarch interests," Jourova said.

She also said that, when there is low trust in the judiciary, "there is an appetite for governments to limit powers" of the courts.

"For such governments, it is easy to attack the judiciary and disbalance constitutional powers," she said. "Governments don't risk anything."

Jourova also said the European Commission was concerned with "increased politicization of anti-corruption institutions" in Ukraine and threats to the independence of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine. 🇺🇦

Bolton shows ugly backyard of American, Ukrainian politics



Sergii Leshchenko
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I saw John Bolton only once in my life.

It happened not in Ukraine, but in Munich, Germany, during a closed discussion at the annual security conference — a mere two months before he was appointed as national security adviser to U.S. President Donald J. Trump in 2018. Bolton spent more than an hour with us, a group of Ukrainian lawmakers, at Literaturhaus München. He looked like a man who is in no hurry. His views on the world resembled a theoretical study by an international scholar. No one then could have imagined that he would soon become one of the most influential figures in world politics with regular access to the Oval Office.

As a result of his 1.5 years of work there, Bolton has published a controversial memoir, “The Room Where It Happened.” In this book, we can learn a lot about how Ukrainian politics is seen in the ruling U.S. administration. And while we know many of the circumstances related to the impeachment of Trump through sworn testimony in court, Bolton’s book has shed light on several other events.

In his book, Bolton describes in detail his 2018 trip to Kyiv for Ukraine’s Independence Day celebration. The American guest took part in the parade on the main street of Kyiv, and held a meeting with the Ukrainian leadership.

Poroshenko’s favor

But after that something happened that is difficult to call traditional politics. Then-President Petro Poroshenko took Bolton to another room and asked the U.S. to back his re-election campaign and help him with a few more issues. Since Bolton has helped with those issues, it allowed him to refuse Poroshenko’s request for electoral assistance without seeming rude.

An outsider might wonder what kind of a weird request is that. The answer is simple. The entire Ukrainian politics is based on the fact that all the promising candidates for the post of Ukrainian president need to be reviewed by the U.S. Perhaps, the explanation for this lies in the unofficial doctrine of Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter, who laid the principle “without Ukraine, there can be no revival of the Soviet Union” at the heart of the American foreign policy. Brzezinski died in 2017, but his case lives on: Both American parties support Ukraine’s independence.

US ‘casting call’

All Ukraine’s presidents, starting with the second one, Leonid Kuchma, had to undergo a “mandatory casting call” in the U.S. Kuchma visited America before the election in 1994 at the invitation of Richard

Nixon. They never had a chance to meet — the American president died on the eve of their meeting, and Kuchma instead had lunch with George Soros.

The next Ukrainian president, Viktor Yushchenko, was loved by the U.S. This was not only because of his liberal views but also because his wife was an American citizen. He visited Washington regularly. One day, during a conversation between Yushchenko and then-Vice President Al Gore, President Bill Clinton walked into his office and was introduced to the promising Ukrainian politician.

Yanukovich’s troubles

Viktor Yanukovich had a somewhat troubled past and had to use paid lobbyists to tune up his relationship with the American establishment. In 2002, this task was appointed to his adviser Eduard Prutnik, who hired a company Venable, LLP to boost Yanukovich’s image. After Yanukovich lost the 2004 presidential election, Paul Manafort took over this job. In the end, it cost him 7.5 years in prison and confiscation of his ill-gotten profits.

Poroshenko’s lobbyists

Poroshenko, who used the lobbying company BGR Group as a channel for informal communication with Washington, was also a frequent guest in the U.S. His services were paid for in a non-transparent way by the NGO called the National Council of Reforms, as the Kyiv Post had previously reported.

With the help of lobbyists, Poroshenko tried to win Trump’s approval. But Trump considered the Ukrainian government involved in trying to sabotage his presidential campaign in 2016. Poroshenko brought billions of dollars of Ukrainian budget to the sacrificial altar of his relationship with Trump — to buy coal from Pennsylvania, locomotives of General Electric, and nuclear fuel from Westinghouse.

Enter Zelensky

The American establishment had a chance to check out presidential candidate Volodymyr Zelensky only in Kyiv — he thought it would be irrational to leave Ukraine during the short election campaign in 2019. As Zelensky’s advisor at that time, I was lucky to witness a moment when the then-special envoy for Ukraine, Kurt Volker, shook hands with the future president during a visit to the Zelensky’s team headquarters. Volker then cautiously tried to find out the views of the election’s frontrunner on many issues that concerned the U.S. — among those his relations with billionaire oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky, the land law, the fight against corruption, the language issue, and cultural diversity in



Then Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko shakes hand with then U.S. national security adviser John Bolton (L) during the Independence Day military parade in Kyiv on Aug. 24, 2018.

Ukraine. Volker reacted to every answer he heard with an approving nod.

From Bolton’s memoir, we can see that the American administration was as neutral as possible about the candidates during the last election in Ukraine. Although Poroshenko asked Bolton to impose U.S. sanctions against Kolomoisky during the same meeting on Ukraine’s Independence Day in 2018, he was politely rejected.

Investigating Kolomoisky

Bolton advised Poroshenko that evidence of Kolomoisky’s violation of the U.S. laws should be sent to the U.S. Department of Justice. In the end, without Poroshenko’s involvement, the FBI opened an investigation into Kolomoisky’s actions after a report by his former business partner Vadim Shulman, who accused him of laundering money in the U.S. by buying real estate in Cleveland.

As for Trump’s administration, Bolton’s memoirs never gave a clear answer about the nature of its relations with Ukraine. On one hand, the book is filled with Trump’s tirades against Ukraine, in which he accuses Ukraine of trying to prevent his election in 2016, mixing truth, fiction, and f-words. Trump is referring to the denunciation of his former chief of staff, Manafort, in 2016, for receiving illegal payments from Yanukovich. However, both the Justice Department and the jury confirmed that Manafort’s actions violated the law. Trump has no one to blame for that, except for Manafort himself.

In another instance, Trump calls Ukraine an obstacle to normalizing U.S. relations with Russia. But at the same time, he refuses to meet with Russia’s President Vladimir Putin because of the Russian aggression

in the Kerch Strait, in which the Kremlin’s navy fired on Ukrainian military boats and captured 24 sailors.

