

New owner of Dnipro Hotel reveals himself: Property to become esports arena → Page 6

Illia Ponomarenko: In Kyiv, cycling is still a deadly business → Page 10

Nataliya Yemchenko: Leshchenko lobbies interests of Pinchuk, Kolomoisky → Page 12

Sergii Leshchenko: How corrupt Ukrainian court helped Giuliani's conspiracy → Page 13

Explore Ukraine: Shatsky Lakes offers untouched forests, clear water → Page 14



Kyiv Post

UKRAINE'S GLOBAL VOICE

25th year!

Impunity Reigns

After facing years of unpunished harassment, anti-corruption activist Vitaliy Shabunin says that enemies burned his home in the latest attack on reformers in Ukraine

Ukraine's chief pro-Russian provocateur takes aim at politics

By Oleksiy Sorokin
sorokin@kyivpost.com

Since 2014, Ukrainian observers have agreed: The country is moving west, for good.

Russia's occupation of Crimea and Donbas and the aging Ukrainian pro-Russian electorate gave the impression that Western values, structural reforms and an aspiration to join the European Union were key to Ukraine's post-revolution social contract.

They were wrong. Ukraine's pro-Russian elites are making a comeback. And the new ace in their hand is Anatoly Shariy, a young, pro-Russian blogger known for xenophobic rhetoric about Ukrainians, Jews, Roma peo-

→ page 8

Did Zelensky show weakness by fulfilling terrorist's demand? Probably not, experts say

By Thaisa Semenova
semenovath@gmail.com

Ukrainian law enforcement detained an armed hostage-taker in Lutsk who demanded, among other things, that the country's President Volodymyr Zelensky publicly endorse a documentary about animal abuse on July 21.

After speaking for several minutes with the ex-convict, who had been holding 13 people prisoner for nearly 12 hours and threatening to "blow everything up," Zelensky published a video online in which he urged Ukrainians to watch the documentary.

"Everybody watch the 2005 film 'Earthlings,'" the president said in a terse statement posted on

→ page 2



Vitaliy Shabunin, head of the Anti-Corruption Action Center's executive board, speaks with the press in front of his burned house in Kyiv on July 23, 2020. Shabunin's house burned overnight after alleged arson. No one was injured. Shabunin, who is one of Ukraine's most outspoken critics of corrupt officials, believes that the attack was retribution for his activism. Since at least 2016, Shabunin and his colleagues at ANTAC have suffered from ongoing harassment, including physical attacks.



Order annual Doing Business magazine from the Kyiv Post

Contact us at subscribe@kyivpost.com or call 044 591 77 88

INTERNATIONAL MULTI-PROFILE CLINIC 0 800 30 86 87 | 044 499 86 87
www.imp-clinic.com | 44 Yevhena Konovatsia st.

Official COVID-19 Testing & Certificates
For returning to work or travel

Special services:

- OGUK Certificate
- Physical Exam for Ukrainian work permit
- International Health Care visa exam

July 24 2020
Vol. 25, issue 30
Copyright © 2020
by Kyiv Post

The material published in the Kyiv Post may not be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher. All material in the Kyiv Post is protected by Ukrainian and international laws. The views expressed in the Kyiv Post are not necessarily the views of the publisher nor does the publisher carry any responsibility for those views.

Газета "Kyiv Post" видається
ТОВ "БІЗНЕСГРУПП".

Щотижневий наклад 6,000 прим. Ціна за домовленістю. Матеріали, надруковані в газеті "Kyiv Post" є власністю видавництва, захищені міжнародним та українським законодавством і не можуть бути відтворені у будь-якій формі без письмового дозволу Видавця. Думки, висловлені у дописах не завжди збігаються з поглядами видавця, який не бере на себе відповідальність за наслідки публікацій.

Засновник
ТОВ "БІЗНЕСГРУПП"

Головний редактор
Брайан Боннер

Відповідальний за випуск
Брайан Боннер

Адреса видавця та засновника співпадають: Україна, м. Київ, 01004, вул. Пушкінська, 31А, 6-й поверх.
Реєстраційне свідоцтво
Кв № 23191-13031ПР від 29.03.2018.
Передплатний індекс ДП Преса 40528
Надруковано ТОВ «Новий друк», 02660, Київ, вулиця Магнітогорська, 1, тел.: 559-9148
З приводу розміщення реклами звертайтеся: +380 44 591-7788
Відповідальність за зміст реклами несе замовник.

Mailing address:
Kyiv Post, 31A Pushkinska, Suite 600,
Kyiv, Ukraine, 01004

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

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

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

Employment Advertising
tel. +380 44 591-3408
advertising@kyivpost.com

Adnan Kivan
Publisher

Brian Bonner
Chief Editor

Olgia Rudenko | Alyona Nevmerzhytska
Deputy Chief Editor | Commercial Director

News Editor
Matthew Kupfer

Business Editor
Denys Krasnikov

Video Editor
Anna Yakutenko

Staff Writers

Daryna Antoniuk, Natalia Datskevych,
Olena Goncharova, Toma Istomina,
Artur Korniienko, Igor Kossov,
Anna Myroniuk, Illia Ponomarenko,
Alexander Query, Oleksiy Sorokin,
Daria Shulzhenko, Oleg Sukhov,
Bermet Talant

KP Brand Studio Director:

Jakub Parusinski.

Website: Victoria Petrenko,
Anastasia Shepeleva, Helen Mukhina.

Photo Editor: Pavlo Podufalov.

Photographers: Kostyantyn Chernichkin,
Oleg Petrasniuk, Volodymyr Petrov.

Photo Editor Assistant: Veronika Strashko.

Cartoonist: Anatoliy Vasylenko.

Video: Ruslan Batytskyi, Anna Borysova,
Elina Kent, Tamara Kiptenko,

Austin Malloy, Alina Sedlerova,
Iryna Yavorska.

Social Media: Sofia Fedeczko.

Chief Designer: Vladyslav Zakharenko.

Designer: Yura Borovik.

Sales: Yulia Kovalenko, Yulia Krus,
Vita Shvets, Elena Symonenko.

Transport Manager: Mykola Andrusha.

Chief Accountant: Galyna Bondarchuk.

Accountant: Aleksandra Lyfar.

Subscription: Tetyana Garanich.

IT: Oleksiy Bondarchuk,
Oleksandr Slipachenko

Digital Strategy: Alexandra Trapikayte

Website Developer: Roman Kryvenko



Maksym Kryvosh, the man who held a bus with 13 passengers hostage for 12 hours, lies face down after surrendering in Lutsk, a city in western Ukraine, on July 21. He released the hostages after President Volodymyr Zelensky fulfilled one of his bizarre demands and endorsed the 2005 documentary film "Earthlings."

Experts: Zelensky's concession to Lutsk terrorist doesn't set precedent

page 1 →

Facebook.

Immediately after the terrorist's arrest, Zelensky deleted the post. Instead, he wrote a message on Facebook congratulating the public with the hostages' release. He stressed: "There is no place for terrorism in any country."

Since the dramatic hostage situation, critics of Zelensky have said he showed weakness by giving into the terrorist's demands. They suggest that the Lutsk negotiations set a worrying precedent and could lead to Zelensky making even bigger concessions under different circumstances.

But experts don't buy it.

"In any negotiation process, we always weigh what we get and what we are ready to give for it. The price that the president paid in this case for the release of the hostages was low," said Victor Vertsner, an Israeli army reservist holding the rank of major with experience in counterterrorism. "The documentary is pretty useful though."

The film, narrated by the American actor Joaquin Phoenix,

portrays animals suffering in agriculture and scientific research.

"It's hard to speak about a worrying precedent here, given how utterly bizarre the demand was," Katharine Quinn-Judge, senior analyst at International Crisis Group told the Kyiv Post. "It's not as if Zelensky agreed to incite violence or to cede territory to Russia, or proclaim COVID-19 a hoax. Are vegan activists across the country now going to start taking busloads of people hostage to draw attention to their cause? It's hard to imagine."

At the same time, it's possible that the incident can inspire copycats, who may want to test what silly things the president can tell to the nation.

"This would indeed have awful repercussions for ordinary people, and would certainly strain Zelensky's legitimacy," said Quinn-Judge.

But to avoid such a scenario and mitigate the threat of violence in Ukraine, the country must redouble its efforts to reform the police, which have largely stalled, she added.

"Authorities need to keep rooting out corruption in law enforcement,

and desperately need to get the illegal arms trade under control."

The assailant, identified by police as Maksym Kryvosh, a 44-year-old Ukrainian born in Russia, hardly fits into the classic terrorist profile, Vertsner says. His motivation is unclear and does not match the ideas of any known terrorist organization.

The man's criminal past can be one of the reasons for yesterday's attack in Lutsk, Vertsner thinks.

"Often ex-convicts do not find self-application at large, so they want to return to the place they feel at ease," Vertsner said.

Kryvosh had spent around 10 years in prison on convictions including fraud and the illegal handling of weapons. A book he authored under the penname Maksym Plokhoi ("Maksym the Bad" in Russian) describes his life in prison and his outlook on life.

The old maxim of never negotiating with terrorists has long been outdated, the experts say.

"As for the idea that Zelensky showed weakness — something that, say, (far-right party) National Corps is saying — I'm not sure what they would have seen as a strength," Quinn-Judge told the Kyiv Post. "Let's recall that Russia under (President Vladimir) Putin has a record of showing 'strength' in hostage situations. They stormed the Dubrovka theater in 2002 and school No. 1 in Beslan in 2004, killing hundreds on both occasions. These events have left communities with the double trauma of being attacked by terrorists and, as they see it, by their own law enforcement."

"I'm not saying this would have had the same outcome, but I do want to emphasize that taking the 'never

negotiate with terrorists' approach does not necessarily strengthen the legitimacy of the state."

Samuel Barnai, an expert on the history and politics of central and eastern Europe at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, agrees that negotiations always have to be held.

"The old approach of not negotiating with terrorists has not worked for a long time, and Israel is a clear example of this. Israel negotiated the release of Corporal Gilad Shalit for 5 years and 4 months and exchanged him for 1,027 terrorists."

Although efforts to free the hostages in Lutsk were ultimately successful, they also featured several rocky moments.

After Kryvosh was arrested, special forces arrived on an armored personnel carrier and used a flash-bang grenade.

