

Sergii Leshchenko: Yulia Tymoshenko's career starts & ends with scandals

→ Page 2

Editorials: Big week for Ukraine & Kolomoisky wins US court delay in lawsuit

→ Page 4

Diane Francis: Ukraine is not surrendering in its fight against Nord Stream 2

→ Page 5

The best photographs from Ukraine's Independence Day parade on Aug. 24

→ Page 12-13

Animal rights activists want Ukraine to step up the fight against abusive conditions

→ Page 14



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→ pages 6 – 11

Pivotal Trip

After Merkel visit, Crimea Platform & Independence Day celebrations, Zelensky and Biden meet on Aug. 31



After a big week in which President Volodymyr Zelensky was front and center, the Ukrainian leader travels to America next week for a White House meeting on Aug. 31 with U.S. President Joseph Biden. Ukrainian presidents, with the exception of overthrown President Viktor Yanukovich, have met with their counterparts in the Oval Office several times. But the frequency of such visits makes them more rare than routine. Clockwise, from top left, Leonid Kravchuk meets with Bill Clinton on March 4, 1994; Petro Poroshenko meets with Donald J. Trump on June 20, 2017 (he also met with Barack Obama on Sept. 18, 2014); Viktor Yushchenko meets with George W. Bush on Sept. 29, 2008; and Leonid Kuchma meets with Clinton on Dec. 8, 1999. The timing of the Zelensky visit — coming during the dog days of summer ahead of three-day holiday weekend for American Labor Day — has prompted critics to complain that Biden has downgraded U.S.-Ukraine relations. The Biden administration denies the accusation.

See story on page 2 and editorial on page 4



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Засновник ТОВ "БІЗНЕСГРУПП"

Головний редактор
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Відповідальний за випуск
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Адреса видавця та засновника співпадають: Україна, м. Київ, 01033, вул. Жиланська, 68, 2-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
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Zelensky faces uphill battle to strengthen ties with US

By Oleksiy Sorokin
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President Volodymyr Zelensky's Aug. 31 visit to the White House will not be easy.

His first face-to-face meeting with U.S. President Joseph Biden coincides with the fumbled U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the pending completion of the Russian-German Nord Stream 2 pipeline that will shrink Ukraine's leverage and cost it at least \$1.2 billion per year in lost gas-transit revenue from Russia.

Zelensky, whom Biden has kept at arm's length, must make the most of his time in Washington.

The upcoming negotiations will center on arms supplies, U.S. financial support, energy and Ukraine's progress in fighting corruption and establishing rule of law. Biden has already complained about the lack of reforms, when asked about Ukraine's prospects for joining the NATO military alliance. He said on June 14, 2021, "the fact is, they still have to clean up corruption."

Since late March, Russia has been massing troops and rattling sabers near Ukraine's borders, while Kremlin dictator Vladimir Putin routinely denigrates the idea that Ukraine is a real nation. Ukraine's top officials have called for more U.S. military aid to defend against Russia's war, now in its eighth year.

On Aug. 22, Zelensky said that U.S. naval assistance will be one of the key topics of his talks with Biden as Ukraine seeks to rebuild its Black Sea fleet.

Energy security is also on the list. Biden greenlighted the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline by not sanctioning the main companies involved in the construction of the 1,230-kilometer pipeline. In doing so, the administration effectively chose Germany over Ukraine as its priority.

Zelensky wants to negotiate a "compensation package" for his country.

"I want to understand what guarantees Ukraine will have and who is giving them," Zelensky said after his meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Aug. 22 in Kyiv.

The Ukrainian president has also been vocal about his desire to receive a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) and to see more sanctions imposed on Russia.

Yet, Zelensky's wish list is too long, experts say.

"If he wants to return home with a clear success and having boosted U.S.-Ukraine relations, he should not ask for things he knows — or should know — he cannot get," wrote Steven Pifer, former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, in an opinion piece for the Kyiv Post.

Tough times

Zelensky's visit to the U.S. is coming at a bad time.

After seven months in the White House, Biden has racked up numerous important failures, some of which directly involve Ukraine.

"Ukraine, at large, became a hos-



U.S. President Joe Biden speaks about the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan at the White House on Aug. 16, 2021. The Taliban, an armed radical Islamist group, recaptured Kabul a day earlier after being routed at the start of the U.S. war in 2001.

tage of U.S. internal politics," says Oleksandr Kraiev, researcher of North American politics at the Kyiv-based Ukrainian Prism think tank.

In April, Biden was on the rise. Fresh off an electoral victory, the president imposed a new round of sanctions on Russia, promised Ukraine unwavering support amid an ongoing Russian military escalation and pushed for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan after 20 years by Sept. 11.

Soon, U.S. foreign policy did a U-turn.

In May, Biden decided to ease sanctions imposed on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, Russia's \$11 billion mega-project set to transport gas from Russia to Germany bypassing Ukraine.

Biden said the project was nearly done and he wanted to boost relations with Germany, a key ally in Europe.

"You can't pretend to be a Russia hawk but then just roll over," said Republican Senator Ben Sasse as a response to this decision.

Democratic Senator Robert Menendez, head of the foreign relations committee, said that the move "created uncertainty in many corners of Europe."

In July, Biden went further, striking a deal with Germany to allow the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to be finished in 2021.

"This commitment is designed to ensure that Russia will not misuse any pipeline, including Nord Stream 2, to achieve aggressive political ends by using energy as a weapon," according to a joint U.S.-German statement.

Soon, Russia began doing just that, threatening to cut Ukraine off Russian gas.

Ukraine wasn't the only country caught in the crossfire of U.S. foreign policy setbacks. The unfolding crisis in Afghanistan is likely to occupy most of the Biden administration's

attention.

"The likelihood there's going to be the Taliban overrunning everything and owning the whole country is highly unlikely," said Biden on July 8 as the U.S. was preparing to withdraw from Afghanistan.

By Aug. 15, the Taliban seized Afghanistan without a fight.

Entire foreign embassies had to flee to the airport. Thousands of Afghans were scrambling to get out of a country overrun by a movement known for a radical interpretation of Islam and public executions.

"We decided to engage in nation-building, that never made any sense to me," Biden said on Aug. 16, defending his decision to abruptly end the \$2 trillion war.

On the same day, at least 12 Afghans died at the airport trying to flee the country, some by way of grabbing the landing gear of the departing American planes.

"This is not as much the Kabul downfall as this horrific scene of panic and despair at the Kabul airport that will turn a severe reputation loss of the U.S. and specifically Biden," said Iliya Kusa, an international relations expert with the Ukrainian Institute for the Future.

Zelensky's pitch

As Zelensky arrives in Washington to revive stagnant U.S.-Ukraine relations, he'll have no backing on Capitol Hill as Congress is taking its scheduled August recess.

The main questions that cause friction between Ukraine and its allies are energy security and potential NATO membership. Both are a hard sell for Zelensky.

Biden's Nord Stream 2 deal with German Chancellor Angela Merkel offered a so-called Green Fund, to which Germany has committed \$175 million to promote and support investments in green energy in Ukraine. Germany stated that it hopes to attract \$1 billion

from third-party backers, including private investors to help Ukraine achieve energy independence.

Germany will also provide \$70 million of funding to support Ukraine's energy security.

"It is up to Ukraine to fill in the blanks to make this offer as concrete and meaningful as possible," wrote energy expert Edward Chow, a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's green energy market is stuck trying to decide what to do about unsustainably high feed-in tariffs that caused the state to build up over \$700 million in debts to renewable energy producers, many of which are foreign companies.

According to political observers, Washington won't give Ukraine a NATO MAP either. "Zelensky should not seek a MAP," wrote Pifer.

Ukraine has the best chances to secure more weapons. President Zelensky has been vocal about his desire to receive military equipment and naval vehicles from the U.S.

During his Aug. 22 meeting with Merkel, the Ukrainian president said that the country requires a proper fleet to stand against Russia's military presence in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea.

"I am going to discuss this issue with Biden on Aug. 31," said Zelensky. "Ukraine expects sniper rifles and many more things, besides the fleet and military boats, which we would like to receive from our partners."

In July 2020, the U.S. greenlighted the sale of 16 Mark VI patrol boats and other equipment, to Ukraine as part of a \$600 million contract. Part of the contract was covered by the U.S. Department of State's Foreign Military Financing program.

Economic cooperation is another area of interest for Ukraine.

Yulia Tymoshenko's swan song is fitting: a corruption scandal



Sergii Leshchenko
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Yulia Tymoshenko wraps up her first 25 years in politics with a corruption scandal – just like she started it.

She was first elected to parliament in the fall of 1996. At the time, the 36-year-old Tymoshenko was known in Kyiv and Moscow as a savvy businesswoman who built a gas empire with a turnover of \$10 billion, had easy access to either Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko or Gazprom head Rem Vyakhirev.

She wanted to become a lawmaker to use the immunity of members of parliament and escape responsibility for crimes – smuggling dollars in cash, for instance, which were found in her hand luggage on the way from Zaporizhzhya to Moscow.

Was Tymoshenko going to spend this money bribing officials at the Russian Ministry of Defense, as the Russian Prosecutor's Office alleged? Or maybe just going shopping in Moscow? She said that she confused her bags by accident before leaving the house and thus took not a bag with documents, but the one in which she kept money to buy an apartment.

In the end, Tymoshenko spent several days in pre-trial detention. And the story then impressed many – those \$26,000 at the time were a real treasure trove, as apartments in Kyiv were sold for just several thousand.

It was from this episode that her journey into politics began. Now, 25 years later, a new corruption scandal has emerged, even though it has been buried in the news during the summer lull.

Unnoticed scandal

In mid-August, the head of the State Food and Grain Corporation, Andriy Vlasenko, was detained while trying to flee Ukraine through Kyiv airport. He and officials from the corporation perpetrated a scheme that cost Ukraine \$57 million.

The scheme was a classic example of corruption.