Trump & Firtash’s lawyer

Trump’s policy is chaotic, and his assessment of Ukraine can be based both on official briefings by professional diplomats from the State Department, and on gossip and lies propagated by a supporter of conspiracy theorist Rudy Giuliani and lawyer Joe diGenova. According to Bolton, Trump personally called diGenova a source of his knowledge about Ukraine. This is shocking. For many Americans, the context is not clear, but Ukrainians know diGenova as someone working for the pro-Russian oligarch Dmytro Firtash, who is facing bribery-related charges in the U.S. and is fighting extradition from Vienna.

Giuliani’s associate DiGenova is also involved in spreading the Russian narrative which seeks to shift responsibility for interference in the 2016 U.S. elections from Russia to Ukraine.

Pro-Russian Tymoshenko

Another revealing point in Bolton’s book concerns the U.S. State Department’s assessment of Yulia Tymoshenko as a pro-Russian politician. Describing his trip to Kyiv in 2018, Bolton recalls Tymoshenko’s request for a tête-à-tête meeting. He adds that the State Department has advised him to avoid such contact without witnesses because Tymoshenko is “too close” to Russia.

This ruins Tymoshenko’s longstanding efforts to build her reputation in the U.S. She has been using lobbyists’ help among the first in Ukraine’s politics — since 1997, when she traveled to the U.S. to be “reviewed.” She tried to build up her relations with Soros and Angela Merkel. However, Tymoshenko’s

rhetoric now makes little difference from that of the pro-Russian politician and Putin’s friend Viktor Medvedchuk.

Medvedchuk alliance

Tymoshenko no longer names Ukrainian oligarchs as the cause of problems in the country, but blames “international financial speculators” for all problems and speaks about the loss of sovereignty. Moreover, Tymoshenko and Kolomoisky are appealing to the Constitutional Court regarding the banking law, which opened the way for Ukraine to receive the IMF money. And together with Medvedchuk, Tymoshenko turns down a law on the unbundling of Naftogaz which aimed to finalize the separation of the independent transmission system operator. This would be very convenient for Russia.

It was Naftogaz that at the end of 2019 signed a useful contract for Ukraine, which obliges Russia to pay for the transit of 65 billion cubic meters of gas this year, even if it doesn’t pump the contracted volumes through Ukraine, and for the next four years — for 40 billion cubic meters annually. With a decline in gas demand in Europe, Gazprom would be happy to break up this contract, but with Ukraine’s hands. And the decision of the Constitutional Court would create just the right conditions for that.

So in terms of Tymoshenko’s characterization, Bolton’s memoir turned out to be quite true.

Having told his story, Bolton showed an unpleasant backyard of both Ukrainian and American politics.

Sergii Leshchenko is a Kyiv Post columnist, investigative journalist, and former member of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine’s parliament.

Bolton's book shows Trump as narcissistic and incompetent

By Matthew Kupfer
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In his new memoir, former U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton confirms what others have concluded: President Donald J. Trump doesn't like Ukraine, had no interest in meeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and fawned over Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as other authoritarian leaders.

And Bolton quotes Trump in all the profane detail, although Trump has dismissed his former top aide as a "wacko" and "grossly incompetent, and a liar."

"I don't want to have any fucking thing to do with Ukraine," Bolton quotes Trump as saying, citing his deputy's account of a meeting. "They fucking attacked me. I can't understand why... They tried to fuck me. They're corrupt. I'm not fucking with them."

As for Zelensky, Trump said, "I have no fucking interest in meeting with him."

The two presidents still haven't met in the White House, nearly a year after the infamous July 25, 2019, phone call leading to Trump's impeachment by the U.S. House and acquittal by the U.S. Senate. Trump, in the conversation, tried to get Zelensky to investigate his Democratic rival, ex-U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden, as the Republican president withheld nearly \$400 million in military and other aid to Ukraine.

Moreover, Bolton reveals:

— Former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko asked for re-election support from the U.S. government and sanctions against billionaire oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky, seen as backing Zelensky in the 2019 presidential race;

— Trump viewed Ukraine as an obstacle to closer relations with Russia;

“

I don't want to have any fucking thing to do with Ukraine.

”

U.S. President Donald J. Trump

— Trump harbored deep hostility against Marie Yovanovitch, then the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, based upon unfounded conspiracy allegations promoted by his personal lawyer, Rudolph Giuliani;

— Trump also took aim at George Kent, a top U.S. Department of State official; and

— The U.S. State Department didn't want Bolton to meet individually with Ukrainian politician Yulia Tymoshenko.

Reelection campaign

Bolton served in the Trump White House from April 2018 to September



U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during a meeting in New York on Sept. 25, 2019 on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.

2019 and witnessed many events that would be hotly discussed during Trump's impeachment.

Bolton has faced criticism for refusing to testify during impeachment, but accepting an advance of \$2 million to write a book about his experiences in the Trump administration.

In his memoir *The Room Where It Happened* — which was scheduled for release on June 23, but leaked online days earlier — Trump is portrayed as obsessively self-interested and hostile toward Ukraine.

For Bolton, it was no surprise that the U.S. president predicated aid for Ukraine on the country's leadership opening criminal investigations that he felt would help him get reelected in November 2020. Therefore, the infamous July 25, 2019 phone call was "not a keystone for me, but simply another brick in the wall."

"I am hard-pressed to identify any significant Trump decision during my tenure that wasn't driven by reelection calculations," Bolton writes. Eventually, in early September 2019 as Bolton resigned, Trump released the aid to Ukraine.

Profane tirade

Trump's personal feelings about Ukraine are hardly a secret. He and his political allies have pushed an unsubstantiated narrative that Kyiv interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential election to help his competitor, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. This was widely viewed as an attempt to deflect attention from Russia's proven interference in the election in support of Trump

In a September 2019 interview with the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Ambassador Kurt Volker,

then the U.S. special representative to Ukraine, admitted that Trump has "a built-in, negative bias" against the country.

"He thinks it's corrupt, they're all terrible people, it's a horribly corrupt country, you can't fix it, and it's not worth it," Volker said.

Still, Bolton's account of Trump's obscene tirade against Ukraine is stark for its extreme vitriol.

On May 23, 2019, Trump met with a U.S. delegation that had just returned from the inauguration of Zelensky. It included Volker, Energy Secretary Rick Perry, U.S. Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland and Republican Senator Ron Johnson. The four men had returned home from Kyiv with a positive impression of the new president.

Bolton, who was in Tokyo at the time, would learn of the ensuing conversation — and Trump's tirade — from his deputy, Charles Kupperman.

Trump lashed out against Ukraine, saying he wanted nothing to do with the country. When Perry tried to explain that helping Ukraine was important, Trump would hear nothing of it.