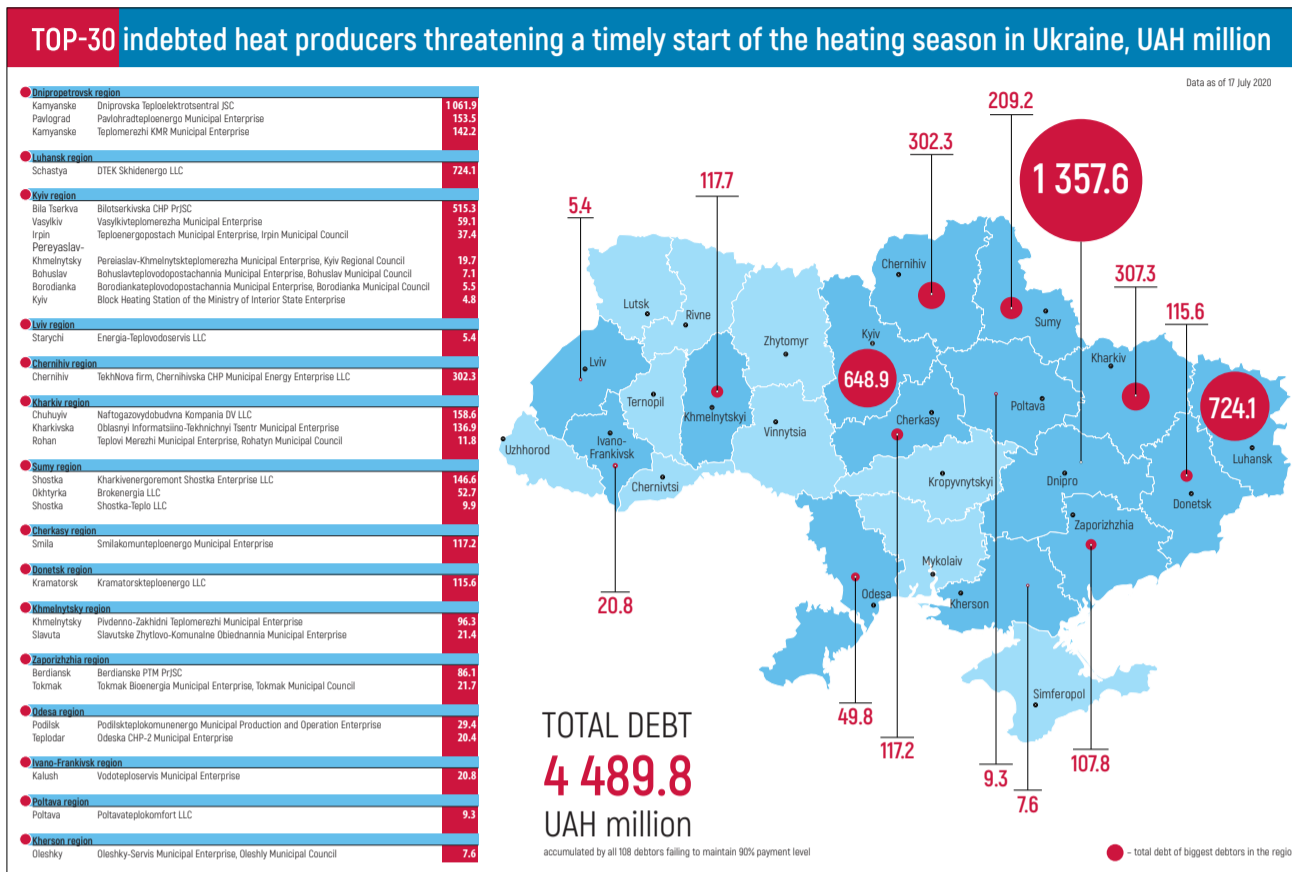
Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Anton Gerashchenko claimed that they did it to "psychologically suppress the will of the criminal." However, the attacker was already led away when special forces arrived.

Vertsner suspects the situation occurred due to a lack of proper coordination of the security forces.

"Ukraine has a problem with the 'three-headed snake.' The Security Service of Ukraine in this situation should have taken the command entirely and fully coordinated the actions of all structures, including the president," he said. "This does not mean that it should lead the President and make decisions for him, but it had to coordinate actions."

Kryvosh is currently being held in a pretrial detention center. On July 23, a court arrested him for 60 days. 🇺🇦

Winter is coming – is Ukraine ready for the heating season?



can put tens of thousands of consumers, including schools and hospitals, at risk.

These 108 heat producers have almost 4.5 billion hryvnias in excess debt (over \$160 million), with dim prospects to find the missing funds. If they do not manage to cover their dues, local heat producers may be forced to delay the start of the heating season, which typically starts in mid- or end-October.

Many of them have grown to become familiar faces, raising red flags year in and year out. Kamyanske in Dnipropetrovsk oblast, for example, has been a top truant several years running – now owing over a billion hryvnias just by itself (i.e., it has paid for just under 60% of gas it consumed as of the time of writing).

Smila, a town in Cherkasy oblast, is a similar case in point. In recent years Naftogaz has repeatedly issued warnings, highlighting the responsibility of local authorities and reminding that “most Ukrainian cities do not have problems with the heating season.”

This situation is set to repeat itself this year, as Smila Heating Company has only paid for about 36% of the gas that has been supplied.

“Smila will be on time,” head of the district heating company Oleksandr Golubets told speakers at the EnergyThursday discussions. “I guarantee this,” he added, but warned it will only happen with the help of Naftogaz, central and local government to develop and support a debt payment plan.

Local political inaction

The problem is that local governments and actors fail to mobilize efforts in time, argues Nataliia Khotsianivska, the Deputy Minister for Regional Development, Building and Housing.

“As long as it’s the middle of July and its 25 degrees Celsius everyone is care-free. It’s when the temperature drops in October that people start to activate,” she explained.

Vadym Hlamazdin, development director of the Federation of Employers of the Oil and Gas Industries, took a more cynical view. Local governments see they cannot or will not cover expenses and end up engaging in a sort of moral hazard.

“They will start saying ‘People are freezing, President come rescue us,’” he noted, explaining how populist pressure is consistently applied by local governments ahead of the heating season.

Because of the accumulated debts, this winter may be one of the most challenging yet – despite the comfortable reserves on the central level.

“I am not too optimistic. I don’t think the heating season will be launched without a problem,” noted Kharchenko. “The UAH 70 billion number is scary, and I don’t think it will just go away.”

To address this problem, experts believe the central government needs to step up and force local governments to become more accountable.

Year-round focus on energy efficiency

Being late with gas bills is just part of the problem. Local producers also need to invest in repairs and maintenance of the local network, while local governments must embrace opportunities to reduce their residents’ consumption needs through energy efficiency programs.

Galyna Dzhulay, a housing cooperative head for Novoyavorivsk city in Lviv oblast, provided an account on how such measures have reduced a building’s heating needs by 49%.

Such programs have long been supported by Western financial institutions in their efforts to improve Ukraine’s energy security.

The “EnergoDim” program compensates up to 70% of the expenditures on making a building more energy efficient. Supported by Ukraine’s state budget, the European Union, the German government, the program is one of the main tools for local governments to start to manage their energy needs – but one that requires bottom-up action and mobilization.

“We cannot do much about the gas price per unit but we can influence how many cubic meters we need,” says Dzhulay. “Ultimately, only the thermo-modernization of buildings can make a difference.”

Last week’s #EnergyThursday focused on preparations for the heating season.

The middle of summer with its sweltering weather might seem like an unusual time to worry about heating, but it is actually a critically important moment in the energy timetable. Indeed, summer is the time when Ukraine’s gas storage reserves are filled up to get ready for the coming winter.

This year those reserves are doing better than usual. As of July 20, the country’s underground storage system had some 20.9 billion cubic meters of gas in reserves – about 5.8 billion cubic meters more than at the same time in 2019. This suggests Ukraine will have enough gas in reserve to make it through the winter.

It does not mean, however, that all is good and ready.

“Accumulating fuel is just part of the story,” argues Oleksandr Kharchenko, managing director of the Energy Industry Research Center, a think tank. “That fuel then needs to be processed more or less effectively and the ensuing heat needs to make it to buildings,” he added.

Regulated gas supplies

Ukrainian legislation mandates that Naftogaz – the national oil and gas company that supplies local heating companies with gas so they can warm consumers throughout the winter – provides gas to these companies even if they have not paid for 100% of their earlier consumption.

The same regulations, however, prohibit Naftogaz to sell gas to producers who have paid for less than 90% of what they owe (or 60% for heating companies managed by the State Property Fund).

These rules are set out in so-called public service obligations (PSO) imposed by the government on Naftogaz until May 2021. In 2019, heating companies accounted for nearly 7.4 bcm of consumed gas, or nearly 25% of total consumption. After the PSO is abolished for the households segment gas supply to, heat producers will remain the last regulated segment of the Ukrainian gas market.

Record deficits

Over 40% of heat producers cover their bills in full and nearly 50% maintain indebtedness within the limits allowed by the government. However, this legal leeway results in accumulation of significant debt. This summer, debts to Naftogaz for gas supplied under the PSO reached a huge 69.4 billion hryvnias (\$2.5 billion), around half of which is debt of heat producers.

Less than 10% of heat producers across the country have accumulated debts in excess of the allowed limit. These companies face the risk of having their requests for gas declined when the heating season starts unless they manage to find cash and climb above the cut-off limit. This group is causing the greatest concern for the government.

These “bad faith” organizations account for a minority of heat producers – just 108 delinquent companies out of a total of some 1,300 (see chart with the “top 30”) – but they

Before modernization



Electricity consumption, heating and cooling amounted to 224 kWh/ sq.m.

After modernization



Electricity consumption, heating and cooling was reduced to 121 kWh/ sq.m.

EDITORIALS

'Holistic' help ahead?

With the 2020 U.S. presidential election rapidly approaching, a proxy for Joe Biden, the Democratic Party's nominee, has outlined what the former vice president's Ukraine policy would look like.

In an interview with the Politico news outlet, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Carpenter, a top foreign policy advisor to Biden, presented the Democratic candidate as supporting both increased military aid and greater help with reforms — at least, that's how it sounded.

"We can give Ukraine all the Javelin missiles we want, but if Russia has political influence in that country through various corrupt relationships, then (they) are walking in through the back door while we've got our eyes glued to the front door," Carpenter told Politico's Lara Seligman.

"We have to promote Ukraine sovereignty in a holistic way, which means both military support and security assistance, but also helping Ukraine beat back this — growing, by the way — Russian covert influence within its politics," he added.

As incumbent President Donald Trump's supporters have widely noted, it was on his watch that the U.S. provided lethal aid — including the Javelins — to Ukraine. This is true, but Trump also halted nearly \$400 million in defense aid to Ukraine in an attempt to extort politically motivated investigations against Biden from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

If Biden becomes president, he will not make Ukraine's security "contingent on them doing us favors," Carpenter said.

We would welcome that change, as well as Biden's focus on "holistic" aid to Ukraine. But Biden and his advisors should remember that Russian influence in Ukraine is a complicated occurrence. The politicians who advocate for Russia are Ukrainian citizens, as is their electorate.

But many of them are backed by oligarchs who made their money in corrupt ways. Some are oligarchs themselves.

Should Biden become president, his administration should remember that the battle against Russian influence cannot be separated from Ukraine's struggle to reform. As long as Ukraine's political system remains corruptible and its economy is uncompetitive, Russian influence will flourish in the country.

As long as its news media remains dominated by oligarchic interests and television serves as an instrument of political propaganda, pro-Russian views will always enjoy an advantage over pro-Ukrainian ones.

Ukraine must defeat the Kremlin's influence and it needs American help to do that. But Putin's strongest weapon against Ukraine is entrenched corruption.

We welcome Carpenter's statements and hope that, should Biden become president, he will prioritize supporting Ukraine's reformers — and not attempting to corrupt its president like Trump did.

Up our game

After six years of war, Ukraine's security potential was recently tested on the new front: domestic terrorism.

On July 21, an armed man took civilian hostages and set out demands for the authorities. This was virtually the first attack of its type in Ukraine's history.

For a whole day, the country was glued to the screens of their TVs and smartphones, waiting for news from Lutsk, the capital of the western Volyn Oblast, where a man held a bus with 13 passengers prisoner, threatening to blow it up unless his demands were met. He finally released hostages and was arrested in the late evening.

It was as horrible as it was surreal. The man, who was armed with a gun and claimed to also have explosives, put out a variety of strange demands, most notably for President Volodymyr Zelensky to record a video address endorsing the 2005 animal rights documentary "Earthlings."

And he complied. After Zelensky posted a video repeating the text scripted by the attacker, he surrendered.

This immediately led to a broad discussion. By complying, the president breached the rule familiar to anyone: no negotiating with terrorists. Some argued that this sets a dangerous precedent, and might inspire other attacks, with other demands for Zelensky.

Others sensibly pointed out that it was such a small concession that it didn't bear any consequences and probably saved lives.

One thing is obvious: Ukraine needs to up its game when it comes to responding to terrorism.

