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Kyiv Post

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Adieu, Avakov

Arsen Avakov served as interior minister for 7.5 years, under four prime ministers and two presidents. His era ended on July 15.

While many celebrated his resignation, the future of the key ministry remains grim, even after Avakov's exit.



Kostyantyn Chernichkin

Interior Minister Arsen Avakov takes part in the Annual Collegium of the Interior Ministry on Jan. 27, 2018 in Kyiv. Avakov, who served under two presidents and four prime ministers, resigned on July 13. The parliament approved the resignation on July 15. He was often dubbed the second most powerful man in Ukraine. With him gone, President Volodymyr Zelensky will install a loyalist at the ministry. It will bring him unchallenged authority: He will control the government, the parliament, and all law enforcement agencies.

See coverage on pages 8, 9



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Laying of a "gooseneck" pipe on April 5, 2019 in Lubmin, Germany. Part of the Nord Stream 2 project, the section sits on the German landfall side of the gas transportation project. Each pipe is expected to carry 22.5 billion cubic meters of gas per year.

Axel Schmidt/Nord Stream 2

Russia puts squeeze on Europe over Nord Stream 2

By Dylan Carter

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Russia is sending a clear message to Europe: Allow the completion of Nord Stream 2 or gas prices will remain high and supplies dangerously low.

Following a cold winter in Europe, gas storages in several European countries are at less than 50% capacity.

Russian gas giant Gazprom, unwilling to increase gas supplies, has driven gas prices to new highs and sent gas brokers scrambling to seek alternative supply.

Russia's actions are placing pressure on Europe's leaders to allow the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which project head Matthias Warnig says will be completed by the end of the summer.

With the completion of Nord Stream 2 looming, Ukraine finds itself on the verge of a catastrophe: In bypassing Ukraine, Russia will be able to economically isolate it and increase the EU's energy dependence on Russia.

Moreover, it gives Russia the leverage to block Ukraine's accession to NATO and the European Union.

Warning signs

Current gas deliveries from Gazprom suggest Russia is weaponizing gas deliveries to force its agenda in Europe.

In the first quarter of 2021, the transit of natural gas from Russia to European countries through Ukraine's Gas Transmission System (GTS) amounted to 10.4 billion cubic meters. In 2019, the amount for the same period was 21 billion cubic meters.

And for the third month in a row in June, Gazprom has not purchased intermittent capacity for natural

gas transit through Ukraine's GTS, according to Expro Consulting, a firm that focuses on the development of Ukraine's oil and gas and energy industries.

Meanwhile, gas prices for August have reached a historic high of 36.3 euros per megawatt hour. Depleted gas supplies due to a cold winter have led to the higher demand.

Russia's refusal to purchase gas transit through Ukraine amid high demand raises eyebrows.

Anastasia Simitsa, a resident security expert at Ukrainian energy think-tank Dixi Group, says that "if Gazprom built its strategy for economic feasibility, then the company would try to sell its product profitably to European customers."

Instead, she says, Russia is manipulating the market by creating an artificial deficit and the illusion of the need for Nord Stream 2.

This strategy seems to be confirmed by the head of Gazprom's exporting division Elena Burmistrova, who said in May that Gazprom would be "able to cover additional demand with the commissioning of Nord Stream 2."

Burmistrova's message to Europe is crystal clear: Gas supplies will remain low until the EU caves to their demands to finish Nord Stream 2, wherein gas supplies will start again.

Olena Pavlenko, president of Ukrainian Energy think-tank Dixi Group, told the Kyiv Post that Gazprom's behavior is evidence of Russia's attempt at blackmailing Europe.

"These threats were once exclusively used on Russia gas-dependent nations, now they are used against EU countries as well," Pavlenko said. "It is a serious signal of what Russia's strategy will be with further gas dependence."

This is especially true for Germany,

for which the share of Russian gas will be higher than the recommended 30% once Nord Stream 2 is completed, according to Pavlenko.

Cornering Europe

Russia's squeeze on Europe has been years in the making. Europe, particularly Western Europe, has become increasingly dependent on gas from Russia. Gazprom supplies nearly 40% of Europe's gas, 81% of that to Western European countries.

At the same time, domestic gas production has all but sealed the EU's fate as dependent on Russian gas. EU natural gas production fell by 11.0% in 2019 compared with 2018, according to Eurostat.

The Netherlands, the EU's main natural gas producer, registered a drop in production by 13.5%.

According to the latest long-term European gas outlook from S&P Global Platts Analytics, Russia's market share is expected to remain about 30%, rising close to 40% by 2040, as domestic European gas production and supplies from Norway dwindle.

Ukraine in trouble

Pavlenko says the economic consequences of reduced gas volumes are scheduled to be catastrophic to the Ukrainian market.

"For Ukraine, this means not only a loss of funds from gas transportation, but also means that gas transmission operators must adapt to reduced volumes, lay off several thousands of employees, and revise tariffs for the domestic market," Pavlenko said.

Russia and Ukraine signed a five-year agreement through 2024 that guarantees Russia will transport no less than 40 billion cubic meters through Ukraine each year and must pay Ukraine at least \$7.2 billion over the course of the contract.

If Nord Stream 2 is completed, it will allow Russia to start bypassing Ukraine after 2024 — or even earlier, if Gazprom breaks the contract, dragging Ukraine into arbitration.

Pavlenko also says that the EU's reliance on Russian gas will dissuade any intervention in the region in the event of further military aggression by Russia.

"Without the Ukrainian pipeline, the level of EU concern will be significantly lower than now," she said.

At the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on June 4, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that "Ukraine must show good will if it wants Russian gas transit to Europe and related fees to remain."

And of Russia's and Germany's claims that they will leave guaranteed transit volumes in Ukraine, Pavlenko says these are "empty promises."

All but settled

With Nord Stream 2 completion on the horizon, Ukraine's position as a gas transit nation has become increasingly compromised.

Ukraine, already reeling from greatly diminished gas volumes, is sounding the alarm on any compromise deal regarding the pipeline. On June 25, Naftogaz CEO Yuriy Vitrenko called for "restraint" in various proposal assessments that offer a compromise, calling for suppliers other than Gazprom to be allowed to access Ukraine's gas transit network.

The Biden administration's decision to waive sanctions on Nord Stream 2 has all but ensured the project's completion, despite U.S. lawmakers' calls for the administration to act against the pipeline.

With the Nord Stream 2 fate being almost settled, Ukraine's future seems increasingly uncertain. ❧

Dilapidated state mines continue to threaten energy security

By Veronika Melkozerova
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Every day, Volodymyr Zatuliviter descends 600 meters into one of Ukraine's three remaining uranium mines, knowing he might not even get paid for it.

The 26-year-old miner from Smoline village of Kirovohrad Oblast and others like him keep Ukraine's lights on.

The Smolinska mine, where Zatuliviter works, supplies uranium concentrate to Energoatom, Ukraine's state nuclear power company, which makes more than half of the country's electricity. Close to another third of the country's power comes from burning coal, produced from dozens of coal mines around the country.

Despite the importance and danger of his job, Zatuliviter often goes without pay. On June 14, he and dozens of colleagues traveled 300 kilometers to Kyiv to protest.

"This has been going on for two years. We do our jobs, breathing toxic air and working in the contaminated water of the mine, wearing our old gear. And then we also have to protest to get our salaries," Zatuliviter said.

"After they paid us, they had no money left for the mines to keep working. Either we get our money and the mine stops, or we keep it alive but work for free."

The Smolinska Mine has been on the verge of collapse for two years. The heads of the Skhid GZK company, which runs all three uranium mines in the region, accuse Energoatom of not paying for the uranium on time, saying it owes the mines Hr 600 million (\$21.8 million).

But Energoatom claims its payments are timely, like the Hr 200 million (\$7.2 million) payment it made on June 15, right after a miners' protest in Kyiv.

But the problem is bigger than any one company. Miners say the entire industry that employs 70,000 people is broken.

"Our gear is old and crappy. Our equipment hasn't been repaired for years. Meanwhile, our chiefs get



Coal miners of the Nadiya ("Hope") mine strike their helmets on the ground to make noise during a rally demanding to be paid all the back wages they're owed near the Cabinet of Ministers in Kyiv on June 23, 2020. Coal miners across Ukraine are regularly forced to protest just to get their employers to pay them for their hard, dangerous work.

huge salaries. For what?" Zatuliviter said.

In 2020, the Skhid GZK mining company lost Hr 550 million (\$20 million). However, its acting head, Anton Bendyk, was paid a salary of more than Hr 1 million (\$36,000) for the year. Skhid GZK's press service did not respond to a request for comment.

Mykhailo Volynets, chief of the Free Trade Unions Confederation of Ukraine, said that most state-owned mines share the same story of corruption and mismanagement. Even when mining companies post huge losses and rack up debts, their directors continue to enjoy high salaries at everyone else's expense.

The bosses spend peanuts on maintenance, leading to more financial losses.

As the mines age and crumble, Ukraine relies more and more on coal imports, including from its invader, Russia.

Out of order

In 2014, some 121 coal mines were operating in Ukraine, according to the government. By 2021, Ukraine controlled only 33 of them.

The state lost control of more than 80 mines after Russia invaded Ukraine, seized large parts of the Donbas and killed nearly 14,000 people.

But the mines that remained under Ukraine's control are barely surviving.

"Some mines are out of action for 6–8 months at a time, their electricity is cut off for unpaid debts," Volynets told the Kyiv Post. "Only the air conditioning and water pumping systems work. And people still have to be paid even if a mine doesn't extract anything."

Many mines are deeply unprofitable and rely on subsidies to survive.

"The government throws billions at the industry but people still have to strike to get their salaries," Volynets said.

Over 70,000 Ukrainians are currently employed by the mines, according to the Free Trade Unions Confederation. They include miners, mechanics, cleaning, and technical staff.

In many areas, mines are the only employers in town, keeping their economically depressed regions on life support. Most of them are in eastern Ukraine, close to the front line held by Russia-backed militants.

Struggling to survive

Coal production in Ukraine dropped from 64.9 million tons in 2014 to 28.8 million tons in 2020.

"State-owned mines produced 2.6 million tons in 2020, 2.2 million tons of which were energy coal. For comparison, in 2015 state mines produced 6.7 million tons," Olga Buslavets, former acting ener-

gy minister of Ukraine told the Kyiv Post.

Worse yet, every year, getting coal out of the ground becomes more expensive.

"The production cost of Ukrainian coal increased by 80% in the last five years," Buslavets said.

In 2020, it cost Hr 3,833 (\$139) to extract a ton of coal, which then sold for Hr 1,451 (\$52), meaning mines were losing money on each ton.

"The state had to invest more and more into the state mining companies every year. State subsidies grew from Hr 1.2 billion (\$43.6 million) in 2015 to Hr 5 billion (\$181.8 million) in 2020," Buslavets said.

Between 2015–2020 the mining companies' debts to the state grew to Hr 32 billion (\$1.1 billion).

