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# Kyiv Post

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## 'Stronger Than Ever'

### Zelensky's first face-to-face meeting with Biden brings no breakthrough yet sends signal of support

Press Service of the President of Ukraine



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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky meets with U.S. President Joe Biden in the Oval Office on Sept. 1, 2021. This was the two leaders' first face-to-face meeting and the first trip to the White House for a Ukrainian leader in more than four years. The U.S. and Ukraine issued a joint statement calling bilateral relations "stronger than ever." And the U.S. sweetened the atmosphere with more than \$100 million in new aid. But Zelensky did not get unequivocal U.S. support of Ukraine's bid for NATO membership. He also did not persuade Biden to change course and impose sanctions that would stop the completion of the Russian-German Nord Stream 2 pipeline.



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# Zelensky's Washington trip brings hope, not much else

By Oleksiy Sorokin  
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President Volodymyr Zelensky's long quest for a White House visit ended in success on Sept. 1, marking a milestone in Ukraine's relationship with its most important partner.

The two-hour-long conversation between Zelensky and U.S. President Joe Biden resulted in a joint statement and a promise of closer ties.

"The partnership between our nations grows stronger, and it's going to even become stronger than it has been," said Biden.

He reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to back Ukraine's sovereignty in the face of Russian aggression and to support Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

The meeting brought a drop of comfort at a precarious moment in the two countries' relationship.

Months ago, the Biden administration struck a blow against Ukraine by greenlighting the Russian-German Nord Stream 2 pipeline project. More recently, the tumultuous American withdrawal from Afghanistan as the country fell to the Taliban led many to question the U.S. commitment to supporting its allies.

The U.S., in turn, wants to see more progress with rule of law reforms in Ukraine — something that Zelensky hasn't yet delivered.

While framing the White House meeting as a major success, Zelensky allowed one hint that it wasn't perfect.

"The meeting took place in a normal, productive, not always a cloudless atmosphere," Zelensky said after the talk with Biden. "It was a man-to-man conversation."

Among the victories of his trip, Zelensky counts a \$117 million military and humanitarian aid package, an "extensive discussion" of security issues and reassurances of support that Ukraine hopes were heard in the Kremlin.

## Defense partnership

Defense and security was the key topic of Zelensky's first face-to-face meeting with Biden. The two presidents spoke over the phone twice prior to their meeting.

Biden was considered a strong proponent of Ukraine's territorial integrity, visiting the country six times while serving as vice president under President Barack Obama.

In recent months, Biden's image of "a friend of Ukraine" shattered as he kept Ukraine's leadership at arm's length and chose a softer stance on Russia.

Ukrainian leadership hoped to receive ammunition, military equipment and naval assistance out of the Washington meeting, as Ukraine seeks to rebuild its Black Sea fleet.

The resulting joint statement didn't meet those expectations.

"There is bilateral interest in security in the Black Sea region and there are concrete things that we proposed, unfortunately, I can't share the details," Zelensky said



President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) enters the Pentagon accompanied by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in Arlington on Aug. 31, 2021.

after the meeting, hinting that some agreements might be signed when Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visits Ukraine later this year.

Biden confirmed the allocation of up to \$60 million in military assistance to Ukraine. The new assistance package will include more Javelin anti-tank missiles.

He said he provided the aid because of the "major increase in Russian military activity along the border."

UkrOboronProm, Ukraine's state-owned defense production conglomerate, signed three framework agreements with U.S.-based defense companies, worth up to \$2.5 billion.

The biggest catch was an agreement with L3Harris Technologies, which specializes in producing wireless equipment, tactical radio and electronic systems. UkrOboronProm also signed agreements with two low-profile companies Global Ordnance and DAY & Zimmermann Lone Star, which specialize in producing ammunition and logistics.

Taras Chmut, a retired marine and the chief editor of the Ukrainian Military Portal news site, told the Kyiv Post that without more details about these agreements, it's hard to assess their substance.

According to Zelensky, the two presidents have also extensively discussed Russia's ongoing occupation of Donbas and Crimea. Since March 2014, when the war began, some 14,000 people have been killed and over 1.5 million people have been displaced.

Zelensky asked the U.S. to join the Donbas peace talks and to assist Ukraine in returning approximately 450 captives held in Russia and the occupied Donbas and Crimea.

"We handed over a list of all Ukrainian prisoners, a list of people who are imprisoned in occupied Donbas, occupied Crimea, and in Russia," Zelensky said during his

opening remarks.

"What role, what assistance can the U.S. provide?" he added.

The U.S. also allocated \$45 million in humanitarian aid and \$12.8 million in COVID-19 assistance.

Asked after the meeting whether he received any security guarantees or a roadmap for a potential NATO accession, Zelensky said Ukraine received "support," yet "no deadlines."

## No energy

Energy security was the next big issue. Ukraine signed a framework agreement for a \$30 billion nuclear energy project but got nothing from the U.S. to make up for Nord Stream 2.

Zelensky oversaw the signing of a memorandum between state nuclear monopoly Energoatom and the U.S.-based Westinghouse Electric to build a nuclear reactor unit for the Khmelnytskyi Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine.

Zelensky said that a total of five nuclear reactors are to be built in Ukraine by the company in the future. Khmelnytskyi Nuclear Power Plant currently has two reactors with a capacity of 1,000 megawatts each. Two more have been commissioned.

"The implementation of the memorandum will provide an opportunity to attract investment for the construction of reactors worth about \$30 billion," the president's office said in a statement.

Not surprisingly, the Nord Stream 2 didn't get much attention from the U.S.

"The U.S. and Ukraine continue to oppose Nord Stream 2, which we view as a threat to European energy security," the joint statement said.

However, it was the Biden administration that waived sanctions placed on the Swiss-registered parent company Nord Stream 2 AG in May, paving way for the pipeline's

completion by the end of the year.

According to Zelensky, his counterpart promised to introduce more sanctions on Russia if the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is used to pressure Ukraine. The White House didn't comment on Zelensky's words.

Republican Senator Ted Cruz accused Biden of not doing enough to stop the pipeline.

"Nord Stream 2 will directly and acutely endanger the national security of our allies, gift (Russian President Vladimir) Putin with a generational win, and undermine the safety of Americans," said Cruz, who's been vocal in his criticism of Biden, a Democrat. "Solar panels aren't going to deter Russian aggression."

## Reforms wanted

Unsurprisingly, the need for reforms was extensively mentioned throughout the joint statement.

The White House called for reforms of Ukraine's judiciary, defense industry, Security Service, expansion of the corporate governance reform, the protection of the independence of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU).

"Ukraine intends to reform state-owned enterprises, protect central bank independence, strengthen financial sector supervision, and create a fair business and investment environment," the statement said.

The statement also mentions the need to select the new head of the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office quickly and transparently. The key position has been vacant since August 2020.

Additionally, the State Investigation Bureau lacks the head since December 2019, while NABU Head Artem Sytnyk has been on the hot seat since Zelensky took

# Top prosecutor's priority appears to be image over achievement

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Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova portrays herself as an anti-corruption crusader and courts Western embassies by presenting herself as a reformer. She's penned 11 opinion pieces, published by the Kyiv Post, extolling her supposed achievements in a bid to influence international public opinion.

In this image offensive, Venediktova claims she is carrying out President Volodymyr Zelensky's de-oligarchization drive and cleaning up the den of notoriously corrupt prosecutors, where self-enrichment and punishing enemies were the priorities over bringing justice.

But since she took office in March 2020, Venediktova's results appear no better than any of her dismal predecessors in Ukrainian history. Not a single top incumbent or former top official has been convicted. Not a single major oligarch has been charged with any crime.

If no breakthroughs are forthcoming, the first female prosecutor general may go down in history just like all the men who preceded her — another time-server unwilling or unable to break the grip of a powerful elite that is stunting the nation's future with criminal impunity.

Examples abound. But the derailment of two cases of seemingly obvious high-level corruption raise questions about her ethics, independence, and motives.

Venediktova's office has effectively destroyed the best-known graft case against a sitting official — Zelensky's deputy chief of staff Oleh Tatarov.

In another case with wide-ranging implications for the perpetuation of judicial corruption, prosecutors have not taken on the leading symbol of bribe-taking judges, Pavlo Vovk, allegedly heard in leaked recordings bragging about how the Kyiv District Administrative Court that he leads is untouchable and unaccountable.

There are numerous other cases that form an unmistakable pattern, say those watching Venediktova's actions.

"All these cases demonstrated that she, as a person politically dependent on the President's Office, will not fight top-level corruption," Olena Shcherban, an expert at the Anti-Corruption Action Center, told the Kyiv Post.

The Prosecutor General's Office did not respond to repeated requests for comment. After months of assurances from her and two of her top aides that she will answer the Kyiv Post's questions, she hasn't made herself available for an interview with the newspaper.

In her TV interviews and published opinion pieces, Venediktova vehemently denied accusations that she is stalling or obstructing investigations. But even she is not satisfied with her accomplishments.

"Last year we jailed more than 14,000 people," Venediktova said on the 1+1 television channel in



Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova speaks during a news briefing in her office in Kyiv on June 18, 2020. So far, she has failed to punish top-level corruption and resolve high-profile cases.

April. "Obviously society demands jailing top corrupt officials... Is society satisfied with (prosecutors) work? No. Am I satisfied? No. But our (conviction) statistics have increased by dozens of times in the past year."

The statistics, however, don't contain any big names or big crimes.

## Incumbent officials

Venediktova's dependence on Zelensky, who appointed her, is reflected in her ability to sidetrack a bribery case against the president's deputy chief of staff Tatarov, who has denied the accusations.