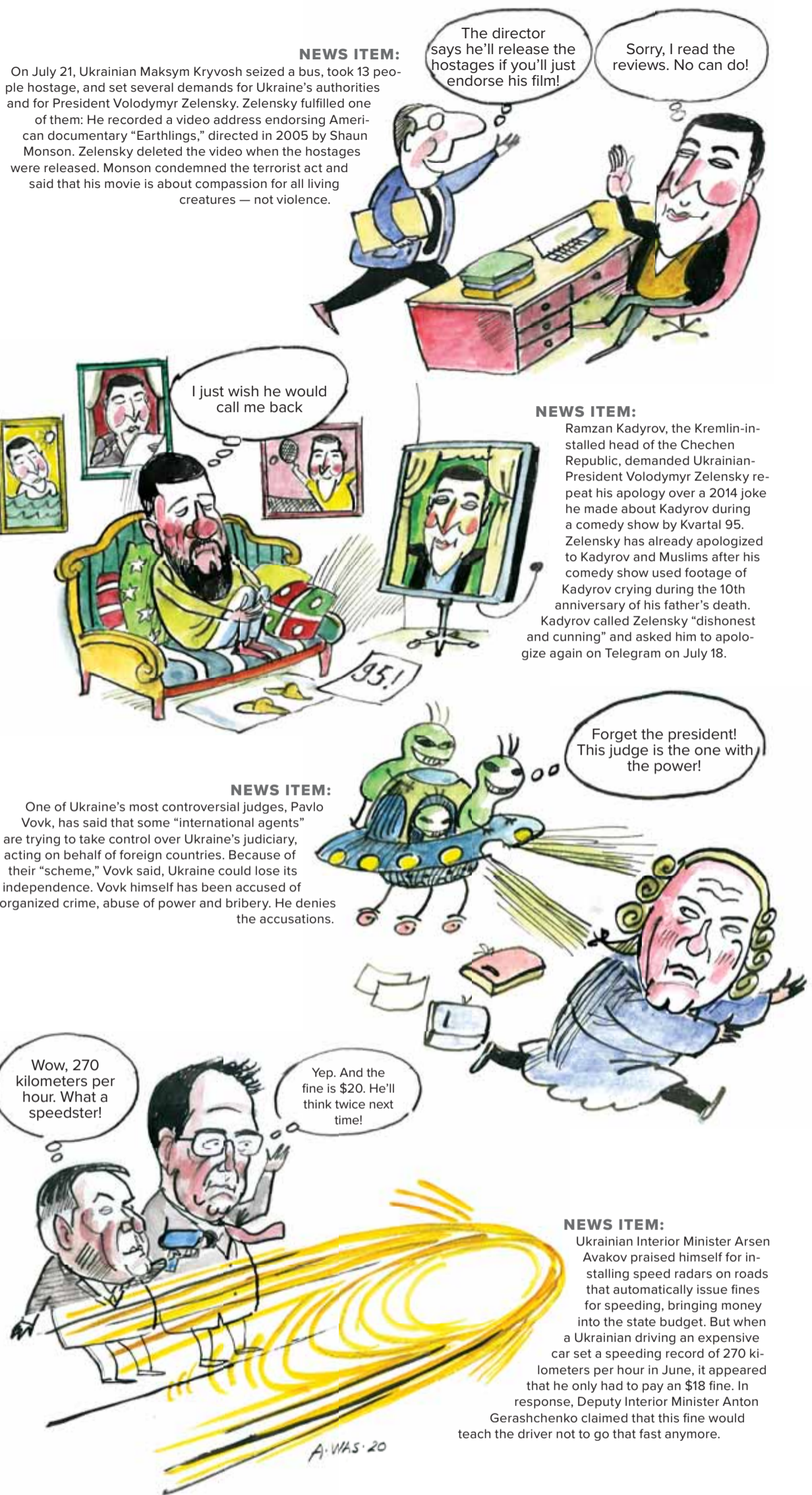
During the hostage situation, law enforcement and officials' mistakes and bizarre actions were painful to watch. Why did special forces storm the bus after the attacker was detained and taken away? Why did the president and interior minister chat with the attacker, instead of leaving it to a professional negotiator? Does Ukraine even have hostage negotiators or a protocol for how to react?

Understandably, Ukraine doesn't know how to respond to hostage taking. Although the country has suffered many security challenges, true domestic terrorism is a new one.

But there is no excuse for not being prepared for future attacks. Domestic terrorism is a global challenge, and while Ukraine has been lucky enough to avoid it, the man from Lutsk might inspire other attackers.

Moreover, as Ukraine integrates with the European Union — which has regularly faced terrorism — it may increasingly face this problem. With the Lutsk attack, the country got a warning shot.

Ukraine has shown that it can defend against Russia's militants on the battlefield. Now it must prepare to defend itself on the home front.



NEWS ITEM:
On July 21, Ukrainian Maksym Kryvosh seized a bus, took 13 people hostage, and set several demands for Ukraine's authorities and for President Volodymyr Zelensky. Zelensky fulfilled one of them: He recorded a video address endorsing American documentary "Earthlings," directed in 2005 by Shaun Monson. Zelensky deleted the video when the hostages were released. Monson condemned the terrorist act and said that his movie is about compassion for all living creatures — not violence.

NEWS ITEM:
Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-installed head of the Chechen Republic, demanded Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky repeat his apology over a 2014 joke he made about Kadyrov during a comedy show by Kvartal 95. Zelensky has already apologized to Kadyrov and Muslims after his comedy show used footage of Kadyrov crying during the 10th anniversary of his father's death. Kadyrov called Zelensky "dishonest and cunning" and asked him to apologize again on Telegram on July 18.

NEWS ITEM:
One of Ukraine's most controversial judges, Pavlo Vovk, has said that some "international agents" are trying to take control over Ukraine's judiciary, acting on behalf of foreign countries. Because of their "scheme," Vovk said, Ukraine could lose its independence. Vovk himself has been accused of organized crime, abuse of power and bribery. He denies the accusations.

NEWS ITEM:
Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov praised himself for installing speed radars on roads that automatically issue fines for speeding, bringing money into the state budget. But when a Ukrainian driving an expensive car set a speeding record of 270 kilometers per hour in June, it appeared that he only had to pay an \$18 fine. In response, Deputy Interior Minister Anton Gerashchenko claimed that this fine would teach the driver not to go that fast anymore.

See these features online at Kyivpost.com

Ukraine's Friend & Foe Of The Week



Nikolai Ilyin
Belarusian-Estonian combat medic gave his life for Ukraine. He was killed on July 13 while attempting to recover the body of a Ukrainian scout killed by a landmine on the front line in Russia's war against Ukraine.



Ramzan Kadyrov
Brutal Chechen dictator and rights violator is demanding that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky again apologize for a 2014 comedy sketch.

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.

Kyiv Post Digital

Most of the Kyiv Post's content is online. Here are some samples of the great journalism that readers will find daily at kyivpost.com

UKRAINE

Zelensky asks new NBU head to keep exchange rate stable, minimize pandemic impact



LIFESTYLE

Ukrainian creates concept design for Pepsi, wins Red Dot Award



OPINION

Steven Pifer

We've seen this movie before



BUSINESS

Ex-head of road agency Ukravtodor arrested, charged with corruption



CORONAVIRUS

Ukraine trialling 4 potential COVID-19 drugs



RUSSIA

Chechnya's Kadyrov wants Zelensky to apologize for old joke, again



PHOTOS

Memorial for journalist Pavel Sheremet opens at site of his murder in Kyiv



SUMMER OFFER FROM KYIV POST!

Subscribe today and get T-shirt, cup or tote bag as a gift!



Scan QR-code



Buy a website yearly subscription



Get a gift!



Hurry up!
Our gifts are this season's hot trend!

After sale, Dnipro Hotel to transform into esports arena

By Alexander Query
query@kyivpost.com

The mysterious buyer of the Kyiv's central Dnipro Hotel revealed himself on social media on July 23.

It turned out to be Alexander Kokhanovskyy, founder and former CEO of NaVi, a superstar esports team from Ukraine. He bought the hotel from the state on July 15 for \$41 million and now is going to turn it into an esports arena where computer geeks will clash playing video games for a living.

"The victory in the tender for the Dnipro Hotel wasn't won by Russian oligarchs but (by) Ukrainian tech guys," Kokhanovskyy wrote on Facebook.

Gaming, not gambling

The hotel will continue to offer classic services such as restaurants, bars, spa areas, and fitness centers. But it will also feature everything a professional esports gamer needs: training areas, rooms for players and esports stage to hold competitions. It will also have "the world's best players' lounge," Kokhanovskyy said.

Kokhanovskyy estimates that the renovation will take two years and \$20 million, he told Ukrainian media AIN.ua on July 23.

The 56-year-old Soviet-era hotel, a 13,000-square-meter building located just a short walk from the Dnipro River, features 186 rooms, restaurants, bars, a spa center and several conference rooms.

Kokhanovskyy dismissed rumors

People walk past the 13,000-square-meter Dnipro Hotel, located in the Kyiv city center on European Square, just a short walk from the Dnipro River, on July 16, 2020.



Volodymyr Petrov

that the hotel would be used for gambling. He's not interested in casinos or bookmaking even though gambling was legalized in Ukraine

on July 14, a day before the auction, and that the hotel would qualify to have a gambling area.

For him, buying the hotel was the

first step he could take to develop the esports industry in Ukraine and help improve its legislation by drawing extra attention from the media and public.

In Ukraine alone, two million people follow esports. Kokhanovskyy's legendary esports team NaVi — short for Natus Vincere in Latin that means "Born to Win"— is one of the most successful teams on the planet.

Experts predict the esports industry could become the world's number one sport over the next 10 years, putting even soccer out of play. According to a report released by global analytics company Newzoo on April 15, the industry will top over \$1 billion in revenues in 2020, for the second year in a row, potentially reaching \$1.5 billion in 2023.

Secrecy

The Dnipro Hotel was among the first five state-owned objects put up for privatization by President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Kokhanovskyy, alongside with Ukrainian partners, bought the hotel through an unknown company called Smartland, legally registered at a rundown private house just outside Kyiv in the town of Brovary.

At first, an online search did not reveal any additional information about the company, their owners or their activities, and the phone number was fake.

Kokhanovskyy told AIN.ua that the pool of investors has no connection with any "Russian traces" and Smartland is just one of his partners. ❖



Kostyantyn Chernichkin

Memorial for journalist Pavel Sheremet opens at site of his murder in Kyiv

A woman lays flowers during the opening ceremony of the memorial to journalist Pavel Sheremet in Kyiv on July 20, 2020, the fourth anniversary of his murder. The monument was unveiled at the corner of Bohdan Khmelnytsky and Ivan Franko streets in the Kyiv city center. Sheremet was a prominent Belarus-born journalist who worked at the Ukrainska Pravda news outlet and hosted a morning show on Radio Vesti. He was killed when a bomb detonated in his car as he was driving to work on July 20, 2016. The monument was created by well-known Ukrainian sculptor Nazar Bilyk and architect Maksym Kotsyuba. Sheremet's friends and colleagues commissioned the sculpture, while Bilyk came up with the concept. It took six months to complete the monument.



Intel Extreme Masters

Ukrainian esports club NaVi wins the IEM Katowice tournament in shooter video game Counter-Strike: Global Offensive on March 3 in Katowice, Poland. The mysterious buyer of the Kyiv's central Dnipro Hotel turned out to be Alexander Kokhanovskyy, founder and former CEO of NaVi. Kokhanovskyy bought the hotel from the state on July 15 for \$41 million and now is going to turn it into an esports arena where computer geeks will clash playing video games for a living.

Case against notorious judges shows need to reform judiciary

By Oleg Sukhov
sukhov@kyivpost.com

It has been a year since the high-profile criminal case against top judge Pavlo Vovk has been obstructed and blocked by numerous officials and judges.

Now Vovk and other judges of the Kyiv Administrative District Court, which is headed by Vovk, face new charges by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU).

On July 17, judges Vovk, Yevhen Ablov, Ihor Pohribnichenko, Ihor Kachur, Bohdan Sanin, Oleksiy Ohurtsov and Volodymyr Keleberda were charged with organized crime, usurpation of power, bribery and unlawful interference with government officials.

Vovk and the other judges denied the accusations and called the NABU actions an attempt to put pressure on the court. They also called charges politically motivated.

The case has exposed the law enforcement's system's ability to protect its most notorious members. Audio tapes implicating Vovk published by the NABU have also revealed how unreformed and sure of its impunity the judiciary is.