The state corporation didn't export grain directly, but through related firms at lower prices, and the difference was deposited abroad. In January-May alone, about 10 unprofitable grain export contracts were signed. The second scheme involved money laundering through insurance. The tariff for the insured's services was 3–5 times higher than the market value of such services.

But it's not just your regular corruption scandal. This case sheds light on a real plotting that characterizes the changes in Ukrainian politics over the past year. It is necessary to explain who is Andriy Vlasenko, who was detained for corruption. He is Tymoshenko's proxy and a cousin of her close ally and lawyer Serhiy Vlasenko, a lawmaker from her party.

Political corruption

Andriy Vlasenko became the head of the unprofitable state company in 2020 under the quota of Tymoshenko's party. He was a rather unexpected candidate, as Tymoshenko is a critic of the government and even predicts there will be a new revolution to overthrow the current government. So how did her protegee get the chair? This is an example of typical Ukrainian political corruption – he got the job in exchange for the votes of Tymoshenko's 25-member faction for the 2021 state budget.

Why did Zelensky need Tymoshenko's votes? To understand this, we need to return in the fall of 2020.

The president was in the weakest state since his election. At that time, billionaire oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky was able to convince several dozen lawmakers from Zelensky's Servant of the People faction to join what would become an informal "Kolomoisky group" in parliament. It was led by Oleksandr Dubinsky, who was later sanctioned by the U.S. for collaborating with Russian agent Andriy Derkach.

Having singled out a separate group of lawmakers loyal to him, in the fall of 2020 Kolomoisky issued an ultimatum to the president. The oligarch ordered members of parliament loyal to him not to vote the way Zelensky wants until he agrees to a coalition with the oligarch's proxies. This would have made Zelensky a hostage of Kolomoisky, because the president would become dependent not only on votes but also threatened by early elections.

At the same time, Medvedchuk was chipping off Zelensky's electoral core in southern and eastern Ukraine, using his TV channels as propaganda weapons. And the Constitutional Court, controlled by Oleksandr Tupytsky, began to cancel anti-corruption reforms and was preparing to abolish the land reform.

A lot has changed in the last 12 months. Zelensky is entering a new political season with renewed strength. Medvedchuk lost the TV channels and is charged with treason. Tupytsky was removed and has not been able to appear in the Constitutional Court for six months, although the work of the court is still blocked. Kolomoisky, suppressed by U.S. sanctions, was deprived of influence over state-owned Centerenergo. He removed his minion Dubinsky from the game, who has not made any public statements for the past several weeks.

As a result, Zelensky doesn't need any further support from Tymoshenko.

And the corruption revealed at the state corporation became a timely chance to strike a double blow: not only to deprive Tymoshenko of cash flow but also to discredit her.



Lawmaker Yulia Tymoshenko speaks to activists at a rally against the launch of a new agricultural land market in front of the Constitutional Court in Kyiv on June 3, 2021.

For two weeks, Tymoshenko didn't comment on the detention of her colleague.

Bad blow

It seems that the authorities aimed at the very heart of the Tymoshenko clan.

After all, Andriy Vlasenko was only a nominal leader who signed documents. Tymoshenko's son-in-law Artur Chechotkin was allegedly an informal confidant of the State Food and Grain Corporation.

Tymoshenko had previously criticized official supervisory boards, accusing them of damaging state-owned companies. In the Grain Corporation the role of the supervisory board was informally performed by Tymoshenko's son-in-law. But this didn't protect the company from corruption. It's not helpful for Tymoshenko that her ally was receiving an average of Hr 423,600 (\$15,800) a month as the head of the state grain corporation. Tymoshenko has harshly criticized the management of state companies, such as oil and gas company Naftogaz, for high salaries.

There is another argument supporting Tymoshenko's connections to the management of the State Food and Grain Corporation.

Yulia Tymoshenko's daughter, Eugenia, has bought from one of the corporation's managers... no, not grain, but equipment for mining cryptocurrencies for \$4 million. The money was reportedly lent to her by Tymoshenko and come from the money received from the American company Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom as compensation for supporting the repressions of ex-President Viktor Yanukovich's era.

Tymoshenko's daughter, when paying for the cryptocurrency equipment, transferred the money to Valeya, a company owned by a woman named Olena Volkova.

As it turned out, in February, when the Grain Corporation came under Tymoshenko's control, Volkova became the company's deputy chair.

Here's another interesting fact about Tymoshenko's family.

Until recently, Tymoshenko's son-in-law Artur Chechotkin was the owner of UkrBudInvestBank, a small financial institution that helped highlight Tymoshenko's ties with Medvedchuk.

Before Medvedchuk came under sanctions, he kept his money in Ukraine only in Tymoshenko's son-in-law's bank. Medvedchuk's wife Oksana Marchenko and his right-hand man Taras Kozak also had accounts with the bank. That's where Tymoshenko kept her money, too.

When I mentioned this connection in an earlier op-ed in the Kyiv Post, she sued me and tried to secure a ruling to forbid me to mention her ties to Medvedchuk. Fortunately, she lost the case both in the first-instance court and in the appeal court.

Another interesting fact about Tymoshenko's family is her son-in-law's connection to Turkish criminal boss Sedat Peker, who has recently put himself in opposition to Erdogan's government. The two were photographed meeting in Ukraine.

By launching an attack on Tymoshenko, Zelensky's government may ease the fate of Ukrainian democracy.

For a quarter of a century, she skillfully manipulated public opinion, and has gone from being a proponent of pro-Western values to a spreader of fake narratives about Ukraine's foreign rule, effectively aligning herself with the likes of Medvedchuk. Moreover, this transformation of Tymoshenko is taking place with the tacit consent of her faction, which includes even the Euro-optimist lawmakers from the previous convocation of Ukraine's parliament.

Members of the Batkivshchyna faction know very well how Tymoshenko gained control of the Food and Grain Corporation and how she used it. Each of them now has to decide whether they want to continue working under the leadership of a person who has been repeatedly accused of corruption over 25 years of his political career. And this time, it's crystal clear those accusations were not false.

Sergii Leshchenko is an investigative journalist and was a member of Ukraine's parliament from 2014–2019. He became a columnist for the Kyiv Post in October 2019.

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EDITORIALS

Ukraine's big week

The nation celebrated its 30th birthday with style and substance – and learned who its true friends really are.

First, there was German Chancellor Angela Merkel's stopover for a cup of coffee with President Volodymyr Zelensky on Aug. 22 in Kyiv. The brevity of her visit, the absence of meaningful commitments and that fact that it was tagged on to a questionable Moscow visit with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Aug. 20, pretty much tells Ukraine all it needs to know: Kyiv ranks low on Berlin's priorities.

Merkel looked silly asking Putin to release jailed critic Alexey Navalny, to consider a long-term gas transit contract with Ukraine, and in cajoling the dictator to stick to the Normandy format to end Russia's war against Ukraine.

Why silly? Germany has undermined its credibility by pressing ahead with Nord Stream 2 and other trade ties with Russia despite the Kremlin's war crimes, violations of international law, flouting of the European Union's own energy regulations, use of banned chemical weapons, and imprisonment and likely murder of dissidents. Its actions in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Syria are those of a rogue nation.

In this capitulation, Germany has even coined a word to describe abject subservience to the Kremlin – "Schroederization" – meaning politicians who can be bought off by Putin, such as ex-German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. Nord Stream 2 has rendered other sanctions meaningless. The West doesn't want to impose tough sanctions against Putin. And evidence exists that the feeble ones in place are being flouted.

More encouraging was the Crimea Platform, a gathering by Ukraine of like-minded nations who demand an end to Russia's illegal occupation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, seized in a military invasion by Russian forces in 2014 as punishment for overthrowing the Kremlin-backed Viktor Yanukovich during the EuroMaidan Revolution. Nearly 50 nations signed on to the declaration. Many sent their presidents or prime ministers. It is heartening that so many nations are on the side of international law and Ukraine's territorial integrity in what promises to be a long fight, but one the world must win. Hopefully, the many nations still on the moral fence will take a stance in support of Ukraine.

And then there was Independence Day itself. The atmosphere was hopeful and joyful. The parade was spectacular. Ukraine celebrated its renewed military might, honored its slain heroes, and demonstrated why this is a vibrant nation on the front line of the struggle for democracy and against autocracy. This is no Afghanistan. Ukrainians are well-educated and motivated to defend their nation on their own. Of course, help from friends is important, which brings us to next week – another important one for Ukraine's future.

The Aug. 31 White House meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and Zelensky is one that Ukraine has sought for years. The last such Oval Office meeting took place between U.S. President Donald J. Trump and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in 2017, although Trump and Zelensky met on the sidelines of a United Nations conference in 2019.

Thorny issues will likely surface such as the Russian-German Nord Stream 2 pipeline. But if Zelensky can't get the sanctions he wants to stop the pipeline, he should look ahead and seek U.S. commitments in assisting Ukraine to pivot to a future of renewable energy independence.

Let's hope both Biden and Zelensky use this time wisely. Zelensky needs to show that Ukraine will fight corruption, will spend aid wisely, and is a worthy ally. Biden needs to show, after the cut-and-run exit from Afghanistan, that he recognizes the importance of Ukraine prevailing against Russia's war and in building a strong democracy.

There is no reason to overstate the importance of one meeting. The bilateral relationship will remain strong no matter what transpires. But this is a big chance to improve Ukraine-U.S. ties for years to come.

Unfortunate delay

Ukraine heavily relies on American and English courts in its battle against billionaire oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky.

A country with such a busted judiciary can hardly hope to hold such a powerful man accountable for stealing billions from the public.

Hopes were high when PrivatBank sued Kolomoisky in the state of Delaware. They were even higher when the U.S. Department of Justice seized Kolomoisky's properties in 2020 and all but accused him of money laundering. Criminal charges seemed on the horizon.

Now, a Delaware court has put the civil case on hold until Ukraine decides whether PrivatBank's nationalization in 2016 – and Kolomoisky's companies' shady loan repayments – are legal.