Venediktova blocked the charges against him by twice replacing a group of prosecutors assigned to the case. She then took the case away from the ostensibly independent National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, known as NABU, and gave it to the Security Service of Ukraine, the powerful but politically pliable institution headed by the president's personal friend, Igor Bakanov.

In February, a court refused to extend the Tatarov investigation, and prosecutors effectively killed it by missing the deadline for sending it to trial.

Venediktova blamed court decisions, citing a Pechersk District Court ruling to take the case away from the NABU, and another by the Shevchenkivsky District Court, which refused to extend the investigation.

However, the Anti-Corruption Action Center argues that these courts had no jurisdiction and that Venediktova ignored a ruling by the High Anti-Corruption Court that the case must be investigated by the NABU.

Venediktova now decides the fate of all the NABU cases because she is effectively carrying out the duties of the chief anti-corruption prosecutor until a new one is chosen to replace Nazar Kholodnitsky, the discredited

former one. Right now, the anti-corruption prosecutor's office only has an acting head.

Venediktova has also been accused of blocking corruption cases against two lawmakers from Zelensky's party — Oleksandr Yurchenko and Pavlo Khalimon — and against Denys Yermak, the brother of Zelensky's chief of staff Andriy Yermak.

She denied the accusations. Shcherban of the Anti-Corruption Action Center said: "We don't see any results in the field of criminal cases linked to the president's team. As long as Venediktova is in charge of the anti-corruption prosecutor's office, we shouldn't expect such results because she's a political protégé of the president."

## Poroshenko cases

So far, Venediktova has also failed to move effectively against alleged corruption of ex-President Petro Poroshenko and his allies.

Zelensky was elected in 2019 with the slogan "Springtime — Jailtime," implying that Poroshenko-era officials would be jailed for corruption. But three springs have passed, and neither the former president nor any of his top allies even remotely face the prospect of conviction.

"Spring doesn't force us to do anything," Venediktova told 1+1 in April. "We must do our work during any season and we jail people regardless of the day of the week and the weather."

Venediktova's predecessor, Ruslan Riaboshapka, was fired after only six months in 2020 amid criticism that he had failed to prosecute Poroshenko-era corruption or show other achievements.

Venediktova, who drafted charges for Poroshenko when she headed the State Investigation Bureau before becoming prosecutor general, was expected to go after the former president.

But the cases, as usual, have

trial prospects for the case.

Since then, the case has seen no progress. She blamed delays on defense attorneys, who have been studying the investigation materials for a year. Venediktova said prosecutors could move to restrict the time for studying the materials, but they haven't done so.

## De-oligarchization

In line with Zelensky's priorities, parliament has passed an anti-oligarch bill in a preliminary first reading in July. It could be a first step in curtailing the powers of a business elite. However, Ukraine has historically depended on foreign prosecutors to bring any justice for the nation, given the feeble track record of its prosecutors.

And Shcherban, the anti-corruption activist, accused the President's Office of "trying to replace a real fight against oligarchs with populist slogans."

But in an interview for the Ukraine 24 channel in May, Venediktova countered that "criminal cases aren't the panacea" and defended the anti-oligarch bill.

In January, Venediktova personally got involved in the criminal case concerning PrivatBank. In 2016, the state was forced to nationalize the country's largest financial institution after alleged insider lending, money laundering and fraud siphoned off \$5.5 billion.

A report by forensic auditor Kroll into PrivatBank uncovered a "large-scale and coordinated fraud," yet the bank's former owners — oligarchs Ihor Kolomoisky and Hennady Boholyubov — have faced no criminal charges, after what seemed like a promising development in February: The charging of three former top bank executives with embezzlement and forgery.

The oligarchs are fighting civil cases in the UK, Switzerland, U.S. and Ukraine, while a criminal investigation against Kolomoisky has been opened in Israel.

## Punishing Medvedchuk

Pro-Kremlin politician Viktor Medvedchuk, co-leader of the 44-member Opposition Platform — For Life party, is a notable exception in prosecutors' failure to go after heavyweights.

In May, Venediktova announced that Medvedchuk and his ally Taras Kozak had been charged with com-

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EDITORIALS

# Bare minimum

The long-anticipated first in-person meeting between President Volodymyr Zelensky and his U.S. counterpart Joseph Biden concluded in the White House on Sept. 1.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba have both asserted that U.S.-Ukraine relations are better than ever before. Kuleba called the meeting a straight-up success.

In reality, Ukraine got the bare minimum for both sides to save face.

Ukraine got humanitarian and COVID-relief aid, as well as a \$60 million military aid package that includes Javelin anti-tank missiles, which it's not actually allowed to use on the front line.

The only other deal worth mentioning is a memorandum between the state nuclear operator Energoatom and the U.S.-based Westinghouse Electric to make a new reactor for the Khmelnytskyi Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine. The pilot project may lead to a contract for five reactors worth up to \$30 billion.

However, as expected, Ukraine got no compensation for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that will cut it out of Europe's gas market and pave the way for Russia to deepen its invasion. The U.S. again denounced Nord Stream 2 while doing nothing to stop the project.

Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO were once again brushed off as untimely. "We received support, we didn't receive any deadlines," said Zelensky summing up U.S. cold response.

Biden's 2020 election pitch to voters and foreign leaders was to bring America back. Eight months later, the U.S. is hanging up its unofficial badge as the world's law enforcer.

Prior to Zelensky's meeting with Biden, a chorus of experts have told the U.S. to increase support of Ukraine. Some said that after the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, helping Ukraine would send a message that the U.S. is still firmly behind its international commitments.

But America has demonstrated that Ukraine is a second-tier priority at best, behind Afghanistan, China, Hurricane Ida and a long list of other issues.

And as we see now, the U.S. isn't ready to help its ally with a variety of problems, which is fully in its power to do.

Of course, the U.S. will always "stand behind Ukraine's territorial integrity" and "support Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations." There's no possibility that the U.S. will simply give up on Ukraine.

Yet Ukraine's corruption, delayed reforms and lack of concrete results have depleted American patience.

And even if relations between the two countries are indeed better than ever before, they are certainly not good enough to make a substantial difference.

# No end to impunity

One of the biggest achievements of President Volodymyr Zelensky's first two years in office has been to lift lawmakers' immunity from criminal prosecution.

The reform looked like a breakthrough on paper. But in real life, the immunity — and impunity — goes on. We received a vivid reminder just recently.

Oleksandr Trukhin, a lawmaker with the 243-member parliament faction of Zelensky's Servant of the People party, was apparently involved in a car crash on Aug. 23. A car that he was reportedly driving rammed into another vehicle on a highway near Kyiv. Six people were injured, including two children.

Soon, the impunity machine started working its gears. News of the crash began to disappear from media websites. Journalists shared emails they received from shady PR people, offering to pay to have the news about Trukhin taken down, or at least his name removed.

The blunt whitewashing campaign caused more outrage than the car crash itself.

Meanwhile, the police, controlled by a former Servant of the People lawmaker, stayed silent about Trukhin's role in the crash. The party stayed silent. The president, who is responsible for the fact that Trukhin got elected, stayed silent.

It's clear that the lawmaker is about to get away with the crash, and the president is about to let him.

It's not the first time Zelensky and his administration demonstrated their readiness to overlook the misdeeds of members of their team.

The president has infamously defended Oleh Tatarov, the deputy head of his administration, who is suspected of helping a developer embezzle millions of hryvnias from the state in his previous job.

Zelensky's lawmaker Mykola Tyshchenko has been caught violating the lockdown to throw a birthday party for his wife and got away with it. Another lawmaker, Pavlo Khalimon, was implicated in bribery but Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova refused to authorize an investigation.

Zelensky could use the scandals within his party to prove his devotion to justice and rule of law. Instead, he is preferring to overlook his lawmakers' misdeeds or downplay them.

This is how it's always been in Ukraine. When someone breaks the law, they can get away with it if they're wealthy, connected or a member of parliament.

Serhiy Pashynsky shot a man during an argument in 2016, and got away with it. Viktor Lozinsky, dubbed "the murderer lawmaker," almost got away with killing a villager in 2009. Only after enormous public pressure was he convicted but he ended up spending just five years in prison.

Incidentally, Trukhin's own ex-wife has gotten away with killing a 62-year-old woman with her car in 2009. It probably helped that she is the daughter of one of the richest Ukrainians, Dnipro-based businessman Oleksiy Martynov.

This is why Trukhin's case is so familiar and why it is seen as a test of Zelensky's devotion to justice.

Zelensky failed several tests already. Perhaps, this time he will surprise us.



**NEWS ITEM:** President Volodymyr Zelensky met with his U.S. counterpart Joe Biden at the White House on Sept. 1. Experts pointed out the bad timing of their meeting: Biden was preoccupied with the Taliban taking over Afghanistan and hurricane Ida raging in the U.S.



**NEWS ITEM:** Oleksandr Trukhin, a lawmaker with the Servant of the People party, has allegedly caused a car crash that injured six people on Aug. 23, and then tried to hide it. After public attention to the case, Trukhin admitted he had been "at the site of the crash," avoiding saying whether he was a driver or a passenger in the car.



**NEWS ITEM:** While discussing the Russian-German Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project with U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm on Aug. 31, President Volodymyr Zelensky said that Russian gas is "the dirtiest in the world due to significant methane emissions during production and transportation, as well as corruption, blackmail and manipulation."



**NEWS ITEM:** Natalia Lavreniuk, a Russian citizen and the spouse of Ukrainian lawmaker Taras Kozak, who along with him had been targeted by economic sanctions, had apparently tried to get a fresh start. The woman legally changed her name to Svitlana Zhuchkova, according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

See these features online at [Kyivpost.com](http://Kyivpost.com)

### Ukraine's Friend & Foe Of The Week



**Marta Farion**  
A U.S. attorney and the president of the Kyiv Mohyla Foundation of America, Farion supports education in Ukraine and promotes it abroad, raising money for universities. On Sept. 1, President Volodymyr Zelensky awarded Farion with the Order of Prince Yaroslav the Wise of the IV degree for her achievements.



