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Kyiv Post

25th year!

UKRAINE'S GLOBAL VOICE

Decade In Review

The decade started with Viktor Yanukovych and ended with Volodymyr Zelensky.

In between came revolution, war and the joy of visa-free travel to Europe.



- 1. EuroMaidan Revolution participants celebrate New Year's Eve on Dec. 31, 2013 on Independence Square.
 - 2. People wave European Union flags in Kyiv on June 10, 2017, during a concert to celebrate the start of visa-free travel to Europe.
 - 3. A Ukrainian soldier fires near Donetsk on Oct. 20, 2014.
 - 4. President Volodymyr Zelensky holds the bulava, the Ukrainian symbol of power, during his inauguration on May 20, 2019.
 - 5. Russian soldiers block the Ukrainian Navy near Simferopol in Crimea on March 5, 2014.
- (AFP, Kostyantyn Chernichkin, Mykhailo Markiv)

Today's newspaper is the final print edition for 2019. The first print edition of 2020 will be on Jan. 10. Over the holidays, follow us online at KyivPost.com.



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A veteran war photographer, killed on duty in the Donbas

By Veronika Melkozerova
melkozerova@gmail.com

Editor's Note: This story is part of a special project by the Kyiv Post, "Dying for Truth," a series of stories documenting violence against journalists in Ukraine. Since the country gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, more than 50 journalists have been killed across Ukraine – including eight since 2014. Most of the crimes have been poorly investigated, and the killers remain unpunished. The project is supported by the Justice for Journalists Foundation. Content is independent of the donor. All the stories in the series can be found at www.kyivpost.com.

It was February 2015. Russia's war against Ukraine had been raging for 10 months. Serhiy Nikolayev, the war photographer of Segodnya newspaper, was traveling in the Donbas war zone with his friend, war photographer Max Rokatansky, and some other journalists.

They were reporting on one of the deadliest periods in the war which has dragged on for nearly six years and taken more than 13,000 lives.

In the village of Pisky in Donetsk Oblast, the group led by two Right Sector volunteer battalion guides was attacked with mortars. Nikolayev and Right Sector fighter Mykola Flerko were severely wounded in the shelling.

Rokatansky managed to call for help and, less than five minutes later, an ambulance from the Hospitalier volunteer medical battalion arrived at the scene. Nikolayev was still conscious when medics started working on him. His colleagues were filming everything.

When a doctor asked him whether he had insurance, Nikolayev responded: "What freaking insurance are you talking about? I'm on vacation. My first time in the Donbas, but not on the war front."

Before the war erupted in Ukraine, Nikolayev had already captured five armed conflicts on camera. He had worked in Iran, Somalia, Libya, Syria and Georgia. But it was indeed his first trip to war-torn Donbas.

Segodnya newspaper, like many other Ukrainian media, was not officially sending its reporters to the front line, as the media could not guarantee them medical insurance, Rokatansky told the Kyiv Post.

"But that was how everybody worked back then," he said. "Only



Segodnya newspaper photographer Serhiy Nikolayev photographs soldiers near the village of Pisky in Donetsk Oblast in February 2015. He was mortally wounded by shelling on Feb. 22, 2015.

the big TV channels and foreign journalists had insurance on the war front."

So like many other journalists and photographers, Nikolayev decided to take an official vacation to photograph the events unfolding in Donbas. As of 2019, the Defense Ministry of Ukraine obliges every journalist to pass a special medical training to receive accreditation for the war zone and offers medical insurance of Hr 1,000 (roughly \$40) a day.

But back in those days, a special letter from a newsroom was often all one needed. Journalists were pooling money to buy bulletproof vests and helmets to work in the war zone.

"This particular war has become very personal for us. Many of our colleagues decided to leave the newsrooms and go to war. Some of them died that year in combat," Rokatansky said. "We had a choice – to go there, armed with guns or with cameras. We chose cameras."

In the first two years, the Donbas war zone was poorly defined and was extremely dangerous.

However, that did not stop dozens of international and Ukrainian journalists from working there at their own risk. In total, five journalists have died in Donbas since 2014, the Committee to Protect Journalists



Photographer Serhiy Nikolayev took a picture of a boy he met in the Donetsk Oblast city of Pisky in February 2015. After meeting his father, Nikolayev decided to revive his project "Unchildish Childhood," dedicated to children who grow up on the frontlines of war across the world.

reported on its website.

Nikolayev was the only Ukrainian journalist among them. He died of his wounds on Feb. 28, 2015.

Not a family man

In photographs, Nikolayev captured the pain, wounds and deaths of dozens of people suffering from military conflicts around the world. During each trip, he took pictures of the children forced to live and grow up in the war zones.

In 2013, Nikolayev turned his work into a photo exhibition called "Unchildish Childhood."

"It seemed that something was pulling him to trouble spots all over the world. He wanted to be there, to capture the moments of terror during wars, to show people how awful war can be," Valentyna Nikolayeva, his mother, told the Kyiv Post.

"At one point, he noticed that children who live in war zones grow up too fast. That's how he got the idea for the exhibition."

Nikolayeva lives with her daughter, Nikolayev's younger sister Iryna

Ivlicheva. Both women described the photographer as kind and loving, but rather closed off from the family. Every time Nikolayev decided to go to work in another war zone, he kept it a secret from his relatives. His marriage fell apart. However, he was close with his daughter Valeria.

"He told me once that he was not a family man. He just could not stay at home. He always needed to be on the road, at war. He wanted to show what people have to live through there," Ivlicheva told the Kyiv Post.

Nikolayeva added that there were times she didn't know where her son was for days. But he was always calling her as soon as his plane landed in Ukraine. "I think he was trying to protect us that way," Nikolayeva said.

She didn't know that Nikolayev was attacked and beaten while taking photographs in Crimea in February-March 2014, as Russia was annexing the peninsula.

"He was always like that: blown with the wind, a kind, courageous adventurer, ready to risk everything

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2020

EDITORIALS

Ukraine's decade

The past decade was perhaps the most challenging in Ukraine's post-Soviet history.

At its very beginning, a pro-Russian president was voted in and quickly became a dictator. He dragged Ukraine further away from Europe and it took millions of people in the streets, their courage, willpower and self-sacrifice to depose the tyrant. More than 100 people were killed to reverse a mistake made peacefully at the voting booths.

Russia didn't let go and waged a war against Ukraine, taking more than 13,000 lives, injuring over 40,000 people and displacing 1.5 million. The death toll keeps rising as Russia continues its war and still holds Crimea and parts of Donbas in its iron grip – a total of 7 percent of Ukraine's territory now in the Kremlin's hands.

For most of the decade, and too much of its history, Ukraine has been defending its sovereignty from a warmongering neighbor.

At home, it has fought a never-ending war against corruption and poverty, but oligarchs and corrupt vested interests keep getting in the way of a truly democratic society, including rule of law and economic competition. It's revealing that a nation with 11,000 prosecutors, 300,000 Interior Ministry employees, 8,000 judges and 40,000 SBU agents can't hold anyone accountable for murder and serious financial crimes. The vast apparatus was put in place to protect those in power, not hold them accountable.

By the end of this turbulent decade, frustrations were so high that Ukrainians this spring voted in a showman, Volodymyr Zelensky, with no political experience to lead them to a better future. And they gave him a majority in parliament, voting simply for the Servant of the People candidate in the July elections.

Yet when we summarize this decade, we think of hope, of willpower, of self-sacrifice and of those who are changing the country. We think of the new generation that has taken power and how much better they are than their communist predecessors who not so long ago governed Ukraine.

Ukrainians stood up for their rights during the EuroMaidan Revolution. Ukrainians stood up for their country, when volunteers took up arms against Russian aggression and when ordinary people provided supplies to the army when the state couldn't. Ukrainians won't allow their country to slide back into darkness. We have seen evidence of that on multiple occasions this decade.

We enjoy freedom of speech because we fought for it on the streets and through the power of words. We enjoy freedom of expression because we were vocal about our beliefs. And we enjoy the right to vote, a practice so rare in post-Soviet countries, because we earned it.

No one is taking that from us. This decade was filled with grief, yet we learned a lot. We learned to rely on ourselves. We learned that we can overcome any obstacle.

This decade shaped the Ukrainian nation. We recognized our heroes, we emphasized our culture, we gained respect for our language.

And even after a decade as tumultuous as this one, we are confident as we look ahead. A bright future awaits us. We know because we are ready to fight for it. We also know there are many battles ahead in the quest for a just society.

Why this matters

The turn of the decade is a good time to appreciate the importance of the lessons from history.

Which is why we don't agree with the opinion we often hear from our critics: That stories looking into the misdeeds of Ukraine's former leadership are irrelevant today.

This was a popular response to our investigation of ex-President Petro Poroshenko's administration's efforts to sway public opinion – allegedly by paying media to run ads masked as news stories and attacking critics on social media via armies of loyal bloggers. (See the full story at www.kyivpost.com and its abridged version on page 5.)

The documents that the Kyiv Post found concern the administration's media activities in 2015–2016. They allege, for example, that more than \$800,000 was spent on hidden political ads on the radio during the two months before the 2015 local elections. For comparison, the campaign's budget for normal advertising on the same radio stations was almost four times smaller. And nearly all the money was allegedly paid in cash.

Another aspect of the story involves political analysts who were assigned to publish positive comments about the administration while posing as independent observers.

The only member of the former administration who commented for the story, ex-head of its information department Volodymyr Gorkovenko, vehemently denied the authenticity of the documents, which according to a Kyiv Post source were discovered in his former office.

While the story made a storm in the local press, it also drew criticism online – mostly from those supportive of Poroshenko – questioning the need to report on the activities of the administration that isn't in power anymore.

We are far from the only ones who face this criticism. We noticed that any journalistic report or investigation uncovering something done by Poroshenko or his circle is met with a whirl of: "Let him go! Focus on the new people!"

As any professional media, we strive to report fairly on every administration. Unlike some of the "independent" observers online, we don't switch allegiances depending on who's in power.

If we obtain evidence of President Volodymyr Zelensky administration's wrongdoing, we will not hesitate to investigate it and publish the findings.

The deeds of predecessors contributed to the situation we live in today – that is why we look into them. Those in power need to know that their accountability doesn't end when their term does.



NEWS ITEM:

Several thousand people protested against the anticipated opening of the farmland market in Kyiv on Dec. 17. Despite the protests being officially called by agrarian organizations and supposedly represented small farmers, the most active participants were members of the far-right paramilitary group National Militia, who attacked police officers guarding the rally.



NEWS ITEM:

Maryna Poroshenko, the wife of ex-President Petro Poroshenko, said on Dec. 16 that she would leave her position as head of the state Ukrainian Cultural Fund due to pressure from President Volodymyr Zelensky's administration. In 2017, after the fund was created, Poroshenko got the job, bypassing the official competition and without even applying to it. The fund distributes millions of dollars in state funds.



NEWS ITEM:

Lev Parnas, an associate of U.S. President Donald Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani, received \$1 million from Ukrainian oligarch Dmytro Firtash, who is fighting extradition from Austria to the U.S. on bribery charges.



NEWS ITEM:

Ex-Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin gave an interview to the right-wing One America News Network in a film seeking to find evidence for U.S. President Donald Trump's claims that his political opponent, ex-Vice President Joseph Biden and his son Hunter, conducted corrupt activities in Ukraine. In the film, Shokin said that he was poisoned, and that he "died and was resurrected twice."

See these features online at kyivpost.com

Ukraine's Friend & Foe Of The Week		VOX populi:
Friend	Foe	
 <p>Ted Cruz The United States senator from Texas, Cruz delivered a strongly-worded speech against the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and in support of Ukraine on Dec. 12 on the floor of the Senate.</p>	 <p>Vladimir Solovye" data-bbox="740 810 825 890"/> <p>One of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin's main propagandists runs a Goebbels-style show and uses Ukraine as an enemy image to distract Russians from real problems.</p> </p>	<p>Vox Populi: Ukrainians react to Trump's impeachment</p>

Feel strongly about an issue? Agree or disagree with editorial positions in this newspaper?
The Kyiv Post welcomes letters to the editors and opinion pieces, usually 800 to 1,000 words in length. Please email all correspondence to chief editor Brian Bonner, at bonner@kyivpost.com. All correspondence must include an email address and contact phone number for verification.

Poroshenko's administration allegedly paid media, bloggers

By Oleksiy Sorokin
sorokin@kyivpost.com

In Ukraine, politics has long been fractious. It's an environment where politicians seek to influence the press and political bloggers actively spar with their opponents on Facebook. In some cases, these conflicts have spilled over into harassment.

But new documents obtained by the Kyiv Post suggest that not all press or media commentary in favor of former President Petro Poroshenko was authentic.

Rather, during Poroshenko's 2014–2019 term in office, his allies allegedly paid media outlets for favorable coverage and directed smear campaigns against his critics on social networks.

All parties that could be reached denied participating in these activities. Poroshenko's spokespeople didn't reply to a request for comment.

The documents, allegedly found in the presidential administration after Poroshenko left office in May, relate to the administration's unofficial information campaigns in 2015 and 2016.

They list budgets for Ukrainian television channels, print media,



Ex-President Petro Poroshenko speaks at the European Solidarity party convention on May 31, 2019 in Kyiv. Poroshenko lost to Volodymyr Zelensky in the second round of the presidential election on April 21, 2019.

websites and radio stations, which received money to publish paid articles as news. This practice is widespread in Ukraine and known in the

local parlance as “jeansa.”

The documents also describe efforts to recruit political experts to spread opinions beneficial to

Poroshenko and his allies while posing as independent commentators.

For example, the documents indicate that more than \$1 million —

most of it in cash — were paid to seven radio stations during the 2015 local election campaign for “being featured in news segments.”

Media outlets mentioned in the budget also denied getting paid to print “jeansa.”

However, the Kyiv Post found on their websites stories that were listed in the documents as “jeansa” planned for publication.

A separate group of political consultants worked to form a network of pro-presidential bloggers meant to flatter the president and curb the negative impact of political scandals online, according to one such consultant who talked to the Kyiv Post.

Together, the documents and the former consultant's account of her work offer a rare window into one of the endemic problems of Ukrainian politics: candidates and politicians paying off media, experts and commentators for favorable coverage.

Ads masked as news

The documents allegedly belonging to Volodymyr Gorkovenko, head of the media department in Poroshenko's administration, state that Argumenty I Fakty (aif.ua), a popular Ukrainian newspaper, received \$2,100 for an article pub-

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Ukraine sues Israeli bank and Kolomoisky for \$600 million

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State-owned PrivatBank has filed a new lawsuit, this time against Israel's Discount Bank. The bank is accused of aiding the Ukrainian oligarchs Ihor Kolomoisky and Gennadiy Boholyubov in stealing at least \$600 million.

The lawsuit, announced on Dec. 19, is part of PrivatBank's drive to recover as much of the \$5.5 billion dollars in alleged fraudulent losses as it can. The losses occurred when the bank was owned by Kolomoisky and Boholyubov. In December 2016, Ukraine nationalized the nearly bankrupt financial institution.

The bank is already suing Kolomoisky and his business partners in the U.K., U.S. and Cyprus. The latest claim was filed at the Tel Aviv District Court in Israel.

PrivatBank and its lawyers in Israel declined to comment on the details of their new claim. A source close to the bank's management, who asked not to be named because of ongoing legal proceedings, said that the new case against Discount Bank may become central to their efforts to recover funds they say were stolen.

The Kyiv Post made multiple attempts to speak with Discount Bank, but a spokesperson could not be reached for comment before publication time.

Three years ago, on Dec. 19, 2016, the state nationalized PrivatBank and auditors exposed a \$5.5 billion gap in the bank's balance sheet, caused by insider lending and embezzlement, according to the Ukrainian government.

The government had to recapitalize the bank with taxpayer money to prevent bankruptcy.

Its former owners deny wrongdoing and have been trying to regain control over the bank in Ukraine.

Fraud claim in Israel

PrivatBank's new case adds to a growing roster of legal claims against former owners Kolomoisky and Boholyubov, as well as the companies, accountants, banks and lawyers who may have been involved in a decade-long, Ponzi-like scheme of insider lending.

A claim filed on Dec. 18 in the Tel Aviv District Court by Israeli lawyers retained by PrivatBank and the Ukrainian government shows that PrivatBank is aiming to recoup 2.1 billion Israeli Shekels, or \$600



A photo from May 7, 2019 shows a general view of Tel Aviv, Israel. A claim filed on Dec. 18 in the Tel Aviv District Court by Israeli lawyers retained by PrivatBank and the Ukrainian government shows that the bank is aiming to recoup 2.1 billion Israeli shekels, or \$600 million, transferred into accounts held at Tel Aviv-based Discount Bank.

million, transferred into accounts held at Discount Bank.

The accounts, held by an alleged shell company named in Israeli court documents as St. John, are said to have received \$1.2 billion in fraudulent transfers from Cyprus between 2007 and 2011.