At first blush, this is bad news and a reprieve for the oligarch and his allies. Ukrainian courts are not dependable even in the best of times. Does this decision mean that an adverse ruling in Ukraine can sink the Delaware civil suit – and Kolomoisky's criminal charges with it?

Probably not. Legal insiders who spoke with the Kyiv Post think that the chance of the bank being returned to Kolomoisky is very remote. And even if Kolomoisky's companies prove that their supposed loan paybacks weren't fraudulent, the Delaware Chancery Court has the discretion to continue the case.

As for criminal charges, the civil case has already served its purpose as a vehicle to help U.S. investigators gather the evidence of Kolomoisky's alleged wrongdoing. The FBI and Justice Department already have all the information, which has now been passed into a grand jury's hands. If American criminal charges are coming, they are not going to be diverted with an adverse Ukrainian court decision.

Nevertheless, the Delaware decision is a setback. If the U.S. truly wants to help Ukraine root out corruption, it must not delay going after one of its principal architects. Every extra day Kolomoisky walks free is an obstacle to reform and justice.

We hope U.S. officials act sooner rather than later to help give this sneering bully his day in court.

NEWS ITEM:

Russian officials complained about Ukraine's alleged "unfriendly" and "anti-Russian" attitude after President Volodymyr Zelensky launched the Crimean Platform initiative to take back Crimea after Russia's military invasion and illegal annexation in 2014.



NEWS ITEM:

A member and acting head of Ukraine's Gambling and Lottery Regulatory Commission was arrested on suspicion of receiving a \$90,000 bribe to grant gambling licenses, the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office reported on Aug. 20, but gambling has been legal for over a year in Ukraine.



NEWS ITEM:

German Chancellor Angela Merkel paid a farewell visit to Ukraine on Aug. 22 as she prepares to step down as chancellor after 16 years. It was a short trip, during which she failed to reassure Ukraine on security matters. She didn't visit the 30th Independence Day celebrations on Aug. 24, to which she was invited, nor the Crimean Platform inaugural summit on Aug. 23, instead choosing to arrive a day before those events.



NEWS ITEM:

Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid said in an interview to Ukrainian outlet Evropeyskaya Pravda that Ukraine would likely need 20 years of reforms to obtain a membership in the European Union, but the bloc is struggling to maintain its unity in front of nationalism that threatens its existence.



See these features online at Kyivpost.com

Ukraine's Friend & Foe Of The Week



Friend

Diane Francis
The Canadian-American writer (who also serves on the advisory board of the Kyiv Post) provides a regular stream of insightful columns and opinions on Ukraine. Sometimes she's a cheerleader, but her deep understanding of Ukraine is undeniable. She is must-reading for those who want to understand Ukraine.



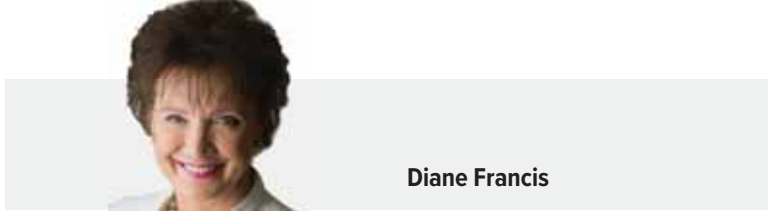
Foe

Dmitry Peskov
Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quick to pounce on the Aug. 23 Crimea Platform summit in Kyiv as an "anti-Russian event." Not it wasn't. It was event to support democracy, international law and to oppose militaries illegally seizing the territory of other nations.

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

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Ukraine is not surrendering in its fight against Nord Stream 2



Diane Francis

Editor's Note: This was originally published on Aug. 25, 2021, by the Atlantic Council and is reprinted with permission.

The CEO of Ukrainian energy giant Naftogaz has slammed Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline as a threat to European security and an existential threat to Ukraine. Speaking to the Atlantic Council, Naftogaz chief Yuriy Vitrenko was also critical of the pipeline's beneficial owner, Gazprom, which he branded as a "rogue corporation" that has flouted laws, regulations, and is controlled by the Kremlin.

Ukraine has long opposed the Nord Stream 2 energy pipeline, which aims to take Russian gas to Germany across the Baltic Sea. Officials in Kyiv say the project is an economically unjustified geopolitical weapon designed primarily to bypass and isolate Ukraine. However, hopes of preventing the pipeline's completion received a major blow in May when the Biden administration relaxed sanctions measures in a move that sparked vocal protests on both sides of the Atlantic.

Meanwhile, in Washington there has recently been mounting criticism aimed at Ukraine's Naftogaz for allegedly failing to meet its commitments to maintain Western corporate governance standards. But criticizing Naftogaz about corporate governance while ignoring the fact that there is no corporate governance whatsoever at Gazprom is hypocritical, says Vitrenko.

"This corporate governance business is nonsense, more like an excuse," he argues. "And the corporate governance of Gazprom? It is notorious for being a button in Vladimir Putin's hands. It is not managed by an independent board [as Naftogaz is] and is not insulated from political meddling and graft. It is run by people close to Putin and a state-owned investment bank."

Opposition to Nord Stream 2 is not limited to Kyiv. The European Parliament has repeatedly voted against the pipeline and US Congress has also imposed a series of sanctions measures. Critics claim the infrastructure project will increase Russia's energy stranglehold over Europe while leaving Ukraine significantly more vulnerable to further Russian aggression. At present, Russian reliance on the Ukrainian gas transit network is seen as a restraining factor preventing Moscow from expanding its ongoing military intervention in Ukraine. However, if transit via Ukraine ends, Putin would be free to escalate the current conflict dramatically.

In an attempt to allay fears over Nord Stream 2, Germany and the US signed a joint agreement in July that included commitments to prevent any weaponization of the pipeline against Ukraine. However, Moscow has since downplayed the significance of this agreement and critics of the pipeline also remain unconvinced.

On Aug. 20, German Chancellor Angela Merkel met Putin in Moscow and pledged to "fight until the last day in office to ensure Ukraine's ter-



A worker walks by the Nord Stream 2 gas line landfall facility in Lubmin, north eastern Germany, on Sept. 7, 2020.

ritorial integrity can be guaranteed." Merkel is expected to step down at the end of September following elections in Germany.

Two days later, she met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. While in Kyiv, the German leader reiterated that gas should not be used as a geopolitical weapon and vowed sanctions would be on the table if Russia didn't comply. Zelenskyy responded by reminding Merkel that Nord Stream 2 is a "dangerous weapon" not only for Ukraine but for Europe as a whole.

Meanwhile, debate over the fate of the pipeline continues in

America. On August 23, US Senator Ted Cruz, who co-sponsored US sanctions against Nord Stream 2 and has since held up appointments to key State Department positions in the Senate in protest over President Biden's sanctions waiver, re-stated his opposition. "President Biden has refused to do what Congress has repeatedly instructed him to do and written into law.

He is gifting Putin a generational geopolitical victory every day with his abject failure to stop the pipeline. I will continue to use all available leverage to force the Biden administration to implement Congressionally-mandated sanctions."

While construction work on the undersea pipeline is now virtually complete, a number of legal obstacles remain before it can be certified for operation, Vitrenko points out. Under European energy law, pipelines and the energy they transport cannot be owned by the same entity for anti-trust reasons. Ownership must be separated via a process known as "unbundling" in order to prevent one entity from controlling transmission as well as supply.

On Aug. 25, a German court rejected Gazprom's bid for exemption from the EU's "unbundling" requirement. This ruling is expected to delay the pipeline's entry into service, but it will be appealed.

"Unbundling is the most relevant issue," says Vitrenko. "Before certification, the pipeline must be compliant with the letter and spirit of the law. This means the operator has to prove it is not controlled by Gazprom, the gas supplier. This is next to impossible because Nord Stream 2 is a 100 percent owned entity of Gazprom, and is managed by a former Stasi agent who is a personal friend of Vladimir Putin. All decisions about its operations are made in the Kremlin. It is impossible to imagine any measures that would prevent Gazprom and Putin from exerting control. That would be naive."

If German courts eventually certify Nord Stream 2 without requiring unbundling, countries such as Poland and Ukraine plan to continue the legal battle for as long as it takes, says Vitrenko. Any attempt by the German courts to give the pipeline the green light could also trigger fresh sanctions because, according to the joint agreement signed by Germany and the United States, the project must comply with "the spirit and the letter of the law," he adds.

According to Vitrenko, Putin is already demonstrating what the pipeline will mean for European energy security. "He is currently blackmailing Germany and the European Union by decreasing supplies of gas to create an artificial shortage and skyrocketing prices. This prevents enough supplies from going into European storage. It is Putin's way of saying if you want to have enough gas this winter, you must allow Nord Stream 2 to operate without full compliance."

Vitrenko is convinced new sanctions remain a distinct possibility. "We believe as it becomes more obvious that Russia is blackmailing Europe, there are now more than enough grounds for the US government to impose sanctions that would override Biden's waiver," he says.

While efforts to prevent construction of the pipeline have failed, the battle to block Nord Stream 2 is still far from over. On August 31, President Biden will welcome Ukraine's President Zelenskyy to the White House. The pipeline is likely to be high on the meeting agenda, along with the looming threat of an escalation in Putin's seven-year war against Ukraine.

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World in Ukraine: Uzbekistan

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Ambassador: Uzbekistan wants to restore close ties with Kyiv

By Brian Bonner
bonner@kyivpost.com

In the heyday of the bilateral relationship, trade between Ukraine and Uzbekistan — two nations that were Soviet republics — hit \$2 billion yearly as recently as 2009, Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Ukraine Alisher Kurmanov said.

Now, the volume has dropped to less than a quarter of that amount. They barely register in each other's top 10 trading partners, while China and Russia are at or near the top of both lists. The short-term aim of Uzbekistan and Ukraine is to get the turnover up to \$1 billion yearly from the current \$450 million.

"Whether it's education science and agriculture or trade, we had good relations," Kurmanov said. The goal now: "Resurrection of our old ties to get back on track to what we used to have."