Their debts to employees also ballooned. In 2016, mines used coal revenue to cover 70% of their salary costs while the government paid for the rest. In 2020, mines could cover only 25% of salaries, according to Buslavets.

Huge debts

As of June 2021, the Ukrainian government owed more than Hr 367.5 million (\$13.3 million) in unpaid salaries to miners, accrued between

2015–2020, as well as Hr 752 million (\$27.3 million) accrued in the first five months of 2021, Ukraine's Coal and Energy Ministry press service told the Kyiv Post.

As a result, miners occasionally have to protest or hunger strike to get their salaries.

"Many of them got their utilities at homes shut off, as they don't have the money to pay for electricity, heating, and hot water," Volynets said.

In 2016, Viktor Trifonov, a 60-year-old former miner and the head of the Miners Trade Union of Selidove, a town in Donetsk Oblast, set himself on fire in front of the Energy Ministry in Kyiv. He survived.

"I did that because people expected I could help them to get their money. Our hunger strike didn't work. I was desperate," Trifonov said. The ministry soon covered its debts at the time.

Protests for salaries have become part of Ukrainian miners' work culture.

As a result, many of the miners the Kyiv Post talked to near the Energy Ministry fell for the militants' propaganda that the miners were honored in the USSR and have to beg for their salaries in Ukraine.

Following several protests, on July 14, the Cabinet of Ministers ruled to pay Hr 393 million in salary debts to state-employed miners.

Fear of the future

Ukraine produced up to 30% of its energy from coal in 2020, with domestic coal accounting for 27%. The remaining few percent comes from other sources, including imports from the EU, Russia, and Belarus.

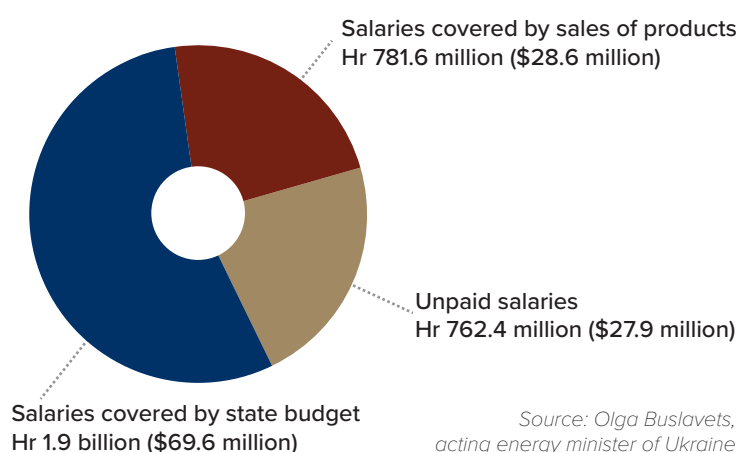
The importance of coal in Ukraine's energy sector falls every year, as the government turns to renewable energy.

Under the decarbonization plan, announced in Ukraine in recent years, authorities plan to close most state coal mines by 2030, which is a terrifying proposition for miners.

They believe that this program is a convenient cover for Ukrainian authorities who want to bankrupt and close the mines keeping dozens of industrial towns alive in eastern Ukraine.

The closures could be very costly for Ukraine, Volynets said.

Salaries at state-owned mines, January-May 2021



Source: Olga Buslavets, acting energy minister of Ukraine

In recent years, state-owned mines have become less and less profitable. Employee salaries were once covered by the mine's income but now they depend heavily on government subsidies and miners often go without pay.

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EDITORIALS

Long overdue

Objectively, the resignation of Interior Minister Arsen Avakov is good news. He has been a pillar of Ukrainian corruption and a major obstacle to reform for far too long – since he took office in 2014.

His exit should have taken place much earlier and in a very different way. In 2019–2020, Zelensky kept Avakov on the job despite civil society’s strong opposition to the ex-minister’s failures and alleged corruption.

Zelensky praised him and legitimized Avakov’s 2019 publicity stunt in which three suspects were arrested in connection with the murder of Belarusian journalist Pavel Sheremet in 2016. Since then, no hard evidence has been presented against them, and all three have been released from detention facilities.

Eventually Avakov’s downfall happened for the wrong reasons: Zelensky didn’t care about his toxic reputation but he took issue with his disloyalty and independence. The president is clearly seeking to monopolize power and have only loyal puppets in all key jobs.

Neither Avakov nor Zelensky stated any plausible motives for the minister’s resignation. To add insult to injury, Zelensky’s allies lavished ample praise upon Avakov during his dismissal, as if he was a hero of Ukraine, and they regretted saying goodbye to him.

This is nonsense. Zelensky and his associates must have said the truth: Avakov must have been fired because he has sabotaged police reform and all high-profile cases and is likely involved in large-scale corruption.

Moreover, Avakov must be investigated for his alleged crimes and convicted if found guilty.

There is plenty of evidence to be investigated: video footage clearly implicates Avakov and his allies in corrupt dealings. But given the behavior of the Zelensky administration, he will likely stay unpunished.

Unfortunately, Western embassies have also failed to properly respond to Avakov’s disastrous tenure.

He has curried favor with Western diplomats and regularly met them. Regardless of their motives, this can be seen as a campaign to legitimize one of Ukraine’s most odious and tainted officials.

Avakov’s expected replacement, Denys Monastyrsky, is also questionable. He has ties to Avakov, which means that the ex-minister’s influence and corrupt legacy will likely remain intact.

Monastyrsky has also taken part in a rigged competition for the head of the State Investigation Bureau and praised a PhD thesis by a pro-Kremlin politician that consists of nonsensical pseudo-science.

As he often does, Zelensky is appointing a political loyalist with dubious credentials, not an independent professional with integrity.

The bottom line is that, despite the positive fact of Avakov’s resignation, the overall picture stays the same. Corruption continues, and reforms in the key ministry are out of question.

Get over it, Putin

On July 12, Russian President Vladimir Putin published a delusional article once again trying to convince the world that Russians and Ukrainians are one and the same.

Putin’s article, published in both Ukrainian and Russian, attempts to promote the tired myth that Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians have always shared a single history. In it, he insists that Ukrainians are just “Little Russians” who have lost their way and fallen prey to nefarious Western influence.

First of all, these claims are patently false. Ukrainians and Russians, while they have a shared history, have always been historically different.

Even more importantly, regardless of the past, Ukrainians have repeatedly chosen their future.

They chose it when they decided to break off from the Soviet Union and gain independence.

Then again in 2004, when during the Orange Revolution they rejected the Kremlin-backed candidate Viktor Yanukovich from becoming president.

Then again in the 2014 EuroMaidan Revolution when Ukrainians flatly rejected closer ties with Russia in favor of an association agreement with the European Union.

Just look at the 2019 elections. Pro-Russian presidential candidate Yuriy Boyko got a pitiful 11% of the vote.

And lest we forget the Ukrainian soldiers who risk their lives every day fighting Russian aggression on the front lines of the war in Donbas to prove to the world what country they do not want to be a part of.

If Ukrainians felt such a brotherly longing for Russia, then why do so many young people who choose to study abroad go to Europe, Canada and the US?

If Ukrainians wanted to be a part of this so-called “single nation” with Russia and Belarus then why are English-language schools so popular in Ukraine?

It’s simple: Ukrainians don’t want to be one with Russia. Ukrainians have proved time and time again that they view themselves as part of the Western, European community.

It is crystal clear what the Ukrainian people want. Maybe that’s what’s got Putin so upset – Ukraine broke up with Russia many years ago and he isn’t over it.

We get it. Putin is obsessed with Ukraine. And for a good reason. From the most fertile soil in the world to more than 200,000 world-class IT specialists, Ukraine has it all.

Maybe Putin is trying to distract his own people from an increasingly grim reality. Just this week, Russia recorded its highest-ever daily death toll from the coronavirus since the start of the pandemic. Pensions are diminishing. Mass protests arose this year over the poisoning of opposition figure Alexey Navalny.

The fate of the Ukrainian people isn’t up to Putin, it never has been.

How many revolutions and wars do Ukrainians have to fight until Putin finally gets it?



NEWS ITEM: Russian President Vladimir Putin authored an article, published on the Kremlin website on July 12, where he once again promoted the false narrative that Ukrainians and Russians are “one people.”



NEWS ITEM: President Volodymyr Zelensky visited Germany on July 11-12, and had dinner with Chancellor Angela Merkel. The visit didn't yield any concrete results. Germany is about to help Russia deal a major blow both to Ukraine and to Europe's security by letting it finish the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.



NEWS ITEM: Interior Minister Arsen Avakov resigned on July 12 after having served as the minister for 7.5 years, under two presidents and four prime ministers. He acquired a controversial reputation, and the civil society had been cheering for his resignation for years, portraying him as a devil at protests. However, many fear that Avakov's replacement will not be an improvement.



NEWS ITEM: On July 12, an association of Ukrainian farmers launched an online platform for trading onion and garlic that they called “the onion and garlic stock market.” The goal is to connect Ukrainian farmers with international consumers.

See these features online at Kyivpost.com

Ukraine’s Friend & Foe Of The Week



Friend

Vince Owen, commanding officer with HMS Defender
The commander gets the award on behalf of the United Kingdom, which is Ukraine’s strong ally helping it resurrect its naval power and protect its waters.



Foe

Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, Germany’s defense minister
The official canceled her meeting with Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky, offering no explanations. Germany has been prioritizing Russia’s Nord Stream 2 project over Ukraine and Europe’s security.

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

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

Fearing repercussions in Russia, American professor comes to Kyiv to shoot films

By Dylan Carter
carter@kyivpost.com

One of the most widely used American Russian-language multimedia teaching materials, "Golosa," will now record its Russian-language video segments in Kyiv.

"Golosa," first printed in 1992, is a Russian language resource widely used in American universities and schools.

The lead author of the book, Dr. Richard Robin of George Washington University, an expert on Russian-language education and instruction, originally recorded video segments for the textbook in Moscow. But Russia's current political conditions have made filming the segments there impossible now.

A different Russia

One of the most pressing barriers to filming in Russia is the Kremlin's views on homosexuality and gay adoption.

"I have colleagues who are lesbians that adopted a child originally born in Russia," Robin stated. "They used to take their child with them every summer. But then they decided, with the new anti-gay laws, and the anti-adoption procedures, that maybe it would be a good idea not to go to Russia," Robin said.

Robin also said it used to be easy to ask a store manager in Moscow to film in their store, but now, "with all foreigners being suspect, that kind of conversation would probably not happen."

Since their adoption would be declared illegitimate in Russia, they decided to seek other places where Russian is spoken.

The senior American lecturer has now started filming in both Kyiv and Odesa, speaking with business owners, members of the public, professionals, and officials.

"In Kyiv everything is very relaxed, and Americans are well received... no one is going to stop me and say: 'no no don't do that,'" Robin said.

Russian in Ukraine

While there has been a concerted effort by the government following the 2014 Euromaidan Revolution to promote the use of Ukrainian in the public sphere, Russian still remains widely spoken.