The Tel Aviv claim further accuses the two Ukrainian oligarchs of fraud and embezzlement and also names the bank, one of Israel's largest, as a defendant in the complaint, accusing it of aiding the alleged scheme.

A few local media outlets in Israel, published in Hebrew, have begun to shed more light on details in the Israeli court documents.

The Calcalist business news website in Israel reported that the claim contained allegations of "fraud, robbery, violation of the money laundering ban and a host of other wrongdoings and offenses, which caused huge financial damage... of unprecedented sums" to PrivatBank and the Ukrainian state.

Kolomoisky and Boholyubov are Israeli residents and passport holders. Kolomoisky has a residence and office in Herzliya Pituach, an affluent beachfront neighborhood in Tel Aviv District.

The lawsuit, which Calcalist reports was filed on behalf of state-owned PrivatBank but also the Ukrainian government, demands repayment "for the damage done... by those acts of embezzlement and fraud... smuggled to Israel and deposited in a bank account managed by a shell company in Israel."

Discount Bank should have realized that huge amounts of money transferred to its branch came from "toxic funds," the lawsuit further states, local media reported.

Kolomoisky responds

In a robust but at times bizarre conversation with the Kyiv Post on the evening of Dec. 19, Kolomoisky repeated his previous denials of any wrongdoing in relation to PrivatBank and again said he was poised to take back control of the nationalized bank.

"This is complete bullshit. They're just wasting your money," Kolomoisky said of the new claim in Tel Aviv, during a profanity-filled and conspiracy-laden telephone call.

"I don't even remember this bank. Maybe I'm familiar with it, maybe I once was a client but I hadn't heard of it in, I don't know, 10 years," the oligarch said in reference to Discount Bank in Israel.

After the call, and without explanation, Kolomoisky sent the Kyiv Post a Christmas-themed pornographic video in a WhatsApp message.

Delaware case

PrivatBank also said on Dec. 19

that it has increased the amount of its claim in the U.S. Chancery Court of Delaware, but it did not provide details. The causes of action are almost identical to the Israel case.

The bank filed an extraordinary civil complaint in Delaware in May, accusing Kolomoisky, Boholyubov and their associates of moving transactions valued at \$470 billion through Cyprus over the course of a decade through loan recycling schemes and laundering. The complaint alleges that "hundreds of millions of dollars" were funneled into the United States.

The defendants used a Ponzi-like "shadow bank" unit inside of PrivatBank and their Cyprus companies to move the money out of Ukraine and park it in assets and a variety of enterprises across a dozen U.S. states, including real estate and metallurgical companies.

Their co-defendants in the U.S. include Mordechai Korf, Chaim Schochet and Uriel Tzvi Laber.

Korf owns a series of metallurgical companies in the U.S., along with Laber, who was also once a director of the Ukrnafta energy firm in Ukraine, in which Kolomoisky holds a significant stake. Schochet is allegedly Korf's brother-in-law and a major commercial real estate landlord in the state of Ohio.

Also among the defendants are 20 U.S. companies, many registered in the state of Delaware and owned by the oligarchs and their business partners. The U.S. case has reportedly triggered an FBI investigation

into Kolomoisky and his alleged accomplices.

London hearings

The PrivatBank claims are also being heard in London. Three U.K. firms that appear to be shell companies and three more firms incorporated in the British Virgin Islands were allegedly used by Kolomoisky and Boholyubov to launder \$1.82 billion from PrivatBank.

On Oct. 15, PrivatBank won an appeal in London over U.K. jurisdiction and got a green light to advance the lawsuit that alleges fraud on a massive scale carried out by its former owners. The amount of their claim has increased to \$3 billion with interest and fees.

The London High Court, which without passing judgment has already recognized that "fraud on an epic scale" took place at PrivatBank, is now set to hear the case. A trial is expected to take place in mid-2021. Kolomoisky has told the Kyiv Post he is not sure if he will attend the hearing.

Kolomoisky on offensive

While PrivatBank has gained ground in legal cases abroad, Kolomoisky has been on the offensive in Ukraine.

There are around 400 cases against PrivatBank and its nationalization active in Ukrainian courts today, according to a lawyer acting for the bank, Andriy Pozhidaev.

Among the most crucial is a dispute over the nationalization itself.



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PrivatBank shows it is serious about recovering stolen cash

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In April, the largely discredited Kyiv District Court ruled that the 2016 state takeover was illegal. PrivatBank, the Ministry of Finance, NBU, and the other five state bodies have appealed.

The first appellate hearing was scheduled for Dec. 19. It was very brief and took place behind closed doors, with media and the public barred from attendance. The court adjourned the hearing quickly and stated that one of the other hundreds of PrivatBank cases must be resolved first.

Kolomoisky told the Kyiv Post that PrivatBank was forced to postpone because he is at an advantage in the Ukrainian cases, and the state-owned bank cannot risk displeasing the International Monetary Fund and government regulators.

"If (the courts) even had the slightest chance, they would have ruled in favor of the government, PrivatBank, the national bank and so on," the billionaire told the Kyiv Post. "But they can't."

PrivatBank's lawyer had a different position, and said that proceedings are expected to be lengthy because of the sheer amount of case material.



A protester dressed as Ihor Kolomoisky in a Santa suit entertains the media outside of the Kyiv appellate court on Dec. 19, 2019, where PrivatBank was challenging a lower court ruling from April that its 2016 nationalization was not legal. The hearing was brief, took place behind closed doors, and was adjourned until Jan. 31.

This is the second postponement in recent months. The Kyiv Economic Court adjourned proceedings to hear from the Court of Appeal, which has now shifted responsibility to the Supreme Court.

On Jan. 31, the Supreme Court is scheduled to hear PrivatBank's appeal of a May district court decision in favor of Kolomoisky.

Making return illegal

PrivatBank and other state institutions claimed on Dec. 19 that overturning the nationalization would be illegal. They cite a law that states that banks taken by the state through nationalization procedures cannot be returned to their former owners. However, the legislation has loopholes that Kolomoisky has been able to exploit.

A bill to toughen the law was introduced on Dec. 11, stating that once a bank has been deemed insolvent, court challenges from former owners could not stop liquidation or nationalization. Instead, former owners may be entitled to monetary compensation for "real damages."

A senior government source, who did not want to be identified because of ongoing legal cases, told the Kyiv Post that Ukraine will not return PrivatBank. They said the government also will not pay any damages to Kolomoisky and will instead go after him for the billions he owes the state. ❖

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Exports of Ukrainian Beer Increase

The Obolon Company, one of the largest national producers of beverages, in 2019 expanded exports of Ukrainian beer to several new countries.

which makes it the largest Ukrainian exporter of this beverage.

The company takes an individual approach to each country.



This year, the company started to export its products to Brazil, Mexico, Uganda, Niger and the Comoro Islands. Moreover, several years ago, the company launched exports to Sweden, the United Arab Emirates, Peru and India.

The company's products are now available in 52 countries.

Obolon accounts for 62% of total exports of Ukrainian beer,

"Each market has different, if not unique, requirements and demands for the types of beverages, brands, the flavor profile and aroma, the type of packaging and so on," said Oleksandr Slobodyan, Obolon's president. "Entering a specific market might entail developing a completely new product that is tailored to the specific requirements of the target group as much as possible."

Obolon cooperates with many European countries, and is looking for partners in new regions.

"Our ongoing operations on the international market help us understand modern trends," said president. "The company's current top position in exports has provided it with the asset of experience, which can be used to enter new markets and introduce innovations on the domestic market. Year after year, we prove that Ukrainian products are of high quality."



And we start exporting to new countries every year. We are proud that Obolon products can be found on shop shelves practically all over the globe."

Background. Obolon is one of the largest national producers of beer, soft and low-alcoholic drinks, and mineral water. The company manufactures the following types of beverages: beer, soft drinks (such as Zhivchik and Zhivchik Smart Cola), kvass «Starokiyvsky» (a beverage made from fermented mixed cereals, such as Ancient Kyiv Kvass), and mineral water (such as Obolonska and Prozora). The company was officially launched in 1980. The State Property Fund issued privatization certificate No. 1 to the company, making it the first privatized company in Ukraine.

Drain the swamp? Rewilding in Ukraine seeks restoration

By Vincent Mundy

Despite gusting winds blowing through the brittle golden-brown reeds on this chilly late October day, there's a pungent stench of rotten eggs percolating through the air. We're standing beside a swamp, near the tiny ancient town of Tatarbunary on the northern fringe of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, some 163 kilometers southwest of Odesa.

But the distinct aroma is not unpleasant when one understands how healthy and natural it is. Lovers of natural thermal springs will concur, because bathers realize the smell is from sulphur produced from long-dead life forms, which are processed into essential nutrients and minerals during the process of decomposition.

Rather less pleasant are the thick plumes of dark grey smoke belching from the exhaust pipes of a battered old military truck and rusting Belarusian tractor perched on the edge of this degraded wetland. They've been hastily deployed in a desperate attempt to save an excavator machine from being completely swallowed by the squelching earth near an obsolete Soviet dam they are trying to demolish.

Reversing the damage

The dam being dismantled by Rewilding Ukraine is one of the last of 11 earthen dams to be removed on the Sarata and Koginik rivers. Both flow in stops and starts within the reserve on the northern fringe of Europe's biggest wetlands. The demolition work, funded by a 28,000 euro crowdfunding grant raised by Rewilding Europe in conjunction with the Dam Removal Europe initiative, will create 20 kilometers of precious wetlands — a big boost for



A rewilded area formerly blocked by a dam in Ukraine's Danube Delta region near Tatarbunary on the Kohylnyk River, located in the territory of the Danube Biosphere Reserve (DBR).

courtesy of Maksym Yakovlev/Rewilding Ukraine

local wildlife, including many species of fish, otters, amphibians and increasingly endangered migratory birds.

But, sadly, the project is far from indicative of the broader outlook for the world's rapidly disappearing wetlands.

According to Wetlands International, a nongovernmental organization dedicated to wetland preservation, some 50% of the world's wetlands have disappeared in the last century and more than 90% since the industrial revolution. But here, not far from Ukraine's Black Sea coast and Romania where 80% of the Danube Delta wetlands ecosystem is contained, a pioneering rewilding project is offering a glimmer of hope and a model for

the future, with wetlands properly valued for the many crucial benefits they provide.

Thanks to rewilding, which is essentially the restoration of degraded ecosystems, local fishermen in Tatarbunary should profit from healthier fish stocks and farmers will benefit from more pasture for grazing animals. The new habitats will create fresh opportunities for nature-based tourism too, but there's another key reason the Tatarbunary council approved the project: to stop floods that have become an annual menace in the last few decades.

Before the floods

Since the 1970s, when the dams were built as a crude alternative to footbridges to access local aquifers,

flooding has caused immense damage to local homes and businesses. Every year the local roads become impassable for days or even weeks as the floodwaters get higher and linger longer, says Maksym Yakovlev, a local ornithologist who studied biology at Odessa Mechnykov National University.

The 34-year-old, who is also a wildlife photographer, is part of a team of biologists and conservationists working for Rewilding Ukraine, a local branch of Rewilding Europe, which is overseeing the dam removal scheme now nearing completion.

Yakovlev, like several generations of his relatives, has lived in the area all his life, but is too young to remember life before the dams. But he explains how his grandparents'

memories are still vivid and how they are particularly rueful about the damage the dams caused.

"My grandparents told me how so very different it was here and how so many more fish, birds and other creatures lived here before the dams were made," he says while carefully skirting the edge of the reeking swamp where the excavator is stuck. "But the dams quickly devastated the ecosystem."

Yakovlev explains how, prior to their construction, there were no flood problems and the local rivers slowly meandered through a rich wetland ecosystem which would store, hold back and slowly release water after heavy rains. "Back then, before the dams, when the ecosystem was functioning properly, we had healthier soil and vegetation. So locals who relied on these benefits have been complaining for years," he says.

Drain the swamp?

Rapid climate change, increased urbanization and wetland conversion or degradation are major factors in the massive increases in floods and fires all over the world. But even as floods of biblical proportions sweep the globe, wetlands are still being drained and destroyed for unsustainable agricultural, residential or commercial developments.

The Wetland Extent Trends index show natural wetlands declined by 35% on average from 1970 to 2015 and, according to the summary from the Ramsar Global Wetland Outlook from 2018, "the status of global wetlands makes sobering reading; wetlands in many areas are in trouble, with serious implications for all of society. Reversing the trend of degradation and loss is critical."

The well-worn Trump mantra "Drain the Swamp" promulgates the pernicious myth that swamps are useless, disease-infested places, rather than vital transition zones.

On the contrary, swamps, bogs and marshes are all important constituents of healthy ecosystems. According to the Environmental Protection Agency in the U.S., "wetlands within and downstream of urban areas are particularly valuable, counteracting the greatly increased rate and volume of surface water runoff from pavement and buildings. The holding capacity of wetlands helps control floods and prevents water logging of crops. Preserving and restoring wetlands together with other water retention can often provide the level of flood control otherwise provided by expensive dredge operations and levees."

Wetlands are as important and as productive as rainforests and prevent floods like no artificial drainage system possibly could. They filter and purify our groundwater and supply us with most of our drinking water. They allow us to irrigate farmland and support agriculture through the maintenance of water tables and nutrient retention in floodplains. And they sequester huge amounts of carbon dioxide,

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Wetlands need to be integrated, even in urban areas, for survival

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too. So why isn't more being done to save them?

Soviet catastrophe

Thankfully non-governmental organizations such as Rewilding Europe are taking the issue of wetland conservation and restoration very seriously. The Dutch lottery-funded nonprofit is working to increase the size and health of the Danube Delta ecosystem, which was particularly damaged in Ukraine by a disastrous large-scale Soviet irrigation project implemented in the '70s.

The Soviet land-reclamation project was intended to increase agricultural output through an irrigation network that would connect, via newly-built canals, the three major European rivers on the northern coast of the Black Sea: the Danube, the Dniester and the Dnipro. But the Danube-Dniester Irrigation System (DDIS) never actually worked, and instead the project ruined thousands of hectares of farmland and wetlands.

The wetlands quickly dried when they lost their source of water, which was directed into the canals and on to the Sasyk lagoon. The artificial lagoon, which was made by cutting off the sea with a 14-kilometer concrete dike, was supposed to become a giant freshwater irrigation reservoir. But despite pumping in fresh water from the rivers, the lagoon remains saline to this day and is undrinkable.

So while the irrigation project was a catastrophic failure, the ecosystem was never restored and the canal network and salty lake remain, much to the chagrin of locals, many of whom demand the lagoon be reconnected to the sea again. Meanwhile, the former wetlands, like those here in Tatarbunary, almost completely disappeared. But now, thanks to Rewilding Ukraine, things are finally going in reverse.

Yakovlev operates a drone that provides a clear view of the dramatic changes already taking place in this beautiful landscape. "Without the dams," Yakovlev explains as his drone safely lands on a patch of dried reed bed, "former polders are being re-flooded and the shallow waters and reed beds will become new spawning grounds and nesting sites for many endangered fish and birds. And upstream in Moldova, work is beginning to improve the river flow there too, so these are exciting times for us."

"Just in the last few weeks, as the first dams were removed, we have seen shoals of fish return and otters establishing new territories," says Yakovlev. "It's amazing how quickly mother nature can recover — she just needs a helping hand sometimes."

Brave new waterworld

Bundled into a small speedboat to zoom across the choppy waters of the Danube, Yakovlev and his team are just 100 kilometers away from Tatarbunary, in the heart of the reserve, to check out another exciting Rewilding Ukraine project taking shape on the huge Danube Island of Ermakov. Here biologists are studying how the introduction of large herbivores regulates and improves wetland ecosystems.

And it's not long before he encounters some of the dozens of unusual rewilding pioneers that have been released this year on the isolated island, which is only accessible by boat and, thus, safe from poachers.

Sometimes, for the very healthiest and spongiest wetlands, some huge hairy hooves are needed, too. They prevent the vegetation from growing out of control and create space for other important wetland species, says Rewilding Ukraine guide and team leader Mykhailo Nesterenko says as the group skids across the water's surface.

Suddenly the boat slows down and Nesterenko stands up to point at the shoreline. There, fleetingly



An excavator machine used to remove an obsolete river dam is partially consumed in a degraded area of wetland beside the Kohlynyk river within the territory of the Danube Biosphere Reserve (DBR) near Tatarbunary.

appear the dozens of wild konik horses that now inhabit the island. "These large herbivores will play a very important role in the Ermakov ecosystem," explains Nesterenko, "and we will be bringing other creatures to the island soon, including kulan donkeys."