Legal experts and anti-corruption activists are calling for the liquidation of Vovk's court and argue that the Vovk case clearly demonstrates the need for genuine reform of the judiciary — something that has not happened so far.

"We are unique. We are the only court that has survived all of them for five years. Unliquidated, unreformed, unassessed," Vovk boasted and quipped, according to the NABU tapes.

Vovk also quips in the tapes that no one should doubt the court's "political prostitution." Meanwhile, one of the court's judges said in the tapes he supports "any lawlessness in the judiciary branch."

Bribery

In February 2019 Vovk told a representative of one of the presidential candidates that he can organize a court ruling against a Central Election Commission regulation if the court gets a bribe, according to the tapes.

"Are there any interested parties that can sponsor this?" Vovk said. "(The relevant judge) must realize that there is an interest on the part of interested politicians who can sponsor this."

In March 2019 Vovk also said that the court is ready to issue a certain ruling in a case involving an unidentified company only if the company is ready to bribe the court, according to the recordings.

"If they are ready to sponsor this, then we're ready to issue this shit," he said. "If they're not ready, let them fight."

In the tapes, Vovk also discussed getting a bribe for a court ruling rejecting a ruling by the National Agency for Preventing Corruption on a lawmaker's administrative infraction.

Pavlo Vovk, head of the Kyiv Administrative District Court, was charged on July 17 with organized crime, usurpation of power, bribery and unlawful interference with government officials.



Constitutional Court

The tapes also document Vovk's alleged efforts to unlawfully influence the Constitutional Court and get control over it, according to the NABU.

"We already own two courts — the Constitutional Court and the Kyiv Administrative District Court," Vovk also said in the tapes.

In February 2019 the Constitutional Court canceled the law criminalizing illicit enrichment. Vovk and Ablov were interested in it because the NABU had investigated illicit enrichment cases against them. Both had to be closed after the ruling.

On the tapes, Vovk takes credit for influencing the judges and making them issue the scandalous ruling, according to the NABU, and said they can now "buy whatever they want" and take their wealth out of the shadows.

"I think you and Ablov can now declare the \$1 million in income from stock that you had. Your mom gave it to you as a gift when you were a child," Vovk joked. "Or golden bees were born in your house."

Supreme Court

In March 2019 Vovk talked about trying to prevent the participation of Supreme Court Chairwoman Valentyna Danishevska in High Council of Justice meetings through a lawsuit that Vovk himself is considering. His aim was to obstruct the appointment of Supreme Court judges by the High Council of Justice, according to the NABU.

Vovk also discussed obstructing the appointment of ex-High Council of Justice Chairman Ihor Benedysyuk to the Supreme Court through a conflict of interest ruling by the National Agency for Preventing Corruption.

High Council of Justice

In March 2019 Vovk instructed one of the judges to arrange a fake lawsuit to cancel the results of a competition for High Council of Justice jobs. He talked of stopping Oleksiy Filatov, then-President Petro Poroshenko's deputy chief of staff, from getting into the council.

"We'll come up with some lawsuit. Why should we let this asshole get in there?" Vovk said.

In the tapes, Vovk also said he had talked to former Poroshenko Bloc lawmaker Oleksandr Hranovsky about the matter.

"I told him 'Sasha, in the context of our friendly relations, I warn you beforehand that if I see some asshole whom I don't like (in the High Council of Justice), tell (then President) Pyotr Alekseyevich (Poroshenko) that I'll fuck him up.'"

Relationship with Avakov

The recordings also mention Interior Minister Arsen Avakov directly or indirectly several times. His spokesman Artem Shevchenko declined to comment.

In April Vovk told Ablov that, thanks to him, the court is associated with Avakov, metaphorically calling the minister "backpacks."

In 2017, Avakov's son Oleksandr

and the minister's ex-deputy, Serhiy Chebotar, were charged by the NABU with embezzling Hr 14 million (\$550,000) by supplying overpriced backpacks to the Interior Ministry. Ablov ruled that an auction to supply backpacks was legal, helping to whitewash the minister. Chief Anti-Corruption Prosecutor Nazar Kholodnytsky's office closed the case a year later despite published video evidence that shows Chebotar and Oleksandr Avakov discussing the corrupt deal.

According to the recordings, Vovk and Ablov also discussed interfering in a decision not to hire Ablov as a State Investigation Bureau official. Specifically, they discuss influencing the Kyiv Administrative District Court judge who was considering canceling the decision.

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

Case obstructed

The Vovk case has faced obstruction from the very beginning.

In August 2019, the Prosecutor General's Office charged Vovk and other judges of his court with obstructing the work of the High Qualification Commission of Judges, issuing unlawful rulings and unlawfully interfering in the work of other judges.

In 2019, prosecutors applied to extend the pre-trial investigation period by three months. However, Kyiv's Shevchenkivsky Court rejected their motion and ordered the Prosecutor General's office to either close the case against the judges or send it to trial within five days. The prosecutors did not send it to trial, and the case stalled indefinitely after that.

In June the Constitutional Court made it even harder to try Vovk by canceling the law criminalizing unlawful rulings.

However, the deadline does not apply to the new charges against the judges announced in July, and the new case may be sent to trial.

Two sources at the NABU and the Prosecutor General's Office told the Kyiv Post that Deputy Prosecutor General Andriy Lyubovich is facing pressure from Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova for authorizing the new charges, alleging that the notorious judge has backing in high offices. The Prosecutor General's Office did not respond to a request for comment. The sources spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak to the press.

"The Vovk tapes are not just about Vovk and his court but about the whole judiciary, which is rotten at its core," Halia Chyzhyk, a judicial expert at the Anti-Corruption Action Center, said on Facebook. "The judiciary's lack of reaction to this horror film only confirms this." 🇺🇦

Special insert of Ukraine's achievements will be published in Aug. 21 issue

To advertise, contact us at +38 044 591 77 88 or advertising@kyivpost.com

Young, popular, pro-Russian: Blogger Anatoly Shariy dives into Ukrainian politics

page 1 →

ple and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Shariy is not shy about promoting outright lies about Ukraine. He regularly appears on Russian state television and pro-Russian channels in Ukraine.

Despite living in the European Union since 2012, Shariy has amassed over 300,000 followers on Facebook and 2.5 million subscribers on his YouTube channel. His Telegram channel is among the most read in Ukraine.

His supporters organize protests and get into fistfights on the streets of Ukraine's largest cities, while the blogger himself records multiple daily videos in which he accuses Zelensky of plotting his assassination.

Now Shariy is working to discredit Ukraine in the eyes of Western politicians, too. In his quest to promote the Russian agenda, he has found supporters among the German right-wing party, Alternative for Germany.

Despite lacking a concrete political platform, Shariy has managed to become the new face of Russia's political agenda in Ukraine.

Now, his party has a good chance of making it into local councils during the October local elections.

Political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko does not yet see Shariy as an immediate threat, but his dive into mainstream politics can have lasting consequences.

"It works well for the Russian propaganda machine," Fesenko says. "On one hand, they are helping Shariy, creating an image that he is backed in Europe. On the other hand, they are using (Shariy) as their proxy to destabilize Ukraine."

Going political

In 2019, Shariy decided to capital-



Security detains a man during a protest near the president's office, organized by the pro-Russian Shariy Party in Kyiv on June 17, 2020.

ize on his online fame and compete for a seat in parliament. His party failed to pass the five percent threshold, getting 2.2% of the vote. Now, however, the Party of Shariy, as it is officially called, has a second chance.

Ukraine will hold its local elections on Oct. 25. According to the Rating Group pollster, Shariy's party has a chance at making it into the city councils in five regional capitals, all in eastern Ukraine.

In the Azov Sea port city of Mariupol, home to 500,000 people, Shariy enjoys up to 8% support.

The party is led by Shariy's wife Olga Shariy, who also runs Shariy.net, which presents itself as a news

website. However, it mostly promotes Shariy and his wife.

Shariy allies himself with Viktor Medvedchuk, the closest ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ukraine. That gets him much-needed publicity. Medvedchuk's television empire gives hours of prime airtime to Shariy and his followers.

Shariy appears regularly on NewsOne and Channel 112. Both are officially owned by Taras Kozak, a lawmaker with the Opposition Platform – For Life party. However, Ukrainian journalists allege that the channels actually belong to party leader Medvedchuk. He denies it.

Shariy appears during prime time as an expert, journalist or even as the

main guest. His own party members, under fake names, ask him softball questions during talk shows.

"Under Shariy's brand, they're trying to bring a huge number of pro-Russian-oriented people to power, to parliament, to local councils," Ukrainian journalist Serhiy Ivanov told the Kyiv Post.

Ivanov has a tense relationship with Shariy. The two have attacked one another online.

Today, Shariy fills the empty niche of a young pro-Russian politician.

According to Rating Group polls, the pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life party is predominantly supported by people over 50. Only 2% of Ukrainians under 30 are ready to support the party.

"If they don't attract younger voters now, they will lose a substantial chunk of the electoral base," says Ivanov. "The younger generation won't vote for those 'communist party-type' figures."

In 2019, those people voted for Zelensky. Now, Shariy wants to be their candidate.

Zelensky promised his voters a lot, including peace with Russia. Because it wasn't yet achieved, the pro-Russian electoral base is now disenchanted, the polls show, and Zelensky lost over 10% of his support.

That's the field where Shariy is playing.

Bigotry and lies

Shariy's rise can be dangerous for Ukraine.

Before entering politics, Shariy made a name for himself selling Russian propaganda and hate online. He regularly attacked minorities and promoted dubious unproven claims about Ukraine.

Since the 2013–2014 EuroMaidan Revolution, which led to the ouster of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, Shariy has been even more active online, promoting a pro-Russian agenda.

In 2015, Shariy recorded a video in which he said that people from

western Ukraine are inferior to 'real' Ukrainians.

"I'm Ukrainian. You're not Ukrainian," he said. "You're... I'm not saying you're second rate, but you are half-blood, third blood, quarter blood, you're fuck knows what."

After Russia invaded Ukraine, Shariy began retranslating Russian propaganda. He called Russia's war against Ukraine an "internal conflict" and said that Russian tanks photographed on Ukrainian territory were actually Ukrainian.

He also tried to blame Ukraine for the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 on July 17, 2014.

A day after the civilian airliner was shot down, killing all 298 people on board, Russian proxies began to spread lies that the plane was attacked by a Ukrainian fighter jet. That same day, Shariy published a 40-second audio recording on Youtube, which he claimed was leaked audio conversations of Ukrainian jet pilots. He hinted that they were involved in the tragedy.

Soon, Russian state media picked up the claim and began accusing Ukraine of shooting down MH17. However, the idea was so absurd that the Russian propagandists eventually ditch it.

The Joint Investigation Team led by the Netherlands Public Prosecution Service has ruled that the plane was shot down by a Russian Buk missile system.

Shariy's bigotry extends beyond hatred of Ukrainians. In June, Ivanov dug up blogs published by Shariy on Politiko.ua, a local blogging platform, back in 2010. In those posts, Shariy wrote that homosexual men should be sterilized and Roma people and immigrants should be "cleared out."

"After such comments, he should have been deported (from the EU)," says Ivanov.

But there's a problem: Shariy likely holds the passport of a European Union country and isn't planning on returning home.

Luxury life

Shariy is known for a luxurious lifestyle of brand-name clothing and multi-million-dollar villas on the Mediterranean coast.

On July 7, the Slidstvo.info investigative journalism project discovered that Shariy owns a villa near Barcelona worth over 1 million euros.

He has been living in the European Union since 2012.

Back in 2011, Shariy shot a man with a pneumatic pistol in a Kyiv McDonald's restaurant. According to police, he also staged an attack against himself by hiring people to shoot his car.

Security camera footage leaked online shows Shariy shooting an unarmed man who was exiting the McDonald's in the back. Shariy then flees the crime scene.

Shariy has accused the Ukrainian police of political persecution. To this end, he fled the country and asked for asylum in Lithuania. His request was granted. In Ukraine, both cases are now closed.