"Russian seems to be spoken pretty freely. There seems to be a lot of pressure in the media to have everything in Ukrainian. I don't see anything wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with trying to make the language that was supposed to be the designated language of the country, the national language," the professor said.

In Ukraine, most of the population profess Ukrainian to be their native tongue. According to a 2017 Razumkov Center poll, 67.7% of Ukrainians use Ukrainian as their first language, 17.4% mix Russian and Ukrainian, and 13.8% state that Russian is their first language.

According to a 2020 poll conducted by the Center for Social Monitoring, however, 36.3% of Ukrainians speak only Ukrainian,

10.3% speak only Russian, and 26.8% speak both languages equally often. In Kyiv, Russian is widely spoken.

The professor recognized that there were challenges to filming in Ukraine, like sensitive language issues, but pushed back against critics of Russian language education.

"I'm very sensitive to the notion of repressing original languages that people spoke. I understand the nationalistic urge to make one single language. A country should have a lingua franca, and Ukrainian now is that. But to repress people who want to speak their own language at home, I think that's a bad idea."

"All of the people I'm interviewing, they're native Russian speakers. It's not as if I have to look for Russian speakers here," Dr. Robin stated.

Filming in Kyiv

The academics are now looking to make the 6th edition of their book more inclusive and diverse. The decision to film in Kyiv will be followed by incorporating audio clips and written passages from Central Asian Russian-users.

For Robin, the move is not a reluctant decision, but rather highlights the dire political situation in Russia.

"I don't need Russia to change its ways on my behalf so I can start shooting video, I don't need him to stop oppressing people just for my video, I need to be assured that foreigners won't be viewed as foreign agents trying to do damage to Russia. And I get that feeling now." 🇺🇸



Richard Robin is a senior lecturer from George Washington University in Washington D.C. Robin has written for numerous language journals and is an expert on technology in language teaching.

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EUROPEAN ENERGY SECTOR IS CHANGING AT THE MOST RAPID PACE EVER



Oleg Nikonorov, Regional Gas Company CEO

Ten years from now the energy sector will have a completely different landscape. This technological shift will be as huge as the difference between a Tesla and Volkswagen Golf.

In my opinion, there are three major factors driving the energy sector's transformation:

#1 Growing energy consumption

Increased transportation, heating, households, and industrial production are showing persistent growth of electricity consumption.

#2 Decarbonization

Europe has set a goal to reduce carbon emissions by 50% by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050. That's a difficult target and the energy sector is of paramount importance to meet that goal.

#3 Renewables

To meet decarbonization targets, all future energy consumption will be covered by renewables and green gases, such as hydrogen. Traditional fossil fuels will lose their share of the market as hydrogen begins to play a significant role in renewables in the future.

All of this requires a very serious energy infrastructure makeover to make it happen. 500 billion euros will need to be invested over the next decade in Green Deal projects from both the private and government sectors in Europe. Roughly 50% will be invested in the production of green energy, and 50% will be invested in infrastructure to bring green energy to the customer. This train is already moving forward!

What is the role of Ukraine in the European Green Deal? People wondering: Is Ukraine capable of being part of the European Green Deal; what are the benefits for Ukraine to join it?

The answers to all questions are positive! Ukraine has a unique chance to be on the same train as the rest of Europe so as to not be left at the train station.

To do so, Ukraine has to move in the same direction and play by the same rules. These are the factors that will drive Ukrainian energy strategy:

#1 Decarbonization

Decarbonization is becoming the cornerstone of the new Energy Strategy for Ukraine and should include reachable goals for decarbonization to secure all of the resources required. The energy balance will shift from fossil fuels to renewables and syngas like biomethane and hydrogen.

#2 Renewables

Renewables should replace fossil fuels. More investments should be allocated to renewables and regulations should stimulate and protect these investments. Ukraine has excessive capacities in the production of electric power: nuclear, hydro, and solar. They could produce enough hydrogen to export it to the EU.

#3 Sustainable infrastructure

Sustainable infrastructure is essential to bring new energy to customers. Producing hydrogen will become more efficient and less expensive over time, just as solar panels have become cheaper over the last decade. The question is how to best deliver hydrogen to the customer. And the answer is – existing gas infrastructure! But of course, it certainly needs a makeover.

Ukraine's energy infrastructure has been heavily underfinanced for the last 30 years. Gas infrastructure has an enormous technical capacity exceeding current consumption by four times. It needs a complete makeover. This is the same process that many Eastern European countries have gone through over the last ten years.

Today our European colleagues are beginning to redesign and adapt their networks and equipment to hydrogen-ready standards. This requires new significant investments.

The good news for Ukraine is that the existing network can be redesigned into a hydrogen-ready network almost at the cost of the full repairs.

The bottom line is simple: to export hydrogen from Ukraine to the EU, the Ukrainian gas network – including transmission and distribution needs to be brought up to par with hydrogen-ready standards.

We wanted to find out if it was possible, how much would it cost, and how exactly it needed to be done. We found out that our European colleagues were running field tests and experimenting with gas blends. So we decided to act.

RGC launched the hydrogen research project in 2020. We built our test site and provided research grants to universities and scientific laboratories.

We invested in the research and development of the future redesigning of the gas network. We already have the first results from our field tests and laboratories. There are more experiments to be done and a lot of work ahead to get all the answers, but preliminary results say "yes," transporting hydrogen and methane blends via the existing network is possible.

We keep our information open and are sharing it with members of the Hydrogen task force at the MARCOGAZ technical association.

Last month, the Energy Community Secretariat stated in their report that RGC is running the most significant R&D project to bring hydrogen onto the Ukrainian market.

We believe that hydrogen and methane blends could be injected into redesigned gas networks in the nearest future. It's Ukraine's ticket to get on the Green Deal train with the rest of Europe.

How Ukrainian woman disappeared into Islamic State and came back

By Anastasiia Lapatina
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Fatima Boyko, 69, carries a thick binder with her at all times.

Inside, there are letters from the Red Cross and Ukraine's Foreign Ministry, statements by the Security Service of Ukraine and blurred photos of children in tents, all accompanied by the most important item — the list of Ukrainians stuck in prison-like refugee camps in Syria, waiting to come home.

Nine Ukrainian women and 23 children are languishing in the al-Hawl and Roj refugee camps in northeastern Syria. The camps mostly house women who were married to the fighters of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), once the world's deadliest terrorist group, along with their children.

Until recently, Boyko's own niece Amina, who goes under this name for security reasons, was on the list. For four years, Amina and her children lived under ISIS rule, before finally fleeing to al-Hawl in 2019 and seeking repatriation.

Boyko, who coordinates Ukrainian families searching for relatives in Syria, did all she could to bring her niece back. With the help of the Ukrainian government, she succeeded. Amina's family was safely returned to Ukraine on June 16, 2021.

But many continue to live in life-threatening conditions, pleading the Ukrainian government for help.

Here is how one Ukrainian woman and her children spent six years in ISIS and Syrian refugee camps before coming home.

Departure

Amina left Crimea for Turkey in 2014, months before the peninsula was occupied and illegally annexed by Russia.

She and her husband, both Crimean Tatars, were offered construction jobs in Turkey by friends. Boyko said Amina couldn't find a job on the peninsula and had to find ways to financially support her four small children.

"There wasn't even a hint that they would go to Syria," said Boyko.

The couple first left Crimea without the kids. Months later, Amina returned to take them with her; the family was ready to settle down in Turkey, she said. At the time, she was pregnant with her fifth child.

"Amina came back gloomy, wearing only dark colors," Boyko told the Kyiv Post. "And then, overnight, they just disappeared without saying goodbye."

No one could get a hold of Amina or her husband for months. But then, Boyko started receiving text messages from international phone numbers.

"It's me. I'm here. I'm in Syria," one message read.

Trapped

After Amina and her husband got to Turkey, he moved on to live in Syria. Amina had told a journalist from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that she eventually decided to follow him.

She never explained what her



A Ukrainian woman Amina and her seven children exit a plane after arriving at the Kyiv International Airport Zhulyany from Erbil, Iraq, on June 16, 2021. The family was evacuated from Syria after living under the rule of the Islamic State and in Syrian refugee camps for six years.

Alina Smutko

husband was doing there, only that she loved him and wanted to reunite. After she got to northern Syria, much of which was controlled by ISIS at the time, she realized she had made a mistake.

"We were lied to," Amina texted Boyko. "We need to get out of here but we don't know how to. We were trapped."

Boyko advised them to look for the Red Cross, a humanitarian non-governmental organization that assists victims of war and violence. Amina said she hasn't seen anyone from the Red Cross but would try to find a town that wasn't under heavy airstrikes.

Soon, she dropped out of contact, only reaching out to her aunt once every 4–5 months.

"Once, I thought that they probably died," Boyko said. "I've been following the news and had a clear understanding that there is a war in Syria."

The Syrian civil war, which killed 400,000 and displaced millions, began in 2011 after the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad violently suppressed pro-democratic protests around the country.

Ever since, Syria has been torn apart by warring factions, including the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Assad's state military, countless radical factions and Iranian, Russian and Turkish forces, proxies and mercenaries.

ISIS took advantage of the chaos to claim large parts of the country. Amina and her family ended up in ISIS-controlled territory, unable to leave.

At one point, Amina told Boyko that her husband tried to help her and the kids escape the country.

"You will be able to leave tomorrow," Amina's husband told her. But

after that, he left home and never came back.

Later, Amina was told that he died.

Life in Caliphate

Amina and her children spent around four years living under the brutal rule of the terrorists who had seized large parts of Iraq and Syria. Their highest goal is the establishment of a global caliphate, an Islamic state with a Muslim leader, which they used to attract recruits from around the world.

"They go there to build a bright future, having watched videos of cities being destroyed and had been told that Muslims must help each other," Boyko said. "It's a one-way mousetrap."

Every aspect of life under ISIS was governed by a strict interpretation of Sharia, the Islamic religious law.

All men and women were fed a constant stream of indoctrination. Disbelievers and people seen as violating any religious tenets were routinely tortured, crucified and executed, often by beheading. Executions or other physical punishments were often done in public — Amina's small children have witnessed them many times.

Appearance is crucial — men must have beards, while women are required to fully cover their bodies, including their eyes. Listening to music is prohibited, along with smoking and drinking.

Under ISIS rule, men often work in construction or are trained to be fighters. Women are entirely dependent on their husbands and take care of the children and the household. They can't leave the house unescorted, without a husband or a male relative.

"A woman just can't live there

alone," Boyko said.

When Amina's first husband was killed, she was placed into a commune for widows, where men aren't allowed.

She remarried twice, first to a man from Azerbaijan and then to a Crimean Tatar, both of whom were killed. Both got Amina pregnant and she bore two more children.

Amina's last husband was an ISIS militant, she told RFE/RL reporters.

"He was very cruel, he beat my children, I wanted to leave him. 'I know why you are like that, because you are not with (ISIS). And I will take you to the Sharia court, your children will be taken away, and you will be executed.' That's what my husband told me," Amina said.