"Ukraine tried to take me down. I'm not fucking interested in helping them," Trump said.

He also encouraged Perry to speak with his personal lawyer, Giuliani, and Joe DiGenova, a pro-Trump lawyer and pundit. Both have pushed the Ukrainian election interference narrative.

"I want the fucking DNC server," Trump said, referring to a strange conspiracy theory that one of the Democratic National Committee's

servers, which were hacked by Russia in 2016, was being held somewhere in Ukraine. The theory is patently untrue.

According to Bolton, several weeks later, Johnson of Wisconsin admitted to being "shocked by the president's response."

"I thought it sounded just like another day at the office," Bolton writes.

“

I have no fucking interest in meeting with him.

”

U.S. President Donald J. Trump, referring to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

Poroshenko meeting

Another surprising episode in Bolton's memoir is his 2018 one-on-one conversation with then-President Poroshenko.

On Aug. 24, Bolton had come to Ukraine to attend the country's Independence Day parade.

Afterwards, he held several meetings with top Ukrainian officials.

After one of those meetings, Poroshenko led him off into another room for a private talk and asked for the United States to endorse his reelection campaign, Bolton writes. "He also asked for a number of things that I addressed, allowing me to slide past the endorsement

request without being too rude when I said no."

But that wasn't the only thing on the Ukrainian president's mind.

"What he really wanted was for America to sanction Ihor Kolomoisky, a Ukrainian oligarch backing (former Ukrainian Prime Minister) Yulia Tymoshenko, who was, at least at this point, Poroshenko's main competition in the 2019 elections."

Bolton told Poroshenko that "if he had evidence on Kolomoisky, he should send it to the Justice Department."

The *Kyiv Post* reached out to Poroshenko's spokesperson for comment, but did not receive an answer.

Kolomoisky would go on to back Zelensky's victorious presidential campaign. Later, he would manage to insert a number of his loyalists into the new president's Servant of the People party during the July 2019 parliamentary elections. In May 2020, *Buzzfeed News* reported that Kolomoisky was under investigation by a U.S. federal grand jury for money laundering

After his conversation with Poroshenko, Bolton would have coffee at the U.S. ambassador's residence with Ukrainian parliamentary leaders. Among them was Tymoshenko.

A long-time Ukrainian political heavyweight, Tymoshenko dominated the conversation, even noting that she had read Bolton's book, *Surrender Is Not an Option*.

Bolton writes that the State Department "didn't want me to meet with Tymoshenko separately because they thought she was too

Bolton under fire for his \$2 million book fee while dodging testimony

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close to Russia, although typical of the department's methods, that's not how they put it."

Giuliani vs. Yovanovitch

On May 20, 2019, U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch was formally removed from office after being recalled a month earlier.

Yovanovitch had lost her job to vicious rumors spread by Ukrainian politicians, people close to Trump and even the president's own son. They claimed that she was bad-mouthing him and trying to undermine his presidency.

The career diplomat's firing would deliver a serious blow to morale at the Department of State. She would go on to testify during Trump's impeachment.

In his book, Bolton recalls that, on March 23, 2019, Trump complained that Yovanovitch was "bad-mouthing us like crazy" and that she was only concerned about LGBTQ issues.

"She is saying bad shit about me and about you," he said, before demanding that she be fired immediately.

“

He also asked for a number of things that I addressed, allowing me to slide past the endorsement request without being too rude when I said no.

”

John Bolton, writing that ex-Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko sought U.S. endorsement of his re-election in 2019

Several days later, on March 25, Bolton would learn that Giuliani was the source of Trump's claims about Yovanovitch. Giuliani alleged that George Kent, the deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, was protecting Yovanovitch and was working with financier and philanthropist George Soros against Trump. This was also an unsubstantiated conspir-

acy theory.

"I reached (Secretary of State Michael) Pompeo by phone in the late afternoon to relay the latest news, now with the update that it came from Giuliani," Bolton writes. "Pompeo said he had spoken with Giuliani before, and there were no facts supporting any of his allegations, although Pompeo didn't doubt that, like 90 percent of the Foreign Service, Yovanovitch probably voted for Clinton.

“

The U.S. State Department "didn't want me to meet with Tymoshenko separately because they thought she was too close to Russia..."

”

John Bolton, writing about his preparations for meeting ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko

"He said she was trying to reduce corruption in Ukraine and may well have been going after some of Giuliani's clients."

Soon, Bolton would speak with Pompeo again.

"He again mentioned his previous conversations with Giuliani, who couldn't describe in any detail what had supposedly happened but who had raised it constantly with Trump over the past several months," the former national security advisor writes. "But Pompeo also said that, in looking at the embassy, the State Department now had a pile of materials they were sending over to (the Department of) Justice that implicated Yovanovitch and her predecessor in some unnamed and undescribed activity that might be criminal."

The Kyiv Post reached out to Yovanovitch for comment, but has not received a response.

Giuliani later denied that he had any clients involved in the firing of the ambassador — "which I found hard to believe," Bolton writes.

On August 26, 2019, Bolton would again travel to Ukraine and meet with Zelensky, his chief of staff, top government officials and military leaders. Here he would finally attempt to address the claims being made by Giuliani, albeit somewhat obliquely.

After a meeting, Bolton pulled aside Ruslan Riaboshapka, then the country's prosecutor general.



U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton speaks to the press at a press conference in Kyiv on Aug. 28, 2019.

(Volodymyr Petrov)

Reactions

President Donald J. Trump

"Bolton's book, which is getting terrible reviews, is a compilation of lies and made up stories, all intended to make me look bad. Many of the ridiculous statements he attributes to me were never made, pure fiction. Just trying to get even for firing him like the sick puppy he is!"

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo

"John Bolton is spreading a number of lies, fully-spun half-truths, and outright falsehoods. It is both sad and dangerous that John Bolton's final public role is that of a traitor who damaged America by violating his sacred trust with its people."

Former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko

"Ukraine now in the world (is) one of the most pro-American nations... no matter if it is Republicans or Democrats... This is a Russian scenario just to break unity between Ukraine and the U.S. And definitely this is not in the interest of Ukraine and definitely this is not in the interest of the United States."

Former Deputy Secretary of Defense Michael Carpenter

"Bolton's account makes crystal clear Trump despises Ukraine, couldn't care less about its struggle with Russia, and only cares about advancing his corrupt interests. Of course we knew that already."