In 2019, during court hearings on defamation charges Shariy leveled against his sister Olena Marchenko



Activists protest Putin's war crimes

People stage a protest performance led by Donetsk artist Serhiy Zakharov in front of the Ukrainian parliament building in Kyiv on July 21, 2020. Called "Putin's House of Cards," the protest was organized by former prisoners of war, their families, human rights activists and artists to direct lawmakers' attention to war crimes committed by Russia and the country's President Vladimir Putin. In 2014, Russia invaded Ukraine, occupying Crimea and parts of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. A total of over 13,000 people were killed. Human rights groups have recorded multiple instances of unlawful imprisonment, torture and murder in the occupied regions.

The new face of Russian propaganda spreads bigotry, fake news to promote his party

page 8 →

and Russian lawyer Mark Feygin, it was revealed that Shariy has a European Union passport.

Marchenko and Feygin had accused Shariy of pedophilia. They both lost in court.

Alternative for Germany and Ukraine

Since June, Shariy has been actively working with pro-Russian European politicians in an attempt to discredit the Ukrainian authorities and undermine the country's relations with the west.

"Those links suggest that Moscow is helping this project," says Fesenko.

His main allies are lawmakers from the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, the right-wing populist minority party known for its pro-Russian sentiment.

On July 2, German AfD lawmaker Waldemar Herdt submitted an official letter to the Council of Europe's High Commissioner on Human Rights prior to her visit to Ukraine.

Herdt said he was contacted by members of the "Sharia Party" about violence against the opposition in Ukraine. Herdt's misspelling of Shariy's last name could hardly hide the purpose of the message: pro-Russian politicians want to discredit Ukraine's leaders.

Herdt, who was born in the Soviet Union and was a member of the Communist Party, is among Russian state media's favorite EU lawmakers. He illegally visited occupied Crimea in 2018 during the Russian presidential election and praised the vote on Russian television.

In January, Herdt and his fellow AfD member Petr Bystron organized an official event for Medvedchuk in Berlin. Pro-Russian media branded the event as "German parliamentary support for Medvedchuk and his Donbas peace plan."

Russia has been occupying parts of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region since 2014.

German broadcaster Deutsche Welle reported that the event was held in the official parliamentary headquarters of the AfD. All other factions rejected the invitation. Only two non-AfD lawmakers listened in on the event.

The meeting's goal was to demonstrate that pro-Russian groups in Ukraine are the only ones who want peace, promoting Russia as the peacemaker.

Members of the AfD have long faced accusations of harboring sympathy for the Kremlin. Their lawmakers have been paid to monitor fraudulent elections in Russia and have been regularly invited to visit the country. Their trips are financed by the Russian State Duma.

European networking

Lately, Shariy's party has been trying to widen the range of its international supporters. His press secretary, Yulia Pavlenko, has been contacting German political experts and suggesting they make a public state-

ment decrying alleged attacks on the opposition by radicals employed by the Ukrainian government.

The whole statement is a lie.

An employee for Medvedchuk's 112 Channel is helping put him in touch with European politicians.

The most recent catch in Shariy's net of pro-Russian European politicians is the far-left Irish European Parliament lawmaker Clare Daly, who has been accused of corruption for hiring her friend's son as a paid assistant.

Daly held a public hearing condemning Ukrainian "radicals" and supporting the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

Daly issued an official personal statement that the EU governments "helped foster extreme nationalism in Ukraine to serve a geopolitical agenda, and now neo-Nazis with government ties are beating up opponents and menacing civil society."

Shariy uses such statements to undermine the Ukrainian government's relations with western politicians. The aim is to push Zelensky into the arms of Russia.

It's difficult to assess whether this strategy is working.

"(Shariy) relies on the radical left and radical right, which is basically the same thing," says journalist Ivanov. "No serious politicians are taking him seriously."

But it still can be risky for Ukraine. "It's beneficial for Russia to weaken Zelensky. Then they'll have more tools to influence Ukraine," says Kyiv Mohyla Academy Professor Oleksiy Haran.

After Daly made her statement, Channel 112 tuned in, posting news articles titled "European Parliament sharply condemns the spike in violence by right-wing radicals in Ukraine." It failed to mention that the European Parliament has 751 lawmakers, not one.

Who is paying

All this activity by Shariy and his party requires vast investments. But where is the money coming from?

Ukrainian law enforcement is now asking the same question. On July 20, a Shariy party member was fined for using his account to transfer money of unproven origins into the party's account.

In fact, the party's entire financial statement looks like a laundromat. Each party registered in Ukraine must file a financial statement to the National Agency on Corruption Prevention.

"Creating regional headquarters, political promotion, media presence, salaries — it all can cost from \$200,000 up to \$2 million a month," says Fesenko.

Shariy can't afford that alone.

In 2019, Shariy's party filed a financial statement stating that its budget was only Hr 6 million (\$225,000). Moreover, the money came from donors who couldn't afford such generous gifts.

In one instance, Shariy's party declaration stated that Arusyak Arustamova, a retiree, donated Hr

420,000 (\$16,000). When journalists called to ask where the money was from, the woman couldn't answer. Later, she said it was part of some kind of arrangement.

Her husband, also a retiree, donated the same amount.

"When people top up a legal party account with money of unproven origins, acknowledging the fact that it is not their personal funds, that raises serious concerns," says journalist Ivanov.

In 2020 Shariy's party switched donors. Its main contributor is now a non-profit surprisingly called "Party of Shariy." The non-profit doesn't release a financial statement.

Shariy is a very popular YouTube personality who can potentially purchase a Spanish villa with his own income. But the amount of money he spends on political projects is impossible to accumulate from his online platforms.

"Knowing how many subscribers he has and how long he's been on YouTube, I guess it's possible (to buy a villa)" says Mykyta Roginets, media expert and head of BeTrue Media. Shariy's income from YouTube may be over \$30,000 a month.

However, Roginets points out that Shariy spends vast sums on self-promotion.

"I know for a fact that he's been



A screenshot from a July 23 YouTube video published by Anatoly Shariy where he hints that the recent hostage standoff in Lutsk was staged.

spending over \$60,000 in advertising on Facebook," he adds. "That's a huge amount."

The State Fiscal Service of Ukraine opened an investigation into an alleged money laundering scheme organized by Shariy and his party. Shariy was summoned for questioning on July 3, but didn't show up.

If found guilty, he could face up to 20 years in prison.

Zelensky's biggest rival

Shariy may push a pro-Russian narrative, but Ukraine's incumbent president is himself partly responsible for the blogger's rise.

In the past months, members of Zelensky's ruling party have supported Shariy in his attacks on Ukraine's pro-Western opposition. In May, the Shariy.net website was accredited for Zelensky's press conference dedicated to his first year in office. It was even allowed a question.

However, any alliance between Shariy and Zelensky's people was never going to last. As Zelensky took a tougher stance on Russia, rejecting

Russian demands in the Donbas, Shariy began to actively attack the president online.

Shariy began verbally attacking the president's team and hiring people to protest in front of parliament. After journalists uncovered where Shariy lives in Spain, the blogger accused them of working for Zelensky.

Now Shariy claims that Zelensky's administration is plotting his assassination. The Presidential Office responded by saying that Shariy is using Zelensky's name for personal promotion.

As popular as Shariy may be on the internet, he is not an immediate threat. But political expert Fesenko believes that the legitimization of such a marginal figure in Ukrainian politics can have lasting consequences.

"Shariy's aggressiveness is very dangerous," says Fesenko.

"Our society is very neurotic. And when a political leader promotes this kind of aggressive approach, it causes unnecessary risks to our society." ❦



Fallen soldier

Civilians and soldiers pay last respects to Ukrainian Armed Forces serviceman Nikolai Ilyin, who was killed in action in the Donbas on July 13, during a ceremony at the St. Oleksandr Church in Kyiv on July 22, 2020. Ilyin was a citizen of Estonia and a native of Belarus. In 2018, he signed a contract with Ukraine's army to fight against Russian-backed militants in Donbas. Ilyin was killed when he volunteered to participate in a mission to recover the body of a Ukrainian scout killed in no-man's land by a landmine.



Courtesy

Oleg Petrasniuk

Ukrinform

In Kyiv, cycling is still a deadly business



Illia Ponomarenko
ponomarenko@kyivpost.com

The struggle is real: Kyivans want to ride bicycles through the city freely and safely, no matter how hard the authorities try and ignore them.

The Ukrainian capital now has more bicyclists than ever before. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of bike riders in the streets has likely increased tenfold, if not more.

During the lockdown to prevent the novel coronavirus' spread, many Kyivans opted to bike around the city instead of using taxis. Even after city transport resumed operations, some of them continue using their bikes — or electric scooters, unicycles, you name it.

Every morning and every evening, dozens of riders — including yours truly — rush along busy avenues, right next to endless streams of cars and buses.

Using a bike as your everyday mode of transport is a way to make a trivial thing like commuting between home and work a joyful little adventure. We all love the sensation of riding free on the road, hearing the wind whistling, enjoying the sunsets burning behind skyscrapers, being immune to traffic jams and compensating for our sedentary office work.

For these reasons, I do at least 30 kilometers each and every day.

But there's a small problem: This city doesn't love us cyclists back. In fact, sometimes these streets want us very much dead.

Kyiv calls itself a major European capital, but in terms of cycling infrastructure, we're still in the stone age compared to even our neighbors like Warsaw, Bratislava or Budapest.

The Kyiv authorities have vowed to fix the problem and make Kyiv bike-friendly. That led to a perfect storm of useless and bizarre decisions that led to millions in budget funds being buried in the ground and even more of chest-beating by the city mayor Vitali Klitschko.

Formally, Kyiv now has nearly 100 kilometers of bicycle lanes scattered all across the city, and their number grows. But as one can see on the Kyiv map, many of them are quite short, sometimes just several hundreds of meters long.

They are not interconnected in a city-wide grid, and most of them start randomly, lead to nowhere and, thus, make no sense.

But even when it comes to bike lanes that seem long and consistent — such as the one running



A bicyclist rides along the pedestrian bridge in downtown Kyiv on April 2, 2020. The bridge that connects Mariinsky Park and Volodymyrska Hirka Park is one of the few routes in Kyiv where there is a bike lane.

along the western half of Peremohy Avenue — you're terribly wrong if you think you can ride with the wind straight from Akademmistechko metro station to the city center.

The first rule of street bicycling in Kyiv is: No one cares if there's a bike lane and you want to use it. Most of the routes in this city are full of pop-up grocery markets, spontaneous illegal parking lots and massive crowds of roaming pedestrians who don't give a damn that these lanes weren't designated for their baby strollers.

In almost any city in Europe, they could be warned by police or even fined. In Brussels, I could easily take a cross-city ride between the NATO headquarters and the Grand Place without leaving safe bike lanes. In Boone County, Missouri, I felt like I was in a bicyclist's paradise as I explored its legendary historic MKT trail across the state.

In Kyiv, meanwhile, I sometimes can't ride 30 meters without shouting at people standing and talking in the middle of the bike lane in the Akademika Palladina Street — just because they can get away with it.

In compliance with the first rule of street bicycling in Kyiv, the police never react to cars parked in bike lanes. Very rarely do I see them towed away. In the rare case they are, it only happens in the city center.

Too many people still don't perceive bicycles as real participants in street traffic. This effectively renders bike lanes, these poor bits of infrastructure, almost impossible to use.

Given the choice between possibly hitting a careless child standing in a bike lane and risking my life by driving among the cars, I favor the latter option. And I'm not alone in taking to the roadways.

It is a known fact that the modern motorcycle movement was founded by bored American military pilots seeking a new life on the edge after World War II. In this country, adrenaline junkies would find their fix on bicycles in the wild west of Kyiv street traffic.

It's a cruel, unforgiving world that takes no prisoners and demands

Green Beret-levels of survival skills.

Sticking to the extreme right lane and trying to breathe through the fog of exhaust, make sure the truck coming from behind is not going to smash you without even noticing.