**Lanny J. Davis**  
Davis is representing Dmytro Firtash, the exiled Ukrainian oligarch fighting extradition to the U.S. While everyone is entitled to legal defense, Davis' assertions in a Sept. 1 op-ed that Firtash's record is one of an "anti-corruption, pro-democracy" businessman need to be called out.

**Feel strongly about an issue? Agree or disagree with editorial positions in this newspaper?**  
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# Once back home, Ukrainian Olympic athletes struggle to pursue their dreams

By Asami Terajima  
terajima@kyivpost.com

When Ukrainian athlete Viktoriya Tkachuk came home from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, it was time to go back to a difficult reality.

The 26-year-old finished sixth in the 400-meter hurdles in Japan, beating dozens of professional athletes from all over the world. Despite her performance, Tkachuk knew she could expect little support from Ukraine, the country she represented.

Professional athletes in Ukraine are paid less than \$600 per month, having some of the lowest income among countries competing at the Olympics.

With such a meager sum, they can't afford to pay for proper health-care in case of injuries, which tends to happen a lot due to Ukraine's decaying sports infrastructure.

When she suffered a knee injury in the summer of 2019, Tkachuk had nowhere to turn for help. She learned that she and her coach were on their own, without any support from the state.

"We (athletes) would like to be protected in case such a thing happens that could end our career," she told the Kyiv Post.

In this year's Olympics, Ukraine won 19 medals and made it to the top 20 countries by the number of medals.

Ukraine promised to reward its medal-winning athletes with cash prizes totaling \$1.84 million. Gold medalists will each receive \$125,000. Silver medalists will get \$80,000 and bronze medalists will get \$55,000. These are considered big prizes by international standards.

But few get to the very top. To be able to continue professional careers and compete for medals, many athletes need the government's support along the way.

## Dismal salary

Getting a diagnosis for Tkachuk's injury was difficult.

A knee injury often involves going through magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) tests that can easily cost \$37 (Hr 1,000) if not more, but the salaries that Ukrainian athletes receive from the Ministry of Youth and Sports are negligible.

Regular salaries of Ukrainian athletes ranged between \$450 (Hr 12,000) and \$562 (Hr 15,000) per month in 2018, according to the Center for Public Monitoring and Research.

Tkachuk also works as a junior sergeant in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Because she receives a salary as a military employee, she is only able to get half of what she would have been paid by the sports' ministry as a professional athlete.

She couldn't disclose the amount, but the salary for her military rank is Hr 19,000 (about \$700), according to online media Ukrainian Military Pages.

Her official income as a sports-



After returning from the Tokyo Olympics where she placed sixth in women's 400-meter hurdle race, Ukrainian athlete Viktoriya Tkachuk practices at the Pioneer Stadium in Kyiv, on Aug. 20.

woman reaches "about 120–130 euros per month," she said. Sometimes she earns more, depending on the bonuses. But the salary is still merely enough to cover treatment in case of an injury.

"If I get a massage 2–3 times a week, my athlete's salary is gone," she said.

Regardless, Tkachuk lives comfortably compared to other athletes, she said.

She receives additional income from her Nike sponsorship. The authorities of Donetsk Oblast, where Tkachuk is from, also help her out. But for those who aren't fortunate enough to receive these types of financial support, it may be a lot more difficult, according to Tkachuk.

And coaches' salaries are not attractive enough for athletes to think about this career when they retire.

Even though the salaries given to coaches slightly increased over the years, the difference is still hard to notice, says Oleg Chukanov, vice president of the Sports Committee of Ukraine, a union of non-Olympic sports federations.

"Low wages discourage athletes to become coaches when their professional careers are over," he said.

## Dangerous infrastructure

Decrepit infrastructure also puts athletes in danger, Tkachuk said.

Athletes need proper facilities and equipment to train or recover from injuries.

Due to a lack of funding,

Ukraine's sport venues, built decades ago under Soviet rule, are falling apart, endangering athletes. Some venues are so old it would be easier to build new ones than to renovate, Chukanov said.

Only one stadium in the city of Lutsk in northwestern Ukraine with a population of 217,000 ful-

fills the criteria to host national championships.

A running stadium should have eight lanes covered with soft rubber, something even Kyiv doesn't have. Tkachuk has to drive an hour outside the Ukrainian capital to reach a suitable stadium without risking her career because of the lanes' poor

quality.

Many competitive runners practice at Rusanivets Stadium located on the left bank of the Dnipro River in Kyiv, but Tkachuk said she can't train there. Even after post-renovation opening in 2019, the stadium

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## World in Ukraine: Pakistan

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# More oligarch toys: Villas and vehicles of the wealthy

By Anna Myroniuk  
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*Editor's Note: The first installment of the "Oligarch Toys" series ran in the Kyiv Post on Aug. 13.*

If Ukraine is trying to reduce the power of its oligarchs, it has its work cut out for it.

Since they seized control of Ukraine's biggest state enterprises in the 1990s, these tycoons have had decades to consolidate their wealth and power.

A new law pushed by President Volodymyr Zelensky would ban political donations from oligarchs and force them to report all communication with public officials. Oligarchs would be banned from buying state property, something that enriched them in the first place.

The lawmakers approved the bill in the first reading on July 7. The final vote is expected in September.

In the first installment of the "Oligarch Toys" series, the Kyiv Post reported about the real estate, vehicles and other luxuries owned by Rinat Akhmetov, Victor Pinchuk, Ihor Kolomoisky, Yuriy Kosiuk, and Dmytro Firtash.

Here are five more Ukrainian oligarchs and their most prized possessions:

## Kostyantyn Zhevago (\$2.4 billion)

Kostyantyn Zhevago is the third-wealthiest man in Ukraine but one would not know it from his asset declaration. When he was a lawmaker, he declared no real estate or cars, just a dozen expensive watches.

His wife, Alina Zhevago, has a 208-square-meter apartment in Kyiv, according to her husband's e-declaration from 2016. But that is not where Zhevago lives.

In 2019, the Prosecutor General's Office issued a notice of suspicion to Zhevago for alleged embezzlement of \$113 million through Finance and Credit, a bank he used to own. Since then, the oligarch has been on the run.

It's unknown where Zhevago resides now but London is the most likely destination. He has been looking for the right apartment there for eight years, according to his lawyer's filing to a U.K. court.

In June 2018, he finally found some suitable digs — a penthouse and a few smaller suites and studios in a residential house in Grosvenor Square in London's Mayfair district.

He agreed to pay \$137 million, in multiple installments. He failed to make the third payment on time and the developer terminated the agreement.



A 65-meter, \$70 million luxury yacht belonging to Kostyantyn Zhevago, the third-wealthiest man in Ukraine.

Even though Zhevago hadn't declared any fast cars or fancy boats, he has a few of each.

According to luxury vehicle watchdog SuperYachtFan, Zhevago has a 65-meter yacht produced in 2014 by Dutch shipyard Amels.

The craft was designed in the U.K., by London firm Winch Design and Hampshire-based Tim Heywood. It can accommodate up to 14 guests and 16 crew.

As of Aug. 26, Zhevago's Z yacht was cruising along the coast of Monaco in the Mediterranean Sea, according to MarineTraffic, a vessel tracking website.

Zhevago reportedly owns a helicopter and a plane. His private jet is a Bombardier Global Express with the registration number G-XXRS, which costs around \$50 million and can accommodate 14 passengers onboard, according to SuperYachtFan.

In 2017, Dzerkalo Tyzhnia, a respected media outlet, wrote that Zhevago recently bought a helicopter Agusta A109 from another influential oligarch. Its registration number is UR-KVZ which might stand for Kostyantyn Valentynovych Zhevago. In Ukraine's aircraft registry, this plane is listed as property of Finance and Credit Leasing LLC, a company in Zhevago's business empire.

The same registration number, KVZ, was spotted on the plates of a \$2 million Aston Martin ONE-77, a \$500,000 Ferrari 599 SA Aperta

and a \$850,000 SLR McLaren, according to 24tv.ua.

## Petro Poroshenko (\$1.6 billion)

Petro Poroshenko served as Ukraine's president from 2014 to 2019 while continuing to run his businesses. He is currently a lawmaker.

Poroshenko lives in a 1,332 square meter house in Kozyn, a village 30 kilometers south of Kyiv. The two-story mansion is labeled the "White House" in Ukrainian media for its neoclassical look. It is surrounded by smaller buildings scattered around the territory. One of them is a private chapel.

In 2012, Poroshenko paid Hr 30 million (\$3.7 million) for the property, according to his e-declaration.

In Kozyn, Poroshenko also owns several plots of land with a total area of 4.2 hectares. Additionally, he has a combined 2.9 hectares all around Kyiv Oblast.

His real estate includes a 300-square-meter house near Kyiv, three apartments in the capital, a flat in Vinnytsia, a city 270 kilometers southwest of Kyiv, and a resort in Lyman, a village on the Black Sea coast in Odesa Oblast.

But wait, there's more. Poroshenko has a 1,254-square-meter villa on the coast of the Alboran Sea in Malaga, a port city in the south of Spain. It is a two-story building with a swimming pool.

Poroshenko acquired this villa back in 2008 for approximately \$5.9 million, according to investigative journalism program Schemes. He didn't include it in his declaration.

His car fleet includes a Jaguar XF and two Mercedes-Benz S.

Poroshenko has also openly declared owning dozens of art pieces including paintings, sculptures, furniture and carpets. His wife Marina owns branded jewels and furs.