"Years have passed with us rarely communicating," Boyko told the Kyiv Post, realizing that she had to look for help among politicians, journalists, and defenders of human rights to rescue her niece.

She sent numerous letters to Refat Chubarov, the chairman of the Mejlis, the highest representative body of Crimean Tatars in Ukraine, and the Office of the President of Ukraine. She also sent emails to the Red Cross in Damascus, the capital of Syria.

Boyko wasn't receiving any concrete answers from the government.

Meanwhile, her niece tried to escape the Islamic State.

Escaping ISIS

Fleeing from ISIS, Amina and her children ended up in Baghuz — the last Syrian town that the terrorists controlled.

In 2019, the U.S.-sponsored Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) launched an offensive into the town, finally driving ISIS out and regaining control over all territories that

the Islamic State once held in the country. ISIS had also been pushed out of its conquered territory in Iraq.

Before the battle of Baghuz, the U.S. and its allies created a green corridor for refugees to escape. Amina and her children joined the thousands of people who ran from the town.

"They'd have to walk 10–15 kilometers a day not even knowing where to go," Boyko recalled.

Trudging through villages, cities and deserts, Amina and other refugees went without food for days. They ate grass and drank water from puddles.

Some children died and were buried along the way. Amina's family survived.

Eventually, the group stumbled onto the SDF. Hundreds of women surrendered, including Amina.

They were told that they would be taken to a refugee camp, where they could be safe and protected.

Al-Hawl

"We didn't realize we would be trapped again," Amina told Boyko after she and the kids arrived at al-Hawl — a refugee camp in northeastern Syria, controlled by the SDF.

The camp houses people who were displaced after the Islamic State lost all its territory. Most are wives of ISIS members, many of whom still claim allegiance to the caliphate.

Even though the camp was built for 11,000 people, at least 65,000 refugees, including over 25,000 children, now live in the area of less than four square kilometers that is al-Hawl.

The living conditions are dire — sanitation is poor; access to food,

9 women, 23 children remain in refugee camps in Syria, seek to return to Ukraine

page 6 →

water and healthcare is limited. Most people sleep on mats or the ground in tents and are not allowed to use phones or other means of communication.

The camp is encircled by soldiers and barbed wire, making escape impossible.

Violence is pervasive, as tensions run high between the guards and detainees, many of whom continue following ISIS ideology and try to impose it on others.

Trying to contain the mayhem, SDF enforces strict rules to prevent outbreaks of violence.

Under the burning Syrian sun, some repent and beg their home countries for evacuation. Others keep their loyalty to the Islamic State.

First steps

After Amina arrived at al-Hawl, Boyko created a Facebook group

called "Children: Syria-Iraq," in which she coordinated a community of Ukrainians whose relatives have disappeared in Syria.

"We have repeatedly appealed to the President of Ukraine, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Security Service of Ukraine, and the Commissioner for Human Rights to help our relatives and bring them home," read the first statement published by the group last year in November.

"However, government agencies have long responded in the same way: 'We are working on it.'"

Boyko, along with other group members, started appearing at press conferences and publishing statements. The cause began to receive media attention.

On the night of Dec. 31, 2020, two women and seven children were finally returned to Ukraine from Syria.

But Amina wasn't among them.

Despite a plan to repatriate 49



Women and children walk through the al-Hawl refugee camp in northeastern Syria, which houses relatives of suspected Islamic State fighters, on June 23, 2021. Ukrainian woman Amina and her children spent two years in al-Hawl in dire living conditions before being evacuated to Ukraine on June 16, 2021.

people, only nine were brought back. Ukrainian officials said that the situation in Syria continues to be "very difficult," and they need more time.

Last months

At the beginning of their second year in al-Hawl, Amina and her children were suddenly moved to Roj, another refugee camp, some two kilometers away.

It is much smaller, housing fewer than 3,000 people, most of whom are also ISIS brides and their children. Though conditions in the camp are better, the rules are stricter. To prevent the spread of ISIS propaganda, anything black — the color of the group's symbols — is prohibited.

Nevertheless, arbitrary raids and

violence are widespread.

"We'd be tortured, beaten, stung, and thrown into prisons for every misstep, with children being left alone in tents," Amina told Boyko.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian government continued working to repatriate all other Ukrainians from al-Hawl and Roj.

In mid-June, Amina and her seven children finally received the news — they were going home.

The family was transported to Erbil, a city in northern Iraq, where they were put on a special flight to Kyiv.

Coming home

"It's hard for her to remember all this..."

the deaths, the hunger," Boyko told the Kyiv Post, asking reporters to have patience and respect Amina's privacy.

After arrival, the family was placed in a hospital in Kyiv to go through checkups.

Doctors didn't diagnose Amina or her children with anything that required hospitalization and they were moved into a resort, where they spent a little under two weeks.

She is now in Kherson Oblast in southern Ukraine, adjusting to her new life.

"Everyone makes mistakes and each one of us is looking for a beautiful life," Amina told reporters. "I just made an unlucky choice." ❦

Conquering space: how private companies are changing the industry and our future

Advertisement

"The Earth is the cradle of humanity, but mankind cannot stay in the cradle forever."

Konstantin Tsiolkovsky

Since the 20th century, mankind became interested in space exploration. What has pushed us to leave the comfortable, well-known world of our planet and venture into mysteries of the unknown?

The history of space exploration began in 1957, when Sputnik 2, the first-ever satellite has left the Earth, carrying Laika, the first-ever live creature onboard to the vastness of space. Within the next 20 years, a fierce competition has developed between USSR and the USA, with such milestones as Yuri Gagarin becoming the first man in the world to travel into space, followed by Neil Armstrong as the first man stepping on the Moon's surface. The space exploration industry started to evolve surely but steadily, financed mostly by governments of different countries. In 1998, International Space Station was established by a joint effort, and humanity made a confident step into the third millennium.

A New Space Age commenced in 2001, when Dennis Tito became the first space tourist. This landmark event has brought a major change in the industry, proving that space is not to be explored only for the scientific purpose funded solely by governments and with governmental funding. Currently, the global space economy accounts for 385 Bn USD of total market value, with 79% being commercial revenue and 21% governmental. 47% of governmental space investment is concentrated on space transportation, and the other 53% cover orbital infrastructure, space exploration sciences, Moon, Mars and deep space exploration. The biggest part of the space economy (79%) is taken by the satellite segment.

Today, humanity wants to unravel the mysteries of the solar system and explore other planets and their moons - such as the Mars, Venus, and Jupiter. That is where the private investors step in, taking the space industry to a new level of development. In the 21st century, new major players such as Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Richard Branson, and others, appeared in the industry, with the first three becoming pioneers in the commercial space race of our time. Their visions and approaches differ significantly, however, the contribution made is undisputable.



Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world and the owner of Amazon, founded Blue Origin in 2000. Applying a "slow and steady" approach, this company has been working on development of its New Shepard space vehicle, which launched successfully in 2015. In May 2020, Blue Origin landed a 579 Mn USD contract with NASA for development of a potential lunar lander. However, Bezos does not concentrate exclusively on the commercial side of space exploration. His ultimate goal and vision are to establish near-Earth space colonies in order to reduce the increasing pressure of a potential overpopulation crisis. Global population will reach 10.9 billion people by 2100, fossil fuel reserves are predicted to run out by 2090, sea level will rise by 1.1 m, while the average Earth temperature will increase by +2.9°C. Bezos aims at transferring heavy, dirty manufacturing to the space to avoid further pollution of the Earth. The resources will be supplied from the Moon and asteroids, and the colonies will accommodate trillions of people. Ultimately, the Earth will become rather a tourist destination, day trip away from the colonies. On 5th July 2021, Jeff Bezos stepped down as Amazon's CEO in order to focus on further development of Blue Origin.

Another influential space industry businessman is Elon Musk, an innovator, whose out of the box thinking has brought us Tesla, Falcon rockets and a concept of Hyperloop. Musk created SpaceX, a game-changer aerospace manufacturer, that became a first private company to bring humans to the International Space Station. Next ambitious projects

include cargo and crew missions to Mars in 2024 and 2026. These missions will confirm water resources, build support infrastructure, and develop a base for future expansion, thus laying out a path to the ultimate goal of Mars colonization. By 2050, Musk is planning to establish a self-sustaining city with 1 Mn residents on Mars, which will be a "back-up drive" for civilisation. The colony will be connected to the Earth by 3 daily Starship flights.

While Bezos and Musk work on missions for the future of humanity, Richard Branson, world famous entrepreneur, aims to pioneer the space tourism industry. Branson aims to provide everyone with an opportunity to experience zero gravity and observe the Earth from the space by starting commercial space flights in 2022. Such flight will cost 250,000 USD and the spacecraft will carry 8 people. On 11th July 2021 Branson did a first test flight, which started a new era of space tourism.

However, the space exploration arena is not dominated only by private investment companies. Currently, NASA is preparing its Artemis mission — the biggest space exploration programme in close cooperation with different countries and companies. The main purpose of Artemis is to return astronauts to the Moon and prepare for the next step — the exploration of Mars. It is indicative that for such ambitious project many countries and companies join their efforts since the ground for the future of space exploration lies within cooperation of humanity.

In which areas shall the business continue to develop in order to reach new horizons and benefit the Earth's population? There are 5 key areas: space mining, space infrastructure, space farming, space logistics and orbital transportation and space hospitality and travel. Each of these areas provides new exciting opportunities.

For example, space mining will help humanity to increase decarbonisation of the Earth, and provide space refueling, which will decrease costs in space exploration and travel. With the Orbital Assembly Corporation announcing a project for building a first low orbital hotel, space travel becomes even more realistic. Also, space hospitality is a major step for development of space real estate, that could assist with a problem of the Earth's overpopulation.

Space farming will be a next logical step in case of shifting the Earth's population to the space. Food production in the space will lower the costs of space hospitality, and it will also allow space missions to make longer flights into the deep space due to the fact of food availability outside of the Earth. However, solar radiation could be harmful for the plants and zero gravity could complicate the farming conditions. Space manufacturing and construction could benefit from microgravity and vacuum conditions. In-space manufacturing would enable sustainable space exploration missions at reduced cost compared to launching from the Earth.

In conclusion, despite all challenges that humanity faces on the road of space exploration, the benefit of it is unquestionable. By 2040, the space economy revenue is expected to reach approximately 1 Tn USD. As humanity continues to make steps in space exploration, permanent bases on the Moon's surface, pinwheel space stations as gateways for space travel and temporary settlements for asteroids mining activities can turn from an exciting future into realistic present for humanity.

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'Almighty' Arsen Avakov leaves interior ministry after 7.5 years

By Oleksiy Sorokin
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In February 2014, low-key politician Arsen Avakov became the interior minister in the temporary government created during the EuroMaidan Revolution.

Seven years, four months and 18 days later, Avakov resigned from the job as one of the most powerful people in Ukraine.

Avakov served under two presidents and four prime ministers. He survived dozens of scandals and protests demanding his resignation.