The boat speeds upstream and lands on a muddy brown beach, past the thick reeds that blanket most of the shoreline. Gusts of wind carry the notes of countless varieties of birdsong as the group climbs a freshly erected wooden bird-watching platform to observe huge flocks of geese, ducks and other fowl landing and taking off from shallow waters teeming with noisy frogs. "The viewing platform was built in the summer. From up here, you can see how much the island has changed since we removed some of the dams on the island interior," Nesterenko explains. "So instead of these man-made barriers, the impact of the water buffalo will be felt instead."

Eco-entrepreneurs

As darkness approaches, the group moves to a feeding station to meet the star attraction of the rewilding initiative and learn more about how large ungulates make wetlands more effective.

There are 18 water buffalo here, including a new calf. That makes it important not to disturb the matriarch and bull standing proudly in

front of their young one.

Standing 100 meters away, munching on freshly provided hay on a wooden wagon near a soon-to-open building constructed to host rewilding tourists, the bovines do not appear aggressive at all. Nevertheless, rather than approaching, the group's guides sit down on the damp grass so as to appear as docile and unthreatening as possible.

Then, after a few minutes and rather unexpectedly, some of the younger animals approach. They are completely tame and are curious to meet the newcomers. It quickly becomes apparent what they are looking for — a vigorous scratch and some gentle tickling.

Nesterenko explains that they are so tame because they were gifted by the German eco-entrepreneur Michel Jacobs, who lovingly reared the animals on his Carpathian farm near Khust, where he produces mozzarella cheese from the nutritious buffalo milk. The buffalo arrived on a barge in the Summer and have settled in remarkably well. But with Winter beginning, they are being given extra food and carefully monitored.

Wetlands' engineers

Although the animals are tame, they are still able to live in the wild, and their wallowing habits — when an animal rolls in the mud — improve the wetlands immensely, Nesterenko enthusiastically explains. "These animals are one of nature's great engineers, and they open up the scrub and reedbeds, creating pools and puddles which are home to many insects, amphibians and fish."

According to studies, for these watery ecosystems to perform to their maximum potential, the activities of large herbivore creatures are essential. But also, according to a 2018 academic study on rewild-

ing published by the Royal Society Journal, their reintroduction has an important cultural impact, too.

Rewilding "unsettles sedimented ideas of what is natural where (e.g. large mammal assemblies are an African not European phenomena) and resets expectations of what is possible and appropriate in conservation policy and management. This cultural dimension of trophic rewilding may represent the crucial link between rewilding as a new conservation approach and rewilding as an approach that helps society respond to global change."

Going Dutch

With darkness descending, it's time to say goodbye to the buffalo friends and Nesterenko, who needs to stay on the island overnight.

While wetlands in rural areas with roaming bands of horses and buffalo are one thing, how are we to adapt in our cities? Should we also have wetlands in our urban areas with water buffalo living among us?

"With sea levels rising and more extreme weather events such as flooding, we need to completely rethink the way we live," Nesterenko asserts. "We have to integrate wetlands into our urban areas for sure and, ideally, with water buffalo, where possible."

As the group clambers back into the boat and prepares to sail back to the mainland and on to Odesa, Nesterenko shouts over the boat's motor, finishing his thought about how cities can adapt.

"We need to learn from the Dutch who used to suffer terrible flooding. They learned everything about hydrology, the value of wetlands and large herbivores and how to withstand and thrive in a watery world. And the whole world needs to now. Otherwise we simply won't survive." 🌱



Curious young water buffalo near a feeding station on Ermakov island.



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Poroshenko paid for flattering coverage, but it didn't help him

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lished on Sept. 30, 2015 and the same amount for another article published on Oct. 21, 2015. The documents specify that the first story was titled: "How to lose Ukraine?"

A representative of the paper openly told the Kyiv Post that "it was probably a paid story."

Gorkovenko denied paying media off-the-books and denied that he left any documents in his office.

The documents mention at least six other newspapers receiving money for paid content — Silsky Visti, Komsomolska Pravda (Kp.ua), Ukraina Moloda, Gazeta Po Ukrainsky (gazeta.ua), Commentaries, Fakty i Komentary (fakty.ua), and Segodnya. At the time, they were among the most popular newspapers in terms of circulation.

Segodnya, a popular daily that stopped its print run in September, was the only newspaper on the list that published the stories as advertising, also it used softer terms for marking it.

The documents also indicate that \$1.1 million was spent on off-the-books payments for jeans on radio stations prior to the local elections held on Oct. 26, 2015.

Seven popular radio stations received \$874,859 in six weeks prior to the 2015 local elections as payment for "jeansa" in the news. This money was paid for 1,134 placements in the news segments. The documents do not specify what the content was.

Additionally, five of these stations received \$277,547 for regular political ads during the same period. The document specifies that most of it was paid in cash.



People cross a street in front of a campaign banner showing Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on the exterior of an old building in central Kyiv on March 1, 2019, ahead of Ukraine's presidential elections on March 31, 2019.

Representatives of Hit FM, one of the radio stations mentioned in the documents, told the Kyiv Post that paid news items are usually bought before the elections and are sold together with commercial material.

"In the last 10 years, 'jeansa,' especially in large media holdings, became endemic," said Otar Dovzhenko, a media observer at Detector Media, a non-profit monitoring Ukraine's media market. "During the local elections in 2015, it reached extraordinary levels."

Paid experts

One of the documents alleges that Poroshenko's administration provided talking points to three popular political commentators, who nevertheless posed as independent analysts.

According to the document, in May 2016 Ukrainian political analysts Volodymyr Fesenko, Vadym Karasev and Andriy Zolotarev were instructed to positively comment on the appointment of Vitaly Kovalchuk, ex-deputy head of the presidential administration, as Poroshenko's

representative in the Cabinet of Ministers.

They indeed gave favorable comments on the appointment to the press. Neither of the three disclosed their affiliation with the government.

When asked, Karasev denied working with Poroshenko's administration. Fesenko said that he did work with the president's office, yet declined to comment on the extent of his work and the amount paid.

Zolotarev acknowledged the fact that he was told what to say, yet told the Kyiv Post that he did it because he liked Kovalchuk and that he didn't

take money for spreading positive comments on his appointment to the Cabinet. His comments repeated exactly the talking points from the administration.

Online support

In 2015, Poroshenko's administration looked to another arena for promotion — social media.

By that time, the president was swiftly losing popularity due to failure to deliver on his campaign promises: to end Russia's war and stop corruption.

Kyiv Post spoke with political consultant Kateryna Koval, who claims to have worked for the administration and coordinated the work of dozens of bloggers who supported Poroshenko on social networks as part of a small team of consultants.

The team was finding promising bloggers, writing theses for them and promoting them through official accounts.

"We looked for people who had a core base of followers and who were already writing," says Koval.

Bloggers were invited to attend events with the president and special off-the-record meetings with him. The top bloggers, who had tens of thousands of followers, were also initially paid around \$1,500 a month, says Koval. At the time, the official average salary was \$250 a month. There were up to 20 such bloggers, according to her, meaning that the network cost up to \$30,000 per month.

Political consultants like Koval were directing the bloggers by writing talking points for them — highlighting the president's and his party's accomplishments and downplaying their shortcomings.

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Parliament adopts Electoral Code with new voting rules

By Oksana Grytsenko
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Parliament has passed a new electoral code featuring amendments submitted by the president. The code partially implements a proportional representation voting system with open party lists for both parliamentary and local elections.

The bill, passed on Dec. 19, also eliminates Ukraine's controversial single-member districts in parliamentary elections, but partially keeps them on the local level.

The proportional system with open party lists has never before been used in Ukraine, but activists have long demanded its implementation. Its approval means that individual candidate can now be shifted up the party list if they get more support from voters.

The new electoral rules also increase the women's representation quota by 40 percent, remove the norm obliging people to vote at the place of registration and protect people with disabilities.

On Dec. 19, 330 lawmakers cast their vote in favor of the bill, far more than the 226 required to pass a bill.

The new rules will come into force on Jan. 1, so they will be used in the local elections scheduled for autumn 2020.

Several election experts say that collection all norms for the presidential, parliamentary and local votes in one document – the Electoral Code – is a positive change. But they admit that voters will only be able to influence the party lists to some extent. Under the code, the first nine candidates on any party list in parliamentary elections will remain fixed.



A local resident checks her paper ballot during the parliamentary election in the village of Velyka Bugayivka in Kyiv Oblast on July 21, 2019.

"This would work more like a system with closed (party lists)," said Olga Aivazovska, head of Opora, a reputable electoral watchdog.

She added that the Electoral Code will have to be amended next year, especially in the local elections due to the government's plans to change the administrative and territorial structure of Ukraine.

Story of the bill

Ukraine has a history of elector-

al experiments. Since it gained its independence in 1991, it has elected parliaments through single-member districts alone, proportional representation using closed party lists and a mixed system in which half of the parliament was elected by party lists and the other half through single-member districts. The current parliament was elected with a mixed system.

The country has also gotten used to electoral violations. In 2004, peo-

ple rallied on the streets for months to protest rigged presidential elections – an event that came to be known as the Orange Revolution.

Scandals linked to violations of electoral norms were widespread during the presidential and parliamentary campaigns earlier this year.

Since the EuroMaidan Revolution that ousted corrupt president Viktor Yanukovich in 2014, civil society has constantly demanded that the country implement a proportional system with open lists for parliamentary and local elections. Under such a system, people would vote not only for the parties, but also for party candidates. The candidates would move up or down the party lists based on how many votes they receive.

The previous parliament conducted the first reading of the code in 2017. In July, the new parliament voted for it in the second reading, but President Volodymyr Zelensky vetoed it, offering 17 amendments.

The amended version of the code was developed by lawmakers from the committee on state-building with the help of Ukrainian and foreign experts.

Complicated system

Before the vote, Andriy Parubiy, a lawmaker from the European Solidarity party of ex-President Petro Poroshenko, admitted that the new voting system would be very complicated for the electorate and the ballots would be very long.

During the parliamentary elections, each voter will have to make a mark next to a chosen party and also – if he or she wants to – select one candidate from the same party in the regional party list by writing the candidate's number in the ballot.

The ballot will include the top nine candidates of each party in the national list and from five to 17 candidates from each party in the

regional party lists. All the candidates from the regional party lists will also be present in the national lists at positions determined by the parties.

A candidate's chance to be elected will largely depend on the number of parties that pass the 5% electoral margin and also on turnout.

For the parliamentary elections, Ukraine will be divided into 27 electoral regions, which mostly correspond to the country's oblasts. However, highly-populated Dnipropetrovsk Oblast will be divided into two districts. Kyiv city will have the foreign electoral districts attached to it and will also be divided into two electoral districts. Southern Kherson Oblast will have also voters from Russian-annexed Crimea and Sevastopol included in it.

Aivazovska agrees the system is complicated. That could undermine voters trust in it and in the way the votes will be counted.

"But in the parliamentary elections, it will be the duty of the Central Election Commission to count the vote and overcome all these difficulties," she said.

Parties decide

Before the vote in parliament, Taras Batenko, an independent lawmaker who is one of the proponents of the document, said the lawmakers "were trying to maximally open the Electoral Code for the public."

In fact, each party would have nine top candidates in its list who cannot be changed by the voters. Multiple experts told the Kyiv Post that Batkivshchyna party of ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and the pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life party lobbied for this norm. Later, Zelensky's Servant of the People party also supported it.

To rise up the list, a candidate will need to receive at least 25% of the so-called "electoral quota," the required number of votes which vary depending on voter turnout. If this system had been used during the parliamentary elections this year, the electoral quota would have been 28,000.

Another problem is that voters may just get confused and refuse to choose anyone in the regional lists or input the wrong number.

Experts say there will not be many candidates able to move up national party lists. According to Opora estimates, each party that passes the entry threshold will be able to secure 20-22 seats in parliament for the people it wants.

Local elections

In local elections, electoral norms will depend on the number of people living in the area.

The number of deputies in the local councils will vary from 12 in places with less than 1,000 residents to 120 in areas with more than 2 million people.

To elect deputies to councils for



A light of peace for a nation at war

Scouts of Ukraine's national scouting organization Plast carry the Peace Light of Bethlehem. The pre-Christmas campaign started in Austria as part of a relief mission for nations in need or at war. Before it is taken to other countries, the flame will be carried to eastern Ukraine to frontline towns and villages, military hospitals and checkpoints amid Russia's ongoing war. On Dec. 17, the Verkhovna Rada passed a law recognizing Plast's historic role in the country. (Oleg Petrasniuk)

Proportional system, open party lists in brand new Electoral Code

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the villages, towns, districts and cities with less than 90,000 people and amalgamated communities, the single-member system will be used. But for the deputies of the oblast councils and city councils in big cities, the voters would have to deal with the open-list party system. All the candidates could be moved on the lists depending on their support in the regional party lists.

The difficulty here will be for the local election commissions counting the results. Aivazovska said election officials would need additional training.

Advantages of new code

The new Electoral Code will remove the Soviet legacy of voting based upon place of registration. People will now be able to permanently vote in the place where they actually live, not where they are officially registered, which experts see as a clearly positive change.

Internally displaced people will also be able to vote in local elections in the places where they currently live. During the local elections in



(Oleg Petrasjuk)

Members of a local election commission carry a mobile ballot box as they visit residents in Kyiv during Ukraine's parliamentary election on July 21, 2019. People who cannot make it to polling stations are allowed to vote at home.

2015, they couldn't do that, which provoked significant criticism of the existing electoral system.

The new electoral norms will also set a 40% quota for women's representation. In the current parliament, women are just over 20% of lawmakers.

The code also bans any electoral discrimination based on race and ethnicity and demands that the authorities secure the voting rights of people with disabilities, who still often struggle to access polling stations without facilities for people in wheelchairs. ♿

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Protests surge as political situation escalates in Kyiv

By Oleg Sukhov
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As the Verkhovna Rada's last session this year is set to close on Dec. 20, the protest mood is back in Kyiv, and the political situation appears to be escalating.

Thousands of protesters have taken to the streets over various issues: the prospect of agricultural land sales, relations with Russia, the National Bank of Ukraine and other issues.

"The upsurge in political activity is linked to the fact that it is the Rada's last session before the winter holidays," political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko said.

The demonstrations are fueled by billionaire oligarch Igor Kolomoisky, as well as by populist and nationalist politicians.

So far, the protests do not seem to pose a serious threat to President Volodymyr Zelensky's administration.

However, he faces serious challenges next year as he needs to tackle some of the most controversial issues in Ukraine.

Land reform protests

In November the Rada passed the first reading of a bill to cancel the ban on agricultural land sales starting from Oct. 1, 2020. Currently, the bill is being considered in the second reading.

A member of a Ukrainian nationalist movement kicks at police officers as demonstrators and law enforcement clash during a protest against land sales reform in front of the Verkhovna Rada in Kyiv on Dec. 17, 2019.



The lifting of the ban is highly unpopular among much of Ukraine's population, with populist politicians mobilizing their supporters to oppose the legislation.

Protests against the bill have been organized by ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and two nationalist groups – Svoboda and the National

Corps, which is tied to Interior Minister Arsen Avakov.

On Dec. 17, thousands protested against the land reform in front of the Verkhovna Rada, and some of them clashed with the police. As a result, 26 protesters were arrested, and 17 police officers and at least two demonstrators were injured.

The protesters attempted to install tents and block traffic, and some of them were beaten by the police.

"The National Corps wants to show how cool they are and they target extremist methods," Fesenko said.

Stance on Russia

Another protest group, the Movement of Resistance to Capitulation, has been run mostly by supporters of ex-President Petro Poroshenko. Thousands of demonstrators have protested since last summer against what they view as Zelensky's soft stance on Russia.

The latest protest organized by the movement took place on Dec. 8 ahead of Zelensky's meeting with Russian dictator Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron on the next day. They demanded that Zelensky defend Ukraine's interests during negotiations over Russia's war against Ukraine.

However, no concessions to Russia were announced as a result of the summit, and this movement has subsided for the time being.

National bank protests

Hundreds of protesters have also gathered in recent weeks in front of the National Bank of Ukraine to protest against the alleged corruption of the bank's leadership and demand its resignation. On Nov. 25, protesters tried to storm the bank's building.

Yakiv Smolii, head of the National Bank of Ukraine, has accused Kolomoisky of organizing the protests.

The NBU said the oligarch paid the protesters to "create informational chaos" and to pressure the central bank to derail Ukraine's negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and to avoid responsibility for leading the country's largest bank PrivatBank to bankruptcy.

The Ukrainian government nationalized Kolomoisky's PrivatBank after it was found to have an over \$5.5 billion hole in its ledger. That money was allegedly extracted by Kolomoisky and his business partner Gennadiy Bogolyubov using fraudulent schemes. Kolomoisky denies the accusations of wrongdoing, and several parallel legal cases over the bank are currently ongoing in Ukrainian and London courts.

Despite many of the protesters in front of the National Bank of Ukraine being workers of the Nikopol Ferroalloy Plant owned by Kolomoisky, the oligarch himself denies any involvement in organizing the rallies.