## Vadym Novinsky (\$1.4 billion)

Lawmaker Vadym Novinsky has an impressive collection of real estate, predominantly in Russia.

There, he owns three apartments and a house, which is still under construction, according to the latest e-declaration he filed as a lawmaker. Two years ago he declared two more apartments of 184 and 172 square meters in Russia, owned by his daughter Victoria. He did not include these in his latest findings.

Additionally, he has four land plots in Russia with a total area of 10.8 hectares.

In Ukraine, he has two apartments of 136 and 667 square meters and a 1,840-square-meter house in Koncha-Zaspa, a historic neighborhood in Kyiv, where the wealthiest people reside.

There in Koncha-Zaspa he also has four plots totaling 4,500 square meters.

His vehicle fleet includes as many as 13 Mercedes Benz cars, a Land Rover and a Toyota.

It is unknown whether Novinsky has any luxury jets and yachts. But he is really into Christian icons. He has over 40, from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

He has also declared various antiques like furniture, clocks and tableware.

## Oleksandr Yaroslavskiy (\$820 million)

Oleksandr Yaroslavskiy has a luxury 60-meter yacht called Kaiser, according to SuperYachtFan.

Built by a German shipyard Abeking & Rasmussen in 2011, it is worth around \$50 million.

Its interior and exterior design was created by two London-based bureaus, Donald Starkey Designs and Bannenberg & Rowell Design.

On one of its decks, Kaiser has a sunbathing pad, a large bar, and a

Jacuzzi. The yacht can accommodate up to 12 guests and 15 crew.

Yaroslavskiy's family spends their vacation sailing the yacht along Turkey's southwest coast in the Aegean Sea.

On Aug. 7, Marina, the wife of Yaroslavskiy, posted pictures on her Instagram sunbathing on the yacht's deck near Bodrum, a popular Turkish tourist destination.

The yacht was still sitting in a bay not far from the city as of Aug. 26, according to MarineTraffic.

Yaroslavskiy appears to like Bodrum and visits it often. In 2013, he was spotted there together with Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich. The two spent a vacation together on their superyachts, according to Factly news site. Abramovich was sailing his luxury yacht Eclipse.

Yaroslavskiy reportedly owns a mid-size private jet, a Bombardier Challenger 350, with the registration number M-CLAB. The 2017 model of such a plane costs \$12 million.

On Aug. 21, this plane flew from Bodrum to Kharkiv, a Ukrainian city 480 kilometers southeast of Kyiv.

Yaroslavskiy reportedly divides his time between Kharkiv and London.

## Viktor Medvedchuk (\$620 million)

Viktor Medvedchuk, a businessman and a lawmaker with close ties to Russia's ruling elite, sails a 93-meter yacht called Royal Romance with a price tag of over \$200 million, according to SuperYachtFan.

It was launched in 2015 by the Royal Dutch Shipyard Feadship. The interiors were made by the London company Seymour Diamond while the exteriors feature design by De Voogt Naval Architects. It can fit 14 guests and 22 crew.

Royal Romance has five stories. The elevator can take the guests to the deck where the 12-meter (four meters wide) swimming pool is located.

As of Aug. 26, Royal Romance is sailing in the northern Adriatic Sea near Rijeka, a port city in Croatia, according to Marine Traffic. This yacht is not available for charter.

Medvedchuk also owns another yacht by Italian manufacturer Azimut. According to his e-declaration, he bought this one in 2011.

Medvedchuk's car fleet includes nine Mercedes Benz, three BMWs, two Toyotas, two Range Rovers, a Bentley, a Lexus and a Renault.

He flies a Dassault Falcon 900EX, a French-built jet with the registration number P4-GEM, according to SuperYachtFan. Today, such a plane goes for \$8 million.

According to his e-declaration, the oligarch has three houses in Kyiv, with dimensions of 2,113, 1,773 and 311 square meters.

His wife Okdana Marchenko has a 371-meter house on the Black Sea coast in Yalta, Crimea, a peninsula Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

Decorated with white marble with gilding, Marchenko's house resembles a palace crowning her 5,620-square-meter plot of land. 🇺🇦



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# Ukrainian athletes struggle with low wages, decrepit training facilities

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doesn't have a 400-meter standard track and the surface is not even.

Coach Serhiy Basenko, 38, who trained two Ukrainian Olympic runners, says that Rusanivets Stadium has another downside. As it is open to the public, soccer players often practice at the same time as runners there, creating a potential for them to trip on the ball and get career-ending injuries. The athletes also need to watch out for children who often run around, he said.

Aside from poor training equipment, the country lacks modern technology to analyze athletes' performance, Basenko said.

"Sport isn't just about moving the body anymore, but it's also about harnessing the power of technology to come up with a strategy for success," he said.

Athletes need a team of specialists,

including sports medicine doctors, coaches and massage therapists to guide them to success, according to Basenko.

Unfortunately, this is out of reach for most athletes in Ukraine because of the high cost of such care. It's also hard to find professionals to work with, he said.

Regular track coaches like Basenko bear the burden of making sure that the athletes are recovering well, but coaches rarely have a medical background.

If Ukraine was able to create better training establishments and make sure that athletes are taken care of by highly-skilled specialists, "it would dramatically change the results," he said.

The success of athletes on the track depends of their training, according to Basenko.

"It's like planting a tree, it takes time for a tree to grow and it needs to be taken care of until it stands tall



Volodymyr Petrov

Ukrainian athlete Viktoriya Tkachuk uses a resistance band to stretch her leg at Pioneer Stadium in Kyiv on Aug. 20.

on its own."

Ukraine ends up wasting a lot of talents that still haven't bloomed, he said.

### Unfair game

It's difficult for Ukrainian athletes to outperform competitors from countries like the U.S. or Germany, where professionals get access to better pay and better equipment.

It's unlikely a coincidence that the top three economies of the world — the U.S., China and Japan — also won

the most medals at the Olympics, respectively.

Richer nations tend to win more medals at the Olympics. Top athletes are not produced overnight and a country needs significant economic resources to invest in long-term training and infrastructure.

Chukanov said that sports are severely underfunded in Ukraine, despite the country's relative success in Tokyo.

"But there is a way out of this," he told the Kyiv Post.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said he would develop sports infrastructure "that other teams will envy" during a meeting with Tokyo Olympic medalists and their coaches held on Aug. 17.

Zelensky said he envisioned Ukraine hosting the Olympics one day, but making such a dream come true would cost the country billions of dollars.

In the meantime, Tkachuk still needs to drive at least an hour to pursue her dream of a gold medal.

## NATO & Ukraine: The Way Forward



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Chief editor of the Kyiv Post



**Vineta Kleine**  
director of the NATO Information and Documentation Center in Ukraine



**Glen Grant**  
expert on Ukrainian defense reforms



**Kurt Volker**  
former US ambassador to NATO and former US special representative to Ukraine



**Mariana Bezuhla**  
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# Ukraine's spacecraft designer Pivdenne goes back into orbit

By Daryna Antoniuk  
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**DNIPRO** — Time took a toll on Ukraine's state-owned spacecraft design bureau Pivdenne.

Compared to high-tech offices of U.S. space firms like Virgin Galactic or SpaceX, Pivdenne's premises look like a relic, with its dusty floor, old wooden tables and barbed wire fence.

The design bureau located in Dnipro, a city of about one million people 480 kilometers southeast of Kyiv, comprises several khrushchyovka-style five-story buildings surrounding a central office next to a full-size model of an R-12 ballistic missile, which caused the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

This plus the full-size model of a Soviet R-36 ballistic missile installed in the facility's backyard, are the only signs of the bureau's glorious past.

Once the cradle of USSR's most advanced space technology, the agency slowly declined over the decades, mired in corruption and political intrigues.

The future of the enterprise is uncertain, but the agency can use its past to survive. Known globally as one of the USSR's best spacecraft designers, this legacy can help Pivdenne secure contracts with foreign businesses and the state.

## Global interest

The enterprise's rocket production cycle — from design and manufacturing to maintenance and utilization — dates back to the Space Race between the U.S. and the USSR at the end of the 20th century.

Space rockets like Zenit, Dnipro, Cyclone and Kosmos, designed by Pivdenne and manufactured by a giant spaceship factory Pivdenmash in Dnipro, are well-known globally: They went to space nearly 500



A guide demonstrates a model of Ukraine-made Cyclone-4 rocket exhibited at the National Aerospace Educational Center of Youth in Dnipro on Aug. 17, 2021.

times in the last 60 years.

Pivdenne is an old-school space giant, producing \$38 million worth of products and paying \$11 million in taxes with a net profit of only \$408 last year. Nearly 90% of its production goes abroad — Ukraine doesn't produce launch vehicles and satellites for itself.

Globally, the U.S. and Europe — the main markets for Pivdenne — start to hire local contractors for space projects, rather than outsource the work overseas. To stay productive and profitable, Pivdenne has to offer foreign clients cheap and high-quality products or make rockets and satellites for Ukraine.

In the next five years, Ukraine wants to launch seven satellites,

build its own spaceport and a carrier vehicle. Pivdenne will compete for these projects with Ukraine's private space businesses — young, ambitious and backed by investors.

And the state-owned behemoth isn't afraid of the competition.

"Globally, we compete with big international companies like Boeing, so it is not serious to be bothered by private Ukrainian firms," said Maxim Degtyarev, the chief designer at Pivdenne.

The Ukrainian government has made the first step to get its once legendary space industry back into orbit. In December, Pivdenne will launch the satellite Sich 2-30 into space. But it may not be enough to save the agency, which relies heavily on projects abroad.

The bureau designed the first stage for NASA's rocket Antares that lifts payloads to the International Space Station (ISS). Since 2013, Antares has flown 14 successful missions to the ISS.