The era of Avakov ended abruptly when he filed a resignation letter on July 13. Two days later, parliament approved it with 291 votes.

During his seven years in office, Avakov held enormous sway over Ukraine, commanding an army of 200,000 law enforcers and influencing radical groups.

He also was the only top official with his own influence, not dependent on President Volodymyr Zelensky. His resignation — reportedly on a mutual agreement with Zelensky — removes a counter-balance to the president who already controls the parliament, Cabinet, and law enforcement.

Political Analyst Volodymyr Fesenko says that Zelensky has “finally outgrown Avakov.”

“Zelensky has been in power two years, he gained strength, confidence, his office gained political weight, they came to the conclusion that they don't need to rely on Avakov for stability anymore,” says Fesenko. “The time had come to install a loyalist to lead the ministry.”

Avakov, 57, has said nothing of his plans. His resignation comes just months before the mayoral elections in his hometown, Kharkiv, the second-largest city in Ukraine.

Meteoric rise

Ukrainian activists, lawmakers and human rights groups have demanded the removal of Avakov for years. Yet his resignation came as a surprise.

Avakov was able to capitalize on the change of government after the EuroMaidan Revolution, increasing his political weight ever since.

He was appointed Interior Minister in February 2014, days after then-President Viktor Yanukovich was ousted from power. Taking command of law enforcement agencies, Avakov suddenly found himself among the most powerful people in the country.

His influence only grew as Russia annexed Crimea and ignited a war in the Donbas.

The newly-created 60,000-strong National Guard and dozens of semi-independent volunteer battalions under Avakov's command made him a mighty powerbroker.

Avakov also received political backing, when the People's Front party which he co-led with then-Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, won 82 out of 450 seats during the 2014 parliament elections.

When Yatsenyuk's government resigned, Avakov remained. He was too powerful even for then-President Petro Poroshenko to dislodge.



Activists wearing protective gear hold a banner saying “Avakov, get out,” as they attend a rally demanding the firing of Interior Minister Arsen Avakov on Feb. 23, 2020. Protests demanding the ousting of Avakov sparked regularly for years. Avakov resigned on July 13.

The adult in the room

Surprisingly for many, Avakov was able to keep his post after Zelensky took office.

Avakov successfully distanced himself from the dying People's Front party and allied with Zelensky prior to the 2019 presidential elections.

Being the only experienced politician around Zelensky, “he ‘sold’ stability to the young president,” says Fesenko.

In the early days of Zelensky's presidency, Avakov accompanied the president on his trip to Paris, took part in the four-sided Normandy Format meeting on the future of Donbas and met Pope Francis in the Vatican.

Zelensky called him “one of the most effective state officials.”

Avakov was also tapped to control the streets. He maintained close ties with Andriy Biletsky, founder of Azov volunteer regiment, which answered to Avakov's Interior Ministry. Biletsky, who knew Avakov since at least 2005, took charge of the National Corps, a nationalist political party. For a time, the National Corps had an active presence on the streets of Kyiv.

Biletsky became the face of the nationalist scene. He was loyal to Avakov.

“Avakov was a major stabilizing factor, who keeps the ministry in check, who controls the streets, who maintains bureaucratic stability because Zelensky's first government was young and inexperienced,” says Fesenko.

Toxic minister

Besides having strong ties to radical groups, Avakov's long rule was also

marked by corruption and lack of justice.

Anti-corruption activists argued that Avakov made it impossible for them to oust corrupt officers. Activists left the police vetting commissions in 2016. Only 5,656 police officers, or about 6 percent of the police force, were eventually fired as a result of the vetting procedure.

The rape of a woman in rural Kaharlyk and the fatal shooting of a five-year-old boy in Pereyaslav-Khmelnitsky by drunk police officers have been the most recent, lurid cases of police violence in Ukraine.

“The rape of a woman in the police department in Kaharlyk it's the tip of the iceberg, it just showed us the fraction of to what extent the police are unreformed,” says Daria Kaleniuk, the executive director of the Anti-Corruption Action Center.

Under Avakov's watch, the National Police was accused of sabotaging high-profile investigations and failing to solve criminal cases.

Among them was the murder of Kateryna Gandziuk, a whistleblower and a local official, who died in November 2018 following an acid attack, and Belarusian journalist Pavel Sheremet, who was killed in a car explosion in Kyiv in July 2016.

In Gandziuk's case, the police initially arrested an apparent scapegoat and went after actual perpetrators only after street protests erupted demanding a fair investigation.

Sheremet's case is ongoing and has seemingly reached a dead end. After years of inactivity, in December 2019, Avakov detained a handful of suspects and invited Zelensky to take part in the highly publicized event.

Nearly two years later, the case has yet to move to court, lacking strong evidence. The suspects were released on house arrest after more than a year in pre-trial detention.

The case became the capstone of public dissatisfaction with Avakov.

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

“From the time Zelensky was inserted into the Sheremet case it became a time bomb for Avakov,” says Fesenko.

Corruption allegations have also been brought forward against Avakov's allies.

In 2017, Avakov's son Oleksandr and the minister's ex-deputy, Serhiy Chebotar, were charged by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau with embezzling Hr 14 million (\$550,000) by supplying overpriced backpacks to the Interior Ministry. Both were taped by NABU discussing the scheme.

However, the case was closed a year later.

According to the Rating Group poll, Avakov's disapproval rating peaked at 68% in March 2021 when protests against the minister became regular.

Why now?

Avakov was always unpopular but he survived several government changes under Poroshenko and Zelensky. Each prime minister praised Avakov for “professionalism.”

According to Fesenko the main reason for Avakov's dismissal was that the president wants a loyal appointee leading the ministry.

“Avakov was loyal, yet indepen-

dent,” Fesenko said.

For activists and opposition lawmakers, who have long demanded Avakov's ousting, a simple resignation isn't enough.

“Avakov must be held responsible,” said lawmaker Oleksandra Ustinova, representing the 20-member Voice party, during a parliament meeting on July 15. “This responsibility must be conveyed not just in his dismissal, but also in his criminal responsibility for forgeries, murders and torture associated with the National Police.”

That's unlikely. Zelensky's Servant of the People party has praised the minister even after his resignation, calling him a “professional” and “patriot.”

Kaleniuk said that the way Avakov was let go shows that he must have some kind of an agreement with Zelensky.

Servant of the People party head Oleksandr Kornienko said that he wanted Avakov to represent the party in the upcoming Kharkiv mayoral elections. Avakov launched his business and political career in Kharkiv in the late 1990s and maintained close ties with the city.

“Of course, I don't see a better option for Kharkiv than Arsen (Avakov),” said Kornienko.

Kharkiv council member Dmytro Bulakh says that Avakov is unlikely to win the mayoral race.

“He's highly unpopular in Kharkiv,” says Bulakh, who is in opposition to the government. “Same as everywhere else.”

Fesenko thinks Avakov can't compete for an elected office but his honorable retirement leaves the door open to future appointments.

“This is not the end of Avakov,” he said. ☪

Avakov's dubious legacy to remain intact under his proposed successor

By Oleg Sukhov
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Denys Monastyrsky, who is expected to replace Arsen Avakov as interior minister, is not a reformer and is unlikely to bring much change to the ministry, according to his track record and anti-corruption activists.

Avakov has failed to reform the police, allowing many tainted officers to keep their jobs. Monastyrsky lacks the credentials to do much better. In fact, he has ties to Avakov, who is likely to keep his influence on law enforcement.

Monastyrsky, who was hand-picked by Zelensky, may also be controlled by the President's Office, including its controversial deputy chief of staff Oleh Tatarov.

This will likely strengthen Zelensky's grip on power.

Monastyrsky did not respond to repeated requests for comment. Earlier he said he wouldn't speak in detail about his plans for the ministry until his presentation in the parliament on July 16, when lawmakers vote for his appointment.

"The president offered me the job of interior minister this morning," he said on July 13, the day when Avakov resigned. "This is the most difficult choice in my life and I agreed to seek this position."

Early career

Monastyrsky, 41, was born in the city of Kmelnytsky and got a law degree from Khmelnytsky Public Administration and Law University.

In 2002–2006 he was an aide to Vitaly Oluiko, a lawmaker from then-President Leonid Kuchma's For United Ukraine bloc.

Monastyrsky also worked as a lawyer at law firms Hillmont Partners, Global Ties KC and Legal Consulting from 2007 to 2017. Hillmont Partners used to represent the interests of Zelensky's TV production company, Kvartal 95.

Oleksandr Lemenov, head of anti-corruption watchdog StateWatch, characterized Monastyrsky as "smart" and "sly" and argued he knows criminal law well.

In 2019, Monastyrsky was elected to parliament on Zelensky's Servant of the People ticket and took charge of the Verkhovna Rada's law enforcement committee.

Ties to Avakov

Monastyrsky is no stranger to Avakov's circle.

In 2016–2019, Monastyrsky was an aide to Avakov's deputy Anton Gerashchenko. He also served at the Ukrainian Institute for the

Future, a think tank co-founded by Gerashchenko.

Monastyrsky and his committee did not vote for Avakov's resignation, leaving it up to the Rada to decide.

"Monastyrsky is a representative of Avakov," Tetiana Shevchuk, a lawyer at the Anti-Corruption Action Center, a Kyiv-based watchdog, told the Kyiv Post. "He will promote Avakov's interests. Avakov is going into the shadows but (Monastyrsky as) one of his people will replace him."

Lemenov, who is acquainted with Monastyrsky, told the Kyiv Post that he would not go after Avakov and his allies. He added that some of Avakov's people such as Gerashchenko would likely remain at the ministry.

Monastyrsky denied having links to Avakov. In 2020 he hinted at Avakov's resignation following the rape of a woman by police officers and said that Avakov could be fired if he failed to complete the investigation of the 2016 murder of Belarusian journalist Pavel Sheremet.

Shevchuk argued that Monastyrsky's criticism of Avakov was a publicity stunt. She said that, by criticizing Avakov, Monastyrsky just wanted to show his loyalty to the Zelensky administration.

State Investigation Bureau

In 2016–2017, Monastyrsky was the secretary of the commission to choose the head of the State Investigation Bureau. He was given the job by the Cabinet, in which Avakov held considerable influence.

Lemenov, who was a member of another selection commission at the bureau, said that Monastyrsky voted how authorities wanted him to vote.

Roman Truba, who was eventually chosen as the head of the bureau, was promoted by Avakov's People's Front party, according to Lemenov.

Lemenov and other activists say the selection was dominated by politicians, rigged in favor of government loyalists and ignored civil society's opinion.

Avakov's influence on the selection commission was also mentioned in tapes recorded by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine in the Kyiv Administrative Court. In the tapes, Ukraine's most notorious judge Pavlo Vovk and another controversial judge, Yevhen Ablov, discussed influencing Ablov's potential appointment to the State Investigation Bureau.

"The (State Investigation Bureau) commission is controlled by Avakov's people," Vovk said in the recording. "I reached an agreement with Avakov."