Sheremet case

Another issue that has triggered a backlash is the Dec. 13 arrest by the police of several suspects in the murder of Belarusian journalist Pavel Sheremet in Kyiv on July 20, 2016. Surgeon Yulia Kuzmenko, musician Andriy Antonenko and medic Yana Dugar were charged with the murder.

The evidence in the case was dismissed as extremely weak by Avakov's critics, and some veterans of the war with Russia and volunteers helping the army supported the army. Some of the suspects' supporters protested during court hearings on their arrest and threatened journalists and prosecutors.

Despite the diverse reasons for protests, Zelensky's position appears to be stable so far.

"The opposition is divided," Fesenko said. "The situation will change only if (those protesting against a soft stance on Russia) and opponents of land reform unite. But this is not happening yet."

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Protesters hold signs at the "Red Lines for Zelensky" rally in Kyiv on Dec. 8, 2019, ahead of the Normandy summit in Paris scheduled for Dec. 9. Activists' demands for the summit in Paris included maintaining Ukraine's commitment to integration with the European Union.

He photographed the horrors of 5 wars. Then he was killed in Donbas

page 2 →

to do his job," Nikolayeva said. When Nikolayev decided to go to the Donbas war zone, he also chose not to inform his family.

A boy in Pisky

Rokotansky said Nikolayev was not even supposed to go on that trip to the war zone with him in February 2015. Rokotansky was working as a fixer for foreign journalists preparing to travel to Donbas. Nikolayev just came to visit him and, at the end of the evening, decided to join the group. Segodnya was not officially sending its reporters to embattled region. So Nikolayev took a week-long vacation.

All he had was a confirmation letter from Segodnya that he was a journalist and a blue bulletproof vest emblazoned with the word "Press."

"We got a rare opportunity to speak with and take pictures of the Right Sector fighters, who were not so open with the media back in those days. So we all decided to take that opportunity," Rokotansky said.

However, in Pisky, Nikolayev found even more things to document, Vitalii Lazebnyk, a former Segodnya photographer, told the Kyiv Post. "He



Valentyna Nikolayeva, mother of Serhiy Nikolayev, looks at portraits of her son, who was killed by shelling in the Donbas on Feb. 22, 2015, at her apartment in Kyiv on Dec. 11, 2019.

met a boy who lived with his grandpa exactly on the frontline and wanted to take pictures of him," Lazebnyk said.

Rokotansky confirmed this. He said that, after the 2013 "Unchildish childhood" exhibition, Nikolayev

largely forgot about the project. He was even thinking of becoming a sports photographer. However, that trip and that boy in Pisky inspired him to revive the project.

After Nikolayev was wounded, he desperately asked Rokotansky to

save his camera.

"This is a reflex typical for all war photographers. You don't care about your own life or skin as much as you care about your photos. Just to be sure that it was all worth it," Rokotansky said.

He saved Nikolayev's last pictures and sent the memory cards to the Segodnya newsroom.

Although Nikolayev was not officially on assignment, the newspaper paid to transport his body to Kyiv and for his funeral, Ivlicheva said. Since then, Segodnya has been forced to end its print run and become an online-only publication. Still, Nikolayev's colleagues remember him and his work fondly.

"Serhiy was not only a staff photographer for me but also my close friend. And we did everything we could to support his family as well as ourselves. Nobody in the newsroom has recovered from his death yet," Olga Guk-Dremina, Segodnya's chief editor, told the Kyiv Post.

For his work on the front line, Nikolayev was awarded the Order of Merit and the People's Hero of Ukraine medal post mortem. The state paid Hr 100,000 (over \$4,000) to his family.

His mother still keeps Nikolayev's awards and photos. Although it has been four years since he died, she still keeps them in a closet. She only takes them out to look at them.

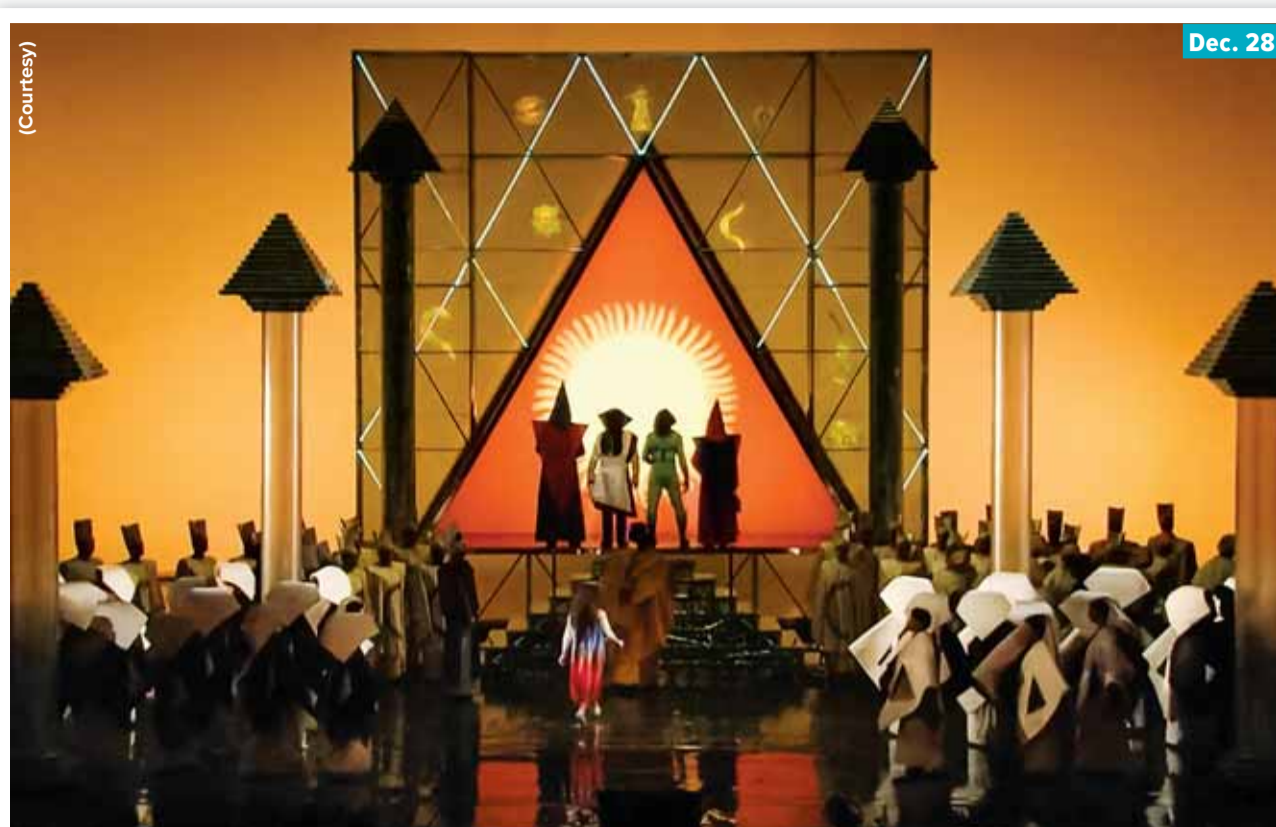
"I always put the photos back, because it's too painful for me," Nikolayeva said. "But that is all I have left." ❦

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UKRAINE'S GLOBAL VOICE



Dec. 28

'The Magic Flute'

The creation of renowned genius Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, "The Magic Flute" is an all-time classic that explores values, reason and spiritual enlightenment. Staged by New York's Metropolitan Opera, the fairy tale opera depicts the journey of Prince Tamino and his fellow companion Papageno on their mission to rescue Pamina, the daughter of the Queen of the Night. Tamino and Papageno are granted magically enhanced musical instruments, which assist the travelers throughout their challenges. The Metropolitan Opera promises "eye-popping puppetry and stunning visuals" to the audience. The opera recording will be screened in English with Ukrainian subtitles.

"The Magic Flute."

Multiplex (Lavina Mall, 6D Berkovetska St.) Dec. 28. 3 p.m. Hr 240-300

Friday, Dec. 20

Classical music

Mozart, Bortniansky, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (by Kyiv Chamber Orchestra). National Philharmonic. 7 p.m. Hr 80-400 **2**

Christmas Jazz Songs — Sinatra. Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 240-590 **4**

Clubs

Low: Young Marco, Pavel Plastikk, Philipp Markovich (electronic music). Closer. 11:55 p.m. Hr 300-400. Visitors must be over 21 **10**

Daria Kolosova, Poly Chain, Omon Breaker (electronic music). Crest. 11:55 p.m. Hr 200-300. Visitors must be over 19 **11**

Miscellaneous

Remont: Nadia Kaabi-Linke (installations reflecting on the unstable and unclear state of the modern world). Izone. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **16**

Invasion (multimedia installation by Ukrainian contemporary artist Yuriy Musatov). Triptych. 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Free **20**

Overcoming Gravity (recently discovered photographs by the Carpathian artist Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and other artworks). Mystetskyi Arsenal. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Hr 80, Hr 40 for students and retirees, Hr 160 for a family ticket. Free for children under 12, people with disabilities, Ukrainian war veterans **17**

The Empty Spaces of Doors and Windows Allow the Room to Be Inhabited (paintings, ceramic objects by Anna Zvyagintseva). The Naked Room. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **19**

Polystylism (contemporary paintings by Mykola Bilous). Tsekh. 2 p.m. - 8 p.m. Free **21**

A Tree Grows In (photographs by US-based artist Sinziana Velicescu observing how plants grow in unusual urban areas). America House. 12 p.m. - 9 p.m. Free. Bring ID **24**

Post Scriptum (graphic paintings by Olena Kudinova). Art 14. 1-7 p.m. Free **14**

Personal Space (paintings by Alina Haieva exploring people's personal space). Dom. 2-11 p.m. Free **15**

New Year's Toy Festival (toy exhibition, events and workshops dedicated to winter holiday decorations). VDNH. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Hr 200 **22**

Chinese Lanterns Festival (over 30 light installations and Chinese lanterns). Spivochko Pole. 4 p.m. - 10 p.m. Hr 160-480. Free for children under 7 **18**

Movies

French Short Film Festival (in French with Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 12:25 p.m., 9:30 p.m. Hr 55, 95 **23**

100 Films in 100 Minutes (short films in various languages with English and Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 2:50 p.m. Hr 65 **29**

Shows

Yakata, Young Siva, the Sex and others (rap). Otel'. 7 p.m. Hr 200 **12**

Theater

Sylphide (ballet). National Opera. 7 p.m. Hr 50-600 **34**

Saturday, Dec. 21

Live music

Christmas Jazz Songs — Louis Armstrong & Ella Fitzgerald (by Old Fashioned Band). Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 240-590 **4**

Christmas Project by Darina Gavrik Group (Christmas songs in Jazz arrangements). 32 Jazz Club. 8 p.m. Hr 500 **3**

Clubs

Call Super, Noizar, Bambu (electronic music). Closer. 11:55 p.m. Hr 300-400. Visitors must be over 21 **10**

Kalush, Fo Sho, Velegura, Serf Sasha and others (rap, electronic music). Mezzanine. 11:59 p.m. Hr 250-350 **32**

Veselka X Herrensaua (electronic music). Otel'. 11:55 p.m. Hr 250-600 **12**

Residents Night: Sinica, Lucid K, Kazuko B2B Sider and others (electronic music). River Port. 10 p.m. Hr 150-200 **13**

Miscellaneous

Remont: Nadia Kaabi-Linke (installations reflecting on the unstable and unclear state of the modern world). Izone. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **16**

Invasion (multimedia installation by Ukrainian contemporary artist Yuriy Musatov). Triptych. 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Free **20**

Overcoming Gravity (recently discovered photographs by the Carpathian artist Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and other artworks). Mystetskyi Arsenal. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Hr 80, Hr 40 for students and retirees, Hr 160 for a family ticket. Free for children under 12, people with disabilities, Ukrainian war veterans **17**

The Empty Spaces of Doors and Windows Allow the Room to Be Inhabited (paintings, ceramic objects by Anna Zvyagintseva). The Naked Room. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **19**

Polystylism (contemporary paintings by Mykola Bilous). Tsekh. 2 p.m. - 8 p.m. Free **21**

A Tree Grows In (photographs by US-based artist Sinziana Velicescu observing how plants grow in unusual urban areas). America House. 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Free. Bring ID **24**

Post Scriptum (graphic paintings by Olena Kudinova). Art 14. 1-7 p.m. Free **14**

Presents Market (all kinds of gifts from furniture and decor to toys and cosmetics by Ukrainian brands). Vsi Svoi D12. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **23**

New Year's Toy Festival (toy exhibition, events and workshops dedicated to winter holiday decorations). VDNH. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Hr 200 **22**

Chinese Lanterns Festival (over 30 light installations and Chinese lanterns). Spivochko Pole. 4 p.m. - 10 p.m. Hr 160-480. Free for children under 7 **18**

Movies

French Short Film Festival (in French with Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 12:25 p.m., 9:30 p.m. Hr 65, 105 **23**

100 Films in 100 Minutes (short films in various languages with English and Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 2:50 p.m. Hr 85 **29**

And Then We Danced (drama, romance in Georgian with Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 3:40 p.m. Hr 120 **29**

Shows

The Best Ukrainian Metal Act (Chasing Embers, Motanka, Septa and other acts). Bingo. 5 p.m. Hr 300-500 **31**

Ze Jozers (post-punk). Mezzanine. 7 p.m. Hr 230 **32**

Solar Fake (electronic, synthpop, industrial). Volume Club. 10:30 p.m. Hr 500 **33**

Theater

Hansard (British National Theater's drama recording in English with Ukrainian subtitles). Multiplex (Lavina Mall). 3 p.m. Hr 190-240 **26**

The Elixir of Love (opera in Italian). National Opera. 7 p.m. Hr 50-600 **34**

Sunday, Dec. 22

Classical music

Bartok, Rachmaninoff, Chopin and others (by Antonii Baryshevskiy on piano). National Philharmonic. 7 p.m. Hr 80-400 **2**

Live music

Street Jazz — Christmas (by Urban Gypsy band). Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 240-590 **4**

Miscellaneous

Remont: Nadia Kaabi-Linke (installations reflecting on the unstable and unclear state of the modern world). Izone. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **16**

Overcoming Gravity (recently discovered photographs by the Carpathian artist Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and other artworks). Mystetskyi Arsenal. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Hr 80, Hr 40 for students and retirees, Hr 160 for a family ticket. Free for children under 12, people with disabilities, Ukrainian war veterans **17**

The Empty Spaces of Doors and Windows Allow the Room to Be Inhabited (paintings, ceramic objects by Anna Zvyagintseva). The Naked Room. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **19**

Presents Market (all kinds of gifts from furniture and decor to toys and cosmetics by Ukrainian brands). Vsi Svoi D12. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **23**

New Year's Toy Festival (toy exhibition, events and workshops dedicated to winter holiday decorations). VDNH. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Hr 200 **22**

Chinese Lanterns Festival (over 30 light installations and Chinese lanterns). Spivochko Pole. 4 p.m. - 10 p.m. Hr 160-480. Free for children under 7 **18**

Movies

French Short Film Festival (in French with Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 12:25 p.m., 9:30 p.m. Hr 65, 105 **23**

100 Films in 100 Minutes (short films in various languages with English and Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 2:50 p.m. Hr 85 **29**

Little Joe (drama, sci-fi in English with Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 4:10 p.m. Hr 95 **29**

Theater

The Nutcracker (ballet). National Opera. 2 p.m., 7 p.m. Hr 50-1,500 **34**

Monday, Dec. 23

Classical music

Bach, Buxtehude, Mozart (by Natalia Sikorska on harpsichord, Illia Korol on violin). National Philharmonic. 7 p.m. Hr 70-350 **2**

World Musical Stories by Oleksandr Piryev (featuring Kyiv Soloists orchestra). National Music Academy. 7 p.m. Hr 100-500 **1**

Live music

Christmas Songs A Capella (by United People band). Caribbean Club. 7 p.m. Hr 150-450 **5**

NAONI Christmas Show (by National Academic Orchestra of Folk Instruments). Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 240-590 **4**

Miscellaneous

French Short Film Festival (in French with Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 12:25 p.m.,

Remont: Nadia Kaabi-Linke (installations reflecting on the unstable and unclear state of the modern world). Izone. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **16**

Invasion (multimedia installation by Ukrainian contemporary artist Yuriy Musatov). Triptych. 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Free **20**

The Empty Spaces of Doors and Windows Allow the Room to Be Inhabited (paintings, ceramic objects by Anna Zvyagintseva). The Naked Room. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **19**

New Year's Toy Festival (toy exhibition, events and workshops dedicated to winter holiday decorations). VDNH. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Hr 200 **22**

Chinese Lanterns Festival (over 30 light installations and Chinese lanterns). Spivochko Pole. 4 p.m. - 10 p.m. Hr 160-480. Free for children under 7 **18**