Anders Aslund, senior fellow at the Atlantic Council

"In (John Bolton's) version of events, Ukraine is one of the few issues that Trump is focused on, and the U.S. leader is depicted as being even more hostile to Ukraine than previously known. Bolton, who believes American interests call for strong support for Ukraine, portrays Trump siding with Putin and Russia at every turn against Ukraine."

Reno Domenico, Democrats Abroad in Ukraine

"The book makes it clear that Donald Trump has no real regard for Ukraine, Ukraine's geopolitical problems, nor any positive feeling toward the Ukrainian people."

Steven Pifer, former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine

"He essentially confirms what we learned last fall: Trump tried to extort Zelensky into investigating former Vice President Biden and his son, Hunter, and Trump held up Congressionally-approved military assistance for Ukraine as part of that attempt. He also makes clear that Trump believed it was Ukraine, not Russia, that interfered in the 2016 U.S. election. Too bad Bolton did not have the moral courage shown by Fiona Hill, Alexander Vindman and others, who testified to Congress about this sordid affair."

David J. Kramer, non-resident fellow at the McCain Institute for International Leadership

"Bolton should have said all this last fall during the impeachment hearings. For whatever reason — greed, cowardice — he chose not to, while others, including some who worked for him, fulfilled their duty at great personal risk to tell the truth."

“

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said ex-U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Marie L. Yovanovitch "was trying to reduce corruption in Ukraine and may well have been going after some of Giuliani's clients."

”

John Bolton, describing why Trump may have been so adamant about firing Yovanovitch at the behest of his private attorney, Rudy Giuliani.



3 dead, \$37 million in flood damage in 4 western Ukraine oblasts

Up to 9 inches (235 millimeters) fell on parts of western Ukraine within a 48-hour period this week -- more than double the typical monthly rainfall. The flash floods killed at least 3 people. Ukrainian authorities are still assessing damage that will top \$37 million in property losses. In Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast, 200 towns and villages were affected, 5,000 homes damaged and 800 people evacuated. Combined with Lviv, Chernivtsi and Zakarpattia oblasts, at least 430 kilometers of roads and 130 bridges were damaged. Transport connection with 34 towns was disrupted.

- 1** An aerial view shows a view of flooded Halych on June 24, 2020, in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast.
- 2** Police officers evacuate residents in flooded Lanchyn on June 24, 2020 in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast.
- 3** A car drives the flood road on June 21, 2020, in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast.
- 4** An aerial view shows flooded Halych on June 24, 2020, in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast.
- 5** People reinforce a dam on June 23, 2020 in Chernivtsi Oblast.
- 6** An aerial view shows a collapsed bridge over the Chornyi Cheremosh River in Kryvorivnya of Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast on June 23, 2020.
- 7** A specialized vehicle belonging to the State Emergency Service drives through a flooded street in Chernivtsi Oblast on June 22, 2020.
- 8** Local residents clean a flooded street in Lanchyn on June 24, 2020 in the Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast.
- 9** A picture shows a view of the flooded Chornyi Cheremosh River near Vizhnitsa on June 23, 2020 in Chernivtsi Oblast. (Photos by Ukrainian Interior Ministry press service, UNIAN, Ukrinform, State Emergency Service of Ukraine)

Liashko: We can't predict future of this pandemic

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service. Restaurants in Kyiv opened, only to be told hours later that the city isn't ready for re-opening. Finally, on June 24, movie theaters were allowed to re-open — but the very next day, the government postponed their opening by one week.

Liashko blames it all on the fast-changing data: a city or region that could be allowed to lift a restriction on one day can be denied that same right on the next day.

But Liashko denies that there is any political calculus in deciding whether to ease the quarantine restrictions.

"There are discussions, but they are based on scientific data and statistics," he says. "None of the decisions we made were political."

Future unclear

Despite having first-hand knowledge about the pandemic in Ukraine and his background in infectious diseases, even Liashko doesn't know what will happen with the pandemic.

"We tried making predictions before, and we saw it didn't work so well," he says. "Although we're doing a lot of modeling and looking at different scenarios, it's impossible to predict what will happen."

But if the second wave of the virus comes — which seems increasingly more likely as the number of cases continues growing every day — Ukraine will be prepared for it, he says.

As for a vaccine, it's too early to say when Ukraine might get it, once it's developed.

"The government appointed the people who are reaching out to vaccine developers abroad," he says. "They are looking into whether there already are queues (of countries) ready to buy it, and we'll see what Ukraine can count on."

Quarantine violations

On June 25, Ukraine reported 994 new cases of the coronavirus in the last 24 hours — a new daily record. But as the number of infections grows, people appear to be more reluctant to abide by quarantine than ever.

As the Kyiv Post spoke with Liashko on the bench next to the entrance to the Health Ministry's headquarters in Kyiv, people were entering and leaving the ministry. Despite a sign on the door that warned, "No entrance without a face mask!", about half of them weren't wearing one.

"That's life," says Liashko about their negligence, adding that they probably put a mask on once inside.

Everyone is tired, he admits. But it is vital — literally — for people to con-



Chief Sanitary Doctor Viktor Liashko (in the background) watches as President Volodymyr Zelensky and other officials have coffee during a working trip to Khmelnytsky on June 3. The group violated quarantine by visiting the cafe, which resulted in Hr 17,000 (\$636) fines for each, including Liashko.

tinue to wear masks in public places and to practice social distancing.

"People heard about the 'easing of quarantine' and took it to mean that quarantine ended," he said. "But that's not the case. We are in this soft stage of quarantine and we will have to live in it for some time — we don't know for how long."

Still, he rejects widespread criticism that blames Ukrainians' neglect of safety measures on mentality or habitual distrust for state orders.

"I think that our people demonstrated in these past months that they can be organized, and they can listen and trust the government's recommendations," Liashko says.

\$600 cup of coffee

The number of people neglecting quarantine restrictions prompted the government and President Volodymyr Zelensky to address Ukrainians and strongly ask them to remain serious about the threat. Zelensky asked the national police to enforce the quarantine more vigorously.

That means charging violators with fines that start at Hr 17,000 (\$630) — a painfully large sum, as Liashko learned first-hand.

The chief sanitary doctor, who spent months calling on Ukrainians to take quarantine seriously, was spotted violating it in early June.

On June 3, Liashko accompanied Zelensky and several other officials on a work trip to Khmelnytsky, a city of 265,000 people some 300 kilome-

ters west of Kyiv. The group made a stop at a local coffee house. They sat inside and had espressos. The President's Office shared a photo of the happy gathering.