Stay vigilant so as not to hit the suddenly opened door of a parked car. Check if another driver is entering the main lane at an intersection and starring into his smartphone. Make sure he's aware that he must let you pass.

No one cares if this section of Shevchenko Boulevard is an officially approved bus-bike lane. If some driver thinks it's wise to leapfrog a traffic jam at a wild speed, the odds are high you'll be exposed to the very real danger of being run over.

And no matter how carefully you follow the rules, an ignorant abuser behind the wheel can pop up at any moment and finish it all within a second.

Joking aside, the Kyiv roads are a dangerous place for bicyclists.

During recent rallies near the Kyiv administration, bike activists said at least five riders had been killed in traffic accidents since the beginning of 2020. New scandals erupt almost every week, such as a July 16 incident when the president of the Roshen Corporation, Vyacheslav Moskaevskiy, hit two bicyclists, allegedly on purpose, and fled the site.

On July 24, there will be yet another rally demanding that the authorities finally ensure European safety standards for bicycle traffic in Kyiv. The activists want new rules obliging vehicles to stay at least 1.5 meters away from bikes on the road and increasing criminal liability for ignorant and disrespectful drivers who provoke dangerous accidents.

In a major European city in 2020, there can be no excuse for exposing bicyclists to potential death just because they want to use this clean and healthy transport in everyday life. ☹

TOP 10 KYIV POST exclusives online this week

Editor's Note: Most of the Kyiv Post's journalism is published online. Subscribe today at the low rate of \$45 annually for access to all articles, photos, videos, the PDF editions of the weekly printed newspaper and our complete archives dating to 1995.



1. Ukraine sets visa-free regime with 6 new countries, including Australia, New Zealand

2. EU borders to stay shut to Ukrainian travelers

3. Zelensky opposes extending quarantine for more than a month

4. Armed man holds 20 people hostage on bus in western Ukraine

5. HBO Europe to release acclaimed Ukrainian film

6. Trump campaign misrepresents photo from Ukrainian revolution to illustrate 'chaos'

7. Law enforcement detains armed man who took 13 hostage in Lutsk

8. Ukraine to extend 'adaptive' quarantine until September

9. Low-cost Wizz Air launches 14 new routes between Ukraine and Italy

10. Two men arrested in racist attack on African students in Kyiv

Subscribe! \$45 per year

Online benefits include:

- **Unlimited access** to all exclusive Kyiv Post stories online
- **Continuously updated** feed of news stories, analysis, multimedia, opinions and more
- **Archives** dating back to 1997



www.kyivpost.com

Top anti-graft activist suspects arson as his house burns down

By Natalia Datskevych
datskevych@kyivpost.com

One of Ukraine's top anti-corruption activists Vitaliy Shabunin, who serves as the head of the Anti-Corruption Action Center's executive board, said on July 23 that his house in Kyiv burned down overnight. He suspects that the fire was the result of arson as retribution for his activism.

No one was injured in the fire. Only Shabunin's parents were at the house, which is located in the southeastern outskirts of Kyiv. They were able to escape uninjured.

Shabunin said that his neighbors heard an explosion before the fire and saw when the entrance burst into flames. He ruled out the possibility of gas leakage, saying that the gas meter and pipes in the house were checked just two weeks before the fire.

Shabunin is famous for his activism aimed at top-level corruption in Ukraine. He holds public rallies, speaks against corruption in Ukrainian and international press, and lobbies for anti-corruption legislation and the recovery of ill-gained assets.

"As a Christian, I bless the perpetrators of (the attack) and those who ordered it," wrote Shabunin. "I thank them for the motivation to work even harder."



Oleg Petrusiuk

Vitaliy Shabunin's house in Kyiv burned down overnight on July 23, 2020, allegedly as a result of arson as retribution for his anti-corruption activism.

The police are treating the fire as arson. The Anti-Corruption Action Center said in a statement that it sees it as an assassination attempt on Shabunin and his family.

During the meeting with the press in front of his burned house, Shabunin said that the attack was possible because President Volodymyr Zelensky "doesn't take any serious steps to protect activists," leaving aggression against them unpunished.

"These are the consequences of his silence and inaction," said Shabunin.

When asked whom he suspects ordered the attack, Shabunin said it might be one of the top officials and business people criticized by the activist and his colleagues at the Anti-Corruption Action Center.

"We have a long list of 'friends' – Oleg Bakhmatyuk, Ihor Kolomoisky, Arsen Avakov..." he said.

Bakhmatyuk is a Ukrainian

agricultural tycoon, who is a suspect in a large-scale embezzlement case. When asked to comment on Shabunin's allegations, Bakhmatyuk's representative denied involvement and condemned the attack.

Ukrainian oligarch Kolomoisky, whom the activists targeted for his attempts to overturn the nationalization of the PrivatBank, denied he had anything to do with the attack on Shabunin. The Kyiv Post is reaching out to Interior Minister Avakov, whom the activists investigated regarding his purchase of a luxury villa in Italy. Avakov is yet to comment on the allegations.

Daria Kaleniuk, executive director of the Anti-Corruption Action Center, said that the police found unidentified objects near the entrance of the burned house that she alleged were the remains of the explosive that started the fire. At the same time, she said she didn't have faith in the official investigation.

"We don't trust investigation performed by police," said Kaleniuk. "For many years, we have been systematically pressured by the law enforcement agencies and corrupt officials."

It's not the first time when Shabunin's house is in the news.

In 2016-2018, during the rule of ex-President Petro Poroshenko, Shabunin faced an intense smear campaign against him, which centered around accusations of stealing some donor funds. The house was shown as "evidence" of Shabunin's dishonesty, prompting him to deny all accusations and publish a detailed declaration of assets and income.

The house has been the site of protests, which later turned out to have been overseen by an employee of the State Security Service of Ukraine, according to Ukrainian investigative journalists.

Shabunin said the protest was organized by Pavel Demchyna, then-deputy chairman of the State Security Service, as a revenge for the Anti-Corruption Action Center's campaign to force the secretive agency to publish asset declarations of its employees – something that they were exempt from. Demchyna denied accusations.

Another rally against Shabunin was allegedly linked to the National Police officials.

In June, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky expelled Shabunin from the National Council for Anti-Corruption Policy, an advisory body. 🇺🇦



JOIN THE CORPORATE CLUB



Subscribe to the Kyiv Post and have fresh issues delivered weekly to your door. Support Ukraine's trusted source of independent English-language news since 1995!



Contact us at subscribe@kyivpost.com #kyivpostclub

Leshchenko lobbies interests of Kolomoisky, Pinchuk



Nataliya Yemchenko

Editor's Note: On July 17, the Kyiv Post ran an op-ed by Sergii Leshchenko, an investigative journalist and ex-member of parliament, calling for Ukraine's Western partners to help the country to tame the appetites of the country's richest oligarch, Rinat Akhmetov, who controls much of the country's energy production and heavy industry. Nataliya Yemchenko, director of public relations and communications at Akhmetov's System Capital Management holding company, responds to Leshchenko's allegations.

A statement built on lies is a statement that's harmful. The statement of Sergii Leshchenko in the Kyiv Post ("West needs to help Ukraine tame Akhmetov" – July 17, 2020) is based on lies. Either by design (which is unworthy of a man who is a supervisory board member of Ukrzaliznytsia) or out of lack of professionalism and ignorance (which is unworthy of an investigative journalist). Executed in a manifest form, his text is a libel.

Since Leshchenko has neither contacted System Capital Management (Editor's Note: SCM is owned by billionaire oligarch Rinat Akhmetov) or SCM businesses to learn their position, nor considered our public position which is readily available in media and on our websites, we are forced to address what he wrote publicly.

I am certain that Leshchenko's false statement is rooted in its author's bias rather than ignorance. Here I am going to show you that Leshchenko is misleading the Kyiv Post audience.

I'll explain why his manipulative calls based on lies go against the interests of Ukraine but serve the interests of oligarchs who own the ferroalloy businesses, as well as Russia. And I'll expose the propaganda techniques employed by Leshchenko.

Before going into arguments, I shall point out that I am confused as to the capacity of that column's author. He sounds neither like a journalist (there are no opinions of the parties) nor like an Ukrzaliznytsia's supervisory board member (otherwise that would be a piece on combatting corruption inside that national monopolist).

He sounds more like a lobbyist for specific business interests, which Leshchenko pre-emptively and hastily disclaimed ("I cannot be accused of pro-Kolomoisky rhetoric.") (Editor's Note: Ihor Kolomoisky is a Ukrainian billionaire oligarch. Leshchenko exposed Kolomoisky in his earlier op-eds for the Kyiv Post.)

As is commonly known, the front-most ferroalloy businessman in Ukraine is Kolomoisky. His partner in this business, as seen from the London court materials, is Victor Pinchuk. However, in his all "anti-oligarch" rhetoric, Leshchenko delicately leaves out Pinchuk and his Interpipe/EastOne business group.

I will give the most basic examples of Leshchenko's lies in his text (although it has so much misinformation that an entire refutation might be in order).

Statement No. 1: "SCM controls 25% of Ukraine's GDP."

It is a lie with nothing behind it, other than similar comments by Kolomoisky.

Leshchenko fails to provide any evidence, as there simply isn't any. In 2012, E&Y estimated the contribution of the SCM businesses to the Ukrainian economy. SCM's direct contribution was 4%, which is six times less than what Leshchenko is pointing at.

Statement No. 2: "Akhmetov uses international investors as a human shield for any attempts to correct the skewed tariffs. This tactic is like taking a hostage."

A false and manipulative statement.

The government publicly promised the renewable energy system investors a specific playing field (in particular what tariff the green investors were going to get and for how long) and formalized this in a special law.

The foreign investors brought their money to Ukraine on the back of these very guarantees. Now that the money has been paid in and the renewables sector has grown exponentially, the state is saying that it changes the rules and wants to pay less for green energy. So all the investors (the international and the Ukrainian alike) defend their Ukrainian investments, just like they would any other.

Now, using Leshchenko's terminology, the ferroalloy business owned by Kolomoisky and Pinchuk is the one that wants to take Ukraine's



Richest Ukrainian, oligarch Rinat Akhmetov (C), who's also founder and president of the System Capital Management holding, attends a tour of the metallurgical plant Zaporizhstal in Zaporizhia on May 16, 2013.

energy hostage together with the international investors. Here is what the investors themselves write about it, for example. The investors say that the oligarchs' lobby is set out to kill the green energy.

And by lobbying for the preservation of manual steering of the market to the benefit of ferroalloy businesses (when the state con-

A manipulation. Ban of Russian coal imports is a matter of energy security of Ukraine. Lobbying for non-critical imports from Russia to Ukraine (and electricity and coal are exactly that) means lobbying for the interests of Russia and the Ukrainian ferroalloy businesses, whose investors need cheap electricity at all costs. But ultimately, this ban was the most beneficial for the state-owned coal companies.

exchange for the commitment to upgrade their dated energy-intensive facilities. In the end, those promises turned out to be false – the ferroalloy companies did not follow up on their investment plans, and the special energy discount for them was offset through up charging other consumers.

Leshchenko wants to 'divide and rule'

When making his false case, Leshchenko uses an old manipulative technique called 'divide at impera' – divide and rule. His jesuitical statement that the debt before green investors is nearing \$1 billion is not followed by a call to help them. It is simply unprofitable for his masters. Instead, he claims that the troubles of renewable energy sector investors are the fault of... the other renewable energy sector investors. He fails to explain why exactly, but dogmatically urges to "tame (billionaire oligarch Rinat Akhmetov)," whose "fault" is just that he, like many other entrepreneurs, invested into green power plants.

Right now, it is utterly important for all the players, including the West, to avoid taking cues from the professional manipulative political lobbyists. The only true path for Ukraine and its international friends is to support the institutional reforms and not the names.

It is the reforms that will allow the taming of inefficiency, which has become a defining attribute of the Ukrainian economy.

Nataliya Yemchenko is System Capital Management's director of public relations and communications. System Capital Management is a Ukrainian financial and industrial holding company owned by Rinat Akhmetov.