That's why Kurmanov took the posting in Kyiv, arriving in June 2020. He is one of Uzbekistan's most experienced diplomats, having served as his Central Asian nation's ambassador in Singapore, Korea and the United Kingdom and Ireland. The married father of two children is fluent in Russian, English and Arabic besides his native Uzbek.

He says mid-sized countries like Ukraine and Uzbekistan — with populations of 40 and 34 million, respectively — are not major geopolitical players. Therefore, he thinks their time is better spent on developing their economies. And both need lots of development. Both are rural, agrarian nations, although Uzbekistan is smaller — about 75% of Ukraine's size. Both are poor and underperforming — about \$60 billion in annual economic output for Uzbekistan and \$160 billion for Ukraine. The Soviet Union relied heavily on both places for raw materials — "commodity appendixes," as the ambassador put it. Uzbekistan supplied cotton, copper, gold, uranium, natural gas.

"We didn't have too much industry," the ambassador said. "We had the aviation industry, but that was shifted to Uzbekistan during World War II."

Both nations are also trying to shake the harmful aspects of their Soviet legacies, which included Joseph Stalin's purges, massive World War II casualties, repression of national history and the dominance of the Russian language. Uzbekistan suffered less than Ukraine, where at least 4 million people starved to death during the Holodomor and perhaps another eight million people were killed during World War II.

"We didn't know the history. We



Uzbek Ambassador to Ukraine Alisher Kurmanov started his current assignment in June 2020, after serving the Central Asian nation as its ambassador in Singapore, Korea and the United Kingdom and Ireland.

weren't allowed to know the history. I am just discovering myself, bit by bit," Kurmanov told the Kyiv Post in an interview ahead of Uzbekistan's 30th Independence Day on Sept. 1. "From the 10th to 12th centuries, great discoveries came from this part of the world. We have to discover our past and our pride."

He said a good starting point for those who want to know more is the "Lost Enlightenment," a book by S. Frederick Starr about Central Asia's golden age, when Uzbekistan was at the center of the ancient Silk Road trade route linking Asia and the Middle East to the West.

'New Uzbekistan'?

Besides the dislocations caused by the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Uzbekistan remained isolated from much of the world for the next quarter-century.

Part of the reason is geography: Although it shares borders with the four other Central Asian nations and ex-Soviet republics of Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, as well as Afghanistan on its southern border, Uzbekistan is landlocked.

But part of the reason is political. The rule of its first president, the late Islam Karimov (1938–2016) dated back to 1989, the last two years

of the Soviet Union, when he led the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. The West considered Karimov to be a tyrannical dictator who killed or imprisoned his opponents and allowed no freedom of expression or media. After the 2005 massacre of hundreds of protesters in Andijan, his regime became an international pariah.

Now Uzbekistan is performing a delicate diplomatic dance — praising Karimov while also disavowing many of his policies in favor of democracy, human rights, global integration and an end to conflicts with its Central Asian neighbors.

Kurmanov said that most Uzbeks still revere Karimov, even five years after his death. He is credited with keeping Uzbekistan independent, economically stable, and with curbing Islamic radicalism in the secular yet primarily Sunni Muslim nation.

But Kurmanov conceded that Karimov closed off the nation from the rest of the world and engaged in unfortunate conflicts with Uzbekistan's Central Asian neighbors over borders, environmental issues and infrastructure.

All of that is changing in the "new Uzbekistan" under the rule of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, a long-time prime minister under Karimov who has led the nation for

the last five years. Mirziyoyev faces re-election on Oct. 24, 2021.

The ambassador said that Uzbekistan is opening up, democratizing, modernizing and living in greater harmony by finding compromises with its Central Asian neighbors, most demonstrably by opening borders to allow travel freely among the five nations.

"Today, Uzbekistan is becoming a country of democratic transformations, big opportunities, and practical deeds," Mirziyoyev told the Yangi Uzbekistan newspaper in an interview published this month. "The New Uzbekistan is a state developing in strict compliance with the universally recognized norms in the field of democracy, human rights, and freedoms, on the basis of the principles of friendship and cooperation with the international community, the ultimate aim of which is to create a free, comfortable and prosperous life for our people."

'Old Uzbekistan' remains?

But critics say the "new Uzbekistan" still has too much of the "old Uzbekistan."

According to an Aug. 10, 2021, article in Asia News, "only pro-government parties have been allowed to run candidates" in the October

presidential election. "Any opposition was liquidated under the 'father of the nation' Karimov."

The U.S.-based Freedom House — an international human rights watchdog — came to the same conclusion, classifying Uzbekistan as "not free." Its 2020 summary, the latest available, says: "While ongoing reforms under Mirziyoyev have led to improvements on some issues, including a modest reduction in media repression and reforms that mandated more female legislative candidates, Uzbekistan remains an authoritarian regime with little movement toward democratization. No opposition parties operate legally. The legislature and judiciary effectively serve as instruments of the executive branch, which initiates reforms by decree, and the media remains tightly controlled by the state. Reports of torture and other ill-treatment remain common, although highly publicized cases of abuse continue to result in dismissals and prosecutions for some officials and small-scale corruption has been meaningfully reduced."

In its 2021 World Press Freedom Index, the France-based Reporters Without Borders watchdog ranks Uzbekistan near the bottom in press



Kurmanov: ‘New Uzbekistan’ awaits those who travel to the growing Central Asian nation of 34 million people

page 6 →

freedoms – 157th out of 180, one notch above Belarus, where the election-stealing dictator Alexander Lukashenko imprisons, harasses – and some fear – murders journalists.

Reporters Without Borders, however, acknowledged the improvements under Mirziyoyev under the heading of “Delicate Thaw.”

“Five years after President Islam Karimov’s death in August 2016, a thaw is under way in what was one of the world’s harshest dictatorships. The last imprisoned journalists – some of whom were held for nearly 20 years – have been released but have not been rehabilitated. Access to websites that were censored for years has been unblocked but others remain inaccessible. Media registration has been made easier. There are now live political broadcasts and some journalists are now covering sensitive subjects such as corruption and forced labor,” the watchdog wrote. “But criticizing the highest level of government is still out of the question. And the authorities are in no hurry to carry out the necessary reforms to the laws that constrain the media. Surveillance, censorship and self-censorship are still pres-

ent and the authorities maintain a significant level of control over the media. Bloggers are still being threatened or arrested. Uzbekistan has reopened its doors to foreign and exiled journalists but many journalists and media outlets, including the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, have found it difficult to obtain accreditation. It will be hard to fully restore press freedom without political pluralism and without justice for the dictatorship’s crimes. The road ahead is still long.”

Kurmanov disputes critics

“This is wrong; this is absolutely wrong,” the ambassador said of Mirziyoyev’s critics. “There is no one who can match him in his eagerness to change Uzbekistan, his openness and his very strong trust into the new and democratic Uzbekistan.”

He said Mirziyoyev will easily win re-election in October not because he’s repressed opposition, but because he’s so popular.

“This is a new Uzbekistan absolutely. The genius of Mirziyoyev is that he is a visionary. He served as prime minister and, before that, as a people’s deputy. He has firsthand knowledge of what to do and

how it is to be done,” the ambassador said. “What’s happening today is Uzbekistan are real democratic changes. The press freedom is phenomenal. We are talking about Western-style democracy, universal human rights. It is very difficult and tough. We have to overcome obstacles. The largest obstacle is changing ourselves. We are at the beginning of a long process.”

Kurmanov acknowledged Uzbeks “are lagging behind the world” economically, he said these changes are under way:

Rather than exporting most of its cotton, he said Uzbekistan has built a vertically integrated textile industry.

Rather than exporting natural gas, it’s processing gas and refining jet fuel for the commercial aviation industry.

Rather than just importing cars, it’s manufacturing at least 250,000 General Motors’ Chevrolet automobiles, many for export.

Rather than creating a class of oligarchs, as Ukraine did in its corrupt and uncompetitive privatizations of Soviet assets, Uzbekistan is now holding competitive open tenders for the sales of such plants as Coca-Cola.

While Uzbekistan, with an average monthly salary of \$280, is poorer



Uzbekistan at a glance

Government type: presidential constitutional republic



President: Shavkat Mirziyoyev



Prime Minister: Abdulla Aripov



GDP, PPP: \$57.71 billion (2020)

GDP per capita, PPP: \$1,770 (2020)



Total area: 448,978 square kilometers



Population: 34 million people

World Bank’s Doing Business Ranking: 69

Credit ratings: S&P – BB- (stable), Fitch – BB- (stable), Moody’s – B1 (positive)

Main economic sectors:

textiles, food processing, agriculture, metallurgy, mining, chemicals, fertilizer production, machine building



Trade: \$449.6 million

(including services)



Exports from Ukraine to US:

Pharmaceuticals, dairy products, sugar, animal fats, chemicals, plastics, cardboard and paper, ferrous metals. \$295.5 million.

Imports to Ukraine from US:

Textile, cotton, fruits and nuts, fertilizers, zinc from Uzbekistan. \$136.9 billion.



US foreign direct investment \$7 million (as of March 31, 2021)

Sources: World Bank, International Monetary Fund, State Statistics Service

than Ukraine, where the average monthly salary is \$500, the ambassador said wealth is much more evenly distributed in his nation.

Rather than closing its borders, it is opening them up to stimulate tourism, which Uzbekistan now considers “a strategic industry.” He said the country has dropped visa requirements for most nations, has

“tourist police” designed to help visitors and has revamped the Tashkent International Airport, which he acknowledged used to be a bureaucratic and unfriendly place.

Just recently Bees Airline, for instance, announced the first-ever, non-stop flights from Kyiv to

→ page 9

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Ukrainian medicine is proving to be very popular with Uzbeks

By Natalia Datskevych
datskevych@kyivpost.com

Uzbekistan's pharmacies are packed with Ukrainian medicines. In 2020, according to the State Customs Service, 25% of all Ukraine's pharmaceutical exports ended up there.

According to the State Statistics Service, the same year, Ukrainian drug companies sold \$72 million worth of medicine to Uzbekistan, accounting for 16% of the bilateral trade between the countries.