On the next day, the government would allow restaurants to open, but at the time, they could only serve clients on summer terraces or sell take-out — meaning that the president and chief sanitary doctor violated quarantine.

After an uproar on social media, the police fined all the members of the group, including the owner of the cafe. Each now has to pay the Hr 17,000 fine and some Hr 400 in court fees.

"It's a lot of money," Liashko says. "My wife keeps reminding me about it."

Liashko says he doesn't understand how the violation happened. They were originally supposed to sit outdoors, but "ended up at the table inside." He doesn't remember who was the first one to take a seat. At the time, he didn't realize they were violating restrictions.

Was the coffee at least good? "I didn't even drink any," he admits. "I was just chatting with the owner."

Politics next?

Lately, Liashko's name started popping up in conversations that had nothing to do with coronavirus. Ukrainian media reported, citing various anonymous sources, that he is considering running for mayor of Kyiv, and may even have the support of the ruling party, Servant of the Kyiv.

The election takes place in October. The current mayor Klitschko will be running for reelection. He leads in the polls with around 40% of support. And yet there is no shortage of those who want to challenge him — for the publicity of the campaign, if nothing else.

If Liashko indeed runs, he will join a crowded pool of candidates that includes experienced politicians, lawmakers and TV celebrities.

Volodymyr Fesenko, a Kyiv-based political analyst and commentator, says the Liashko's chances to win are slim but it all depends on what he does with his sudden popularity.

According to the April poll by the Rating Group sociological company, Liashko is one of the most trusted public figures in Ukraine.

"He has a high level of recognition and, by many accounts, he has a higher approval rating than other government officials," says Fesenko. "The task is to convert the approval rating into the electoral rating."

When Liashko is asked about whether he will run, he changes instantly. The official who battles the deadly virus is gone. Instead, there is a young man who fidgets uncomfortably, smiles broadly, and gives no direct answer.

"We need to defeat the coronavirus first," he says.

It's not a "no."

"It's not a yes, either," he says.

Kyiv Post staff writer Oleksiy Sorokin contributed to this story. 📧



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Belarus dictator Lukashenko seeks to crush dissent to him

By Oleksiy Sorokin
sorokin@kyivpost.com

Belarus is about to hold its sixth presidential election on Aug. 9. Incumbent Alexander Lukashenko has won all the previous votes — and all by the first were deemed unfair.

This time around, the country's long-ruling dictator will once again "officially" win the elections, but he may lose the country in the process.

Unprecedented public upheaval, multi-kilometer lines in support of opposition candidates and astonishing police brutality to suppress them are the themes of the upcoming elections.

Opposition to Lukashenko's regime comes from all sides, with his main competitors being a pro-Russian banker, the wife of a YouTube video blogger and a former long-time government official.

The banker and the video blogger were soon arrested and are being kept behind bars, sparking more protests and, thus, more arrests.

"The brutality of the regime was sparked by the unprecedented public upheaval, and an unprecedented threat to the regime," Vitali Shklyarov, political strategist and visiting scholar at Harvard University, told the Kyiv Post.

Now hundreds of protesters are being held behind bars, while thousands of people on the street mock Lukashenko by calling him a cockroach and pointing out his seemingly low electoral support.

Belarusian journalist Liubou Luniova told the Kyiv Post that Lukashenko has found himself in a lose-lose scenario.

"No matter what he does now, it'll be the wrong decision."

Anyone but him

Often called "the last dictator of Europe," Lukashenko has held office since 1994.

By changing the constitution twice during his 26-year presidency, Lukashenko made the process of legally challenging him at the ballot box an impossible task.

Previously, each election followed the same pattern — the president



Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko gives a speech during a military parade to mark the 75th anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in World War II in Minsk on May 9, 2020.

received over 80% of the vote against handpicked opponents, people who took to the streets were swiftly chased down and opposition leaders demanding fair elections were imprisoned.

Some of the people vocal in their opposition to Lukashenko disappeared and were never found.

But months before the 2020 elections, Lukashenko's seemingly unshakable authority cracked.

Read More: In Belarus, coronavirus-denying dictator plans mass Victory Day parade

Lukashenko's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic downturn and general fatigue with the aging dictator made elections a legal way to express dissatisfaction in an otherwise authoritarian state.

In Belarus, a country of 9.5 million people, a candidate must gather 100,000 signatures to be included on the presidential ballot. The signatures must be collected in a month's time.

Such a high threshold meant that independent candidates had little to

no chance to run for office. But they were not banned from trying.

Fourteen candidates registered to run for office, and getting in line to sign in support of an opposition candidate became a form of protest.

"Those people who stand in multi-kilometer lines, after signing in support of one candidate, they often go and line up for another candidate," says Shklyarov.

"It's a sign that people just won't change," he adds.

Three main candidates — Svetlana Tikhonovskaya, Viktor Babariko and Valery Tsepkalo — were all able to collect the required signatures in an unprecedented fashion.

People standing in line held red and white national flags, banned by Lukashenko, and chanted anti-Lukashenko slogans. The most popular one compared Lukashenko to a cockroach with a moustache and carrying old slippers.

"Slam the cockroach," protesters shouted.

The meme was popularized by YouTube blogger Sergei Tikhonovskiy, whose wife is now running for the presidency. Tikhonovskiy was being held behind bars when candidates were obligated to apply, so his wife registered as a candidate instead.

Tikhonovskiy became her campaign manager and hosted rallies to collect signatures until he was once again imprisoned on May 29.

The gathering of signatures officially ended on June 19, with all three main opposition candidates collecting more than enough to be present on the ballot. Babariko alone was able to collect 425,000 signatures — that's nearly 7% of the voting-age population.

"People made their dissatisfaction clear," says Luniova.

"It was never about policy, it was about anyone but him."

Presidential harassment

After protests erupted nationwide —

and protest lines became a regular feature the Belarusian streets — the police began cracking down, first on candidates and then on protesters as well.

Tikhonovskiy was arrested while campaigning in the provincial capital of Grodno. According to video footage, a woman was following the blogger and demanding that he speak to her. After Tikhonovskiy declined, she called the nearby police and Tikhonovskiy was arrested.

Seven members of Tikhonovskiy's campaign were also arrested.

Now Tikhonovskiy is being held in solitary confinement and is charged with flagrantly disrupting public order, which carries a maximum sentence of up to 3 years in prison. Tikhonovskiy and his supporters call the arrest a staged act and part of the ongoing campaign of politically motivated prosecutions.