Another big contract is the production of engines for the European Space Agency's rocket Vega, which has made 19 launches since 2012.

"These are very important projects that bring money and allow Pivdenne to work on international markets," Degtyarev said.

Pivdenne signed long-term contracts with Vega and Antares and continued working with them even during the COVID-19 quarantine of 2020. Pivdenne receives money for the maintenance of rockets during every launch.

Space industry experts told the Kyiv Post that contracts with Antares and Vega help the enterprise to stay afloat and pay salaries at a time when smaller projects are suspended.

"But these contracts are not perpetual," said Volodymyr Usov, the former head of Ukraine's State Space Agency in an interview with

the Kyiv Post in July.

Starting in 2024, Vega, for example, won't use Ukrainian engines — it plans to replace them with the engines produced by the members of the European Space Agency, according to one of the Kyiv Post's sources.

## Local projects

Although Pivdenne can design modern rockets and Pivdenmash can produce them, Ukraine can't order such a sophisticated space tech yet, because it lacks funds and a Ukrainian spaceport to launch them.

Having its own spaceport would be economically beneficial for Ukraine, according to Volodymyr Taftay, chief of the State Space Agency of Ukraine. But Ukraine's space enterprises cannot build the spaceport until the government approves a space program to attract funds thanks to state orders.

Pivdenne is now busy with another state project — the launch of the satellite Sich 2-30 that will go to space with SpaceX's rocket Falcon 9.

According to Degtyarev, the satellite is now ready, having passed the last stages of testing. Ukraine will send it to the U.S. at the beginning of November.

The launch of Sich 2-30 is a big milestone for Pivdenne and Ukraine. In the last 10 years, the country didn't have its own satellite and spent thousands of dollars buying data from the EU, China or the U.S.

Nonetheless, Sich 2-30 is not perfect. Designed in 2015, it is too heavy and outdated, experts said. Compared to light modern satellites, Sich 2-30 weighs over 170 kilograms and takes low-resolution pictures that can hardly be used in military intelligence, experts said.

According to Degtyarev, Sich 2-30 is an "overview" satellite.

"Ukraine will have satellites that will produce more detailed images.

But to launch them, we need to know where to look," Degtyarev said.

## Space business

Relying on international markets became problematic during the pandemic when space stopped being a budget priority worldwide, which led to foreign countries suspending their contracts with Pivdenne.

As a result, the enterprise reduced its working week to three days, fired hundreds of employees and cut its output by \$37 million compared to the previous year.

According to its financial results, Pivdenne's net profit is negligible — only \$795 in 2019 and \$408 in 2020.

However, the enterprise boasts of paying millions of taxes to the state coffers — in 2018 it received \$1.6 million from the state, but paid over \$20 million in taxes; in 2019 Pivdenne received \$8.4 million and paid back \$15 million.

The average salary at Pivdenne grew from \$348 in 2016 to \$544 in 2020, although former employees told the Kyiv Post that during the quarantine, the salary dropped to \$298 and was paid with delays.

Without sufficient financial backing from the state, Pivdenne had to take loans to pay salaries, employees said. The bureau struggles to find work for thousands of employees and cannot attract money from investors to finance its needs.

Despite the lack of money, Pivdenne's overall performance is great, according to Degtyarev. "The world is moving forward and we are responding to new trends," he said.

Pivdenne has small contracts to produce missiles for the country's defense industry, but the only way for the bureau to develop is to receive more money in the framework of a state space program.

Back in 2018 when Ukraine still had a space program, Pivdenne produced \$98 million worth of space-tech compared to \$38 million today.

The space program also promises to turn the state-owned enterprise into a joint-stock company, allowing it to attract money from investors.

This transformation can prove difficult for Pivdenne, traditionally governed in a secretive, Soviet-like style. Working with investors may require a transparency that could be challenging for the bureau to implement.

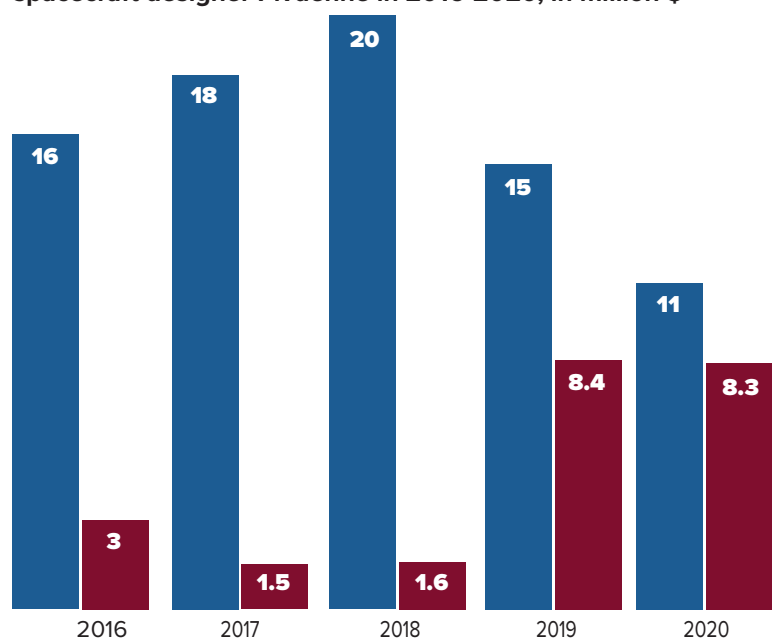
Executives at Pivdenne are reluctant to talk about upcoming changes.

"We do not comment on that. If everything works well, then with any form of management we will have a good result," said Degtyarev.

Degtyarev agrees that the Ukrainian space industry is going through turbulent times, but he believes that it has a great future ahead.

"As naive as it may sound: the only natural way for humanity to develop as a civilization is to explore space," Degtyarev said. "We have great potential. The most important thing is not to lose it at difficult times." ❁

Amount of money paid to and received from state budget by spacecraft designer Pivdenne in 2016-2020, in million \$



Source: Pivdenne state design office.

From 2016 to 2020 Ukraine's spacecraft designer Pivdenne paid \$81 million in taxes, but received only \$22 million from the country's budget. Owned by the state, Pivdenne cannot control its own assets or attract investment; it is also burdened by outdated infrastructure and a bloated workforce



# Ukrainian-born America's tallest man dies at 38

By Dylan Carter  
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Igor Vovkovinskiy, who was once America's tallest man measuring a record 7-foot-8 tall, has died of heart disease at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, United States.

According to a post on Facebook from his mother, Vovkovinskiy died surrounded by his family on Aug 20, 2021.

Originally born in the town of Bar in central Ukraine's Vinnytsia Oblast, he moved to the United States at the age of 7 for medical treatment. According to doctors, Vovkovinskiy's extraordinary growth was a result of pituitary gigantism, which occurs when a tumor pressing against the pituitary gland forces the continual release of human growth hormones.

His condition was extremely rare. Only around 200 cases of pituitary gigantism have been reported globally. According to a documentary filmed for Australian TV show "60 Minutes," by age 6, Vovkovinskiy measured a staggering 6 feet tall.

## America's tallest man

Vovkovinskiy first came to fame when he appeared in the crowd at a 2009 rally organized by then-U.S. President Barack Obama. Sporting a shirt with the message "World's biggest Obama supporter," Vovkovinskiy was easily spotted by the former resident, who was photographed shaking his hand.

From then on, Vovkovinskiy's height continued to draw international attention. The Ukrainian giant featured in TV commercials, films, and late-night talk shows across the world.

Appearing on the American "Dr. Oz" show in New York in 2010, he was officially declared America's tallest man, narrowly beating the previous record holder by one-third of an inch.

Despite the media attention surrounding Vovkovinskiy's height, the Ukrainian-born Vovkovinskiy once stated that he was proud to hold the title of world's tallest man, but would rather not hold it.

Understandably, towering above his peers, there were many drawbacks to his height. "Looking at the world from my height, it's a different experience every day," he told Australian journalists, "I always have to be thinking about: am I endangering my life? Nothing is built for my size, so everything is a challenge."

In 2012, following a plea posted to social media to raise \$16,000 needed to pay for the construction of specially made orthopedic shoes to fit his size 26 10E feet, sneaker company Reebok stepped in to provide him with the shoes for free.

## Daily struggles

Vovkovinskiy's abnormal height also caused him serious medical conditions. His near constant growth placed a tremendous strain on his

internal organs and bones. In a 2016 interview, he told a local journalist that he was in almost constant debilitating pain.

As Vovkovinskiy's illness progressed, the pain became increasingly debilitating and forced him into an extended period of hospitalization. Despite his troubling health, the intricacies of living in a world too small for him, and his inability to simply blend in with the crowd, Vovkovinskiy remained cautiously philosophical about his life.

"The pain I have is pretty much 24 hours a day. Sometimes it's so bad I can't do anything useful. I try to think about something else. Read a book. Skype with my friends from Ukraine," Vovkovinskiy told Rochester Magazine.

"So, I think that even the simple things in life, people should be more grateful. Especially, you live in America. Really count your blessings. Really appreciate all of the little things you have."

Vovkovinskiy traveled across the world, visiting Ukraine frequently and even appearing on stage during Ukraine's 2013 Eurovision Song Contest entry in Malmö, Sweden, carrying singer Zlata Ognevich onto the stage dressed in an eccentric costume.

Unfortunately, leading up to his death, Vovkovinskiy struggled more and more with his pain, unable to take part in the activities he once did.

"The last five years were very hard for Igor. He was living in the past because all the good memories he had were when he was still able to walk and travel," his mother Svetlana told the Kyiv Post. "In earlier years, we would travel to Ukraine every other year in summers, visiting our family and friends. He traveled here in the US. But pain killed his spirit."