"Ukraine's pharmaceuticals are highly demanded in our country," Abdurahmon Mahmudov, first secretary at the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, told the Kyiv Post. "There is not enough production in Uzbekistan and the market is large."

Ukrainian pharmaceuticals are more affordable to Uzbeks, whose average monthly salary is only \$280 – \$220 less than in Ukraine.

"The quality, if compared with Western countries, might be slightly worse, but the price is good enough," said Mahmudov. "It is the best choice for our middle class."

Tashkent Pharma Park

Overall, last year Uzbekistan spent \$1.1 billion importing medicines for the nation's needs, according to the country's Ministry of Health.



Courtesy of Farnak

Employees of the Ukrainian pharmaceutical company Farnak work on equipment that shape ampoules with drugs inside. For the company, Uzbekistan remains a top destination for international trade as half of its exports to ex-Soviet republics end there.

Competing with India, Russia, China, and Belarus, Ukraine is among the top-five largest foreign sellers of pharmaceuticals in Uzbekistan, the most populous post-Soviet country in Central Asia,

with 34 million people.

With the country's population growing by 1 million people per year, the government needs more medicine. Uzbekistan's pharmaceutical market is a top priority for Ukraine. Half of the exports to ex-Soviet republics of Farnak, Ukraine's pharmaceutical giant, go to Uzbekistan.

The company currently ranks fifth in the Uzbek market with a share of 2.3%, according to Anton Zubov, marketing & sales director in charge of CIS countries at Farnak. Farnak mainly sells antiviral drugs, diabetes medications and blood thinners in the country.

"Uzbekistan is a key country in the export for our company," said Zubov.

Uzbekistan massively imports from Ukraine, but it also plans to bring Ukrainian companies to produce drugs on site.

Two years ago, the Uzbek government allocated 80 hectares in the Zangiata district near the capital to set up Tashkent Pharma Park, a state-of-the-art research and production zone to tackle the lack of medical innovation in the country.

The park offers lucrative opportunities for foreign pharmaceutical companies, like free land, access to all utilities, tax breaks and reduced import duties.

Foreign companies producing drugs in the industrial park will also be allowed to participate in public procurement, a right only given to domestic producers so far.

Ukraine's Farnak wants to produce drugs in Uzbekistan, but the company is still in "active negotiations," Zubov said.

According to Eleonora Miroshnik, head of marketing at Lekhim, one of the two Ukrainian companies that is considering whether to enter the Tashkent Pharma Park, the company

successfully established its branch in Uzbekistan in 2015.

And Lekhim already knows the scale of its yearly production in the Tashkent Pharma Park: 165 million ampoules of liquid drugs, 15 million vials to contain medicines, nearly 500 million pills, and 150 million capsule drugs.

"The new pharmaceutical plant will meet all modern high-tech international standards and norms," the company's official statement reads.

But Ukrainian producers still weigh pros and cons, according to Mahmudov. They should move quickly to keep up with competitors, he said.

"If Ukrainian companies do not enter, we will cooperate with Indians, Chinese, Belarusians," he said. "They'll just lose the market."

Perfect location

Uzbekistan is the ancient crossroads of trade routes linking Europe and Asia – and at the heart of Central Asia.

Mahmudov said that setting up shop in Uzbekistan will allow Ukrainian companies to solve logistical hurdles created by Russia's war in 2014. As a result of the Kremlin's invasion, Ukrainian companies had to increase export prices through the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea and pay higher custom prices to deliver their products.

Plus, Uzbekistan may become a new spot for Ukrainian companies to expand into new markets in Central Asia. "Once set in Uzbekistan, they will be able to sell their product to neighboring countries," said Mahmudov.

Farnak's Zubov agreed that building a plant near Tashkent is the best option for keeping its presence on the Uzbek market, where domestic producers are favored.

"Uzbekistan actively defends the interests of its producers," said Zubov. ❖

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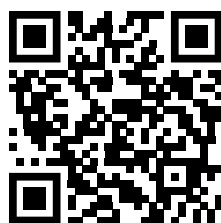


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Ukraine shares a common heritage, challenges with Uzbekistan as ex-Soviet republics

page 7 →

Samarkand, the cultural capital of Uzbekistan.

"We have to put the country back on the map," he said. "We have to make it extremely friendly."

He said the West has other misconceptions of Uzbekistan, including that it is far from everything. Looking at the world from Tashkent, the Uzbek capital, he said the nation sees itself at the center of the world and as a natural aviation hub "only seven hours from London and seven hours from Tokyo."

Wounded in Afghanistan

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, which allowed the Taliban to swiftly retake control this month, conjured up bitter images of the Soviet withdrawal of 1989. Much of that happened through the Friendship Bridge, a span over the Amu Darya River that connects Uzbekistan and Afghanistan.

Kurmanov, the son of a diplomat who died many years ago, was born in Afghanistan in 1965. His family

moved when he was only 3, but then returned there as a Soviet soldier at the age of 18. He was wounded by a rocket-propelled grenade and airlifted back to Uzbekistan, ending his military duty in 1983 and leaving a wound in his right knee that still gives him discomfort.

His earlier memories are of an Afghanistan that was "very peaceful and very dynamic as well." Of today's events, he said that the U.S. didn't learn the lessons of the unsuccessful foreign intervention of the Soviets, who, in turn, repeated the mistakes of the British forces in the 19th century.

Kurmanov said the situation on the Uzbek-Afghan border is peaceful, in contrast to the scenes of chaos at the Kabul airport. Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry said in a recent statement that it has assisted with the evacuation of nearly 2,000 people from Afghanistan by allowing transit through the country.

"In addition, a lot of work was also carried out with representatives of the Taliban movement to obtain security guarantees for the citizens of Afghanistan, who illegal-



Women perform during a reception at the Uzbekistan Embassy in Kyiv announcing the start of direct flights from Kyiv to Samarkand by Bees Airline on Aug. 10, 2021.

Volodymyr Petrov

ly crossed the Uzbek-Afghan border during these dramatic days," the ministry wrote on Aug. 20. "As a result of agreements reached with representatives of the Taliban leadership to prevent any measures of violence, persecution, persecution against this category of persons, 150 Afghan citizens were returned to their homeland of their own free will."

Bilateral relations

One Ukrainian who personifies the best of bilateral ties between the two nations was Nickolay I. Kuchersky (1937–2018), a Soviet business leader in uranium and gold mining in Uzbekistan. "He was a Ukrainian who brought the knowledge," the

ambassador said. Other shared ventures include a Tashkent aircraft factory that produced Illyushin jets and some components for the Antonov model.

But the number of Uzbeks in Ukraine and Ukrainians in Uzbekistan is estimated at only several thousand people in both countries. The ambassador said that "what needs to be done is to institutionalize our relationship," noting the last high-level trade and investment meeting took place between the two countries 14 years ago.

Balancing Russia ties

But there are built-in limitations to resurrecting bilateral ties. Uzbekistan won't take a stance on wheth-

er Crimea, illegally invaded and annexed by Russia in 2014, belongs to Ukraine. It also will not impose sanctions on the Kremlin either.

"We enjoy very good relations with Russia, a strategic and large trade partner," Kurmanov said. "We have to cooperate." He doesn't believe that Russia would ever attack Uzbekistan and occupy its territory, as it is doing in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, three other ex-Soviet republics.

"Our current borders are inviolable," the ambassador said, preferring to focus on the positives with each nation. "There is much more on our common agenda to achieve. We are not in conflict with anybody, absolutely." 🇺🇵

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Uzbek brothers keeping the family business alive and well in Ukraine

By Asami Terajima
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It was a dream for Farrukh Murodov and his older brother to open their own store in Kyiv to sell dried fruits and nuts brought from their hometown in Uzbekistan.

Born into a farming family in the Silk Road city of Samarkand, the second-largest city after Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent, the two brothers grew up helping out in the fields as children. Their 10-hectare domain was an inheritance from their grandfather, who had worked the land since the 1930s.

When World War II broke out in 1939, the people of Uzbekistan, then part of the Soviet Union, made a huge contribution to the common victory over fascism. Of the 6.5 million people who lived in Uzbekistan at the time, 1.5 million joined the deadly fight.

Some 420,000 soldiers lost their lives and 640,000 left the battlefield with injuries. Murodov's grandfather, who fought on the front line in modern-day Ukraine, was lucky enough to make it back home.

Having made friends in the Soviet territory that would one day become known as Ukraine, Murodov's grandfather began to make routine visits, bringing homegrown products from Uzbekistan. The entire family would help him harvest crops and dry them, all by hand. And then he would take ready-to-eat products to other countries and sell them there.

Murodov's father continued the practice of coming to Ukraine two to three times a year to sell products to wholesale vendors. After finishing college in 2003, Murodov and his brother also stepped in and began helping their father.

A few years had passed and their father let his sons carry the respon-

Courtesy of Mindal



A vendor is offering a taste test of dried persimmon from Uzbekistan to a customer at Mindal, a small shop located on the sixth floor of TsUM Department store, on Aug. 25, 2021. The Murodov brothers opened their first store in 2016 to preserve the family business that their grandfather began in 1930s in their native Uzbekistan.

sibility while still giving advice when needed.

"It's a multigenerational family business," the 31-year-old told the Kyiv Post.

Since their first visit to Ukraine, the brothers have been dropping off various products to retailers several times a year. Their business expanded quickly and eventually opened their first store on the sixth floor of TsUM Department in 2016.

Murodov, who runs Mindal (translated as almond) with his 37-year-

old brother and 28-year-old cousin, is just one of the many Uzbeks selling dried fruits and nuts in Kyiv. Others haven't been successful enough to open a store in a place like TsUM but they still supply fresh dried fruits and nuts to the locals. They have stalls at markets like Bessarabsky.

Most of the Uzbeks selling dried fruits and nuts in Ukraine have been here for a long time, according to Bobur Rasulov, a counselor on trade and economic issues

at the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Ukraine. Some have been here for generations.