Soon the authorities turned their attention to Babariko.

Since 2000, Babariko headed BelGazpromBank, the country's fourth largest bank by assets, owned by Russian energy company Gazprom. Babariko left his post in May to run for office.

On June 11, the state cracked down on the bank, arresting 15 of the bank's current and former top managers. Three members of Babariko's campaign were also arrested.

A week later, Babariko and his son Eduard, who led his campaign, were arrested by the Belarusian KGB. They are being held behind bars and are now charged in what appears to be a money laundering case.

The charges haven't been made public, and Babariko's lawyer has been prevented from seeing his client. Officially, the lawyer is not allowed to meet with Babariko because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic — the same pandemic that Lukashenko called a hoax.

"Masks are off, not only from the

puppets that we had here, but also from the puppeteers who sit outside Belarus," said Lukashenko two days after Babariko's arrest.

A day prior, Babariko's campaign fund was frozen.

Government-controlled television channels began a campaign against Babariko long before his arrest, hinting that he's a Russian agent because he worked for Gazprom's bank.

Lukashenko has also accused Russia of meddling in Belarus' elections. The Belarusian dictator's relationship with Russia has been strained since 2019, when the Kremlin used its economic power over Belarus to force the country into deeper integration with Russia.

In 1999, the two countries officially created a Union State, which remains a formality to this day.

The European Union called on Lukashenko to release both Tikhonovskiy and Babariko and to allow the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to monitor the upcoming elections. The EU has promised a new round of sanctions on Belarus.

Lukashenko doesn't care and directly states that there won't be any democracy under his watch.

"If I behave democratically and show that I am warm and fuzzy, I have a chance of losing the country," Lukashenko said on June 20.

Imprisonment and torture

Soon after Babariko's arrest, people took to the streets en masse.

On June 19, the last day of the official signature gathering period, people all over the country gathered in lines spanning several kilometers to demand Babariko's release.

Massive arrests followed. The police, the KGB and men without insignia began grabbing people on the streets. Videos of people being choked and dragged into police trucks spread over the internet.

Mobile internet was also shut down in downtown for at least two hours.

People who openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the regime were fired and harassed on national television.

A doctor from Lida, a small town in Belarus, told Tikhonovskiy in May that his town lacks basic protective equipment during the ongoing pandemic. He was later arrested. For over three days, his location was unknown. He was released after being held for seven days behind bars and was fired from his job.

An 81-year-old retiree who told Tikhonovskiy that Belarus must get rid of "the cockroach" was investigated by the KGB. On ONT television channel, the head of the KGB said that the elderly woman's family has two houses in provincial Grodno, hinting that she's no ordinary Belarusian pensioner.

The Belarusian authorities are used to unconventional methods when squelching protesters. In 2011, when protesters silently gathered on the streets and clapped in support of



Presidential hopeful Viktor Babaryko, former head of Belgazprombank, holds a press conference on June 11, 2020, in Minsk, Belarus. Belarusian authorities on June 18, 2020, arrested Babaryko, President Alexander Lukashenko's main rival in the Aug. 9, 2020, election, on suspicion of financial crimes, the head of the state control committee said.

As Belarus tires of Lukashenko's rule since 1994, he lashes out at his challengers

page 12 —>

political prisoners, the government banned clapping in public.

But while Belarus may at times seem like a caricature of a tin-pot dictatorship, the situation is grim for those jailed in their struggle against the regime. According to Viasna, a local non-governmental human rights group, over 650 people were arrested since the beginning of the campaign. Over 100 people received prison sentences.

According to Luniova, political prisoners are mistreated while in prisons. She says many were not given mattresses, were forced to sleep on the floor in facilities that lacked proper sanitation and were denied legal representation.

Notable examples include Tikhanovsky, who is kept in solitary confinement, and Babariko, who is denied access to his lawyer. Luniova points out the case of Pavel Severynets, a prominent opposition leader, who cut himself because of unbearable confinement conditions. Severynets who was arrested on

June 8, will be kept behind bars at least until September.

No way out

In the current system, there is no hope that elections will be free and fair, yet there's also no hope that the situation will go back to how it was prior to the campaign.

In Belarus, for candidates to appear on the ballot, they must be vetted prior to the official election campaign. The signatures the candidates collected must also be checked by the Central Electoral Commission for authenticity.

The commission is headed by Lidia Yermoshina, who took the job in 1996. Under her watch, four presidential elections took place — all deemed fraudulent by the EU.

In a June 16 interview with Komsomolskaya Pravda Belarus, Yermoshina said that "Tikhanovsky's group used the collection of signatures to change the government," which is apparently illegal in Belarus during elections.

Yermoshina also said she had sued Tikhanovsky.



Belarus' riot police officers detain an opposition supporter in Minsk on June 19, 2020, during a gathering to support candidates seeking to challenge President Alexander Lukashenko in the Aug. 9, 2020 presidential election.

Which candidates will be denied registration will be known no later than July 14.

"Looking at how Lukashenko is acting, he chose a tough stance — punishing the politically active and not negotiating," says Shkliarov.

"From this point of view, the (main opposition) candidates won't be registered," Shkliarov adds.

Regardless of what happens, it has become clear that a lot of people in Belarus want to see Lukashenko gone.

In Belarus, there are no public pollsters. Gathering any kind of information without government approval is illegal, meaning that it's impossible to find out Lukashenko's true level

of support.

In April, a government-approved poll leaked online. It showed that Lukashenko enjoyed a 24% support rate in Minsk before the COVID-19 pandemic and massive arrests.

In a June 18 interview with the Natodna Volya website, Gennady Korshunov, head of the Institute of Sociology at the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, confirmed that the leaked information was correct.

He also confirmed that the Central Electoral Commission enjoyed only 11% trust in March.

With no independent information about Lukashenko's true level of support, opposition websites and television channels conducted their own

unofficial polls. Most showed that Lukashenko enjoyed the support of just 3–6%.