The Ukrainian-born giant spent much of his life being monitored at the Mayo Clinic, with Vovkovinskiy finding employment in an administrative position with the hospital, and his mother working as an intensive care nurse.

Vovkovinskiy's greatest inspiration in life was his mother Svetlana. Having separated from Igor's father for nearly 30 years, Svetlana raised Igor by herself, helping to provide for Igor however she could.

Svetlana never intended for her and her son to remain in the U.S., believing instead that after treatment for Igor's pituitary tumour, they would be able to return to Ukraine. Unfortunately, American surgeons were only able to partially remove the growth.

Instead, remaining in the country due to Igor's health, Svetlana established a new life for their family, even custom-building their Rochester home to accommodate her almost 8-foot tall son. Igor was able to enjoy many of the pleasures of American life, driving his own car, fishing at lakes, traveling



U.S. President Barack Obama shakes hands with 7-foot, 8-inch (2.3-meter) supporter Igor Vovkovinskiy, 27, of Rochester, Minnesota, after speaking about healthcare reform during a rally at the Target Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Sept. 12, 2009.

across the country, and meeting new people.

In a 2013 interview, Igor said of his mother: "The person with the biggest influence on me is definitely my mom. Along the road, she's been my inspiration to do well in college, and to try new and exciting things in life."

## Ukrainian patriot

Despite living halfway across the world, Vovkovinskiy never lost his touch with his Ukrainian roots, keeping in regular contact with friends and family in Ukraine.

"I love Ukraine, however it is," Vovkovinskiy once wrote on Facebook. "Your motherland is your

motherland, you can't change that. I wish that more Ukrainians felt that way."

Igor's mother noted that he cared deeply about Russia's war in Ukraine, and went out of his way to help his country whenever he could. The Ukrainian national raised money for Ukrainian combat veterans and donated equipment to military personnel.

"He was a happy child growing up, and memories of childhood kept his spirit up. That is why the invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine shocked all of us and our mission was to help the Ukrainian volunteer army," Svetlana wrote. "He listened to the news all day, and was very

passionate about politics, corruption, greed, and unfairness."

"We were lucky and found a group of the most honest patriots and worked with them to help on the front. He found on Facebook a list of items that soldiers needed and would order binoculars and headlights online that I sent," Igor's mother recalled.

Vovkovinskiy's funeral is to take place on Aug. 28, 2021, at the Ranfranz & Vine Funeral Home in Rochester. In memory of his death, a fundraiser has been launched to raise money for his favourite cause: helping Ukrainian volunteer organizations and raising money for those wounded in the war. ☹️

## 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.



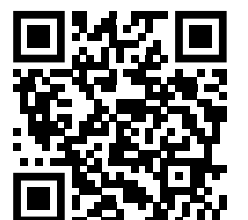
1. Streisand effect: Zelensky's lawmaker allegedly injures 6 in car crash, tries to cover it up by paying off media
2. Zelensky arrives to Washington to meet Blinken, Granholm, Biden
3. Zelensky meets top US officials, signs memorandums on energy, defense
4. Ukrainian-born America's tallest man dies at age 38
5. Pivotal Trip: Zelensky faces uphill battle to strengthen ties with US
6. Biden postpones Zelensky's Washington visit to Sept. 1
7. German executives, Swiss train manufacturer to help modernize Ukrzaliznytsia
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# How dozens of Ukrainians were left stranded in Afghanistan

By Kvitka Perehinets,  
Anastasiia Lapatina

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On Aug. 31, the United States' 20-year war in Afghanistan came to a chaotic end, with the complete collapse of the Afghan government.

As the last American soldier boarded his flight home, hundreds of thousands of people, including several dozen Ukrainian citizens and their family members, at least 200 people altogether, were left behind in a country now run by the Taliban — a radical Islamist movement that seized control of the country on Aug. 15.

The Ukrainian government has repeatedly promised to evacuate everyone who needs it. Over the past three weeks, six Ukrainian flights rescued 650 people from Afghanistan.

And yet, hundreds of Ukrainians and their loved ones remain stranded in Kabul. Many say they've been ignored by Ukrainian embassies and weren't notified about evacuation flights until it was too late to catch them.

Many of these people fear for their lives as the Taliban imposes its fundamentalist rule and hunts down any foreigners suspected of working against it.

The Kyiv Post spoke to a Ukrainian family currently stranded in Kabul about their desperate attempts to come home, and what the Taliban's rule means for those who can't escape.

## Forgotten in Kabul

"Dad, am I going to be slaughtered as well?" said a 10-year-old boy to his father Atif Raziki, 33, a Ukrainian citizen of Afghan descent, who has been desperately trying to evacuate him and his family from Afghanistan to Ukraine.

Raziki's son, along with his brother and sister, saw a video of a Taliban fighter stabbing a boy in front of his mother in one of the Afghan cities. Scared for their lives, Raziki's children have bombarded him with questions ever since.

Raziki joined his wife and kids in Afghanistan on Aug. 23, when he arrived from Ukraine to help them



People at the Kabul airport in Afghanistan board a French military transport aircraft, which will evacuate them to France, on Aug. 26, 2021. Despite Ukraine's relatively successful evacuation efforts, at least 200 people -- Ukrainian citizens and their family members -- remain stuck in Kabul.

evacuate. While Raziki spends long periods of time working in Odesa, his family lives in Khost, a city some 230 kilometers to the south of Kabul.

Before leaving Ukraine, Raziki reached out to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and added his family to the list of evacuees. After arriving in Afghanistan, he called the Embassy of Ukraine in Tajikistan, which manages evacuations, three times. First, Raziki confirmed that his family was on the list, and was told to wait for the embassy to contact him.

"Then people started leaving. I'd see vans just coming to pick people up and take them to the airport. And yet, no one is contacting me," Raziki told the Kyiv Post.

A staff member at the embassy, "someone named Viktor," told Raziki to stop calling him.

The only staff member named Viktor, according to the embassy's website, is Viktor Semenov, who is the counselor to Ambassador Vasyl M. Servatiuk.

When reached for comment, Semenov told the Kyiv Post to con-

tact the Foreign Ministry. When asked why, Semenov didn't respond. According to the ministry, the embassy in Tajikistan is one of the key institutions responsible for evacuating Ukrainian citizens.

"Five days have gone by, everyone left, no one contacted us, and then I learned that the last Ukrainian plane has left," Raziki said.

The last three Ukrainian planes landed in Kyiv on Aug. 28, bringing about 360 people to safety, including at least 80 Ukrainians.

Raziki's family was left to wait.

## 'They don't know humanity'

On Aug. 16, the day after the Taliban seized control of the country, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba wrote that "Kabul airport right now is a place where it's better not to be."

Raziki and his family didn't have the luxury to stay away from the airport. For seven days, they camped out there, from dawn to at least midnight, in the hopes of getting a call from the embassy and being able to swiftly get on a plane.

Under the scorching Afghan sun, Raziki's family stood in huge, chaotic lines for hours, along with thousands of others trying to escape.

"I was beaten up (by the Taliban) every time I went to the airport," Raziki told the Kyiv Post. "I was hit with sticks, batons, and hoses... Thank god this happened only to me, and not to my children. I was protecting them as best as I could."

"They're terrifying people. They don't know humanity. All they know is how to shoot, and they attack and shoot anyone they want."

Raziki also said that Taliban fighters have been knocking on doors, searching for people who have worked for the government, as well as foreigners, which puts his family at an even greater risk.

Local authorities in Khost announced that from now on, girls

can only attend school until grade six. "This was a big hit for me," Raziki said. "They threaten my daughter's future."

He also said it is clear that the Taliban already began instilling their old customs — music is already being prohibited, and men are instructed to grow beards.

## Ukraine's evacuation efforts

Since the crisis in Afghanistan began, Ukraine evacuated over 650 people, including international journalists.

On Aug. 27, Ukrainian troops successfully conducted an evacuation operation rescuing 19 Canada-bound Afghan military translators and their families just hours after an Islamic State suicide bombing took 170 lives at the capital's airport.

The evacuees were in grave danger due to their previous work with the Canadian military, making them a likely target for the Taliban.

Neither the Canadians nor the Americans were able to help — a total of three rescue missions failed before the Ukrainian special forces set off for Kabul on foot to escort two minibuses full of hopeful evacuees onto the airfield.

"We asked the Americans, the Canadians, the Qataris, everybody, and no solution. They were scared to come out," said Jawed Haqmal who had worked with the Canadian special forces in Afghanistan. "The Ukrainian soldiers were angels for us. They did an exceptional job. They have big hearts."

During a working visit to the U.S., Kuleba told journalists that the changing status of Ukrainians wanting to leave Afghanistan over the past few weeks has made it difficult to coordinate evacuation efforts.

"For example, two weeks ago, some people didn't come forward, but then did so later. Others filed a request right away but then left on a different plane because an opportunity to do so came up. So, the num-

ber (of requests) fluctuates, but no one will be left behind," Kuleba said.

Yet stories of those like the Raziki family point out that the blame is not so much on the changing minds of those still in Afghanistan but on the bureaucratic tangle people need to navigate to escape the war.

And Raziki is not alone. Kyiv oblast native Mohammad Fareed contacted independent Ukrainian publication Zaborona with a plea for help to rescue his wife, three-year-old son and five-month-old daughter.

Fareed is in Ukraine, while the three of them have been queuing up by Kabul airport gates and trying to leave Afghanistan for several days to no avail.

Safi Zamar from the southern Ukrainian city Odesa is another one of those who happened to be in the wrong place, at the wrong time. He came to Afghanistan at the beginning of August to visit his family, only to find himself unable to leave. After spending the night waiting for a promised evacuation flight on Aug. 25, Zamar and many others were told to leave as rumors of an explosion began to surface. Those that stayed behind managed to board a flight just hours before the deadly suicide bombing.