Meanwhile, Monastyrsky's wife



Denys Monastyrsky, a lawmaker with the Servant of the People faction, speaks in the parliament on June 4, 2021. Zelensky hand-picked Monastyrsky as a new interior minister, replacing Arsen Avakov who resigned on July 13. The parliament is expected to approve his appointment on July 16.

works as a lawyer at the State Investigation Bureau, prompting accusations of nepotism.

Committee head

Monastyrsky's work as the head of parliament's law enforcement committee has also been controversial. He has been accused of promoting the interests of Avakov and his ministry.

"Instead of controlling the police, Monastyrsky's committee covered up for it," Shevchuk said.

Specifically, Monastyrsky's committee barely reacted to the rape and torture of a woman by police officers in Kaharlyk in Kyiv Oblast in 2020, she added. Police promised to vet everyone at the precinct involved but nearly everyone there kept their jobs and Monastyrsky's committee failed to react.

The committee also tried to drastically expand the powers of the police, supported limiting the independence of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine and has been accused of attempting to block a fair competition for the Economic Security Bureau.

The nonprofit Anti-Corruption Action Center also accused Monastyrsky of trying to block the reinstatement of jail terms for lying in officials' asset declarations and falsifying a committee decision on the issue.

Both Lemenov and Shevchuk argued that no reforms would take place under Monastyrsky.

Kyva debacle

Monastyrsky also signed off on a doctoral thesis by Ilya Kyva, a lawmaker from the pro-Kremlin Opposition Platform-For Life party.

Kyva used to be Avakov's aide and once headed the Interior Ministry's labor union. He earned himself a reputation as an unhinged and scandalous politician.

His dissertation has been widely criticized as nonsensical and meaningless. He was accused of citing nonexistent articles and forging a document upon which his thesis draws.

Kyva's thesis cites no concrete facts or coherent arguments, according to Bihus.Info, an investigative journalism project.

Yermak and Tatarov

The exit of Avakov, the most powerful remaining independent official, is likely to tip the balance of power in

favor of the President's Office and its head, Andriy Yermak.

"This resignation will drastically change the political situation in Ukraine," Viktor Trepak, an ex-deputy head of the Security Service of Ukraine and ex-deputy prosecutor general, said on Facebook. "... Avakov's Interior Ministry was a major check and balance against other government institutions. After Avakov's resignation this factor disappears."

Ukrainska Pravda news outlet reported that Monastyrsky may also come under the influence of Zelensky's deputy chief of staff Oleh Tatarov, who is responsible for law enforcement policy at the President's Office.

Tatarov was charged in December with bribing a forensic expert. However, the Tatarov case has been effectively destroyed by Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova.

"There is speculation that Zelensky promoted Tatarov to balance Avakov's power," Shevchuk said. "I think Tatarov will influence the Interior Ministry, and that influence will increase. But I don't think (Monastyrsky) will be 100% loyal to the President's Office."

There is also another link to

Tatarov. In 2020, Tatarov hand-picked a commission to choose a new anti-corruption prosecutor and Monastyrsky's committee rubber-stamped them, according to a May 13 report by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

The commission members do not meet integrity and professional standards, according to anti-corruption activists.

High-profile cases

Monastyrsky will also inherit all high-profile criminal cases, including Sheremet's murder investigation.

Zelensky has hinted earlier that Avakov could be fired due to his failure to successfully resolve this case.

Initially Avakov was lambasted for failing to produce suspects for years. After three suspects were charged in 2019, no hard evidence has been presented against them. All three have since been released from detention.

Given Monastyrsky's background, his critics doubt his ability to do a better job.

"The Sheremet case will likely collapse," Lemenov said. "It will not be solved, and the official suspects will not be jailed." 🗨️

ON THE MOVE

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ARZINGER STRENGTHENS ITS WHITE COLLAR CRIME



Iurii Sukhov

On July 12, 2021, Iurii Sukhov joined Arzinger Law Firm as Partner. He will continue practicing criminal law as an attorney-at-law and will lead the firm's White Collar Crime practice together with Kateryna Gupalo and Oleksander Plotnikov.

Iurii Sukhov is a seasoned attorney-at-law with many years of experience. He is known for a number of very high-profile and intellectually complex criminal cases, in which he successfully defended the interests of famous Ukrainian businessmen and politicians.

"Arzinger's expertise in White Collar Crime has enjoyed increasing demand in recent years, and this trend is growing steadily. Despite being already among the recognized leaders in this market, we do not stop there and keep working to strengthen the team and increase our market share. This is why Iurii Sukhov's joining us is a logical and expected step to implement this strategy as well as a response to the needs of our clients," comments Timur Bondaryev, Arzinger's Managing Partner.

arzinger.ua

ARZINGER

Miners: ‘Whole industry broken’

page 3 →

Energy and security

Most of Ukraine’s mines are outdated and haven’t been properly maintained for dozens of years due to a lack of financing.

But simply closing them is not really an option. For one, without its own coal production, Ukraine may become even more dependent on Russia.

“If the government destroys the whole mining industry, that will put Ukraine’s energy and thus national security in danger,” Volynets said.

Worse, if the government closes down the mines without providing alternative jobs to the locals, they could turn against Ukraine. Most of the mines are near the war front and mine closures could stoke separatism, Volynets said.

Toretsk, a city of 60,000 people in Donetsk Oblast, still remembers the shutdowns of electricity during the hottest phase of the war in 2014. The pro-Russian militants were only driven out of the city by the summer of that year.

But many residents are still unsure which side to support, local activist Volodymyr Yelets said. The city is full of retirees, while people of working age are employed by two coal mines and a phenol plant. If the mines are closed, more than 2,000 people will lose their jobs.



Miners prepare to descend into the D.F. Melnikov Mine in Lysychansk, a city in Luhansk Oblast on Jan. 31, 2017.

“They should provide us an alternative first, not just shut down the mines. If the mines die, the city would die too,” said Dmytro Bondar, a 26-year-old miner from Toretsk.

Yet Vasyl Chynchyk, the head of Toretsk city administration, said businesses are in no hurry to invest

in a region that can be occupied if the Donbas war heats up. The occupied town of Horlivka, one of the Russia-backed militants’ strongholds, is just eight kilometers east of Toretsk.

“If the Ukrainian government hires more professional people to con-

trol the state mining companies and invests into modernization it would even show people from the occupied Donbas mining regions that there’s light at the end of the tunnel here,” Volynets said.

Falling production suggests that there is not much light to speak of.

said.

The increasing number of extraction will be the main factor for the decreasing of its valued price and better quality.

The shortage of money for modernization keeps this revival from happening. In 2021, the energy ministry asked the government to invest Hr 6.7 billion (\$243 million) for this project. Before that during 2013–2017 and 2020–2021 mines got no maintenance funds, the ministry said.

In 2018, the mining companies got Hr 307 million (\$11 million), just 12 percent of what it needed for modernization. And in 2019 the mines got just Hr 397 million (\$14.4 million) out of the Hr 2.5 billion (\$90 million) they needed.

How to solve the crisis?

The outdated and corrupt mining industry is just one of Ukraine’s energy challenges. It seems that Ukraine’s energy industry is in perpetual crisis.

Buslavets blamed poorly regulated energy prices that do not cover production value.

In the summer, renewables cover Ukraine’s electricity needs, while the heating stations work at minimum capacity and can’t earn enough money to modernize or afford enough coal to cover the winter season, Buslavets added.

In summer, Ukraine has more than enough electricity but the government still heavily relies on electricity imports from Russia in autumn and winter.

This can potentially squeeze Ukrainian energy producers out of the market, as they may not have enough money to buy enough coal and gas for the heating season.

Ukraine sees only one way out of this crisis – synchronizing its energy system with the European Union system ENTSO-E.

The first testing of the new connection is planned for the fall and winter of 2021–2022, when Ukraine connects its energy system with Moldova.

However, the new energy system will work in the future. At present, the only way to prepare for a heating season is to repair as much mines and power plants as possible and stock up on as much gas and coal as possible.

The same approach allowed Ukraine to survive winter 2020–2021 without blackouts.

Solution

As coal production falls, Ukraine imports more every year, from the United States, Kazakhstan and Russia.

Buslavets said that Ukraine has been buying mostly anthracite coal, as most of its own anthracite mines are currently under Russian occupation. In 2020, Ukraine imported 2.6 million tons of coal for energy needs, 2.4 million tons were from Russia, 137,000 tons from the U.S. and 53,000 tons from Kazakhstan.

However, the situation can still be improved. Modernizing state coal mines could raise domestic production to 12 million tons per year, Ukraine’s Energy Ministry press service told the Kyiv Post.

“We can achieve this with the modernization of our mines in the next 3–6 years. The modernization could save \$1 billion and fully cover the internal demand and the energy security of the state,” the ministry

TOP 10 KYIV POST exclusives online this week

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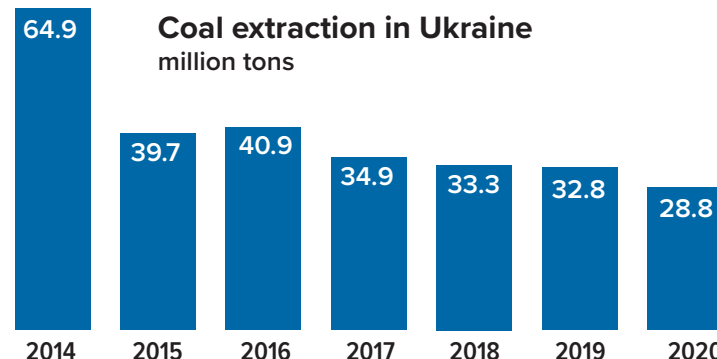
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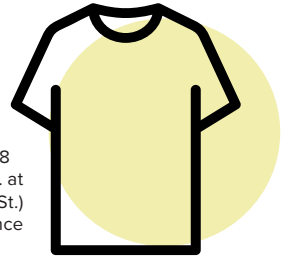
Source: Government statistics

Coal production in Ukraine has plummeted since 2014. Russia seized most of the mines in Donbas and the rest have been slowly falling apart due to shrinking profitability, lack of maintenance and Ukraine’s deeply problematic energy system.

Lifestyle

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Shop for clothes, books, decor and various bric-à-brac at Garage Sale on July 18 from 2 p.m. till 10 p.m. at HVLV (18 Verkhni Val St.) Free entrance



Activists have had enough of historic buildings neglect

Oleg Petrasjuk



Activists gather to block construction equipment in front of the historic Soviet modernist building Flowers of Ukraine in Kyiv on July 12, 2021. The developer, which already demolished part of the atrium, wants to knock it down and raise an office building in its stead. Flowers of Ukraine is emblematic of Kyiv's other historically valuable buildings, most of which are private property and have no protection from developers.

By Daria Shulzhenko
shulzhenko@kyivpost.com

On July 12, Dmytro Soloviov spent all night at the Soviet modernist building “Kvity Ukrainy,” (“Flowers of Ukraine”) in Kyiv. It wasn’t a party, nor a nighttime adventure. Soloviov was there to protect it from being demolished by a real-estate developer.