“
Leshchenko's false statement is rooted in its author's bias rather than ignorance. There is nothing wrong with lobbying itself if it is civilized. Only Leshchenko's lobbying is to the detriment of Ukraine.”

Nataliya Yemchenko

stantly changes the playing field), Leshchenko takes hostages along with them. Meaning that he does himself what he's accusing others of, in best keeping with Orwell's traditions.

In simpler terms, the energy investors stand for a signalized junction with traffic lights and transparent rules, and the ferroalloy lobby wants those traffic lights off and demands a traffic control officer instead.

Statement No. 3: "It was in Akhmetov's interest that the import of coal from Russia was barred."

Who is Leshchenko lying for?

Leshchenko's rhetoric fully conforms to that of the ferroalloy lobby. I can easily demonstrate this with specific examples. This leads me to hypothesize that Leshchenko is lobbying for those very interests.

Being the biggest electricity consumers they do not want any change. While selling their products at market prices abroad, they try to keep fueling their private legacy production facilities with energy at knock-down regulated prices. This is what generates the super-profits for them, the ferroalloy businesses. And what generates the super losses for the state.

There is nothing wrong with lobbying itself if it is civilized. Only Leshchenko's lobbying is to the detriment of Ukraine.

In the mentality of ferroalloy business owners, lobbying for various benefits through politicians, journalists, and even law enforcers looks far more effective for boosting business revenues than the investments into modernization, energy efficiency, and better management.

This showed multiple times already – for instance, in 2012, when through aggressive information campaigns a group of ferroalloy producers got unprecedented electricity benefits from the government in



Get all Ukraine's hot news delivered to your email before breakfast

Sign up for the Kyiv Post Ukraine Digest!

Just go to the bottom of the Kyiv Post homepage and enter your email. It's free!

How corrupt Ukrainian court helped Giuliani's conspiracy



Sergii Leshchenko
mail.pravda@gmail.com

Leaked audio recordings of Ukrainian officials are the soundtrack for Ukrainian politics. There were quite a few recently.

In January, then-Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk was targeted in audio leak where he was caught making unfavorable comments about President Volodymyr Zelensky.

In May, Ukrainian lawmaker Andriy Derkach released tape fragments with voices resembling those of former U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, ex-President Petro Poroshenko, and Russia's President Vladimir Putin. It was largely seen as a Russian provocation designed to tarnish Ukraine. Derkach has been a proponent of the conspiracy theory that Ukraine, not Russia, interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections.

And in 2019, the Verkhovna Rada members had a chance to listen to leaked recordings in which Yulia Tymoshenko calls oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky, congratulating him on his birthday and thanking him for being a "real partner and friend."

Now Ukraine has a new audio blockbuster.

The National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) has uncovered a criminal group within Kyiv's District Administrative Court — the main court for appealing against government decisions. The bureau collected and the media published recordings of conversations between the court's top judges.

The operation may lead to a clean-up of one of the hotbeds of corruption in our country.

Notorious court

After conducting searches last week, the NABU issued a notice of suspicion to the chairman of the District Administrative Court of Pavlo Vovk, his deputy and five other judges of this court, as well as the head of the State Judicial Administration.

The names of the defendants are not familiar even to Ukrainians, because only the actions of the authorities were appealed in this special court. But it was this court that claimed the status of the top justice in the country.

The Administrative Court has a lot of trophies on this corruption safari.

This court saved tobacco producers and the monopolist Tedis-Ukraine from fines. The court has banned anyone from fining oligarch Kolomoisky's oil companies. It also declared the nationalization of Kolomoisky's PrivatBank illegal. Following this decision, Ukraine's Western partners demanded the country's lawmakers to pass a bill that would stop Kolomoisky from overturning nationalization of

PrivatBank.

This court reinstated Roman Nasirov, the ex-head of the Fiscal Service of Ukraine, who has citizenship of several countries and is under investigation by the NABU. It also ruled to dismiss the head of the Health Ministry, Ulana Suprun.

It seems like there should be a price list for the rulings hanging at the entrance of this court.

Stunning recordings

In the recordings collected by the NABU, there is an episode where the head of the court dreams of becoming a judge of the Constitutional Court, to which his colleagues ironically reply: "And what are you going to do there for \$10,000 a month?" This is a very high salary for Ukrainian bureaucrats, but not for corrupt officials. A common rumor has it the District Court judges wouldn't get off the couch if they didn't receive a bribe in the amount twice as much.

In another recording, the judges themselves admit to being corrupt. This recording is dated early March 2019, three weeks before the presidential election, when it became clear that Poroshenko was doomed to lose. In a conversation with his subordinate, the head of the court, Vovk, recalls a conversation with Poroshenko's close associate, a member of his party, Oleksandr Hranovsky. Hranovsky had the informal status of Poroshenko's mediator for the courts. After losing his law-maker's immunity in August 2019, Hranovsky reportedly fled to Israel.

Hranovsky was alarmed by rumors that the district court will establish that there is no coalition in parliament, which would mean the announcement of snap elections. In the recording, Vovk says that he responded to him: "Did you doubt our political prostitution?"

Vovk himself was on vacation abroad when the NABU announced the charges against him. He commented on the situation using the rhetoric of Viktor Medvedchuk, a Ukrainian pro-Kremlin politician close to Putin.

Vovk said that this investigation was conducted by some "foreign agents" who deprived Ukraine of sovereignty and try to control President Zelensky's actions. It is possible that with these narratives, Vovk could be gathering evidence for asylum in Russia.

Giuliani comes up

But in one case, the District Court surpassed even the wildest corrupt fantasies. Moreover, it gained great fame across the world, in the U.S.

This ruling concerned myself and the head of NABU Artem Sytnyk, and it said that we illegally inter-



U.S. President Donald Trump's lawyer and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani talks with journalists outside the White House West Wing on July 1, 2020 in Washington, DC.

fered in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

It was the exact ruling that Donald Trump's attorney Rudy Giuliani showed on air on CNN and Fox News, fueling the conspiracy theory that eventually led to impeachment inquiry against Trump.

To understand this bizarre situation, we would need to go back

“
If President Zelensky doesn't start draining this swamp, he may suffer himself. After all, there are no guarantees that the same corrupt court after the change of power will not go against him
”

Sergii Leshchenko

in time to May 2019. Zelensky has just won the presidential election in Ukraine, but he has not yet taken office. A few days before his inauguration, Trump's attorney announces a trip to Kyiv to get a private meeting with Zelensky.

The goal is to convince the new government to follow the "Russian narrative." That is, to investigate that it was not Russia but Ukraine that interfered with the 2016 U.S. presidential election to help Trump

win — but rather, Ukrainians interfered to help his opponent, Hillary Clinton.

So how did Sytnyk and I "interfere" in the American election? Not by hiring an army of hackers.

No, we "interfered" because... we published the so-called "black ledger" (a list of secret payments made by Ukraine's pro-Russian Party of Regions) of disgraced ex-President Viktor Yanukovich. There were many names on the ledger, but one got us the accusation of interference in the U.S. election. That name was Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign chairman. He appeared on the ledger, listed there as getting hundreds of thousands of dollars in shadow payments.

After this, under the pressure of facts, Manafort left, and two years later was found guilty by a jury and received 7.5 years in prison.

To neutralize these facts and push through the narrative of Ukrainian interference, Giuliani wanted to fly to Ukraine to negotiate with Zelensky. However, at the last moment, he canceled his visit, explaining it with the fact that Zelensky would be surrounded by "enemies of the USA" and "enemies of President Trump" — and mentioned my name.

And now for the fun part. To back his accusations, Giuliani used the December 2018 ruling of Kyiv's District Court where I was found guilty of interfering in the U.S. elections. Obviously, Giuliani has never heard of the existence of such an institution in his life, but was misled by his Ukrainian accomplices.

That court ruling was a mockery of justice. The District Administrative Court had no right to accept lawsuits against the lawmakers, which I was at that time. The Supreme Court prohibits this.

The lawsuit against me and the

head of the NABU, Artem Sytnyk, was filed by a notoriously corrupt lawmaker, Boryslav Rosenblat. At that time, he was investigated by the NABU, and he took revenge with lawsuits. The lawsuit was filed after the expiration of the statute of limitations — Rosenblat exceeded the term for applications at least four times, but his appeal was accepted, which indicates a political character.

But Giuliani kept quoting this court decision, though it was never a rule of law. Once that decision was rendered, we appealed and in the summer of 2019, Sytnyk and I won the appeal and the decision was completely overturned. The appeal issued a new ruling, which states that all of Rosenblat's claims are unfounded. Also, Rosenblat was ordered to pay me Hr 2,400 (\$100 at the time) in court fees.

But Giuliani has never apologized for spreading lies and even undermining my political career in Ukraine.

Now the District Court of Kyiv, which has become a factory of fake justice, is the main anti-advertisement of Ukraine in the eyes of the world. The reputation of Ukraine can be fixed, but not by PR campaigns or "investment nannies," but rather by building a system of truly independent courts. And the first to go must be the District Court of Kyiv.

If President Zelensky doesn't start draining this swamp, he may suffer himself. After all, there are no guarantees that the same corrupt court after the change of power will not go against him, once again confirming its status of a "political prostitute."

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

AFP

Lifestyle

Enjoy the upcoming weekend to the fullest at the charity flea market Kurazh at VDNH exhibition center (1 Akademika Hlushkova Ave.) on July 25-26, starting at 11 a.m. - 10 p.m. Entrance is Hr 150



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

Explore Ukraine: Shatsky Lakes offer untouched forests, clear water



UNIAN

People swim in Lake Svityaz in western Ukraine near the town of Shatsk in Volyn Oblast, some 530 kilometers west of Kyiv. Lake Svityaz is one of 30 lakes that constitute the Shatsky Lakes, a wild area that is getting popular with Ukrainian tourists who, because of the global coronavirus quarantine restrictions, have been traveling their own country more than before.

By Yana Mokhonchuk

yanamokhonchuk@gmail.com

Travel restrictions pose no obstacle for those who are willing to explore Ukraine.

One of the places that travelers can visit in Ukraine is Shatsky Lakes, an area that brims with pure nature and picturesque landscapes at every turn. Pine forests and crystal clear lakes can make one forget that there are any quarantine restrictions in place around the world at all.

In the northwestern part of Ukraine, in Volyn Oblast, some 530 kilometers west of Kyiv, there are about 30 lakes. Called Shatsky Lakes — after the town of Shatsk, where they are located — some of them are about 10,000 years old.

Fresh air, clear water and the smell of pines can offer one a perfect getaway and calm and quiet time off.

The deepest and second-largest lake in Ukraine, Lake Svityaz, is there too. Over 50 meters deep and 27 square kilometers wide, Lake Svityaz is one of the Seven Natural Wonders of Ukraine. It is fed by

groundwater only, as no river flows into it.

Locals say, however, that the lake isn't the only natural treasure in the region. Yes, other lakes are less popular with tourists, but they aren't less beautiful for the traveler's eye.

Lake Pischne, for example, is the clearest lake among the Shatsky lakes. This lake enchants visitors with its sandy beaches, rich aromas of pine resin and white swans.

The Shatsky lakes are known for their high water quality. Research conducted in that area shows that the water contains silver and glycerin that moisturizes the skin and is even believed to treat dermatological ailments. Locals claim they even drink the water from the lakes without purifying it.

There are about 30 species of fish in the lakes. Some of the Shatsky Lakes are far-off, so the nature around them is wilder.

Lake Somynets, for example, is a paradise for fishing enthusiasts. Catfish, pike, perch and crucian are found in the lake. Locals often dive to the bottom to catch crayfish.

The oldest Shatsky lake is Moshne. About 9,800 years old and located a few hundreds of meters from the border with Belarus, it is surrounded by a pine forest that is up to 140 years old. The lake attracts visitors with its quiet and pure nature.

Apart from these five lakes in the area there are the Pulmetske, Luki, Lucimir, Ostrovianske and Krymne lakes. They are all clustered together and it takes about 1–2 hours to get from one lake to another by foot.