Zamar tried to get a Ukrainian visa for his Afghan wife but ended up paying \$1,050 for a rejection, with no refund.

Many Ukrainians remaining in Afghanistan have similar stories: "They couldn't escape earlier with their families because the Ukrainian embassies in Dushanbe and Islamabad were rejecting their visas," Zaborona wrote.

Ukrainian citizen Saidzai, who asked Zaborona not to publish his last name because he fears for the safety of his family, has a similar story. He arrived in Afghanistan from Odesa at the beginning of August. He told Zaborona that war is typical for Afghanistan but no one expected the situation to escalate so quickly. Rockets exploded around his house, leaving a wasteland of destroyed cars. A shooting that broke out near an airport prompted him to come back home. Out of a large family of 20, Saidzai hopes to at least be able to evacuate his wife and six children.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Oleh Nikolenko told the Kyiv Post that Ukraine will continue evacuating its citizens after Aug. 31.

"The evacuation routes of our citizens can be altered, depending on the development of the situation at Kabul airport," Nikolenko said. As the US withdrew all its soldiers, the airport is now controlled by the Taliban.

"We work 24/7 and will not leave anyone behind," Nikolenko said.

In the meantime, the stranded citizens can only hope that the government will fulfill its promise.

"I am scared I will just be stuck here, and won't be able to get out. I hope Ukraine will help us soon," Raziki said.

"They have to take care of us." ❦

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# After 18 months, prosecutor general is a no-show in fighting corruption

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mitting high treason by transferring a natural gas field off the Crimean coast from a Ukrainian firm to a Russian company.

It remains to be seen whether the charges will result in a court verdict or eventually collapse, like most high-profile cases in Ukraine. Lawyer Vitaly Tytych argues that the legal basis for the charges is flimsy and Medvedchuk could have been charged for something much more substantial.

Venediktova argued on TV channel Ukraina in May that “the lawfulness of the charges has been confirmed by a court.”

She also denied any political motives for the Medvedchuk case, although his Kremlin ties make him a popular target in Ukraine. In February, Zelensky imposed sanctions on Medvedchuk and Kozak and shut down Kozak’s three television channels.

### EuroMaidan cases

The investigation of crimes committed during the 2014 EuroMaidan Revolution that ousted ex-President Viktor Yanukovich have shown limited progress under Venediktova.

In April, parliament passed a law to make it easier to try EuroMaidan cases in absentia.

However, Ukraine’s treatment of people charged in absentia violates international standards. Tytych and Sergii Gorbatuk, the former chief investigator for EuroMaidan cases, believe that the new law does not resolve this problem and future verdicts may still be canceled by the European Court of Human Rights.

Another obstacle is that the bill targets people who fled to Russia and Russian-occupied territories, which makes it difficult to try fugitives who fled to other countries, Gorbatuk said. “Formally they

Volodymyr Petrov



A protester holds a spoof on the painting “Lady with an Ermine” by Leonardo da Vinci featuring President Volodymyr Zelensky and Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova at a rally against her in downtown Kyiv on June 10, 2020. Venediktova is seen as a staunch loyalist of the president.

unblocked (in absentia trials) but in fact they made the situation worse,” he added.

Venediktova defended the bill in an op-ed for the Kyiv Post in May, saying that it is a revolutionary step that it “will help to move these cases out of a deadlock.”

“This year could be a year of breakthrough in Maidan cases, because indeed many of these cases may finally receive sentences, and in some pre-trial investigations indictments may be sent to court and their trial may begin,” she said.

### Prosecution reform

The reform of the Prosecutor General’s Office under Venediktova has also faced criticism.

Under her predecessor Riaboshapka, 55.5% of prosecutors were fired from the office’s central branch to remove tainted and

unprofessional employees. Under Venediktova, the percentage of those fired decreased substantially, which her critics see as an effort to save corrupt cadres from dismissal. Eventually, 26% were fired from regional prosecutor’s offices, and 23% were dismissed from local and military prosecutor’s offices.

Courts are also reinstating fired prosecutors en masse. But this is partly the fault of Riaboshapka’s flawed vetting procedure: procedural violations, non-transparency, the elimination of vetting materials and the office’s failure to state motives for dismissal.

About 2,044 prosecutors have filed lawsuits to be reinstated. First-instance courts have upheld 676 lawsuits filed by fired prosecutors and rejected 334 lawsuits.

At least 170 prosecutors have won appeals to be reinstated at

the Prosecutor General’s Office, and seven prosecutors have obtained final rulings in their favor by the Supreme Court.

### Investors’ rights

Venediktova is praised for some actions. In January, the American Chamber of Commerce in Ukraine applauded her creation of the Office for the Protection of Investor’s Rights within the Prosecutor General’s Office.

“We value the establishment of the Office for the Protection of Investor’s Rights, headed by Oleksiy Boniuk, with strong professionals within its ranks, including Iryna Didenko, acting head of the Investment Protection Division,” the chamber said.

“We appreciate the ongoing dialogue, strong cooperation, and high professionalism established by Mr. Boniuk with the business com-

munity, and the leadership demonstrated by Iryna Venediktova, Prosecutor General, in support of protecting investor rights. As of today, fair justice and the safeguarding of investor rights have been established in four matters and progress has been made with, we hope near-term results, for a number of other cases under way.”

Nonetheless, investors, business associations and foreign embassies say that prosecutors have a long way to go in protecting investors’ rights and private property, ending harassment investigations and raider attacks.

### Zelensky’s responsibility

While Zelensky was swift to fire Riaboshapka in March 2020 after only six months on the job, he’s slow to confront Venediktova over her lack of progress, adopting a “wait and see” approach.

“If she doesn’t show results, there will be a third prosecutor general.” That was in April 2020. Later that year, in October 2020, Zelensky also said that Venediktova must show results by the end of the year.

But she’s stayed on even though top crimes go unsolved and powerful suspects escape punishment as before.

Anti-corruption activists hold Zelensky personally responsible. The President’s Office did not respond to a request for comment.

“Zelensky is helping Tatarov to escape punishment for corruption, proving that he is tolerant towards corruption,” Vitaly Shabunin, head of the Anti-Corruption Action Center’s executive board, said on Facebook on July 8. “Apart from Tatarov, Zelensky is helping other top corrupt officials through the prosecutor general in the cases of Rotterdam+, VAB Bank, the Kyiv District Administrative Court etc.”

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# US pledges military aid, calls for Ukraine to fulfill reform agenda

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office in May 2019. Zelensky's party recently registered a bill set to fire the unwanted chief.

"Needless to explain what price Ukraine will pay if Zelensky, God forbid, gives up on this publicly recorded part of the (joint) statement," wrote Vitaliy Shabunin, head of the Anti-Corruption Action Center.

"These commitments are public so that Ukrainians know exactly what Zelensky needs to do to maintain U.S. support in the war against Russia (military, financial and political support)," Shabunin wrote.

Ukraine has a long way to go if it wants to meet all the mentioned benchmarks.

Ukraine launched the judicial reform process, yet failed to reform the Security Service, while the ex-National Bank Head Yakiv Smoliy resigned in July 2020, citing "political pressure."

### California trip

After Washington, Zelensky flew to California where he's expected to meet with tech executives.

"In total, we expect around 20 agreements signed because we still have (meetings in) San Francisco and

Press Service of the President of Ukraine



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) walks with U.S. President Joe Biden after their meeting in the Oval Office at the White House on Sept. 1, 2021 in Washington, DC.

Los Angeles," said Zelensky.

According to Minister of Digital

Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov,

Ukraine wants to attract Google,

Apple and other tech giants to Ukraine.

Attracting big business and investors was one of the key themes of Zelensky's U.S. trip.

Zelensky went as far as to promise a massive transformation plan for Ukraine, consisting of over 80 projects requiring \$277 billion in investment.

The roadmap sets up "ambitious goals for human capital development, green transformation and energy security," Zelensky said.

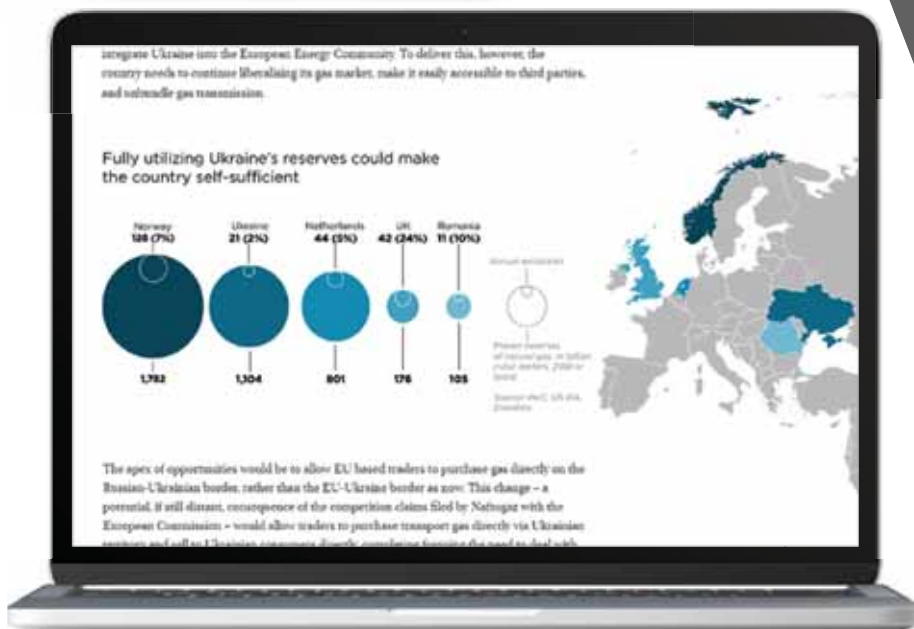
Yet, as with most agreements, memorandums and ambitious bilateral projects, no details were given, leaving the experts watching for the next round of talks.