“This building has historical, cultural, and architectural value, it is a bright representation of modernist architecture,” Soloviov told the Kyiv Post. “But only in Ukraine is modernist architecture actively destroyed,” he said.

According to the development plan, the building was set to lose its iconic 1980s look with its distinct grapevine-covered façade and turned into office building with glass walls.

The plan outraged Kyiv residents who protested against it on July 6. And when the actual demolition started, many flocked to defend the building.

As a result of the protests, the police arrested the construction site to investigate the development’s

legality, but the building is still at risk. Just like many others in Kyiv.

A lot of historical architecture in the capital has no state protection and is often sacrificed in favor of big developers. At least 14 of these buildings have been knocked down since 2018.

But 2021 has been especially heated, putting eight more buildings at risk. Amid government neglect, their protection has fallen on the shoulders of activists.

“If this continues, we won’t have any architectural examples of the second half of the 20th century in Kyiv,” says Soloviov, who also runs the Ukrainian Modernism Instagram account.

‘Save Kvity’

It’s hard to imagine the historic Sichovykh Striltsiv street in Kyiv without its “Flowers of Ukraine.”

It was designed by the renowned Ukrainian architect Mykola Levchuk and built in 1985. The five-story structure stands out with its cascading shape and an unusual purpose: The building housed a plant research center that resembled a modern coworking space for sci-

tists, as well as a greenhouse, flower market and an art exhibition space.

“It was like the first public space in the Soviet Union,” Kyiv lawyer and activist Dmytro Petrov told the Kyiv Post.

The building was initially owned by the state enterprise Flowers of Ukraine until it became private. For the last several decades it has been rented out. Since a grocery store moved out from the ground floor two years ago, the building has remained empty.

A fence erected around the building in early June took locals by surprise. Weeks later, the 30-year-old grapevines that have been winding around the structure’s facade started to dry out — the plant’s roots had been cut.

It turned out that the building was being prepared to be reconstructed into an eight-floor, modern glass-walled office building with a food court, gym and a co-working space.

The developer behind the project is the local company PrJSC Flowers of Ukraine. According to the Village Ukraine media outlet, the building was purchased by two private investors from the international invest-

ment fund Rockwill Group.

The July 6 “Save Kvity” protest and the public outrage online drew no reaction from the new building owners. And on July 12, heavy machinery started the demolition.

To stop the process, activists broke the fence and physically blocked bulldozers even though they had already destroyed the lower part of the atrium.

Oleksii Pysnyi, the head of PrJSC Flowers of Ukraine and the managing partner of Rockwill Group

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Explore
Ukraine

With Oleksandra Korzh
oleksandra.korz.work@gmail.com

Despite controversy, Kharkiv is city that fought and proved to be Ukrainian

Kharkiv, UKRAINE — Kharkiv is a notorious city in eastern Ukraine.

It’s been governed by pro-Kremlin authorities for most of the country’s independent history. It also had a big opposition movement to the EuroMaidan Revolution that ousted ex-President Viktor Yanukovich.

So when Russia invaded Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts next door, many feared Kharkiv Oblast, a majority Russophone region on the Russian border, would follow.

But it didn’t. In fact, Kharkiv has a history of fighting for Ukraine, which can be explored with a visit to this city of 1.4 million people, 480 kilometers east of Kyiv. And history is just one of its many attractions.

Weapons and words

Kharkiv was founded by the freedom-loving Cossacks in 1654. Kharkiv cossacks fought against Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, until Cossack Ukraine was split between the two in 1686.

Modern Kharkiv pays tribute to the Cossack era with monuments to Kharko, the mythical founder of the city, and Ivan Sirko, the legendary leader of Zaporizhian Host.

Kharkiv gave Ukraine one of the country’s first universities, founded in the 19th century. Though established by the Russian Empire to “Russify” the population, the university did just the opposite.

The institution attracted and educated a cohort of the intelligentsia that would explore Ukraine’s past in historical pieces, portray its distinct

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How Ukraine can attract foreign tourists: a gambling tour to Odesa



Odesa is a brand city where many ethnicities crossed paths. They came to do business and stayed to live. The sunny seaside city with many hotels, restaurants, and venues has always attracted tourists. It seems that Odesa has been founded to attract visitors. There are many ways to get to Odesa — by air, by sea, by the river, by train, or by car. It's a powerful international transportation hub. It takes about an hour to get from Kyiv to Odesa by plane, and around five hours by car.

Odesa has many landmarks — architecture sites, artistic patios, and legendary districts. Arkadia is one of them. The resort is actively developing, has a special street full of restaurants and entertaining spaces leading to the sea. This is a place that lives non-stop from mid-spring to mid-autumn. The entrance to Arkadia is topped with a shopping mall and the Gagarinn hotel. This is also the home of First Casino, one of the biggest casinos in Europe and the biggest casino in Ukraine.

This is the top-of-the-line venue of the national First chain. Getting all the permits, installing and certifying equipment, refurbishing premises, hiring and training the staff took two years, though a high number of the personnel were found abroad.

Hundreds of types of games, innovative technologies, and several levels of the playing rooms — you can find it all in our impressive casino! Our venue has a special atmosphere created by the designer interior, optimal sound, lights, temperature, and even scent. The casino area of nearly 5,000 square meters offers 9 roulette tables, 26 card tables, 14 club poker tables, and almost 300 slot machines and gambling terminals. All the equipment is from the top brands: Novomatic, IGT, EGT, Apex. The casino's biggest room features a 27-meter bar with 9 gambling terminals and the biggest choice of drinks in Odesa. The online statistics service in the halls of the casino allows one to see the data about the latest 300 spins.

The casino has numerous design features. The main highlight of the interior is a golden sculpture of a T-Rex. These beasts, which once ruled the Earth, presided over a turning point in the history of the planet. This statue symbolizes a similar turning point in Ukraine's gambling history.

Until recently, casinos in the country had been banned for almost 12 years. Now, as the first legal gambling houses are opening up, First is a pioneer in the jungle of the new Ukrainian gambling legislation. Our company was the first one to obtain a license and all the necessary permits to open a casino.

Dice is one of the first games of chance in human history. Of course, those were not modern dice with numbers. It has been suggested that this ancient game was played with parts of animal skeletons, maybe even dinosaurs. We also should mention that there's not only one T-Rex in the casino. The second one is well-hidden in the building and finding it can be a quest of its own.

There are huge glass bulbs installed along the halls, featuring original Louis Vuitton items and amazing designer masks. The ceiling of the main hall has the pattern of sea waves. Over 5,000 unique glass jellyfish of different shapes and sizes swim through the space, creating an impressive visual effect.

The staff of the First Casino speaks 7 languages: English, German, Turkish, Arabic, Japanese, Russian, Ukrainian.

So if you love gambling and you love the sea, sun, and unbelievable stories, you should visit us in Odesa. We guarantee you unforgettable experiences — if you gamble responsibly, of course! First Casino takes care of your flights, transfer, hotel accommodation, meals, tours, and entertainment.

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Photos by JetSetter

10 historic buildings at risk of vanishing from Kyiv cityscape

page 11 —>

called activists a “group of aggressive people” who “invaded” the construction site even though the company had all the needed documents for reconstruction.

The Kyiv Post reached out to Pyshnyi for a comment but hasn't heard back yet.

However, both the Ministry of Culture and the Department of Cultural Heritage of the Kyiv City State Administration said they didn't authorize the developer's plan. Both bodies are supposed to approve any plans to construct or reconstruct buildings located in a historic area, even if the building itself has no state protection status.

Though the police have arrested the building to investigate, activists continue to keep watch to prevent further deconstruction. They have also called on the authorities to give the building a protected status.

“We want to preserve the authentic facade of the building,” Soloviov says.

Even if the developer eventually loses, “Flowers of Ukraine” is just one example that points to a growing issue.

“It's not just about one particular building, there is a systemic phenomenon and this protest is an expression of public outrage against these chaotic illegal developments,” Petrov told the Kyiv Post.

Brutal demolition

Many of the historic buildings remaining in Kyiv are private property. In most cases, they became property of new owners through corrupt privatization schemes, experts say. And these owners rarely, if ever, care about their cultural and historical value.

Petrov says demolitions of historic buildings in Kyiv intensified in 2011

Save Kyiv Ukraine



The Soviet modernist building Flowers of Ukraine used to stand out on Kyiv's Sichovykh Striltsiv Street with an unusual cascading shape and grapevine-covered facade (L). According to the reconstruction plan (R) developed by the building's new owners, it is set to transform into a modern office center. The plan caused a public outrage pushing the police to arrest the construction site to investigate the development's legality.

when the government decided to exclude Hostynnyi Dvir (Hospitable Courtyard), a 19th century shopping center, from the list of architectural monuments, planning to open a modern shopping mall instead.

“It was one of the most notorious cases,” Petrov says.

According to Petrov, the situation with Hostynnyi Dvir is just a minor case compared to the crisis Kyiv is facing today.

At least 14 historic buildings have been knocked down in the capital since 2018. They include the 1886 bread factory, the 20th-century two-story mansion on Nyzhnoiurkivska Street and the 1940 “Radar” military factory.

Most of them will be replaced with apartment complexes or business centers, experts say.

Activists are also fighting to preserve at least ten other buildings at risk of being destroyed. They include the 1984 “Meridian” House of Culture, a modernist structure that was bought by ex-President Petro Poroshenko's Roshen corporation to transform it into a new concert hall. Another one is the 1973 round-shaped market designed by well-known Ukrainian architect Alla Anyshchenko.

Architectural researcher and activist Semen Shyrochyn says that the crisis is caused by real-estate developers who aim to own property in the city center at any cost. To achieve that, companies “do whatever they want, without having their actions approved,” Shyrochyn says.

To stop developers from destroy-

ing heritage, Ukraine has to protect these buildings through introducing new legislature, activists say.

Possible solutions

Although rare, there are cases when activists have managed to save historic structures from demolition.

The most famous one was Soviet modernist “Flying Saucer.” It was in danger of being swallowed by a mall under construction behind it for over three years. But thanks to a whole movement for its preservation, the building received government protection in 2020. The new status will likely save it from the developer's plans.

Petrov says that the official status of architectural monuments would ensure institutional protection of the buildings. “But the process itself is now complicated and can take years.”

According to Shyrochyn, more than 90% of historic buildings in Kyiv are not officially listed as monuments, which is why they lack governmental protection and risk extinction at any moment.

Petrov says there is a need to improve the procedure for obtaining the status of architectural monuments and to make it automatic when buildings reach a certain age. Shyrochyn says Ukraine can follow the example of some European countries that start protecting buildings once they pass 100 years automatically.

Until then, activists are ready to hold the line on the heritage front.

“If we stop, Kyiv will be changed beyond recognition in the nearest future,” Petrov says. “We have to fight.”