Movies

French Short Film Festival (in French with Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 12:25 p.m., 9:30 p.m. Hr 55, 95 **23**

100 Films in 100 Minutes (short films in various languages with English and Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 2:55 p.m. Hr 65 **29**

Tuesday, Dec. 24

Classical music

Nocturnes by Frederic Chopin (by Roman Lopatynskiy). Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 150-300 **4**

Ave Maria: Bach, Cherubini, Liszt. Kyiv Planetarium. 7:30 p.m. Hr 250-450 **7**

Live music

Christmas Retro Show (by Jazz Age Show Group and Kyiv Rhythm Kings). Caribbean Club. 7 p.m. Hr 290-750 **3**

Kyiv Tango Project Christmas Show. Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 340-690 **4**

New Year's Jazz (by Chuck Wansley and Rodion Ivanov Quartet). Cinema House. 12 p.m., 7 p.m. Hr 190-690 **6**

Miscellaneous

Remont: Nadia Kaabi-Linke (installations reflecting on the unstable and unclear state of the modern world). Izone. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **16**

Invasion (multimedia installation by Ukrainian contemporary artist Yuriy Musatov). Triptych. 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Free **20**

The Empty Spaces of Doors and Windows Allow the Room to Be Inhabited (paintings, ceramic objects by Anna Zvyagintseva). The Naked Room. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **19**

Overcoming Gravity (recently discovered photographs by the Carpathian artist Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and other artworks). Mystetskyi Arsenal. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Hr 80, Hr 40 for students and retirees, Hr 160 for a family ticket. Free for children under 12, people with disabilities, Ukrainian war veterans **17**

Polystylism (contemporary paintings by Mykola Bilous). Tsekh. 2 p.m. - 8 p.m. Free **21**

A Tree Grows In (photographs by US-based artist Sinziana Velicescu observing how plants grow in unusual urban areas). America House. 12 p.m. - 9 p.m. Free. Bring ID **24**

New Year's Toy Festival (toy exhibition, events and workshops dedicated to winter holiday decorations). VDNH. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Hr 200 **22**

Chinese Lanterns Festival (over 30 light installations and Chinese lanterns). Spivochko Pole. 4 p.m. - 10 p.m. Hr 160-480. Free for children under 7 **18**

Polystylism (contemporary paintings by Mykola Bilous). Tsekh. 2 p.m. - 8 p.m. Free **21**

100 Films in 100 Minutes (short films in various languages with English and Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 2:50 p.m. Hr 85 **29**

Little Joe (drama, sci-fi in English with Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 4:10 p.m. Hr 105 **29**

9:30 p.m. Hr 55, 95 **23**

100 Films in 100 Minutes (short films in various languages with English and Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 2:50 p.m. Hr 65 **29**

Theater

Madame Butterfly (opera recording in Italian). Cinema City. 7:40 p.m. Hr 230 **25**

Wednesday, Dec. 25

Classical music

Nocturnes by Frederic Chopin (by Roman Lopatynskiy). Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 150-300 **4**

Great Bach Theory: Albinoni, Vivaldi, Reger and others (organ show). Kyiv Planetarium. 7:30 p.m. Hr 250-450 **7**

Live music

Christmas Jazz (by the Big Band of the National Brass Orchestra). National Philharmonic. 7 p.m. Hr 300-540 **2**

Christmas Jazz Greatest Hits (by Old Fashioned Band). Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 240-590 **4**

New Year's Jazz (by Chuck Wansley and Rodion Ivanov Quartet). Cinema House. 12 p.m., 7 p.m. Hr 190-690 **6**

Clubs

Hanukkah Hip Hop Party. Dom. 7:40 p.m. Hr 200 **15**

Miscellaneous

Remont: Nadia Kaabi-Linke (installations reflecting on the unstable and unclear state of the modern world). Izone. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **16**

Invasion (multimedia installation by Ukrainian contemporary artist Yuriy Musatov). Triptych. 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Free **20**

The Empty Spaces of Doors and Windows Allow the Room to Be Inhabited (paintings, ceramic objects by Anna Zvyagintseva). The Naked Room. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **19**

Overcoming Gravity (recently discovered photographs by the Carpathian artist Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and other artworks). Mystetskyi Arsenal. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Hr 80, Hr 40 for students and retirees, Hr 160 for a family ticket. Free for children under 12, people with disabilities, Ukrainian war veterans **17**

Polystylism (contemporary paintings by Mykola Bilous). Tsekh. 2 p.m. - 8 p.m. Free **21**

New Year's Toy Festival (toy exhibition, events and workshops dedicated to winter holiday decorations). VDNH. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Hr 200 **22**

Chinese Lanterns Festival (over 30 light installations and Chinese lanterns). Spivochko Pole. 4 p.m. - 10 p.m. Hr 160-480. Free for children under 7 **18**

Polystylism (contemporary paintings by Mykola Bilous). Tsekh. 2 p.m. - 8 p.m. Free **21**

100 Films in 100 Minutes (short films in various languages with English and Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 2:50 p.m. Hr 85 **29**

Little Joe (drama, sci-fi in English with Ukrainian subtitles). Zhovten. 4:10 p.m. Hr 105 **29**

Thursday, Dec. 26

Live music

Christmas Jazz: Louis Armstrong & Ella Fitzgerald (by Old Fashioned Band). Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 240-590 **4**

New Year's Jazz (by Chuck Wansley and Rodion Ivanov Quartet). Cinema House. 12 p.m., 7 p.m. Hr 190-690 **6**



Dec. 23

NAONI Christmas Show

The Ukrainian National Academic Orchestra of Folk Instruments, or NAOI, gives a music lovers a chance to boost their holiday spirit ahead of Christmas and New Year. The orchestra will perform some everlasting classical music by world-known composers on the stage of the Architect's House in Kyiv. For its performances, NAOI uses Ukrainian folk instruments including the bandura, kobza, tsymbaly and many others. It also often collaborates with modern artists like electro-folk band Onuka or Crimean-Tatar singer Jamala, the winner of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2016. This time, NAOI will perform music by legendary composers like Johann Strauss, Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Mykola Leontovych, adding to the warm, pre-holiday atmosphere.

NAONI Christmas Show.

Architect's House (7 Borysa Hrinchenka St.) Dec. 23. 7 p.m. Hr 240-590

By Toma Istomina, Daria Shulzhenko, Artur Kornienko

Miscellaneous

Remont: Nadia Kaabi-Linke (installations reflecting on the unstable and unclear state of the modern world). Izone. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **16**

Invasion (multimedia installation by Ukrainian contemporary artist Yuriy Musatov). Triptych. 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Free **20**

The Empty Spaces of Doors and Windows Allow the Room to Be Inhabited (paintings, ceramic objects by Anna Zvyagintseva). The Naked Room. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **19**

Overcoming Gravity (recently discovered photographs by the Carpathian artist Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and other artworks). Mystetskyi Arsenal. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Hr 80, Hr 40 for students and retirees, Hr 160 for a family ticket. Free for children under 12, people with disabilities, Ukrainian war veterans **17**

Polystylism (contemporary paintings by Mykola Bilous). Tsekh. 2 p.m. - 8 p.m. Free **21**

A Tree Grows In (photographs by US-based artist Sinziana Velicescu observing how plants grow in unusual urban areas). America House. 12 p.m. - 9 p.m. Free. Bring ID **24**

New Year's Toy Festival (toy exhibition, events and workshops dedicated to winter holiday decorations). VDNH. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Hr 200 **22**

Chinese Lanterns Festival (over 30 light installations and Chinese lanterns). Spivochko Pole. 4 p.m. - 10 p.m. Hr 160-480. Free for children under 7 **18**

Friday, Dec. 27

Classical music

Jazz Conversation on Classical Themes (by Viacheslav Novikov on piano and Maksym Hladetskyi on double bass). National Philharmonic. 7 p.m. Hr 80-400 **2**

Kyiv Symphony Orchestra Anniversary Show. Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 200-550 **4**

Live music

Christmas Jazz Songs (by Gregory Boyd). Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 340-690 **4**

Merry Swinging Christmas (by Aniko Dolidze Big Band). Caribbean Club. 7 p.m. Hr 250-1,090 **5**

New Year's Jazz (by Chuck Wansley and Rodion Ivanov Quartet). Cinema House. 12 p.m., 7 p.m. Hr 190-690 **6**

Clubs

OJ!: Draft 3x, Jewishmason, Ostium and

others (electronic music). Dom. 10 p.m. Hr 100-150 **15**

Avantage: Detcom, Poly Chain, Nasta Muravyova and others (electronic music). Otel'. 11 p.m. Hr 300-400 **12**

Locals Criminal Practice: Ghetto Sunrise, Roman Khropko, Bru, Dolu and others (electronic music). River Port. 11 p.m. Price to be announced **13**

Parental Advisory: No Moon, Sasha Zlykh, S.A. Tweeman and others (electronic music). Closer. 11:55 p.m. Hr 300-400. Visitors must be over 21 **10**

Miscellaneous

Remont: Nadia Kaabi-Linke (installations reflecting on the unstable and unclear state of the modern world). Izone. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **16**

Invasion (multimedia installation by Ukrainian contemporary artist Yuriy Musatov). Triptych. 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Free **20**

The Empty Spaces of Doors and Windows Allow the Room to Be Inhabited (paintings, ceramic objects by Anna Zvyagintseva). The Naked Room. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **19**

Overcoming Gravity (recently discovered photographs by the Carpathian artist Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and other artworks). Mystetskyi Arsenal. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Hr 80, Hr 40 for students and retirees, Hr 160 for a family ticket. Free for children under 12, people with disabilities, Ukrainian war veterans **17**

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New Year's Toy Festival (toy exhibition, events and workshops dedicated to winter holiday decorations). VDNH. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Hr 200 **22**

Chinese Lanterns Festival (over 30 light installations and Chinese lanterns). Spivochko Pole. 4 p.m. - 10 p.m. Hr 160-480. Free for children under 7 **18**

Saturday, Dec. 28

Live music

Christmas Jazz Songs: Sinatra (by National Academic Brass Orchestra). Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 240-590 **4**

Jazz for Adults with Alexey Kogan. Caribbean Club. 7 p.m. Hr 370-950 **5**

Lords of the Sound. Grand Christmas



Church of House. Christmas Eve Service

Christmas spirit will be present even at the overnight electronic music party at the Dom music bar on Dec. 28. Another installment of the Church of House parties will have a Christmas theme and will feature house, disco, funk and jazz music played by Ukrainian DJs ST-12, JorDee and one secret guest. "This night will be dedicated exclusively to magic!" the organizers say, so who knows, perhaps the secret guest will be Santa himself.

Church of House.

Christmas Eve Service: ST-12, JorDee and others. Dom (10 Sahaidachnoho St.) Dec. 28. 11 p.m. Hr 100-200. Visitors must be over 21

2020. Ukraine Palace. 7 p.m. Hr 350-1,500 **3**

Thousands of Lights New Year's Show (by Dzvinochok children's choir, Olha Lukachova Quartet and Kyiv Virtuosi Orchestra). Zhovtnevyi. 8 p.m. Hr 200-1,300 **9**

Clubs

Church of House. Christmas Eve Service: ST-12, JorDee and others (electronic music). Dom. 11 p.m. Hr 100-200. Visitors must be over 21 **15**

Soul Night: Radiant Futur, Libr: a, Roman Frolov and others (electronic music). River Port. 11 p.m. Hr 150-250 **13**

Closer Residents Night: Timur Basha, Shakolin, Trippsy (electronic music). Closer. 11:55 p.m. Price to be announced **10**

Act Group: Anton Kolo, Hopper Field, Denis Polyakov and others (electronic music). Crest. 11:55 p.m. Hr 200-300. Visitors must be over 19 **11**

Miscellaneous

Remont: Nadia Kaabi-Linke (installations reflecting on the unstable and unclear state of the modern world). Izone. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **16**

Invasion (multimedia installation by Ukrainian contemporary artist Yuriy Musatov). Triptych. 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Free **20**

The Empty Spaces of Doors and Windows Allow the Room to Be Inhabited (paintings, ceramic objects by Anna Zvyagintseva). The Naked Room. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **19**

Overcoming Gravity (recently discovered photographs by the Carpathian artist Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and other artworks). Mystetskyi Arsenal. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Hr 80, Hr 40 for students and retirees, Hr 160 for a family ticket. Free for children under 12, people with disabilities, Ukrainian war veterans **17**

Polystylism (contemporary paintings by Mykola Bilous). Tsekh. 2 p.m. - 8 p.m. Free **21**

A Tree Grows In (photographs by US-based artist Sinziana Velicescu observing how plants grow in unusual urban areas). America House. 12 p.m. - 9 p.m. Free. Bring ID **24**

Presents Market (all kinds of gifts from furniture and decor to toys and cosmetics by Ukrainian brands). Vsi Svoi D12. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **23**

New Year's Toy Festival (toy exhibition, events and workshops dedicated to winter holiday decorations). VDNH. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. Hr 200 **22**

Chinese Lanterns Festival (over 30 light installations and Chinese lanterns). Spivochko Pole. 4 p.m. - 10 p.m. Hr 160-480. Free for children under 7 **18**

Closer Record Market Vol. 7 (vinyl records market). Closer. 4 p.m. - 9 p.m. Free **10**

Movies

Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker (action, adventure, fantasy in English). Zhovten. 2:25 p.m. Hr 130 **26**

Theater

The Nutcracker (ballet). National Opera. 12 p.m., 7 p.m. Hr 50-1,000 **34**

The Magic Flute (opera recording in English with Ukrainian subtitles). Multiplex (Lavina Mall). 3 p.m. Hr 240-300 **26**

Sunday, Dec. 29

Classical music

Haydn, Handel (by Kyiv Chamber Orchestra). National Philharmonic. 7 p.m. Hr 100-500 **2**

Live music

Christmas Jazz: Greatest Hits (by Old Fashioned Band). Architect's House. 7 p.m. Hr 240-590 **4**

New Year's Jazz (by Chuck Wansley and Rodion Ivanov Quartet). Cinema House. 12 p.m., 7 p.m. Hr 190-690 **6**

Organ in Cinema (movie soundtracks on organ). Kyiv Planetarium. 7:30 p.m. Hr 250-450 **7**

Miscellaneous

Remont: Nadia Kaabi-Linke (installations reflecting on the unstable and unclear state of the modern world). Izone. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **16**

The Empty Spaces of Doors and Windows Allow the Room to Be Inhabited (paintings, ceramic objects by Anna Zvyagintseva). The Naked Room. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Free **19**

Overcoming Gravity (recently discovered photographs by the Carpathian artist Paraska Plytka-Horytsvit and other artworks). Mystetskyi Arsenal. 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Hr 80, Hr 40 for students and retirees, Hr 160 for a family ticket. Free for children under 12, people with disabilities, Ukrainian war veterans **17**

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Chinese Lanterns Festival (over 30 light installations and Chinese lanterns). Spivochko Pole. 4 p.m. - 10 p.m. Hr 160-480. Free for children under 7 **18**

Movies

Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker (action, adventure, fantasy in English). Zhovten. 2:25 p.m. Hr 130 **26**

Shows

AnnaRF (electro ethnic reggae). Atlas. 7 p.m. Hr 300-500 **30**

Theater

The Nutcracker (ballet). National Opera. 12 p.m., 7 p.m. Hr 50-1,000 **34**



'Thousands of Lights' New Year's Show

While there will be many holiday-themed musical performances this week, the "Thousands of Lights" show at the Zhovtnevyi Palace is the only one that will combine classical music, jazz and the voices of a children's choir. The "Thousands of Lights" New Year's Show will feature Christmas hymns and carols played by the award-winning Kyiv Virtuosi Orchestra, including "Joy to the World" and the Ukrainian "Shchedryk" that was adapted into "Carol of the Bells." Jazz singer Olha Lukachova and her quartet will perform jazz Christmas classics like "Let It Snow" and "Jingle Bells." And the Dzvinochok (The Bell) children's choir will lend the show that special atmosphere of Christmas light and warmth.

Thousands of Lights.