A family business

Much like in Ukraine, agriculture is an important part of the economy in Uzbekistan. The agricultural industry alone accounts for approximately 25.5% of Uzbekistan's gross domestic product, employing about 27% of the labor force, the International Trade Administration reported in October 2020.

In 2020, the export value of fruits and nuts from Uzbekistan to other countries totaled \$578 million, about 4 percent of the country's total exports that year, according to TrendEconomy, a Bulgarian international trade database.

Dried fruits and raw products including apricots, apples and nuts are the most important organic goods exported from Uzbekistan, according to a report published by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Uzbekistan's continental climate with its hot summers and cool winters is suitable for farming a rich assortment of vegetables and fruits. All the land used for agriculture in Uzbekistan is owned by the state, and there are three main types of lease-holders: farm enterprises, dekhan farms (households) and agricultural firms.

Family farms, locally known as "dekhan farms," are the biggest producers of dried fruits and nuts exported abroad, according to Rasulov. In Uzbekistan, agriculture is "mostly family businesses," he said.

Rasulov said that the way Murodov's family runs a business, where the entire family works on the field and chosen family mem-

bers sell the produced crops abroad is common in Uzbekistan.

Operating a farm is a lot of work. Murodov said there are thousands of fruit trees from red grapes, apricots to almonds, so "we ask all our relatives to come help" especially during the harvest season. Even in winter, the fields need to be irrigated well and someone needs to be there to cover the ground with a sheet to protect it from snow.

"It was passed down from our grandfather," he said.

Weak exports to Ukraine

Uzbekistan is a major global exporter of dried apricots and raisins.

In 2019, the central Asian country became the second-largest exporter of dried apricots by volume after Turkey, according to a statistical yearbook published by the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council.

Nevertheless, Uzbekistan still exports significantly less than Turkey, Andriy Yarmak, an economist for the Investment Center of the FAO, said.

While Turkey exported 100,162 tons of dried apricots in 2019 (about 72% of the global share), Uzbekistan only exported 9,034 tons (about 7%).

Yarmak said that trade with Ukraine follows the same pattern. Uzbekistan is the second largest supplier of dried apricots to Ukraine but Turkey's share is a lot higher.

And even though Uzbekistan is also the fourth largest exporter of raisins in the world and the second-biggest supplier to Ukraine after Iran, the food trade between the two countries is still small. Uzbekistan is not even among the top 60 countries supplying agricultural products to Ukraine, Yarmak added, with Uzbekistan's exports of dried fruits concentrated in a few markets, notably in Russia and China.

But these exports are expected to grow among health-conscious consumers. "They contain a lot of vitamins and are good for health," Murodov said.

Little Uzbekistan in Kyiv

In downtown Kyiv's central department store — or TsUM — on Kreshchatyk Street, there is a "little Uzbekistan."

Lined up with Egersund, which sells fresh Norwegian seafood, and the cafe-confectionary Honey, a narrow shop sells dried fruits, nuts, candies and Middle East sweets like baklava and halva.

Murodov also sells products like cashews and macadamia nuts from other countries. Those with a sweet tooth can also find various types of chocolate as well. Murodov envisioned Mindal to be a place where people can sample products served on an Uzbek plate with a cup of tea.

Only the best quality products are sold at the shop in TsUM. Murodov, who is living his dream, is hoping to expand the business.

"The best moment is to see customers enjoying our products," he said. ☺



Aside from home-grown dried fruits and nuts, the Murodov family also sells a wide range of Uzbek products. The Murodov brothers set up his little corner shop as a "little Uzbekistan" where people can enjoy the brothers' products with a traditional cup of tea.

Hidden gems of Uzbekistan await tourists

By Elina Kent
kent@kyivpost.com

The ancient lands of Uzbekistan beckon adventurers to explore their centuries-old mosques, mystical mountains, world-famous cuisine and signature hospitality.

"Uzbekistan is like a fairy tale," Uzbekistan Ambassador to Ukraine Alisher Kurmanov told the Kyiv Post.

Despite its many treasures, the Central Asian country has been a mystery for much of the world until recently. For long 25 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan was ruled by dictator Islam Karimov, who kept the nation in isolation.

But with the change of leadership following Karimov's death in 2016, the country has experienced a tourist boom. Just three years later, the number of visitors to Uzbekistan tripled, reaching 6.7 million in 2019.

Now that the COVID-19 crisis may be subsiding, Uzbekistan is welcoming travelers with a list of "safe sites" and requiring a coronavirus test from travelers from "green" countries including Ukraine.

History

Uzbekistan is home to ancient cities and a magnificent architectural heritage. Ancient emperors such as Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan passed through the lands. The same cities that they resided in the 5th and 13th century still stand today.

The eastern city of Samarkand is among the oldest cities in the world. It was a key point on the Silk Road.

Turco-Mongol emperor Tamerlane and his descendants called this city their home. The beautiful Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum still serves as a resting place for Tamerlane and his grandsons.

The signature colorful geometric courtyards and mosaics with integrated religious symbols are a staple of Uzbekistan. One of the must-sees is Samarkand's Registan Square, whose tiled medieval center was built by craftsmen that Tamerlane brought back during his conquests.

Abdurakhmon Mahmudov, the first secretary to the Uzbek Embassy of Ukraine, calls Samarkand one of the three top destinations in the country. The other two are Bukhara and Khiva. "The three gems of Central Asia," Mahmudov told the Kyiv Post.

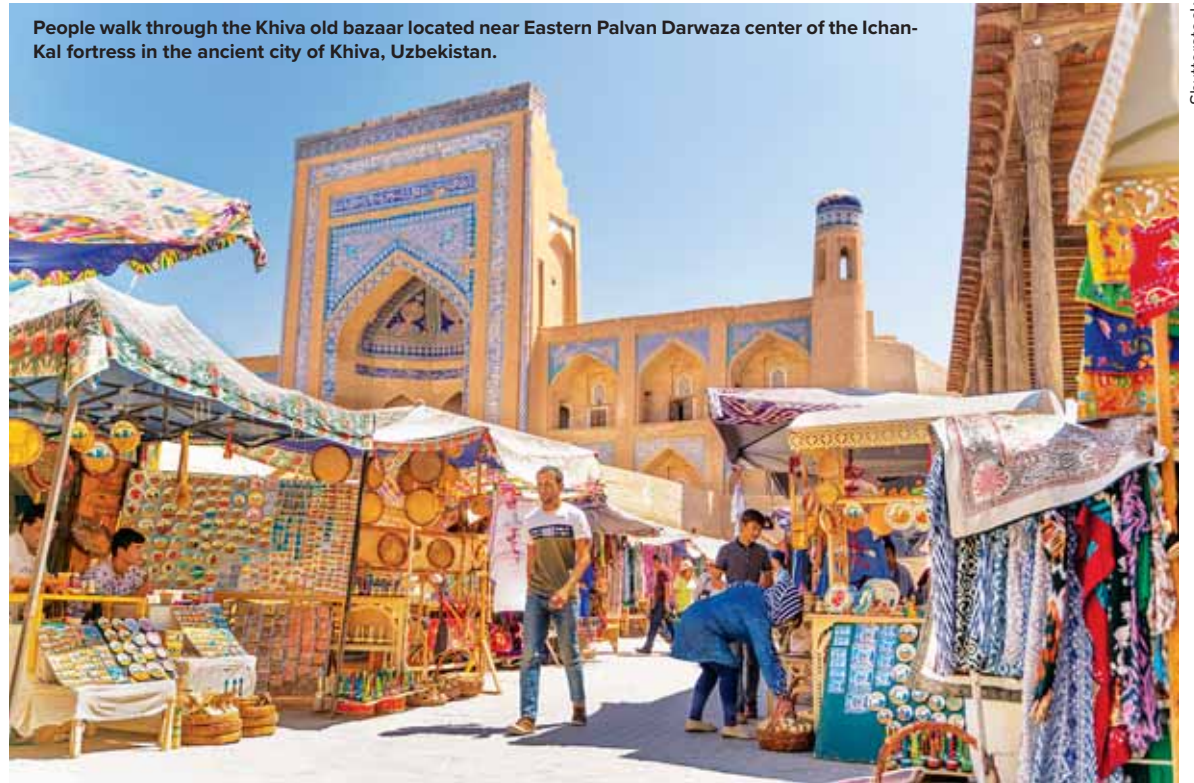
While many historic sites and buildings in Samarkand have been restored, quite a few of Bukhara's buildings remain untouched, standing with original walls and foundations. The city contains more than 140 architectural sites. The colorful 309-year-old Bolo Haouz Mosque and the 900-year-old Po-i-Kalan religious complex are among the most spectacular.

The entire ancient city of Khiva — along with more than its 100 mosques and madrassas — are on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The city is split in two parts with outer and inner towns by the brick wall foundations laid in the 10th century. Khiva is also home to the magnificent fortresses of Ichan-Kala, Kunya-Ark and Dishan-Kala.

Adventures

Uzbekistan is warm for most of

People walk through the Khiva old bazaar located near Eastern Palvan Darwaza center of the Ichan-Kal fortress in the ancient city of Khiva, Uzbekistan.



Shutterstock

the year, which is why travelers can enjoy outdoor activities such as hiking and paragliding at all times in parts of the country.

One possible path is "retracing the footsteps" of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane along the Silk Road.

A popular paragliding hotspot is the Charvak reservoir located 80 kilometers northeast of Tashkent. Mountain biking, rock climbing, and canyoning are other popular summer activities.

During the winter season, skiing and snowboarding can be done at mountain resorts such as Chimgan, Beldersay, Yangiabad and the new Amirsoy that reminds Kurmanov of Bukovel.

To avoid the overwhelming heat during the summer, the best time to visit Uzbekistan is spring or fall.

Gastronomy

Another attraction is cuisine and produce. The combination of hot days and cool nights creates the perfect environment to grow fruits that famously melt in one's mouth. "That's the secret to the sweetness of our fruits, our melons," Kurmanov says.