"We have been here before with the signing of various statements, framework agreements, statements of intent, and relaunching of strategic dialogues by previous Ukrainian authorities and American administrations," Edward Chow, an international energy expert, told the Kyiv Post.

"What is needed now is to put meat on the bones of the structure and processes that were agreed. This is what the market is looking for, concrete progress in reform leading to bilateral cooperation in security and economic fields."

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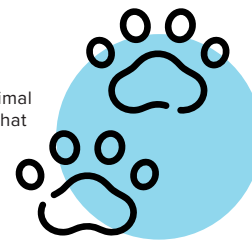
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# Lifestyle

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## Reytarska Circle is more than gastronomic space

By Daria Shulzhenko  
shulzhenko@kyivpost.com

When a remarkable example of Soviet modernist architecture, the round building on Reytarska Street, went on sale nearly two years ago, people weren't lining up to buy it.

A shabby renovation job completed in the 2000s turned the minimalist, circle-shaped building into a spa center with a meretricious interior design resembling a medieval castle.

The ugly building wasn't attractive to anyone but Swiss film director Marc Wilkins.

"It was very difficult to see its potential," Wilkins told the Kyiv Post. "But as a filmmaker, it's my job to imagine something."

Wilkins rushed to find business partners and bought the building in 2020. His group was the only bidder at the auction.

"I imagined pretty much what it is now, the incredible place on Reytarska Street where different businesses circle around gastronomy and new generations come together," Wilkins says.

His dazzling idea soon became reality. In late August, Reytarska got its new resident — Reytarska Circle, the new "gastro-community space" that has been the talk of the town ever since opening.

The place houses six food spots, serving Japanese cuisine, pizza, desserts and wine — all set around the black olive tree that grows in the center of the circle building.

"The idea behind is that we gather around the tree, make plans together and build community," Wilkins says.

### Crazy filmmaker's dream

The filmmaker has been known as one of Reytarska Street's biggest fans ever since he moved to Kyiv and bought an apartment there in 2017.

He says his passion for the area started after Kosatka bar opened on Velyka Zhytomyrska Street, just two blocks away from Reytarska.

"There was suddenly a spot where a new creative generation of the city or even of the nation was meeting," Wilkins says.

Then another hip joint, Zigzag cafe, appeared on Reytarska Street, eventually becoming the get-together venue for Kyiv's creative community.

"There was a style of a restau-



Swiss filmmaker Marc Wilkins poses for a photograph as he stands inside the recently-opened Reytarska Circle in Kyiv on Aug. 31, 2021. Reytarska Circle is a "gastro-community space" that houses six food spots set around the black olive tree that grows in the center of the renovated Soviet modernist building. Wilkins is one of the project's co-founders.

rant and the style of looks which was fresh," Wilkins says. "It was much more avant-garde than the avant-garde in New York City."

He soon decided to open a hotel in Kyiv that would differ from chain hotels and represent the vibrancy of this new creative cluster.

"I was just a crazy filmmaker, dreamer, in love with Reytarska and Ukraine," Wilkins says.

He was eyeing another Soviet modernist structure, a former clinic, on Reytarska, which seemed perfect for the project. Before Wilkins collected the budget to buy and renovate it, the building was sold. He shelved the idea.

He decided to buy another property on Reytarska, which was soon developed into The Naked Room gallery.

A year later, he discovered that another building was going on sale next to the clinic he wanted to buy. This circular building used to house

a physical therapy unit.

He found partners, local entrepreneurs — some were already on board for the hotel project — and introduced them to his vision of the circle. They bought the building in early 2020 and the exciting journey of renovating it began.

### Back to roots

Renovation of Soviet Modernist buildings in Ukraine is rarely successful. To overcome this challenge, Wilkins needed a great team, a visionary idea and a genuine love for Kyiv.

He managed to see the potential in the 1985 modernist building in spite of its crude renovation.

One year after the building was privatized in 2007, it became the tawdry Sabina spa center. In an earlier interview with the Kyiv Post, Volodymyr Shevchenko, the building's original architect, called it "a stump with mushrooms sticking out."

As an active participant of the movement for the preservation of architectural heritage in Kyiv, Wilkins wanted the building to look as close to its original design as possible. He cooperated with Shevchenko to bring the idea to life and tapped renowned Kyiv architect Emil Dervish.

Although they couldn't save the original facade of the building, since it was destroyed by the previous renovation, Dervish says, the team managed to make it blend better with the clinic and surrounding area.

Architects removed the "Medieval"

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# Hip new place opens on that very hip street

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turrets and turned the white fairytale castle with several small windows into a modern minimalist building. It now has dark-grey walls framed with clinker bricks that match the surrounding buildings and enlarged windows that allow more natural light.

Most of the changes, however, took place inside. The spa center's interior layout made it impossible to see the round shape of the building from the inside. Dervish aimed at changing that. The team created an atrium on the ground floor, removed the inside walls from the first floor and set up a summer terrace on the building's rooftop.

But what makes its interior design truly special is "Shady Lady," or Bucida buceras,— a big black olive tree that grows from the ground floor in the middle of the building and is surrounded by a black metal staircase.

Wilkins says that the tree was the most expensive part of the design — its purchase and transfer from The Netherlands by truck cost around 12,000 euros. But the team believes it was well worth it.

"It's the heart and the philosophy of this place," Wilkins says.

The team often consulted with Shevchenko. Wilkins says that the architect commented on some engineering issues but didn't give "creative feedback." The team hopes he liked the renovation. The Kyiv Post reached out to Shevchenko for a comment but hasn't got a response yet.

## Must-try

Reytarska Circle has already become a popular spot in Kyiv, having attracted hundreds of people to the opening. Its restaurants are another draw.

Wilkins says they had nearly 30 different potential businesses that could nestle the circle. He has even-



tually chosen five whose products and values fit with his vision.

Currently, there are two restaurants, a coffee shop that also sells sandwiches and snacks, a patisserie and a wine shop.

The place houses distinct venues including Japonsky Privet (Japanese Hi in English), the latest restaurant by Misha Katsurin and Dasha Katsurina, and the Kometa eatery opened by the founders of Zigzag café. Kometa and Japonsky Privet were among the biggest restaurant openings this summer. Both are located on the Reytarska Circle's first floor.

Japonsky Privet sells the best of Japanese cuisine including the katsu sando sandwiches with beef, chicken or eggs for Hr 130–240 (\$4–9), various miso soups and tuna sashimi. It also offers various sushi for Hr 90–650 (\$3–24). Some are prepared with a funky twist: Philadelphia rolls are served with baked potatoes and truffle sauce, while salmon on top of the rolls is burned with a cooking torch. The price is Hr 360 (\$13).

Wilkins says it's a must-try.

Kometa is another catch opened by the founders of Zigzag. It serves

the U.S.-style pizza, a rare find in Kyiv, distinguished by the crustier dough than in the Italian tradition. Liubov Tsybulska, the restaurant's co-founder, says they have traveled to New York to study pizza-making there to bring the best of it to Ukraine. Aside from selling whole pizza, Kometa offers it by the slice for Hr 78–95 (\$2–4).

"Something that Kyiv has always lacked," Tsybulska told the Kyiv Post.

Besides pizza, Kometa also serves various types of pasta, mac and cheese with gouda and parmesan, as well as appetizers and breakfasts as "an extension of what they do in Zigzag."

The ground floor houses March & Co patisserie, Fresh Black coffee shop and Nisha Deli bistro where one can buy some fresh vegetables or bread, and Ukrainian company Roots that imports wine from the best of European family wineries. Wilkins says they soon plan to finish their rooftop terrace, which will be shared by Kometa and Japonsky Privet.

Kyiv has already been introduced to the concept of food markets before. But Reytarska Circle, though having a similar concept, is more than that, the team says.

## Building community

Throughout the years Wilkins has spent in Ukraine, he has seen how the country is easily controlled by a "small elite" because the people don't trust each other. Tsybulska says Ukrainians can unite during crisis but are often divided in peaceful times.

Wilkins wanted Reytarska Circle to show that unity and trust are possible.

"I wanted this to be a place where

very different people are working together but where you don't see them as different people but as a family," he says.

Here, businesses are not separated from each other but united by the shape of the building and common values. Wilkins says he was first worried that they wouldn't agree on things like music playing inside. He explained to the residents that they are "adding value to each other but not taking it away."

"They started to really grow together and trust each other," he says.

Although they are different businesses, Tsybulska says, they work as one team who support each other and enjoy each other's products. Wilkins says communication is the key, adding that they have regular meetings to discuss their concerns.

He hopes the unity of businesses in Reytarska Circle will become an example for Ukrainians to trust each other and help build a true community.

Reytarska Circle, Wilkins says, could be the place that bridges different people. He already noticed how residents bring new clients to each other and help people meet.

Soon after the opening, Wilkins was amazed to see a director of top investment company having a coffee meeting at Reytarska Circle, right beside designers, artists and other Kyiv creatives.

"They come here and start to connect and mingle," Wilkins says.

He hopes it's just the start of bringing together different circles in Kyiv. "So we build the community and become stronger."

Reytarska Circle. 15 Reytarska St. Mon-Sun. 10-11 p.m. ☎



A woman walks by Reytarska Circle in Kyiv on Aug. 31, 2021. The new gastronomic space is located in the renovated circular building that used to house a physical therapy hospital unit.

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