New Year's Show. Zhovtnevyi (1 Heroiv Nebesnoi Sotni Alley). Dec. 28. 8 p.m. Hr 200-1,300

Venues

Classical Music

1 National Music Academy of Ukraine (1/3-11 Arkhitektova Horodetskoho St.) +38044 279 1242

2 National Philharmonic of Ukraine (2 Volodymyrskyi Uzviz St.) +38044 278 6291

Live Music

3 32 Jazz Club (32 Vozdvizhenska St.) +38068 411 1972

4 Architect's House (7 Borysa Hrinchenka St.) +38050 386 7410

5 Caribbean Club (4 Petliuryi St.) +38067 224 4111

Clubs

10 Closer (31 Nyzhnoiurkivska St.) +38067 250 0308

14 Art 14 Gallery (14 Mykhailivskyi Ln.)

15 Dom Music Bar (10 Sahaidachnoho St.) +38096 011 0515

20 Triptych Global Arts Workshop (34 An-

driivskyi Uzviz St.) +38044 279 0759

25 Cinema City (Ocean Plaza shopping

mall, 176 Antonovycha St.) +38044 230 7230

26 Multiplex Cinema (Lavina Mall, 6D Berkovetska St.) 0800 505 333

30 Atlas (37-41 Sichovykh Striltsiv St.) +38067 155 2255

34 National Opera of Ukraine (50 Volodymyrskyi Uzviz St.) +38044 234 7165

2010

Yanukovych takes revenge, sells out Ukraine's interests

By Natalia Datskevych
datskevych@kyivpost.com

For Ukraine, 2010 was a year of drastic pro-Russian reorientation in the country's political vector, fueled by the fateful Kharkiv agreements, regular fights in the parliament, and politically motivated prosecutions.

The year also saw the deadliest car accident in the history of independent Ukraine, while the country's results in sports were disastrous.

Ukraine is still living with the consequences of 2010.

Yanukovych win

The most dramatic and most important event of 2010 was the election of Viktor Yanukovych as the fourth president of Ukraine. In February, Yanukovych, the twice-convicted felon, defeated Yulia Tymoshenko, Ukraine's prime minister at that time, in the second round of the presidential elections by only 3.5 percentage points.

In 2004, he almost became Ukraine's president in a rigged election, but the results were overturned after the popular uprising known as the Orange Revolution, spearheaded by Viktor Yushchenko. The Ukrainian Supreme Court ordered a revote on Dec. 26, won by Yushchenko.

Tymoshenko cried foul after losing, but lost her appeal of the 2010 election results.

The new president, who led the pro-Russian Party of Regions, actively took the reins of power. He created a ruling parliamentary majority illegally, critics argued, by wooing 16 lawmakers away from their factions to join the coalition that also included the Communist Party and Bloc of Volodymyr Lytvyn.

Yanukovych's cronies filled the Cabinet of Ministers.

He stacked the Constitutional Court with four new appointees, who in October ruled in his favor to change the Constitution to give the president more powers.

As a result, Yanukovych effectively had control of all three branches of government — executive, legislative and judicial.

With his newfound powers,



Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych passes a soldier prior to his inauguration in Kyiv on Feb. 25, 2010. The twice-convicted felon's four-year authoritarian rule was marked by broken promises, repression and an unwelcome subservience to Moscow. He was ousted by the EuroMaidan Revolution on Feb. 22, 2014.

Yanukovych began ruling with greater arrogance. His pit-bull prosecutor Renat Kuzmin, deputy to Prosecutor General Viktor Pshonka, started opening up criminal cases against Tymoshenko and her allies, including ex-Ukrainian Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko and Bohdan Danylyshyn, who served as economy minister in 2007–2010.

Selling out interests

In April, Yanukovych and then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, a longtime ally of Vladimir Putin, met in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv and clinched one of the most outrageous deals of the decade.

Russia gave Ukraine a 30% discount on natural gas, but critics say the price was, in fact, merely lowered to the market price that Ukraine should have been paying anyway.

So, despite giving nothing financially, Moscow got a lot in return — an extension of a rental agreement to keep its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, a Crimean port city, until 2042. Back then, Yanukovych said Ukraine needed this agreement to “normalize relations with Russia and change unfair gas contracts,” which would save the country \$40 billion over the next 10 years.

Many experts immediately described the Kharkiv agreements as a betrayal of the country's national interests with the unconstitutional presence of foreign troops on Ukrainian soil.

The political opposition led by Tymoshenko demanded that Yanukovych be impeached.

At the end of April, before the ratification of the agreement in the Verkhovna Rada, lawmakers pelted parliamentary speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn with raw eggs and smoke

bombs. Lytvyn sat at the rostrum under two black umbrellas, protected by his bodyguards.

However, the agreements were still ratified.

The “discount” later turned out to be a mirage since Ukraine still had to buy Russian gas at the highest price of any European country.

And the Kharkiv agreements gave Russia the right to have its troops in Crimea, a convenience that helped the Kremlin easily annex the peninsula four years later. Russia unilaterally terminated the infamous agreements after illegally claiming that the peninsula is now part of the Russian Federation.

Wreath hits Yanukovych

Ukrainian and Russian leaders had at least 10 bilateral meetings in the first three months of Yanukovych's rule. Putin, then prime minister but always the real

power in the Kremlin, wanted to merge entire sectors of the two nations' economies — including Ukraine's Naftogaz and Russia's Gazprom. Even this was too much for Yanukovych.

In May, Russian President Medvedev flew to Kyiv for a two-day official visit. On the first rainy day, both presidents went to Kyiv's Glory Park to lay two large wreaths made of pine branches at the Tomb of the Unknown Ukrainian Soldier.

As Yanukovych bowed his head to honor fallen soldiers, a gust of wind picked up his wreath and tossed it on his head.

A video of the incident went viral on YouTube. It became so popular that the wreath was even sold in an internet auction 10 days later for \$5,300.

Tragedy in Marhanets

In October, the small city of Marhanets in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast became the epicenter of national news.

In the morning, a train hit a passenger bus, killing 45 people and injuring eight others. The victims were heading to work from nearby Nikopol.

It was the deadliest road accident in Ukraine's history.

The bus, whose driver had clearly violated traffic rules, was pushed 500 meters down the tracks as the train tried to stop.

Among the passengers killed were three children: boys aged seven, 13 and 15.

Sport achievements

In February 2010, almost 50 Ukrainian athletes went to the Canadian city of Vancouver to participate in the 21st Winter Olympic Games.

But the results were worse than expected: not a single medal.

However, in May, Inna Osypenko-Radomska won the gold medal at the World Canoeing Championships in Poznan, Poland. However, four years later, she changed her citizenship to play for Azerbaijan, as Ukraine constantly lacked financing for sports. 🇺🇦



Feb. 12, 2010 — #7
In a remarkable political comeback from disgrace, Viktor Yanukovych defeats Yulia Tymoshenko to become president.



May 7, 2010 — #18-#19
Ukraine's new leaders let Russia's Black Sea Fleet remain in the Crimean peninsula until 2042, get nothing in return.



Oct. 8, 2010 — #41
The Kyiv Post ranked the richest and most influential foreigners in Ukraine and then honored them at a ceremony.



Dec. 3, 2010 — #49
WikiLeaks exposed a lot about how corruption works, including Dmytro Firtash's ties to Semyon Mogilevich.



Dec. 17, 2010 — #51
Rinat Akhmetov pulls ahead of the rest of the oligarchs, with a fortune estimated at \$24 billion.

2011

Yanukovych's kleptocracy is brazen, with no one to stop him

By Oksana Grytsenko
grytsenko@kyivpost.com

The year 2011 was one of kleptocracy, corruption and a crackdown on the opposition. Ukraine's rich were rapidly growing richer, especially those with links to President Viktor Yanukovych and his party.

Ukraine's poor were struggling even to buy buckwheat, a popular staple of the local diet.

Tensions between the rich and poor manifested themselves in protests over several deadly traffic accidents caused by rich brats, who usually went unpunished for their dangerous driving.

The lack of justice in Ukraine sparked concern worldwide when a court sentenced ex-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, Yanukovych's political opponent, to seven years in prison in what was largely regarded as a show trial to sideline the president's greatest foe.

On the bright side, independent Ukraine turned 20 in 2011, and it was preparing to co-host Euro 2012, the European soccer championship and the biggest sporting event in its history.

Billionaires rule

In 2011, Ukraine had eight billionaires, three more than the previous year, Forbes magazine showed in its ranking. All the billionaires earned their wealth in metallurgy, energy, and agriculture. The richest oligarch, Rinat Akhmatov, became three times richer than in the previous year. In the list of 100 richest Ukrainians compiled by Korrespondent magazine, every fourth person — including Akhmetov — was either a member of Yanukovych's party or a native of Donetsk Oblast, where Yanukovych came from.

For the first time, Yanukovych's elder son Oleksandr was listed among Ukraine's top 100 richest people, according to Korrespondent. The term "the family," which meant

the inner circle of people close to Yanukovych and his son Oleksandr, first appeared in 2011. It would be the major phenomenon for the country in the coming years.

Rich brats

About a quarter of Ukrainians were living below the poverty line in 2011, according to the country's Institute of Demography, and the average salary was about \$300. Nevertheless, Ukraine was No 3 in Europe after Russia and Germany by the number of purchased luxury cars.

The division between the rich and powerful and the poor and powerless was best seen in unpunished crimes or acts of hooliganism committed by the children of politicians, oligarchs, and top law enforcement officials.

In July 2011, Roman Landik, the son of a lawmaker from Yanukovych's party, was caught on video viciously beating a young woman in a Luhansk restaurant. Luhansk police issued a search warrant for him only after that video became viral. This incident led to protests in Kyiv.

Activists recalled Serhiy Kalynovsky, the former stepson of oligarch Dmytro Firtash, who killed two people in a car accident in 2007, but managed to go into hiding abroad; Dmytro Rud, son of a prosecutor in Dnipro (then called Dnipropetrovsk), who hit and killed three women in his car in Dnipro, but was released on bail; and Yanukovych's younger son Viktor, who was also a fan of riding fast in the expensive cars.

There was also Margaryta Smilianska-Halytska, step-daughter of the head of Ukraine's State Employment Service. Although her driving did not lead to fatal consequences, it certainly caught public attention: In September 2011, she crashed her Bentley into four other luxury cars — an Aston Martin, Mercedes, Ferrari and Porsche — in Monaco.



Former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko waves to her supporters from the barred window of Lukyanivske detention center in Kyiv on Nov. 4, 2011. In October 2011, a court sentenced Tymoshenko to seven years in prison for abuse of office over the gas deal she signed with Russia in 2009. Ukraine's opposition and the world called Tymoshenko's case political reprisal from her rival, then-President Viktor Yanukovych.

Political persecutions

Yuriy Lutsenko, then an opposition politician and former interior minister, spent the entirety of 2011 in a detention center. He was arrested in late 2010 while walking his dog and accused of abuse of office while minister for giving a state-owned apartment to his driver. The politician was then sentenced to four years in prison.

Lutsenko called the case politically motivated. In 2012, the European Court of Human Rights agreed in a ruling.

In August 2011, a court arrested Yulia Tymoshenko, who had been Yanukovych's main rival in the 2010 presidential election, losing by only 3.5 percentage points. That sparked clashes in Kyiv between Tymoshenko's supporters and the police. In October 2011, a court sentenced her to seven years in prison for abuse of office over the gas deal she signed with Russia in 2009.

Members of the opposition and the international community called Tymoshenko's trial political persecution. Tymoshenko was released from jail in late February 2014, a day after mass protests in Kyiv known as EuroMaidan Revolution ousted Yanukovych, who fled to Russia.

Grain quotas

The government of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov extended the quotas on grain exports, allegedly to secure the grain reserves and prevent hunger in the country. By many of the grain traders and experts said this was actually corruption at work, since the largest Khliv Investbud, a company linked to Agricultural Minister Mykola Prysiashniuk, received the largest quotas. In March 2011, Nibulon, one of the largest grain producers, went to court against the government. In late May 2011, the government lifted the grain quotas under pressure from market players and foreign partners.

On April 15, 2011, the Kyiv Post published an interview with Prysiashniuk in which he gave conflicting explanations about who owned Khliv Investbud. The minister, now in exile abroad, pressured then-Kyiv Post publisher Mohammad Zahoor to fire the newspaper's chief editor, Brian Bonner, for publishing the interview. Zahoor did but reinstated Bonner five days later after the staff went on strike.

Another money-making scheme was linked to buckwheat. The government obliged farmers to sell buckwheat at prices far below mar-

ket level, ostensibly to help the poor. However, buckwheat disappeared from supermarkets. Azarov's government then imported a large amount of buckwheat from China at an outrageously high price in what appeared to be an obvious kickback scheme. The main operator of the purchase was notorious Khliv Investbud.

Ukraine turns 20

In August 2011, the government pompously celebrated the 20th anniversary of Ukraine's independence, while the opposition marched to Presidential Administration in protest against political persecutions. The protest ended with demonstrators scuffling with police.

At the same time, the country was preparing for the Euro 2012 football championships with numerous major infrastructure projects. They included purchasing high-speed trains in South Korea and reconstructing Ukraine's Olympic Stadium in Kyiv. The year was also an absolute triumph for the Ukrainian boxer brothers Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko, who together held the champion's belts in all four of boxing's main heavyweight divisions. ☘



Feb. 25, 2011 — #8
Billionaire oligarch Dmytro Firtash loses his libel lawsuit against the Kyiv Post in a London court.



April 15, 2011 — #15
The Kyiv Post exposed Agriculture Minister Mykola Prysiashnyuk's attempts to monopolize grain exports.



July 15, 2011 — #28
"Mazhory," or rich brats, get away with crimes — including one who dragged a woman by her hair in a crowded cafe.



Sept. 2, 2011 — #35
Wikileaks exposes memos showing how Ukraine's kleptocracy works, including privatizations rigged for oligarchs.



Oct. 14, 2011 — #41
A judge convicts Yulia Tymoshenko of abuse of power in a show trial condemned internationally.

2012

Euro 2012 provides bright spot in an otherwise very grim year

By Olga Rudenko and Vyacheslav Hnatyuk

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With highly questionable parliamentary elections and continuous persecution of the opposition, the authoritarian regime of President Viktor Yanukovich and his Party of Regions looked indestructible in 2012.

Parliamentary elections

Much of the year was dominated by the October parliamentary elections.

Yanukovich's Party of Regions needed to preserve control of the parliament amid dropping approval ratings. To achieve it, they passed new electoral legislation the year before, introducing single-mandate districts and banning parties from running united as blocs. It reduced the chances of opposition parties, who formed a union known as the Dictatorship Resistance Committee, and opened possibilities for cheating.

It also helped that in February, Yuriy Lutsenko, then one of the leaders of the opposition, was sentenced to four years in prison for abuse of office. He became the second opposition leader to be jailed in an apparently political case, after Yulia Tymoshenko in 2011.

As a result, the Party of Regions won 152 out of 450 seats, but preserved control over the parliament with the help of the 66-member faction of the Communist Party, and some independent lawmakers.

International and Ukrainian observers deemed the election "not competitive enough" and reported numerous violations of the voting process and the vote count.

The new parliament was short-lived. Less than two years later, President Petro Poroshenko, the nation's fifth president, dissolved the legislature and initiated a snap election.

Euro 2012

Ukraine co-hosting the UEFA Euro 2012 soccer championship with Poland was one of the brightest moments of the decade for Ukrainians. For the first time, a major event took place in Ukraine,



Two Ukrainian soccer fans root for their national team in Donetsk on June 19, 2012, during a game against England. Wayne Rooney of England scored the single goal in the game and Ukraine lost 0:1.

giving Ukrainians a feeling of being included in the European family.

In the run-up to the championship, the nation has renovated or built from scratch key sports arenas, airports, roads, and hotels. Speedy Hyundai trains were imported to connect the biggest cities. The preparations had cost the country about \$5 billion over four years. There were many allegations of embezzlement of state funds, but no one was prosecuted.

Ukraine's national soccer team, however, failed to qualify for the championship's final stage, as it took the third place in Group D after losses against France and England. The Ukrainian fans enjoyed a single victory against Sweden, though.

Big crime year

The 2012 was also a year of shocking crimes.

The most publicized one was the tragic story of Oksana Makar, an 18-year-old woman from the southern city of Mykolaiv, which shook up Ukraine that year.

Three young men raped Makar on

March 9, 2012, in Mykolaiv. To cover up their crime, they tried to burn the woman alive in a trash pit at the abandoned construction site. Makar survived and was found the next morning. Despite intense medical care, Makar died in hospital 20 days after the attack.

The crime immediately grabbed public attention in Ukraine. It was partly due to the cruelty of the attack, but also because many anticipated that the suspects may evade responsibility, as one of them was related to local officials through his parents. This feeling was fueled by the fact that the then-governor of Mykolaiv Oblast made unfavorable comments about Makar, blaming her parents for "not controlling their daughter."

Amid this expectation of impunity, thousands of people in Mykolaiv and other cities took to the streets, demanding justice for the victim.

The case was known beyond Ukraine. The Kyiv Post got emails from readers abroad, expressing support for Makar's family and trying to send money to them.

In the end, the attackers didn't

evade justice: two were sentenced to 14 and 15 years in prison, while one got a life sentence.

The case caused one of the first protest movements during the Yanukovich presidency. Later in 2013, there were protests in support of another gang-rape victim in Vradiyivka, a city in Mykolaiv Oblast. The Vradiyivka protests, in their turn, are widely seen as a precursor of the EuroMaidan Revolution.