The local cuisine is known for its signature dishes such as plov, pilaf,

manty and bread. Many Uzbek dishes are cooked in an open hearth and with succulent lamb kabobs. Dried fruits and spices are popular items bought from Uzbek sellers in Kyiv.

Winemaking has deep roots in Uzbekistan. When traveling through Central Asia, Venetian explorer Marco Polo wrote in his famous travel diary about Uzbek wine he tried in Samarkand and Bukhara, saying "it amazed me with its excellent quality."

Delicious traditional dishes can be found all over the country and in the many new restaurants popping up in Tashkent, with 2.4 million people.

Modern country

The ancient nation's population is also very young and growing.

"Uzbekistan is actively progressing with technology, like its trains," Kurmanov says. The Spanish-built Afrosiyob high-speed train allows visitors a great way to experience Uzbekistan. Running at 250 kilometers per hour, the train cuts the travel time between big cities. A 600-kilometer trip from Tashkent to Bukhara, for instance, takes three hours compared to the seven in the past.

Tashkent is a modern metropolis that combines old buildings and modern business centers in its

cityscape. Since the change in the government in 2016, a noticeable shift has occurred. As foreign investment increased, the capital has been thriving with new businesses and innovations.

Miri Tsoi, who was born and raised in Tashkent but has lived in Kyiv for the last 30 years, visits Uzbekistan once every year or so.

"Now there's a new Tashkent," Tsoi told the Kyiv Post. "It's completely different, more modern now." Tsoi has also noticed an influx of Ukrainians traveling for work.

But for now, to most of the world, "Uzbekistan is a hidden gem," Kurmanov says.

Travel and stay

To enter Uzbekistan, travelers from Ukraine need to have a negative PCR test result taken 72 hours before flights. The government compiled a safety package with a list of "safe sites," measures and routes for tourists to take available at www.uzbekistan.travel. A direct flight from Kyiv to Tashkent averages at \$200–300 and takes 5–6 hours. Other options are the recently-added direct flights from Kyiv to Samarkand for about \$159. Airbnbs, hostels and hotels are all popular choices for accommodation. 🇺🇸

Uzbekistan sees Ukraine as offering gateway to more trade with Europe

By Max Hunder
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At \$450 million, annual trade between Uzbekistan and Ukraine is modest. But businesspeople from both countries are working to boost that total and this year set up a joint Uzbek-Ukrainian Business Council.

Oleh Revchuk, the Ukrainian co-chair of the council, told the Kyiv Post that a council meeting in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent in May was a great success. "We brought along 45 companies, and 10 or 15 of them have already found an Uzbek firm to partner with," he said.

European gateway

After Ukraine signed a political and trade association agree with the European Union in 2014, Uzbek businesses began to see Kyiv's



Uzbek-Ukrainian Business Council co-chair Oleh Revchuk

potential as a gateway to European markets. Uzbekistan is a poor but

growing nation, with 34 million people currently.

Uzbek demand for Ukrainian machine-building expertise for its new factories has great potential. The Central Asian nation is industrializing. It is seeking to build up its metallurgical sector and halting nearly all raw cotton exports to build a domestic textile industry.

Revchuk says there is now a large demand for Ukrainian industrial machinery, of which Uzbekistan bought \$58 million in 2020, and expertise in rebuilding or servicing factories.

He added that Metinvest, Ukraine's largest steel producer, is among the companies currently looking to increase sales in Uzbekistan.

Logistical problems

Difficult transportation is an obstacle

to the enthusiastic interest on both sides. Getting people from Ukraine to Uzbekistan is not easy as there are currently few regular direct flights. But this problem is dwarfed by the difficulty in transporting goods: Uzbekistan is landlocked, making trade heavily dependent on railroads.

This is a challenge for Ukraine. The cheapest way to carry freight to and from Uzbekistan is through the railways of Russia, which has banned rail cargo with Ukraine.

Revchuk said that he is currently trying to bring together the heads of Ukrainian and Uzbek railway networks to lower the transportation costs for other routes. "If they negotiate a good tariff with the transit countries, it could be about the same price as going through Russia," he said.

Ukrainian IT

Looking to the future, Uzbek businesses are interested in Ukrainian information technology. On Aug. 26, the Uzbek Ministry of Innovation announced its intention to boost the development of digital startups in Uzbekistan. Uzbek growth offers new markets for well-established Ukrainian IT companies. For instance, Uzbek supermarket chains are already using IT systems fully programmed by Ukrainian developers.

Revchuk said that he sees considerable interest from some Uzbek investors in Ukraine's privatization program, but too few entrepreneurs know about it in the first place.

"We want the State Property Fund to conduct an advertising campaign in Uzbekistan." 🇺🇸



Ukraine celebrates its 30th birthday with flair

- 1 People watch the military parade marking the 30th Independence Day of Ukraine in Kyiv on Aug. 24, 2021.
- 2 Jets of a Ukrainian Air Force unit spread yellow & blue smoke with the colors of the Ukrainian flag.
- 3 President Volodymyr Zelensky walks past the honor guard as he arrives for Independence Day celebrations.
- 4 Ukrainian tank units drive through Khreshchatyk Street.
- 5 Military helicopters fly over Maidan Nezalezhnosti.
- 6 Boats participate in a navy parade on the Dnipro River.
- 7 A girl wearing a wreath watches the military parade.
- 8 Varta armored vehicles drive through the Khreshchatyk Street.
- 9 Officers of the Border Guard of Ukraine march along the Khreshchatyk. (Kostyantyn Chernichkin, Volodymyr Petrov))





1



2



3

A big week for nation still finding its way

- 1 A family wearing vishivankas walks on Khreshchatyk Street after the military parade
- 2 A girl wearing a vyshyvanka, a traditional Ukrainian embroidered blouse, holds a Ukrainian flag
- 3 People hold the National flag during the March of Defenders of Ukraine
- 4 Women hold portraits of their relatives, Ukrainian servicemen killed in a military conflict in the country's eastern regions, during the March of Defenders of Ukraine
- 5 Ukrainian veterans and activists honor the memory of Ukrainian servicemen killed in military conflict in the country's eastern regions during the March of Defenders of Ukraine.
- 6 Children walk under a huge Ukrainian flag as they take part in the March of Defenders of Ukraine
- 7 A woman wearing a wreath watches the military parade
- 8 Veterans in wheelchairs take part in the March of Defenders of Ukraine. (Oleg Petراسiuk, Volodymyr Petrov)



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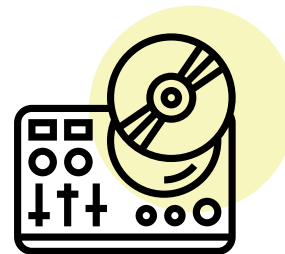


8

Lifestyle

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Enjoy the last summer weekend at Closer's two-day party with 24 DJs on the lineup. Sept. 27-28. Hr 400-600.



Ukraine fights animal abuse in baby steps

By Daria Shulzhenko
shulzhenko@kyivpost.com

Ukraine is not a native habitat for neither lemurs nor pumas. But coming across these exotic animals is easier than might be expected.

Wild animals can be found right in central Kyiv and other tourist magnets like the southern city of Odesa. They are used as photo props for travelers.

Shady businesses in Ukraine have been abusing animals for years. But their era is coming to an end.

On Aug. 6, President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a law that bans using animals for photo services and begging — measures that local animal rights activists have demanded for years. It also strengthens a law on animal cruelty adopted in 2006 that has so far proven useless. The new legislation will come into effect in November.

Though hopes are high for the new law, it covers only a small fraction of burning animal rights issues. Unlike in many other countries, using animals in the entertainment industry is still allowed in Ukraine, which leads to cruelty in zoos, dolphinariums, circuses and elsewhere.

"In terms of animal rights, Ukraine lags behind other countries by at least 10 years," Oleksandr Todorchuk, activist and the founder of UAnimals, a nonprofit that advocates for animal rights in Ukraine, told the Kyiv Post.

According to Todorchuk, the authorities ignore most animal protection bills — at least eight have now been submitted for the parliament's consideration. The recently adopted law is the first animal protection legislation to be passed by the current government.

Activists have had enough. On Sept. 5, they will hold a nationwide rally in 26 cities across Ukraine to call on the authorities to act.

"We will show that there are many of us and that we need to be heard," Todorchuk says.

Cynical business

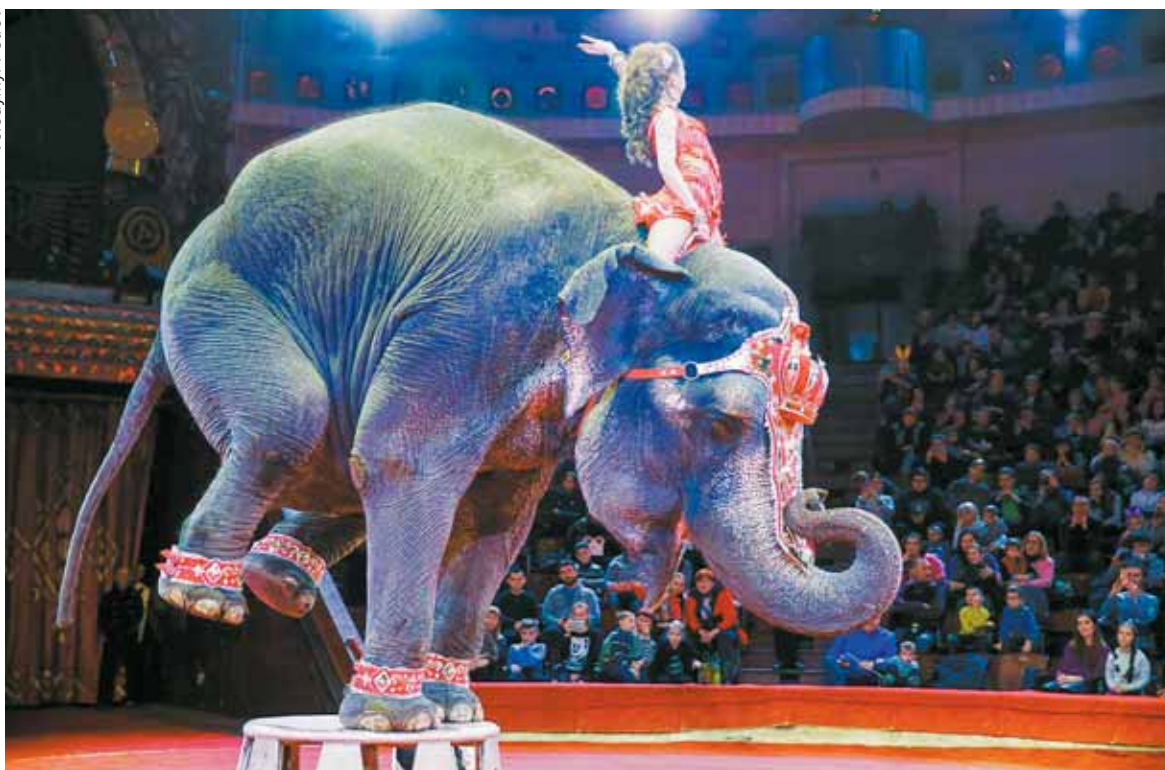
Indian politician and activist Mahatma Gandhi once said that "the greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

By Gandhi's judgment, Ukraine is far from being a great nation.