One way to enjoy nature around the water is to take a walk along the lake beaches — from the central most crowded beaches to the ones where tree branches hang over the water. All the beaches are free and seem like the perfect place for walking, jogging or even biking around. There are also kayaks for rent.

But it's not only about water when visiting this lake region — the forests are just as enchanting.

Starting in July and lasting until mid-August, it's berry season in the forests. And coastal forests are especially rich in strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries and

cranberries. There are also blueberry plantations around. The berries are much cheaper than in Kyiv: A kilogram of blueberries costs \$4.30 in Kyiv, but \$1.60 in Shatsk.

In fact, most of the berries grown in Ukraine are cultivated in its west.

Despite this healthy option, however, the Shatsky Lakes are known for another specialty: locally made Shatsky donuts, balls of dough fried in oil that are much larger than their American counterparts and without holes. They are usually filled with berry jam, condensed milk or chocolate.

The donuts are sold piping hot by locals on the beach, transported in large boxes placed on bicycles. The locals like their donuts so much that they even created and now celebrate the annual Shatsky donut festival with free degustation and music. The festival usually takes place in mid-July.

As nature in these places is almost untouched by people, many plants and animals listed in the Red Book



With Liza Semko
LIZA.SEMKO3@GMAIL.COM

'Myth' tells story of Ukrainian opera singer killed in war against Russia

"Myth" is a documentary about the life of Wassyl Slipak, a world-renowned Ukrainian opera singer who gave up his successful career in the Paris Opera to fight for Ukraine against Russia. He was killed in action in June 2016.

The 60-minute movie depicts Slipak's transformation: before and after taking part in the war against Russia in the Donbas.

What did Vasyly Slipak die for? That's the question the film is trying to answer.

"Myth" premiered in February 2018, but only in 2019 did it become available online with English subtitles and for free.

The movie was created by directors Leonid Kanter and Ivan Yasniy, who appreciated Slipak's sacrifice so much that they came up with the idea for the film ten days after his death. Two weeks later, they were already studying the bunker where Slipak had lived with other soldiers during the war.

They worked on the film for 17 months. Just gathering archival videos took the directors six months, even though the majority of them were provided by Vasyly's brother Ostap, who also agreed to narrate the story.

As one of the closest people in Vasyly's life, Ostap retold everything he remembered about his brother's childhood and later life — up until he was killed in the Donbas at the age of 41.

"He started speaking late, but once he did, he sang straightaway" Ostap says in the film.

Despite Slipak's recent death, the film isn't fraught with mourning. In some moments, it even features comedy: the directors included "Gelsomino in the Land of Liars," a little fairy tale about a boy with a powerful voice, in the documentary's narrative.

Apart from his brother, the directors interviewed Slipak's colleagues, friends, fellow soldiers and his ex-girlfriend Liza, who recalled funny stories about the heroic singer.

One can't help smiling when listening to how Slipak — posthumously awarded the Hero of Ukraine medal — played soccer in the chapel before his musical performance, or how he sang on his balcony in Paris in the morning, finishing his

Film critic

'Myth' offers nuanced look at life and battlefield death of opera singer Slipak

page 14 →

performance by throwing open his bathrobe.

All these stories are accompanied by video clips of his performances. In many episodes, the heroes of the film admire Slipak's talent and his countertenor and bass-baritone voice. Thanks to it, he was invited to work as a soloist at the Paris Opera.

The film can be divided into two parts: Slipak's life before and after the war.

In the first part, Slipak is shown at his prime: a successful person with a girlfriend, loyal friends and a top job at the Paris Opera. At the time, Slipak performed before packed audiences around the world.

Despite his achievements abroad, however, he hadn't forgotten his motherland. And when the EuroMaidan Revolution broke out, it changed Slipak.

"He became a completely different person. All the flags, ribbons of Ukrainian colors, this was already an unhealthy atmosphere... And then he said that Ukraine to him was more important than our relationship," his Russian ex-girlfriend Liza says.

He couldn't stay in peaceful France while Ukraine was struggling with



A screenshot from documentary "Myth" shows the late opera singer Vasyl Slipak, who gave up his successful career in the Paris Opera to fight for Ukraine against Russia. He was killed in action in June 2016.

a bloody revolution and then a war against Russia.

On the archival videos, it seems that Slipak had barely changed when he moved back to Ukraine,

but his closest friends claim the opposite. Some of his friends, however, didn't support his decision to go to war.

The film juxtaposes different

opinions about Slipak and his decision to leave the Paris Opera and to fight for Ukraine's Donbas. The way the film depicts these polarized opinions creates tension that

makes it easy to watch "Myth" in one sitting.

"Myth" is available on Megogo.net, a Ukrainian streaming platform, with English subtitles. 🇺🇦

EMPLOYMENT / CV / TENDER

PLACE YOUR
MINI RESUME
FOR 500 UAH



DELEGATION OF EUROPEAN UNION TO UKRAINE

CALL FOR TENDERS FOR SUPPLY, INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE OF INTRUDER ALARM SYSTEMS AND SERVICES OF A QUICK REACTION FORCE IN ACCOMMODATIONS OF EXPATRIATE STAFF

Reference number EEAS/DELUKRRK/2020/RP/0014
Contract notice 2020/S 137-335931 of 17/07/2020

The Delegation of European Union to Ukraine has launched a call for tender for supply, installation and maintenance of intruder alarm systems and services of a quick reaction force in accommodations of expatriate staff.

Please find under the link below all the information you need in order to participate:

<https://etendering.ted.europa.eu/cft/cft-display.html?cftId=6280>



Agriteam Canada is one of Canada's leading international development firms, providing management and technical expertise to developing and transitional country partners on projects that promote sustainable growth and meaningful opportunities for people to improve their lives. Agriteam has two offices in Canada and 11 offices around the world, including an office in Ukraine.

In October 2019, Agriteam Canada launched a new five-year project in Ukraine: **Support to Ukraine's Reforms for Governance (SURGe)**. SURGe's Ultimate Outcome is to help the Government of Ukraine (GoU) to deliver governance and economic reforms that better respond to the needs of its citizens.

SURGe Project is looking for the following experts:

For the *Administrative Services Office under the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine*:

- *Administrative Services Re-engineering Business Analyst.*

for the *Developing Alternatives to Institutionalization for Children*:

- *Finance Expert*

Please, send your applications to: dariaf@alineainternational.com.

For more detailed information about preferred qualifications and skills, indicative duties and responsibilities, as well as applying procedure, please visit web-site: <https://www.edge.in.ua/vacancies/>

BEST BARGAIN!

Advertising in the Classifieds
and Employment section +380 44 591 77 88
advertising@kyivpost.com

CLASSIFIEDS

Kyiv Post
UKRAINE'S GLOBAL VOICE

The Kyiv Post is seeking the public's help in recovering its lost archives.

Dig into the closets, attics and long-forgotten storage compartments to help us recover some editions that were not kept in the newspaper's archive.

The Kyiv Post is missing the following editions from the following years:

1995 – # 2, 3, 7, 8, 10 and 12-52

1996 – # 1-16, 19-21, 23-26, 28, 29, 31, 33-35, 48, 49, 51, 52

1997 – # 2-11, 17-21, 23-25, 27, 28, 30, 31, 34-36, 38, 40-43, 45, 46, 49, 50, 52

1998 – # 4-11, 13, 16, 19, 20, 23-25, 36, 38, 39, 42, 46, 49, 50, 52

1999 – # 1-35

2000 – # 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

2007 – # 8, 14

Please contact: news@kyivpost.com if you can help or Kyiv Post chief editor Brian Bonner at bonner@kyivpost.com

Work permits
RESIDENCE PERMITS
Business set up, accounting services
+380-44-237-72-76
www.accounting.ua

Energy cosmetologist
and massage is the best for you.

Elena +38 (066) 509 71 63
Ludmila +38 (073) 478 61 25
Viber, Wats App.

Find escape from summer heat, city noise at these 30 lakes in western Ukraine

page 14 —>

of Ukraine live near the Shatsky Lakes. It isn't rare to meet hares, deer, elk, foxes, wolves and martens while walking in the forest. Some of these animals are on the brim of extinction.

About 27 species of birds listed in the Red Book live here. In order to preserve the local nature, the Soviet Ukrainian government created the 32,500-hectare Shatsky Nature Park in 1983.

Given the global coronavirus quarantine restrictions, Ukrainians have started to travel inside the country more than before. And with the influx of domestic tourists, more locals began to rent out houses and rooms. There are also a few hotels.

In the village of Svityaz, locals offer a place for the night at almost every turn. Tourists mainly rent cottages and boarding houses built around the lake near the town of Shatsk and other nearby villages.

There are also many places for camping: some tents are pre-installed and can be rented, and there are camping-friendly areas in the woods where one can set up their own tent. The area also has barbecue zones.

The town of Shatsk can be reached by bus, train or car. Traveling by train from Kyiv, one needs to switch to a bus in Kovel or Lutsk that will go



Ruslan Balytskyi

In the northwestern part of Ukraine, in Volyn Oblast, some 530 kilometers west of Kyiv, there are about 30 lakes. Called Shatsky Lakes — after the town of Shatsk, where they are located — some of them are about 10,000 years old. A picture shows one of them, Lake Svityaz, photographed on July 17, 2020.

to Shatsk, Svityaz and Gryada. The cheapest train from Kyiv to Lutsk costs \$7. Bus fare is \$5. There's also

a direct bus from Kyiv to Shatsk for \$19.

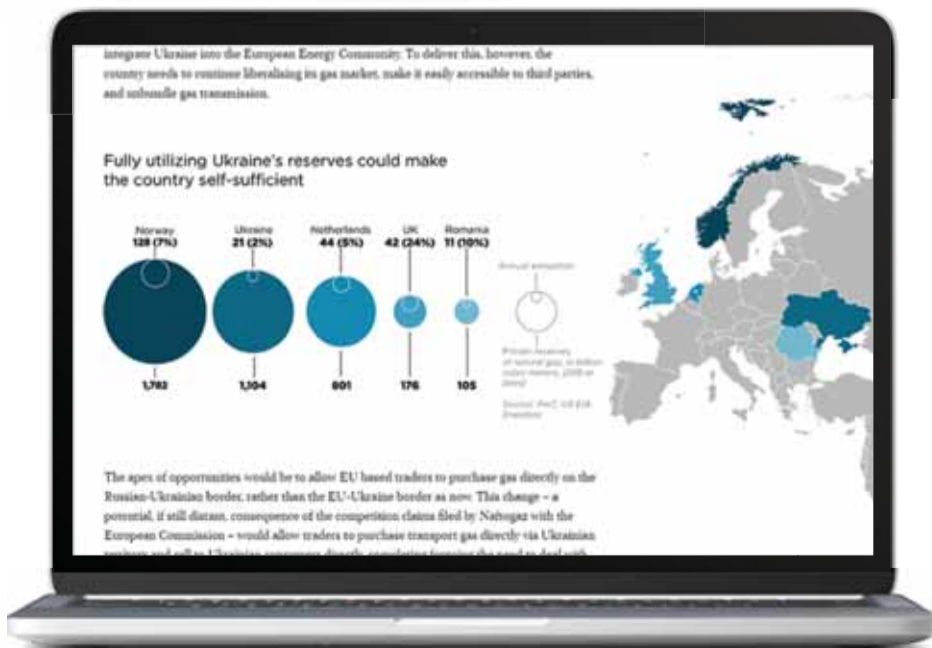
To be able to swim and pick berries,

it's better to visit the lakes in summer. But locals also believe that the place is beautiful and peaceful

after the vacation season is over — in spring or autumn. The water is colder, but cleaner, they say. 🍷

Kyiv Post

BrandStudio



- Tell your brand's story digitally, in print and in video
- Interactive and engaging visuals
- Reach an audience of decision-makers
- No limits to creativity — try new approaches to get your story heard

To learn more reach out to KP BrandStudio
advertising@kyivpost.com
or +38 044 591 77 88