Shortly after Makar was murdered, another unusual crime grabbed the headlines. On April 27, 2012, a series of explosions took place in the industrial city of Dnipro, then known as Dnipropetrovsk, located some 500 kilometers south of Kyiv and home to 1 million people. It was something unusual for Ukraine: terror attacks. Four explosive devices were hidden in concrete trash bins. They detonated within hours. No one was killed, but 27 people were injured.

The police soon arrested a local university professor for organizing the explosions. Seven years later, the case is still being heard in court, with the professor claiming he was set up

by Security Service of Ukraine agents.

But this wasn't it for 2012. In September, a man shot dead three guards at the supermarket in the Karavan shopping mall. It was one of the rare mass shootings in Ukraine's history. The man was identified as a Kyivan named Yaroslav Mazurok. He was found dead in Kyiv weeks later.

Although the police said it appeared to be a suicide, speculation went on regarding whether it was true and whether Mazurok was really "the Karavan shooter." Mazurok's motives were never clear.

Language law

The new language law, adopted in July 2012, caused controversy in Ukraine. It expanded the use of the Russian language and languages of other national minorities, and was widely believed to be detrimental to the Ukrainian language.

The language law polarized parliamentary parties and the public, causing clashes in the parliament and in the streets. As the pro-Russian Communist Party and Party of Regions pushed for adoption of the law, the law was deemed to represent the interests of Russia. It was also criticized by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.

The controversial law ended up causing even more damage than anticipated. In February 2014, it was the parliament's attempt to cancel it that was used by separatists as a pretext to start pro-Russian rallies in eastern Ukraine.

The Constitutional Court ended up canceling the law in 2018.

Anti-tobacco move

In 2012, Ukraine made considerable progress in fighting tobacco smoking.

In March, the parliament banned tobacco advertising. The state also increased taxation of the tobacco industry and made tax enforcement more stringent. This worked towards making cigarettes less affordable to buyers and replenishing state coffers.

In December, the country banned indoor smoking in public places. This move protected millions of Ukrainians from secondhand smoke, which used to be omnipresent in Ukrainians eateries. ☹



Feb. 24, 2012 – #8
Pirates boarded commercial ships and kidnapped those on board for ransom, affecting Ukrainians working at sea.



March 2, 2012 – #9
Viktor Yanukovich has installed relatives, friends, business partners and Donetsk cronies in top positions.



June 15, 2012 – #24
Ukraine had high hopes in the Euro 2012 soccer championship after beating Sweden 2-1, but then lost to France.



June 29, 2012 – #26
Italy and Spain squared off in the Euro 2012 championship final in Kyiv, a match won on July 1 by Spain.



Sept. 28, 2012 – #39
A draconian new libel law would have effectively banned criticism of public officials, prompting a blank-page protest.

2013

Ukraine ignites in revolution to seize control of its future

By **Toma Istomina**
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After more than three years of President Viktor Yanukovich's march towards dictatorship, Ukrainians finally had enough. Yanukovich's misrule included rampant corruption, persecution of his political enemies, police brutality, and sustained attempts at censorship and harassment of journalists. The business community also had numerous complaints and foreign investment remained tepid in light of the poor investment climate.

But the trigger for the massive protests was Yanukovich's refusal in November to sign a political and trade association agreement with the European Union, cementing his turn away from the West and towards the Kremlin. Journalist Mustafa Nayyem's Facebook post on Nov. 21 calling people to Independence Square provided the spark to ignite the uprising.

Political repression

At the start of 2013, two major political foes of Yanukovich remained in prison: former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and former top cop Yuriy Lutsenko. Both were recognized as political prisoners by the European Court of Human Rights.

However, they faced different fates. Lutsenko was pardoned by Yanukovich in April, a move largely perceived as the result of Western and domestic pressure.

Meanwhile, Tymoshenko faced new accusations of involvement in the 1996 assassination of lawmaker Yevhen Shcherban on the tarmac of Donetsk airport. The case was soon closed, but Tymoshenko remained jailed on a conviction of abuse of power for a 2009 natural gas agreement she reached with Russia. She was freed only after Yanukovich fled to Russia on Feb. 22, 2014.

Apart from high-profile political cases, there were also several trials involving non-public figures, which gained public resonance and added to the police state image Ukraine had acquired. Two Ukrainians were sentenced to outrageous prison terms for altering the graffiti image of a man resembling Yanukovich, painted on a wall. They had painted a red dot on his forehead.



The EuroMaidan Revolution's rally of Dec. 15, 2013 is estimated to have been attended by more than 200,000 people, with the massive crowd spilling over on to Khreshchatyk Street and the hillside overlooking Independence Square.

While the victims of Yanukovich's regime continued to face prison sentences, the judges who presided over the show trials were promoted for their loyalty to the authorities.

Pukach conviction

One of the most flagrant crimes in Ukrainian history was the Sept. 16, 2000 murder of journalist Georgiy Gongadze. The opposition journalist and founder of the Ukrayinska Pravda news site went missing. His corpse was found several months later, beheaded in a forest outside of Kyiv. The investigation of the crime stalled for years. Then, in January 2013, former police general Oleksiy Pukach was sentenced to life in prison for intentionally murdering Gongadze.

Former President Leonid Kuchma has been accused of ordering the journalist's assassination. He denies this allegation. However, no one has ever been brought to justice for ordering Gongadze's killing, and Pukach remains the highest-ranking official convicted in the case.

Media crisis

Ukrainian media has long been dominated by oligarchs who own

unprofitable outlets and use them as political weapons to promote friends, punish foes and mislead the public. However, in 2013, the situation became even worse. Journalists faced censorship, while media outlets churned out entertaining content to distract from the real state of affairs in the country.

First, one of the top television channels, Inter, was sold to Dmytro Firtash, an oligarch tied to Yanukovich and his close associates, and Serhiy Lyovochkin, the president's chief of staff. Under the new owners, Inter's news coverage amounted to pro-Yanukovich publicity.

TVi, an opposition news channel known for critical reporting and strong investigations, got a new owner, the little-known New York-based Ukrainian Alexander Altman. Some of the channel's staff went on strike and eventually quit, saying the real owner was a Yanukovich ally.

Two more influential print publications, Korrespondent and Forbes, were bought by Serhiy Kurchenko, who was close to the president's elder son, Oleksandr Yanukovich, and seen as a front man of the family. Outraged by the new owner's

censorship, 13 journalists left Forbes. Days later, Vitaly Sych, the chief editor who had led Korrespondent for more than a decade, was removed from his post. Several more respected journalists followed Sych.

The authorities' intervention into media was perceived as an effort to stifle criticism before the 2015 elections.

Meanwhile, the Kyiv Post made an important move toward financial independence in 2013 by establishing a paywall, a system common in the United States and Europe, in which paid subscribers get access to all content.

Business deterioration

Ukraine's gross domestic product in 2013 was the highest recorded to date: \$180 billion.

But the number masked serious problems. The country lagged in the World Bank's Doing Business rating: 137th place out of 185 countries. Foreign currency reserves fell to their lowest level since the 2008 global crisis. The economy was largely in the shadows, corruption flourished and raider attacks against businesses were a regular occurrence.

One of the most sensational cases was a raid of Globus shopping mall, located in the very center of Kyiv. The takeover of the \$200 million property from a British investor overnight in September, yet it triggered no reaction from police and was legitimized by a court ruling.

Change of vector

Yanukovich masked his pro-Kremlin policy with pro-European rhetoric. But his authoritarian governing style didn't fit with EU values. Russia forced the issue by launching a trade war against Ukraine to pressure it into joining a Moscow-led customs unit of former Soviet republics — including Belarus and Kazakhstan — rather than the EU.

Yanukovich buckled under Putin's pressure and reversed course. On Nov. 21, 2013, his then-Prime Minister Mykola Azarov announced that the country would put the association process on hold.

Euromaidan Revolution

Nayyem's Facebook post helped channel the public outrage. Hundreds of protesters immediately turned out in the rain on Kyiv's main Independence Square on Nov. 21. Largely attended by students, the peaceful protests aimed to encourage Yanukovich to change his mind ahead of an important Nov. 29 EU summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he was supposed to sign the agreement. The summit ended disastrously for Yanukovich as he once again spurned Europe.

And, on the night of Nov. 30, riot police brutally attacked the protesters and journalists. The footage of that attack shocked the country by confronting citizens with the nightmarish reality that police were willing to beat peaceful citizens in the streets.

Many more Ukrainians took to the streets including, on Sunday, Dec. 1, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians.

The issue was no longer just about integration with the EU. Rather, it was about basic human rights.

2013 ended with great uncertainty as tent camps controlled Khreshchatyk Street and Independence Square. ☹



Jan. 18, 2013 – #3
An investigation found that a privately owned customs terminal in Odesa looks to be a venue of major corruption.



Oct. 25, 2013 – #43
Serhiy Kurchenko came out of nowhere to amass a fortune. A closer look shows backing from Viktor Yanukovich.



Nov. 8, 2013 – #45
Many services and sectors of the economy are in the hands of a few privileged players, some enjoying monopolies.



Nov. 29, 2013 – #48
Up to 100,000 people went to Kyiv's European Square on Nov. 24 to protest Viktor Yanukovich's rejection of Europe.



Dec. 20, 2013 – #52
The Kyiv Post looks at the people who power Ukraine's EuroMaidan Revolution, under way since Nov. 21, 2013.

2014

Victorious revolution triggers Russia's war

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After the 100-day EuroMaidan Revolution succeeded in ousting pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, the nation was left exhausted and vulnerable.

Russia exploited this weakness: instead of helping Ukraine, it started seizing the territories of its closest neighbor, annexing Crimea and starting a bloody war in the Donbas.

Devastating as it was, 2014 also showed the longing that Ukrainians had for democracy and independence, as the nation set to pushing Russia back.

Revolution unites nation

The darkest and most violent moments of the EuroMaidan Revolution took place during five short winter days in the third week of February 2014. They will endure in Ukraine's collective memory as some of the most painful and important moments in recent history.

Protests were initially sparked on Nov. 21, 2013 by the decision of the Yanukovich regime to pivot away from a promised association agreement with the European Union and toward deeper ties with Russia.

Ukrainians were against such a move, and they started gathering across the country to protest. But the peaceful rallies were met by violence and later bullets. Yanukovich's police used gas, automatic weapons, and sniper rifles against protesters.

Events reached a tragic conclusion on Feb. 18–20, as Ukrainian forces backing Yanukovich, including paid-for gangs of so-called *titushki* and Berkut special police killed 100 people.

Besides those victims, 18 police officers were also killed in the final days of the revolution.

But Yanukovich was finished. His faltering presidency came to an end when he fled to Russia on Feb. 22, 2014, evidently in fear of his life. He has remained in exile and has been convicted in absentia for high treason against Ukraine.

The crimes that happened during the EuroMaidan remain unpunished today.

Russia invades, occupies

While more than 100 people died during the revolution, the death toll



Ukrainian soldiers fire mortar rounds at Russian positions in the village of Pisky near Donetsk airport on Dec. 5, 2014.

for the nation would only grow as Russia used the Ukrainian revolution to seize the country's territories.

Almost at the same time as Yanukovich was fleeing to Moscow, Russian soldiers in plain uniform and without insignia seized strategic points on the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, claiming they were defending the rights of Russian-speaking population living there.

Within a month, after a sham referendum on March 16, Russia's land grab was complete. The whole operation is now believed to have been planned well in advance. Yanukovich was convicted by a Ukrainian court for inviting the Russian forces to attack.

Russia didn't stop with Crimea, however, as it started instigating violent uprisings throughout southern and eastern Ukraine, even claiming that southeastern Ukraine was historically part of its country in a region known as Novorossiya.

Russia-backed militants stoked violent protests that brought them directly into conflict with the beleaguered and disoriented Ukrainian security services.

August saw Russian regular forces exploit this chaos and invade the Donbas, marking the start of a

war coordinated from Moscow that continues in Ukraine today. About 7% of the Ukrainian territory is still occupied by Russia, some 14,000 people have been killed and 5.2 million need humanitarian aid.

Volunteers save country

Fleeing the country, Yanukovich left the nation flat broke — he and his cronies siphoned \$40 billion from the nation over his four-year rule. Ukraine's state treasury had no money left and the economy was in danger of collapse, leaving the nation unable to defend itself.

Ukrainian forces were ill prepared for the annexation of Crimea, but the nation quickly mobilized to defend against further attacks in the eastern regions. Volunteer fighters played an essential role in the first weeks of the war, organizing into militia battalions to slow down the Russian invasion, while a new government was rebuilding the state and its military.

This rebuilding would not be possible without another type of volunteers: those who helped to equip the army. Essential things like food and uniforms were in short supply, so volunteers brought them to fighters on the front lines. People crowd-

funded the purchase and supply of things like heaters, medical kits and military equipment.

Soon after, Ukraine's international allies also stepped up and began supporting the Ukrainian armed forces, including the airlifting of supplies and ammunition to forces in the Donbas, but the first volunteer help was vital to contain the war.

Rise of Poroshenko

A wave of patriotism and clear hunger for European integration were used as a rallying cry by Petro Poroshenko to win the May 25 election for Ukraine's first post-revolution presidency.

Although billionaire Poroshenko held minister positions under two presidents, including Yanukovich, his early and strong support of the democratic revolution gave him credibility among voters: Poroshenko got 54 percent of the vote in a landslide victory on May 25.

In his campaign, he pledged to sign the full EU association agreement for closer economic ties in June, and did so on June 27. He had also promised to deliver a visa-free regime with the EU, which came true in June 2017.

But Poroshenko's biggest promises

remained unfulfilled by 2019. He vowed to end the war against Russia in a matter of "hours, not months."

Massacre in Ilovaisk

In an attempt to fulfil this promise, Poroshenko made Ukraine go on the offensive in trying to regain its territory, but suffered devastating battlefield losses, in Ilovaisk, most notably, and soon entered peace talks with Russia at a disadvantage.

The Ukrainian army was advancing to liberate its territory, and the city of Ilovaisk was supposed to be where it would break Russia's proxy forces. But the battle turned into a slaughter that ended the Ukrainian advance and left 366 Ukrainian soldiers dead.

The Battle of Ilovaisk changed the course of the war, forcing Ukrainian authorities to buy time with a humiliating peace deal in Minsk.

Those agreements, signed first in September 2014, proposed a cease-fire followed by the withdrawal of weaponry by both sides. By the end of 2015, local elections were to be held in the occupied territories under Ukrainian law, followed by autonomy for the region.

However, none of the Minsk agreement provisions have been fully realized to this day.

MH17 shot down

Russia and Kremlin-backed forces have committed no shortage of crimes since they first attacked Ukraine in 2014. But few events have sparked outrage like the downing of civilian airliner Malaysian Airlines flight 17.

All 238 passengers and 17 crew aboard were killed after the plane disintegrated over Donetsk.

Multiple investigations have since revealed it was downed by a Russian-made surface-to-air missile from a Russian military base that had been transported into the occupied Donbas from Russia on the day of the crash.

Multiple foreign governments, including Malaysia, Australia and the U.K. have said they hold Russia responsible for the disaster.

The Dutch Public Prosecution Service, in fact, has charged four people with murder in connection with the downing of MH17, three Russians and one Ukrainian. International arrest warrants have been issued, but justice for MH17 is still elusive. ☹



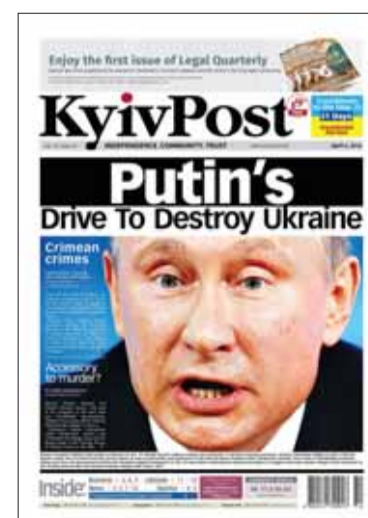
Jan. 24, 2014 – #4
Positions harden between protesters and Viktor Yanukovich, as negotiations to end Ukraine's political crisis fail.



Feb. 21, 2014 – #8
Police snipers fire on demonstrators, killing dozens in the final days of Viktor Yanukovich's rule.



Feb. 28, 2014 – #9
Leaving with blood on his hands and billions of dollars looted, Viktor Yanukovich flees power for Russian exile.



April 14, 2014 – #14
Russian President Vladimir Putin appears bent on destroying Ukraine as an independent nation.



June 6, 2014 – #23
Ukrainians hand Petro Poroshenko a first-round win in the May presidential election to replace Viktor Yanukovich.

2015

Ukraine defends Donetsk airport, loses Debaltseve

By Anna Myroniuk and Igor Kossov
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Ukraine entered 2015 fighting for its life.