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Explore Ukraine

Getaway weekend in eastern Kharkiv offers history, culture and many parks

page 11 →

culture in literary works and develop ideas for its future independence. It gave birth to press that cultivated the Ukrainian culture despite tsarist suppression

The university is still open today, now named after its founder Vasily Karazin, and has a student body of 16,000. Though it didn't retain the original look, its new main building, a giant 14-floor constructivist structure located in the city center, is well worth a visit.

Under Soviet rule, Kharkiv was the Ukrainian capital for 15 years, in 1919–1934, serving as the country's main cultural, scientific and intellectual center.

Later on, despite Joseph Stalin's crackdown of dissent, Kharkiv's intelligentsia continued to stand for Ukraine's freedom.

Many writers and artists would gather in an apartment building called Slovo ("Word"), where they advocated a move away from Russia, towards Europe. "Away from Moscow!" was the motto of Mykola Khvylovy, the informal leader of Slovo.

The KGB killed most of the community members in the 1930s. They are considered to be the first of generation of murdered Ukrainian artists known as the Executed Renaissance.

Slovo still stands today on the intersection of the green and quiet Literaturna and Kulturny streets. Locals use it as a residential building but a plaque commemorates the 123 courageous artists who have been killed but not forgotten.

Though Kharkiv pro-Kremlin authorities had quite a support in 2013–2014, there was also a big uprising supporting the EuroMaidan Revolution.

It was one of the first cities to protest in solidarity with Kyiv, eventually growing one of the biggest demonstrations in southeastern Ukraine.



An aerial view of the Svobody (Freedom) Square in Kharkiv shows the constructivist ensemble of buildings of the Derzhprom office center and Vasily Karazin Kharkiv National University. One of Ukraine's oldest educational institutions, Karazin University has a student body of 16,000.

The activists met daily at the central Svobody (Freedom) Square, withstanding attacks from law enforcers and hired thugs.

A yellow-blue protest camp tent set up in 2014 has remained there long after. Despite the authorities' attempts to remove it, the tent still stands as a reminder of Kharkiv's movement.

Two sides

Kharkiv's two main streets that date back to the 17th century reflect the city's two extremes of renovation and neglect.

Sumska Street, a downtown unto itself, is the modern version of Kharkiv, with its restored historic facades, clean parks, refreshing fountains, bright lights

and comfy restaurants.

But just like many other Ukrainian cities, Kharkiv has a flip side.

The back streets are filled with shabby old buildings, their decay contrasting against the grandeur.

The other key Kharkiv street, Poltavskyi Shliakh, also conveys abandonment. Once an important highway leading to the nearby Poltava city, the street has been neglected since the city center relocated to Sumska Street.

Poltavskyi Shliakh is still full of architectural heritage from the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The street has echoes of its former grandeur – a 19th-century firehouse with a working observation tower and one of the oldest cinemas in Eastern Europe called Bommer. Though now on the brink of bankruptcy, the cinema has been screening films since 1908.

Cultural and green

Kharkiv is considered one of Ukraine's key cultural centers for its vibrant theater, literary and music scenes. Having nearly 50 universities with more than 160,000 students, it is also often referred to as "a student city."

But Kharkiv is also known as the "green" city. Leafy parks and trees along the roads are as essential to the Kharkiv cityscape as historic buildings.

Travelers might have to get on the Ferris wheel in Maxim Gorky Park to see over the tops of the trees and get an aerial view of the city.

There's plenty of other attractions in this amusement park also known as the Kharkiv Disneyland. Visitors can observe youngsters skating, babushkas dancing to retro music, children running around with cotton candies and their parents enjoying the moment.

Another green pearl of the city is Shevchenko Park, a get-together place for street musicians and activists. The heart of the park is a monument to legendary poet Taras Shevchenko depicting characters from his poems. One of them is a Cossack with a sparkling polished toe. Kharkivans believe that if one holds his toe and makes a wish, it will come true.

Though the monument was installed in 1935 Soviet Kharkiv, there is no truer Ukrainian emblem than Shevchenko. And it's no wonder it has been one of the main symbols in a truly Ukrainian city. 🇺🇦



People enjoy the outdoors in Shevchenko Park, one of Kharkiv's many public parks, on June 19, 2021. Kharkiv is known as a 'green city' due to its abundance of trees.

How to get to Kharkiv

Getting to Kharkiv from Kyiv by an Intercity+ train will take 5 hours, by bus or BlaBlaCar sharing service – 7–8 hours. Any trip will cost around Hr 300 (\$11) for one. A hotel room costs Hr 600–1,000 (\$22–37) per night. An apartment rental costs Hr 550–1,500 (\$20–55) per night.



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Victims of parental kidnapping cry out for help in Ukraine

By Daria Shulzhenko
shulzhenko@kyivpost.com

It started out as a fairytale.

Olha Kudryk says she was on top of the world when she got engaged to her then-boyfriend Serhiy Kudryk in 2002. Four years after they got married, she gave birth to their son Yaroslav.

But in 2015, Kudryk's husband asked for divorce and custody over their son to escape conscripted service in the Ukrainian army. Kudryk says she agreed to the divorce, never imagining her ex-husband would kidnap their child.

"I was in shock," Kudryk says. "I came to my ex-husband's house to see Yaroslav, but nobody was home."

According to Kudryk, her ex-husband, his new wife and Yaroslav have since relocated to Kyiv from the small town in Lviv Oblast where they used to live. She has made several trips to the capital looking for her child but with no success.

"Every day I think about how my child is doing out there," Kudryk told the Kyiv Post. "All I want is to be with him."

Kudryk says being deprived of her child has been a nightmare for her. Her son has autism and requires special treatment.

The Kyiv Post reached out to Serhiy Kudryk but never heard back.

Some 100,000 divorces are registered in Ukraine every year, 70% of which lead to court hearings, according to the analytics service Opendatabot. Experts say that thousands of parents end up separated from their children as a result.

Parents can spend years looking for ways to reunite with their kids, unable to rely on the authorities for help. Ukraine's Criminal Code does not classify the abduction of a child by a parent as a crime.

In the battle for reuniting with their children, Ukrainian parents depend on non-governmental organizations and public support.

Oleg Petrasliuk



Ukrainian Evgeniya Zaitseva poses for a photograph in Kyiv on June 21 as she shows the picture of her two daughters kidnapped by her former husband in 2019. Zaitseva and her children are among the victims of parental kidnapping in Ukraine.

Kudryk says that even though she had all the proper legal documentation proving her right to take part in Yaroslav's upbringing, the police regard the issue as a "private family matter."

"It feels like shouting in a deaf ear," she says.

No accountability

Most divorces in Ukraine lead to court hearings. They can take years.

The process is especially tough for families with children that can't agree on joint custody — parental abduction often becomes the result of a conflict when one parent violates a custody agreement and takes away a child.

While both mothers and fathers have equal rights to their common child's upbringing in Ukraine, the number of appeals of violations of one of the parent's rights to custody is growing every year, Ukraine's ombudswoman Liudmyla Denisova

told BBC Ukraine in 2020.

Iryna Suslova, adviser to the head of the parliament's human rights committee, says there is no clear established system in dealing with parental abduction.

According to recent research by Alinea International, 73% of employees of children's services do not consider the procedure clear in cases where a child is abducted by a parent.

And nearly 88% of employees of Ukraine's child services and 85% of employees of juvenile prevention units see the need to change the legislation on responding to cases of abduction.

"There is no responsibility for this (parental abduction), there is no article (in the Criminal Code) concerning it," Suslova told the Kyiv Post. "We see a vicious circle of inaction."

Hope for justice

Suslova, who is also the head of a

women's organization connected to the Za Maibutne ("For the Future") political party, says she wasn't aware of the problem until recently when a woman whose child was kidnapped by the father asked the organization for help.

After posting the woman's story on Facebook, Suslova got dozens of responses from women all over Ukraine with similar stories.

Suslova arranged a meeting for the victims of parental kidnapping with Dmytro Lubinets, the head of the parliament's human rights committee. Suslova says that just like her, Lubinets wasn't aware of the problem.

"There is absolutely no understanding from the government of these situations," Suslova says.

In May, a group of lawmakers submitted a draft law to add punishment for parental kidnapping to the Criminal Code. According to Suslova, the draft law requires the "clear punishment for the kidnapping of a child by one of the parents" — up to six years of restriction of freedom or imprisonment.

Suslova says that such responsibility should prevent future kidnappings.

In Canada, for instance, the punishment can be up to 10 years of prison for any person who kidnaps or detains their child.

Another requirement of the draft law is to oblige the courts to promptly — within two working days — consider the claims on "the unlawful displacement of a child" by one of the parents.

In Ukraine, according to Suslova, courts can take years to solve such claims.

The draft law also requires courts to provide "the right to equal participation of parents in the upbringing of a common child," and to establish a schedule for each of the parents to spend time with their children.

According to Suslova, the draft law is now under consideration in parliamentary committees. The par-

liament will vote on it no sooner than September.

Until then, parents all over Ukraine have to fight for justice on their own. Kudryk is one of them; "I will keep fighting no matter what," she said.

Community and damage

Evgeniya Zaitseva is also among the victims of parental kidnapping.

She says she hasn't seen her two daughters since 2019 when her husband kidnapped their children and filed for divorce. The process for custody over their children is still ongoing.

According to Zaitseva, there are communities of parents whose children were abducted by the other parent.

"We try to support each other," Zaitseva told the Kyiv Post.

There are also non-profit organizations, many of them founded by parents themselves, working to raise awareness of this problem.

One of them is Women UA, an organization that aims at defending the rights of women and children. It was founded by Ukrainian TV presenter and influencer Polina Nenia who faced this problem herself.

On its Instagram account, the organization shares stories of mothers separated from their children and the impotence of the Ukrainian law.

It is less common for men to become victims of parental kidnapping. Kharkiv resident Semen Gen has not seen his daughter in four months and is now prevented by his former wife from taking part in her upbringing.

Gen also founded a public organization, Center for Combating Parental Alienation, to spotlight the problem in Ukraine. According to him, parental alienation is a more correct and complex term than parental kidnapping.

He says that the alienating parent usually aims at destroying the child's relationships with the other parent and the process often begins far before the actual divorce, during the "conflict phase."

The experience affects not only the separated parent, but also the child. It can cause problems with socialization and lead to suicidal tendencies, according to Zaitseva.

Apart from legal tools, there are other ways to relieve the divorce experience for all family members, including kids. Valeria Kolomiets, the deputy minister of justice, says parents should use the help of mediators and psychologists during divorces, to prevent parental kidnapping and the damaging effects on a child's mental health.

But simply relying on parents to follow the recommendations is not an option, as the issue requires responsibility and justice. Suslova hopes the draft law they initiated can help change the situation for the better.

"This problem applies to thousands of people, and not just adults but children who undergo mental abuse," she says. "We need to help them." ❁



Ukrainian Olha Kudryk poses for a photograph together with her son Yaroslav. Kudryk's son was kidnapped by her ex-husband in 2020.

Courtesy of Olha Kudryk