Cruel and bizarre entertainment is booming all over the country: Circuses are allowed to hold performances with wild animals; dolphinariums and petting zoos are hot spots among visitors. One can easily ride a horse or pony in parks in any big city in Ukraine.

Todorchuk says that using animals for human entertainment is the most "cynical business."

Volodymyr Petrov



Hungarian artist Belush Takach performs with an elephant during a show at the Ukrainian National Circus in Kyiv on Jan. 25, 2018. Unlike in many other countries, using animals in the entertainment industry is still allowed in Ukraine. For years, local animal rights activists have been calling to ban cruel and shady businesses in which animals are abused.

"It's abuse in its purest form. For those people, animals are just a tool to make money," he says.

Circus animals usually are confined to small cages with little space to move around. They are beaten with batons and whips and shocked with electric prods during training. When they grow old and can no longer perform, they are either killed or transferred to restaurants or hotels to entertain guests.

Although UAnimals has been demanding to ban the use of performing animals in Ukrainian circuses for years, for now, they have only achieved a ban on the use of animals in traveling circuses.

Petting zoos are also horrific places for wild animals. They live in constant stress because of the visitors' attention and are often kept in poor conditions.

UAnimals has recently rescued several bears and lions from a petting zoo in Yasnohorodka Village in Kyiv Oblast. The lions had signs of malnutrition such as rickets, a condition that results in weak or soft bones, and multiple injuries such as bone fractures.

Months after they have been rescued, the animals are still recovering.

Compared to entertainment establishments like circuses and petting zoos, it's much harder to track wild animals being kept for photoshoots and similar purposes.

According to Todorchuk, such animals often are kept in basements or garages in "horrific conditions." These are either wild or circus animals that have been purchased illegally. They often have no docu-

ments or vaccinations and can be dangerous to humans.

UAnimals volunteers arrange raids across the country to discover and stop the cruel business practices. They often find appalling conditions.

"They force animals to work long hours under the scorching sun with no access to drinking water," UAnimals co-founder Olga Chevганиuk told the Kyiv Post.

One of the latest shocking animal abuse cases happened in Odesa on Aug. 15, when a horse fell and allegedly broke its leg while transporting tourists in a carriage across the city. Instead of taking the animal to the vet, its owner tried to force the animal to stand up and keep going, the UNIAN news outlet reported. The police are investigating the owner on the grounds of alleged cruelty to animals.

Few perpetrators are ever brought to justice, Todorchuk says.

Legislation failure

Although the animal cruelty law has been in force in Ukraine since 2006, activists say it has failed to protect the animals.

Todorchuk says that through animal rights activism he learned about the general problem of enforcing laws in Ukraine. According to the activist, law enforcement and the courts often neglect animal-related cases and easily give up on them despite violations.

"No one cares about the law," Todorchuk says. "It's a huge problem that is relevant to all other

spheres — laws are simply sabotaged at all levels."

Though news about violence against animals appears in the media almost every day, few cases are reported to the police. Neglect is expected and prosecution is rare.

In 2020, for instance, only 35 people were officially convicted for animal abuse, the State Judicial Administration told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Todorchuk estimates that there are thousands of such cases all over Ukraine.

Even if perpetrators are proven guilty, the fines are too low to stop them from engaging in additional cruelty. One may be forced to pay Hr 3,400–5,100 (\$127–191) for various animal abuse.

Police neglect is a big issue. Unlike violent crimes against people, cases of animal abuse are often ignored by the police, especially outside Kyiv, Todorchuk says. According to him, even when the police arrive, they appear uneducated about animal abuse laws and sometimes even refuse to file reports.

UAnimals is currently cooperating with Kyiv police to provide them with guidance on animal abuse cases.

According to the latest Animal Protection Index (API), Ukraine has made limited changes to protect animals since the ranking was first published in 2014, "which has not resulted in an improvement in animal welfare across the country." It also says that the current law on protecting animals from cruelty considers only a limited number of animals and crimes towards them.

"Ukrainian legislation does not

notice it (animal abuse), as if it doesn't exist," Todorchuk says, and sometimes, "it's simply ineffective."

Wind of change

Activists have called on improving the law on animal cruelty for years, and the recently adopted law is a long-awaited victory for them.

Todorchuk says the new law supplements the old one: Besides exploiting animals for photographs and begging, the new legislation also prohibits using cruel methods to train animals, give animals as prizes or awards, force animals to attack each other for training and shoot at them with weapons. It also bans the promotion of animal abuse.

Keeping wild animals in restaurants and hotels, which is a popular practice to entertain guests in Ukraine, is banned as well.

Todorchuk says that some amendments also make the law broader and clearer: Cruelty is now considered to be not only "a violation of the rules of keeping animals," but also the treatment of animals and violation of animals' transportation. It also introduces criminal liability for bodily damage to animals.

The new law also prohibits euthanizing animals and establishes rules for the treatment of farm animals and pets. This includes a ban on leaving pets unattended or tied up in public, as well as other bans.

According to the new law, the National Police of Ukraine now has to not only respond to reported violence, but also to supervise the protection of animals from cruelty. Meanwhile, local authorities have to prevent traveling exhibitions of animals and zoos and establish a list of animals in need of protection in their region.

"It increases responsibility for animal abuse in general," Todorchuk says.

But this is only a small step towards protecting animals in Ukraine, Todorchuk says.

Activists hope to ban other cruel entertainment and businesses: There are currently eight animal protection bills waiting to be considered by the parliament. By holding the nationwide rally, the activists want to show the government that Ukrainian society stands against animal exploitation for entertainment in circuses, dolphinariums and petting zoos.

Todorchuk calls on everyone to join the demonstration, saying that change comes from the bottom up.

"You may love animals, and you may not. But you need to understand that abusing any living creature is wrong," he says. "When it's unpunished, it only grows."

Nationwide Animal Rights March in Kyiv. Taras Shevchenko Park. Sept. 5. 12 p.m.

Zelensky gets plenty of advice on how to use his time with Biden most effectively

page 2 →

“There is no secret that we want to see more American money in the Ukrainian economy. Especially in the strategic sectors of our economy,” Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Aug. 9. “We can build a very effective partnership with American business and American financial institutions.”

Ukraine already received \$250 million from the U.S in 2021.

Washington’s instructions

Yet Ukraine’s wants will come with a price tag attached. According to U.S. officials, the price is the same it’s been for years: successful reforms.

“There’s clearly a need for more progress on things like corporate governance, on judicial reform, on making sure that the anti-corruption bureau is truly independent,” said U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken during his May visit to Kyiv.

Blinken was more straightforward and instructive in a video address that was shown at the Ukraine Reform Conference in Lithuania in June. He laid out five key tasks for the Ukrainian government, such



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Volodymyr Zelensky arrive for a joint news conference following their talks at Mariyinsky Palace in Kyiv on Aug. 22, 2021.

as reforming the Security Service, ensuring a transparent selection of top anti-corruption officials, proceed-

ing with judicial reform and holding corrupt officials accountable.

The tone of the address has report-

edly irked top people in Zelensky’s administration.

Shortly after, when Deputy

Assistant Secretary George Kent spent two weeks in Kyiv replacing Charge d’Affaires Kristina Kvien, he didn’t have a public meeting with either the president or the administration’s leadership.

Out of the to-do list that Blinken provided in June, Ukrainian leadership has made progress only on one account: It passed the necessary legislation for the judicial reform. On July 14, the parliament gave foreign experts a decisive role in reforming the High Council of Justice, the judiciary’s main governing body.

Yet other tasks from Blinken’s list are far from completion.

Ukraine still lacks a leader for its State Investigative Bureau and Special Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office. Both seats have been vacant for over a year. Ukraine’s National Anti-Corruption Bureau head Artem Sytnyk may even be ousted by Zelensky’s party.

Kraiev hopes Zelensky’s team has a roadmap of reforms that can be presented to Biden during the meeting.

“I hope Zelensky is set to achieve concrete results during this meeting and not meet only for the sake of the meeting to happen,” says Kraiev. ❌

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Alinea International is one of the Canada’s leading international development organization. It executes projects for the Government of Canada, as well as the World Bank, United Nations, Asian Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and others.

In October 2019, Alinea International launched a new five-year project in Ukraine: **Support Ukraine’s Reforms for Governance (SURGe)**. SURGe is a technical assistance project in Ukraine, funded by Global Affairs Canada and implemented by Alinea International Ltd.

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Mass graves of Stalin's Great Purge victims found in Odesa



OPINION

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Timothy Ash: Biden shouldn't give Zelensky a pass on Ukrainian corruption



Bohdan Nahaylo: What happened in Soviet Union 30 years ago



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