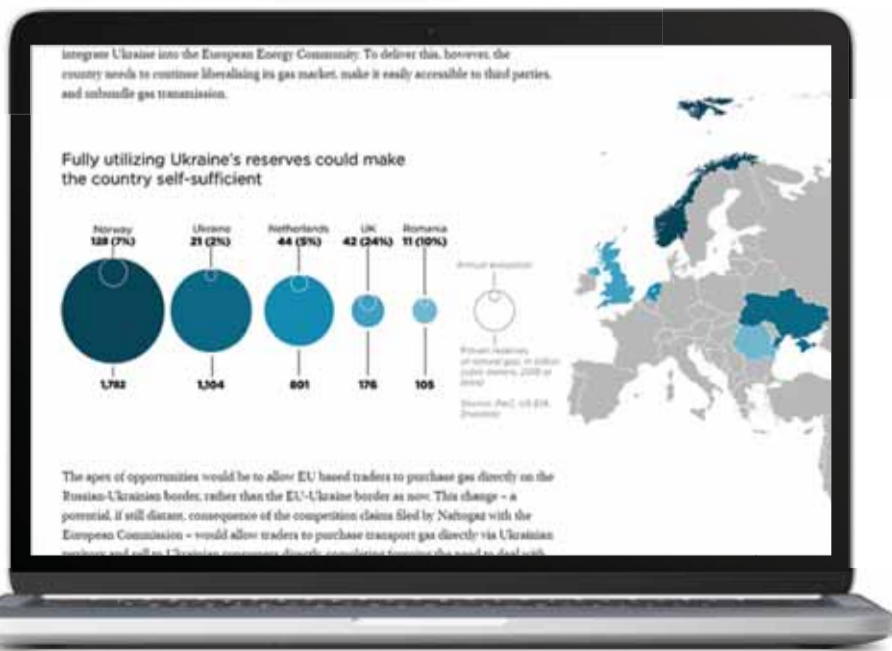
Protesters on the street began shouting "Sasha 3 percent," using a nickname for Alexander in Russian.

"There was never such a massive protest, there was never such a high number of people willing to sign for candidates, there were never 2–3-kilometer lines of people waiting to sign for the opposition," says Shkliarov.

"Regardless of whether Lukashenko will win the elections, a certain process has begun and there is no turning back."

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Lifestyle

Have a meal inside your favorite restaurant. Kyiv authorities allowed indoor service to resume on June 24.



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Seas, lakes and rivers: Where it is safe to swim this summer

By Artur Korniienko
korniienko@kyivpost.com

Not everyone in Kyiv would dare to take a dip in the city's Dnipro River, but because of the novel coronavirus pandemic, its sun-soaked beaches are the safest places to relax by the water this year.

Kyiv authorities allowed swimming pools to reopen on June 24, but mainly only for individual swim training. Meanwhile, the Dnipro's beaches have been full of people since the start of June, over two weeks before the city authorities officially allowed swimming there.

While health experts say that running water and direct sunlight make beaches safer, there are still other dangers in the water: bacteria, pollution and debris. That's why local authorities in each city, district or oblast inspect the beaches before the swimming season starts.

This year, the results have been unusually late because of the weather and the pandemic.

Despite that, experts say you can still enjoy a swim in a lake, river or ocean in Ukraine will staying safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beaches & COVID-19

Chief sanitary doctor Viktor Lyashko approved the opening of sea beaches in mid-May. Ukrainian scientists confirmed, he said, that the sun's ultraviolet rays combined with salt-water kill SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The virus may live in freshwater, but chances of getting infected are slim in running water, he says.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found no evidence that the virus spreads eas-



People are relaxing at the Osokorky Beach on the Nebrezh Lake in Kyiv on June 24, 2020. While not on the list of recommended beaches by local authorities, Nebrezh Lake has some of the cleanest water in the capital, according to environmentalists.

ily through lakes, rivers and seas, but the issue is still underexplored. Former Ukrainian Health Minister Ulana Suprun says that other coronaviruses rapidly die off in water, while SARS-CoV-2 mostly spreads through inhalation of its air particles.

That's precisely why it is vital to physically distance from other people at the beaches, wash hands frequently and not touch other people's things. The Health Ministry recommends keeping at least 1.5 meters of distance from other people. Suprun recommends avoiding large crowds near the water. She also says outdoor beaches are safer than indoor pools.

Water inspection

But before going to the beach, it is important to check the local authorities' website with information about the quality of the water there.

Inspection teams in some regions had trouble conducting the tests because of the COVID-19 quarantine that Ukraine imposed in mid-March.

Still, the main reason why the swimming season started late this year was the weather. The temperature started rising above 20 °C only in June.

Kyiv officially opened the swimming season on June 19, almost two weeks later than last year, with 14 recommended beaches. As of June 12, the Health Ministry also recom-

mends 70 other freshwater beaches in Ukraine, 22 on the Black Sea and 26 on the Sea of Azov.

Reliability of tests

The tests that local authorities conduct follow state protocols. The water quality is tested using bacteriological and chemical analyzes and should meet a long list of sanitary requirements that Ukraine inherited from the Soviet Union. Key points are the oxygen content, the absence of E. coli bacteria and pathogenic contamination.

In Kyiv, beaches are inspected by the Pleso municipal company, which also maintains them. Konstantyn Pigulia, its director for the mainte-

nance and development of recreational zones, says that their tests are reliable. The only deficiency he sees is that there is no unified state system with relevant information on the quality of bodies of water and beaches, like an interactive map.

"If there was one state system where a person could see the quality of water today in Kyiv, Dnipro, Odesa or other cities — it would be much more convenient, better and faster," Pigulia told the Kyiv Post.

The State Agency of Water Resources has an interactive map of only the largest bodies of water, but it's rarely updated and doesn't include information on where it's safe to swim. So the best advice is to check the local authorities' website.

Most local authorities test the water at the beaches only once a year at the start of the season, ecologist Maksym Soroka says, which is not enough. In Kyiv, Pleso tests the water at the beaches every week until Sept. 15 and updates their status on the company's website, according to Pigulia.

Algal bloom

Updating this information is especially important during the algal bloom season, when seaweed and some bacteria rapidly multiply on the water surface, blocking sunlight and oxygen. This happens when water stays over 25 °C for more than two weeks, Pigulya says. Besides being toxic, such water is simply unpleasant to swim in.

Algal bloom traditionally happened at the end of the summer in Ukraine, but this has shifted toward the beginning of August in recent years.

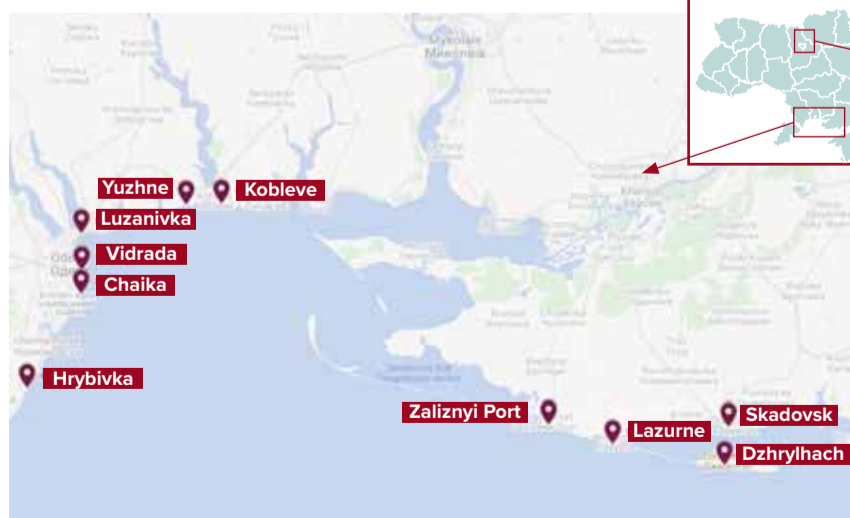
"Because this year has been quite arid, the concentration of pollution is higher. Sooner or later, it's carried into the seas, accumulates there and leads to algal bloom," says Anna Danyliak, a sustainable agriculture expert.

Like many other Kyivans, Danyliak has avoided swimming in the Dnipro River for many years.

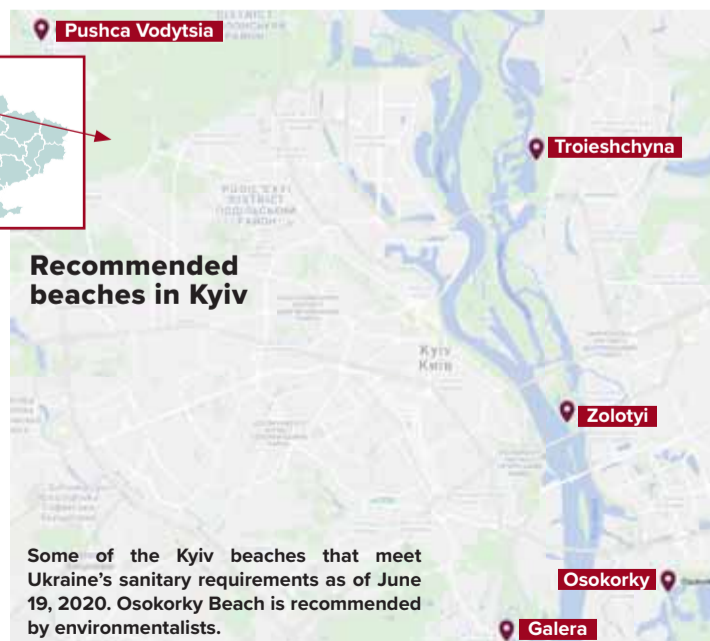
Pigulya says he swims in the Dnipro and recommends eight beaches in Kyiv that have received the international Blue Flag ecological certificate. His favorites are the municipal beach in the Pushcha Voditsa suburb, and the Troieshchyna beach upriver from all other Kyiv beaches. Soroka said that he is planning a vacation on the Black Sea in southern Ukraine.

"There is really a large number of clean, high-quality bodies of water in each oblast. The problem is that you need to search for them," he says. "This information should be publicly available." ❄

Recommended beaches on the Black Sea



These are some of the Black Sea beaches that meet Ukraine's sanitary requirements as of June 12, 2020.



Recommended beaches in Kyiv

Some of the Kyiv beaches that meet Ukraine's sanitary requirements as of June 19, 2020. Osokorky Beach is recommended by environmentalists.

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Only short-listed candidates will be contacted and will receive detailed job description prior to their interviews. All resumes w/cover letter & references should be sent to tenders@itech-ukraine.org by 6 p.m. on July 10, 2020.



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Experience:

A minimum of three (3) years of clinical experience post-graduate training in primary care (Family Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Pediatrics, or Internal Medicine) with at least 50% of the provider's time involved with direct patient care during that time is required.

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Must be able to perform common office-based surgical procedures, primary care procedures, and have emergency response skills such as intubation of patients, IV insertion, ability to perform CPR, etc. Position shall work with standard medical equipment and is expected to know how to operate basic laboratory equipment. Must be proficient in use of computer including Microsoft Word, Excel, Internet functions including medical literature searches and use of common computer-based applications/programs.

Must be sensitive to needs and feelings of the patients and be approachable and personable in order to obtain and maintain the trust and confidence of employees and dependents.

Application deadline: July 5, 2020

How to Apply:

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2018: One year before a new political sea change

1 Parliament member Nadiya Savchenko speaks in a Kyiv court on March 23, 2018. The Security Service of Ukraine arrested the former military pilot Savchenko on charges of plotting to carry out an attack on the Verkhovna Rada.

2 Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov undergoes a medical examination on Sept. 29, 2018, in Russia, where he was serving a 20-year sentence on terrorism charges for opposing the Kremlin annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula.

3 President Petro Poroshenko (L) gives a speech at Sofiivska Square after Epiphanius, Metropolitan of Pereyaslav and Bila Tserkva, became head of the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church on Dec. 15, 2018.

4 A ray of sun shines on a Ukrainian soldier through a bullet hole in the roof of a building near Avdiivka in Donetsk Oblast on June 21, 2018.

5 Anti-Kremlin Russian journalist Arkady Babchenko (C), Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) head Vasyl Grytsak (L) and Prosecutor General Yuri Lutsenko (R) attend a press conference in Kyiv on May 30, 2018. The SBU admitted it had staged the murder of Babchenko in order to foil an attempt on his life by Russia.

6 Real Madrid's Brazilian defender, Marcelo, lifts the trophy as players celebrate winning the UEFA Champions League final match in Kyiv on May 26, 2018.

7 Participants attempt to enter the Prosecutor General's Office during a rally held by activists of Ukrainian nationalist groups and their supporters, who demand the dismissal of Deputy Prosecutor General Yevhen Yenin and protest against the extradition of Russian citizen Timur Timgoyev on Sept. 17, 2018.

8 A Russian coast guard ship rams a Ukrainian vessel on Nov. 25, 2018, in the Black Sea near the Kerch Strait. Russia illegally seized three Ukrainian ships and detained 24 Ukrainian sailors. (Photos by Volodymyr Petrov, Kostyantyn Chernichkin, Oleg Petrasniuk, Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service)