Blasted by Russian guns, weighed down by an economic crisis and beset by uncertainty, Ukrainians held the line in the war-torn Donbas, while pushing forward with long-overdue domestic reforms to create a market economy, rebuild its military and establish rule of law.

For many, it was a year of terrible sacrifice and loss, in spite of the Minsk II peace agreement signed in February. The deal was designed to stop the war, but never did.

The year has also seen attempts to create a new national police force and a dedicated anti-corruption prosecutor's office. Major flaws, however, stymied the two initiatives.

Battle of Donetsk airport

The beginning of the year marked an escalation on the war front that led to a big defeat for Ukraine.

After 242 days of intense clashes with Russian-backed militants, those Ukrainian soldiers who survived had to retreat from the demolished Donetsk airport. The battles claimed the lives of 100 men, while more than 400 were injured.

In spite of the withdrawal, the battle became a symbol of strength of those Ukrainian servicemen who took part in it. For their bravery and fortitude, they were dubbed cyborgs.

After the battle ended in mid-January 2015, the airport — which had been renovated prior to the 2012 UEFA European Football Championship co-hosted by Ukraine — was totally demolished.

Battle of Debaltseve

Right after the battle for the Donetsk airport ended, a new one broke out in a strategic city of Debaltseve, some 100 kilometers northeast of Donetsk. As a result, the Russian-backed forces seized the city in mid-February 2015.

Ukrainian soldiers had to give up their positions after a month-long fierce battle that killed 110 and injured 270 Ukrainians.

At the beginning of February,

under pressure from the West, Ukraine and Russia agreed on a three-day ceasefire so that the local citizens who suffered under the shelling were able to get away. However, only few managed to escape.

Overall, at least 500 civilians were killed amid these hostilities.

Street-level police reform

Long-awaited in Ukraine, the National Police of Ukraine was established in November, replacing a force largely seen as corrupt. The most noticeable changes were in patrol police, which got new uniforms, higher salaries and Toyota patrol cars donated by the Japanese government.

Ukraine invited Georgian officials, who had successfully rooted out police corruption, to come to Kyiv and help.

However, soon the reform came to be seen as cosmetic, since the corrupt veteran employees of the Interior Ministry remained in place under Arsen Avakov, the minister of dubious reputation. The 300,000-member ministry has not excelled, to put it mildly, at solving big crimes.

Signing Minsk Protocol II

At the beginning of 2015, the Trilateral Contact Group — Ukraine, Russia, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe — amended the Minsk Protocol peace package with a detailed and specified guide on how to implement it. Minsk II was intended to revive its forerunner, Minsk I, and was also signed by the representatives of Russia-backed forces of Donetsk and Luhansk.

However, the agreements accomplished little — let alone a cease-fire.

Apart from that, the biggest dispute between the sides is on the order in which to fulfill the peace plan. Ukraine insists on Russia and its proxy forces to withdraw first to give Ukraine access to these territories. This would allow Ukraine to guarantee the security and transparency for conducting honest local elections in the Donbas. Russia, in turn, wants it to be vice versa so that it can legitimize the illegitimate Donetsk authorities.

Taking prisoners

Russia's courts convicted two



Ukrainian armed forces, led by a vanguard of tanks and other vehicles, arrive in Debaltseve in Donetsk Oblast on Feb. 14, 2015.

Crimea-born citizens of Ukraine charging them with plotting terrorist acts. Moscow's move was internationally recognized as political persecution, and the two convicts as political prisoners because there only crime was to assert Ukrainian sovereignty over the peninsula.

Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov and anarchist and anti-fascist activist Olexandr Kolchenko were sentenced to 20 and 10 years in Russia's prison. The two had been imprisoned for four years and were released only in 2019 in a prisoner swap between Ukraine and Russia.

Decentralization

One of the goals of post-EuroMaidan Ukraine was to give more power to local authorities, a process that began in 2014.

In 2015, Ukraine enabled the voluntary amalgamation of territorial communities, also known as hromadas; budget codes were amended to provide more funding to local budgets.

The 2015 decentralization bill authored by ex-President Petro Poroshenko sparked violent protests, due to a provision that would pave the way for more self-determination for the occupied Donbas regions. One of the demonstrators threw a grenade that killed three national guardsmen and wounded dozens of people.

Legislative battles over the execution of decentralization are ongoing to this day.

Ukraine held local elections in October that year under new rules adopted in July, defining the type of elections that must take place at every local administrative level. Elections did not happen in Crimea nor in parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that Ukraine couldn't con-

trol. The elections in Mariupol and Krasnoarmeysk were delayed until November.

Blockade of Donbas

In January, Ukraine introduced transport restrictions in the conflict area. People getting into the Russian-controlled areas required special permits to pass. This decreased access to food and medication for those living there.

The restrictions were even toughened in March, which reportedly led to vehicles carrying food and medicine to be turned away. These restrictions had foreshadowed the total economic blockade imposed on the occupied territories two years later.

Blockade of Crimea

In September, frustrated with inaction against Russian occupying forces in Crimea, Crimean Tatar activists seized control of three checkpoints on the border between mainland Ukraine and the peninsula. Tatars took down the blockade at the end of the year, because it had no effect on the situation.

In the fall, unknown people destroyed major power lines supplying electricity from Ukraine to Crimea, which left millions of people without power. Ukraine officially stopped supplying power to Crimea in 2016, the peninsula was linked to the Russian networks.

At the end of the year, Kyiv had imposed a restriction on the shipment of goods to Crimea, until a Kyiv administrative appeals court in June 2017 partly reversed that decision.

Unsuccessful prosecutor

In September, Ukraine creat-

ed a Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's office within the General Prosecutor's Office of Ukraine.

Nazar Kholodnitsky was appointed to be the first anti-corruption prosecutor. While the move was meant to target the massive endemic corruption in the country, Kholodnitsky would prove to be largely ineffective at his job and the office would accomplish very little in the coming years. Moreover, Kholodnitsky is forever compromised after he was secretly recorded by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine coaching criminal suspects in how to evade charges.

Open public databases

In an effort to fight corruption, the government also opened access to all land and real estate property registries to the public. The move was a huge step towards transparency and the searchable databases were widely praised.

Financial crisis

A multifaceted economic crisis gripped Ukraine in 2015. Crises caused the hryvnia to plunge from Hr 15 per \$1 to over Hr 33 per \$1, while the country's debt jumped to 100% of its gross domestic product.

Ukraine's economy shrank by over 10% in 2015. The loss of two most industrial regions and a decline of trade with Russia contributed significantly to this economic downturn.

Amid a deep crisis of confidence in the banking sector, the National Bank of Ukraine continued its spree of shutting down banks it deemed insolvent, closing 33 banks — bringing to nearly 100, or half the pre-crisis total, the number of banks closed.



Feb. 27, 2015 — #9
Ukraine's society, economy and military are under increasing stress from Russia's war.



April 30, 2015 — #18
At the Ukraine-European Union summit in Kyiv on April 27, the two sides exchanged wish lists for each other.



May 8, 2015 — #19
Millions of Ukrainians were killed fighting Nazis in World War II; now the nation is again at war 70 years later.



June 26, 2015 — #26
While some train to defend Ukraine against Russia's war, others sunbathe on the Azov Sea beach in Mariupol.



Sept. 11, 2015 — #37
The Kyiv Post has been a media partner of Victor Pinchuk's annual Yalta European Strategy conference since 2015.

2016

Yatsenyuk out, Trump in; banking woes mount; Sheremet murdered

By Oleksiy Sorokin and Daria Shulzhenko
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Two years after the EuroMaidan Revolution, Ukraine was still struggling against Russian aggression, saw major setbacks in its aspirations to join the European Union and witnessed one of the most outrageous assassination plots in its history.

The year 2016 began with a free-trade agreement between the EU and Ukraine kicking in on Jan. 1. However, the Netherlands later stalled this pact – Dutch voters dismissed an association agreement with Ukraine in a referendum.

Domestically, Ukraine witnessed a change of government: Volodymyr Groysman was appointed prime minister, increasing the power of then-President Petro Poroshenko, whose party the new premier represented.

It wasn't all good news for Poroshenko. The president's name appeared in the so-called Panama Papers, a list of leaked documents related to offshore companies registered in Central America.

In May, Ukrainian singer Jamala won the 2016 Eurovision Song Contest with her song "1944" about the deportation of Crimean Tatars from their homeland.

In July, Belarus-born journalist Pavel Sheremet was assassinated in downtown Kyiv after an explosive device was planted under his car.

At the end of the year, the National Bank of Ukraine nationalized PrivatBank, Ukraine's largest bank in terms of client share.

Dutch referendum

In 2013, then-President Viktor Yanukovich rejected the political and economic association agreement with the EU, sparking the uprising that drove him from office on Feb. 22, 2014. The agreement was eventually signed that year and, in 2016, the Ukraine-EU free trade agreement came into effect.

Since signing the free trade agreement, bilateral trade between Ukraine and the EU has increased by 60%, while the EU became Ukraine's largest trading partner, with 43% of both Ukraine's imports



Men carry the coffin of Pavel Sheremet to a hearse after a farewell ceremony for the slain journalist in Ukrainian House on July 22, 2016. The Ukrainska Pravda journalist and radio host was murdered by a car bomb in Kyiv on July 20, 2016.

and exports now tied to the EU.

However, the political part of the association agreement was obstructed by the Netherlands. In April 2016, 61% of Dutch citizens rejected the agreement with Ukraine in a nationwide referendum.

While the referendum was advisory, the results forced the Netherlands to delay the ratification of the political part of the agreement.

In December, the Netherlands forced the EU to adopt the following addendums to the agreement: no EU candidate status for Ukraine, no guarantees of military aid or security assistance, no freedom to reside or work in the EU, and the agreement can be suspended.

Poroshenko's control

On April 12, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk submitted his letter of resignation, after the two-month political crisis sparked by the parliament not accepting his earlier attempt to resign in mid-February. Four days later, then-Speaker Groysman, elected on the ticket of Poroshenko's party, was selected as prime minister.

Days before the change of government, the Panama Papers, a set of leaked documents, revealed ben-

eficiaries of more than 200,000 offshore companies, including many Ukrainian oligarchs and politicians. The documents showed that, during his presidency, Poroshenko registered a company in the British Virgin Islands. Journalists alleged wrongdoing and Poroshenko denied the accusations, saying the company was required in order for him to establish a blind trust for his business holdings.

In May, Poroshenko's close ally, Yuriy Lutsenko, was appointed prosecutor general, replacing Viktor Shokin. His appointment was marked with controversy when parliament passed an amendment allowing Lutsenko, who lacked a law degree, to assume his post.

Lutsenko and Shokin would figure prominently in the 2019 impeachment of U.S. President Donald J. Trump.

Trump era begins

Trump, elected in November 2016, troubled Ukraine during the campaign in a number of ways. He expressed admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin. He hired Paul Manafort, ex-President Viktor Yanukovich's despised political con-

sultant, as his campaign manager. He openly courted the idea of recognizing Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the Republican Party platform removed a provision in support of providing Ukraine with lethal weapons against Russia.

Sheremet assassinated

Early in the morning of July 20, 2016, the car of journalist Pavel Sheremet exploded as he headed to work. Sheremet had lived in Kyiv since 2011 and was a prominent critic of both the Russian and Belarusian political regimes. A Belarus native, he had been forced out of both countries because of his political views.

In Ukraine, Sheremet worked for Ukrainska Pravda, a news outlet founded by Georgiy Gongadze, a prominent Georgian-Ukrainian journalist murdered back in 2000. Both the murders of Sheremet and Gongadze remain unsolved.

In December, Interior Minister Arsen Avakov called a press conference and announced that the police had arrested five suspects in Sheremet's assassination. Questions remain about the evidence.

PrivatBank nationalized

After failing a stress test in September 2016, PrivatBank, then owned by billionaire oligarchs Ihor Kolomoisky and Gennadiy Boholyubov, was nationalized on Dec. 18.

The National Bank of Ukraine later revealed that almost its entire corporate lending portfolio was made up of non-performing loans, often made to companies connected to its owners. According to a forensic audit by U.S. firm Kroll, there was a \$5.5-billion gap in PrivatBank's balance sheet.

These days, Kolomoisky and Boholyubov are defendants in a U.K. court case launched by PrivatBank's new management. It alleges at least \$3 billion in fraudulent losses to the bank. While the courts have not yet ruled on the alleged fraud, judges have already recognized that "fraud on an epic scale" took place at the bank.

Kolomoisky denies all accusations and is suing the National Bank for allegedly raiding his property.

ProZorro

Starting in April 2016, Ukraine's government and large state enterprises were obliged to use ProZorro, an electronic system for state procurement meant to make government spending more transparent.

ProZorro started operating in pilot mode in February 2015, but became obligatory only in 2016. Prior to ProZorro, state purchases were conducted through auctions where participants could apply through a non-transparent online form or by sending applications by mail.

Ukraine says it has saved \$3.5 billion in public procurement due to ProZorro since 2016.

Jamala wins Eurovision

On May 14, Jamala, a Crimean-Tatar singer, won the Eurovision Song Contest for Ukraine in Stockholm.

Jamala performed her song "1944" about the Soviet deportation of Tatars from Crimea in that year. The song also seemed to reference Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Thanks to Jamala's victory, in 2017 Ukraine hosted the Eurovision contest for the second time in its history. Prior to that, in 2004, Ukrainian singer Ruslana also won the contest with her song "Wild Dances."



Jan. 29, 2016 – #5
 Opposing Russian dictator Vladimir Putin can be deadly. The list of his slain critics is long and growing.



July 1, 2016 – #27
 Plenty of people got rich through bank fraud and insider lending – all at the expense of Ukrainian taxpayers.



Aug. 5, 2016 – #32
 Russia's Vladimir Putin and then-U.S. presidential candidate Donald J. Trump were eerily aligned against Ukraine.



Oct. 7, 2016 – #41
 Just as Viktor Yanukovich surrounded himself with loyalists and business partners, so did Petro Poroshenko.



Dec. 9, 2016 – #50
 The Kyiv Post published its "Oligarch Watch" series, a study of the power of Ukraine's tycoons over the nation.

2017

Visa-free travel, stalled reforms highlight events

By Alexander Query and Oleg Sukhov

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The country's international friends started to grow impatient with President Petro Poroshenko and the government of Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman for obstructing the corruption fight and backsliding on reforms. Ukrainians were growing increasingly impatient as well.

Oligarchs continued to control significant swaths of the economy, while political leaders attempted to undermine the country's anti-corruption agencies, and tainted judges found their way onto the Supreme Court.

EU-Ukraine relations improve

In June 2017, Ukraine got the ability to travel visa-free to the European Union, fulfilling the dreams of the nation. Those with biometric passports could finally travel to all EU member-states, except the United Kingdom and Ireland.

It was a tangible accomplishment in the difficult quest for European integration. Additionally, the trade component of Ukraine's association agreement with the EU, signed in 2014, helped reorient the nation's economy to the West, even though many of the provisions have not been adopted yet.

Financial aid

In 2017, Ukraine also received \$3.9 billion in loans from the International Monetary Fund. It was part of a \$17.5 billion lending commitment agreed upon in 2015 and scheduled for disbursement over the following years.

Ukraine's need for credit was acute. The year before, the state had to nationalize and recapitalize PrivatBank due to an alleged \$5.5-billion fraud scheme by its former owners. Across the Ukrainian banking sector, taxpayers needed to pay \$15 billion because of bank insolvencies, largely caused by fraud and insider lending.

The IMF and Western partners pushed the government to create an independent anti-corruption court.

They also demanded that the government raise household gas prices to market level.

The U.S. Congress also chipped in with \$350 million in security assistance, including lethal and non-lethal equipment, training and technical help on the condition of transparency in military spending.

Other types of foreign assistance also started coming in. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, for example, contributed a 100-million-euro loan to increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse emissions in the country's public sector.

Energy independence

With Ukraine fighting to defend its border in the east, it was also struggling for energy independence from Russia. The country was looking for alternative sources of energy imports, while also trying to boost its own production.

U.S. companies also began to challenge Russian dominance as suppliers of nuclear fuel and coal to Ukraine. The first ever shipment of 700,000 tons of U.S. coal arrived in Ukraine in December in a purchase worth \$80 million. The first shipment of U.S. liquefied natural gas was also delivered to Ukraine through Poland around the same time.

Ukraine also turned to the European Union for natural gas in 2017, with 100% of its imports coming from countries like Romania, Poland and Slovakia that year. Some of those imports, however, still originated from Russia.

Business struggles

2017 was also a year in which Ukraine continued to struggle with its oligarch-dominated economy, stalling the country's market liberalizations and obstructing its deeper integration with the EU.

PrivatBank spent a lot of time at the heart of business scandals this year. The government did not investigate or prosecute the oligarchs Ihor Kolomoisky and Gennadiy Boholyubov, the founders and co-owners of the bank, suspected of embezzlement on a massive scale.

Billionaire oligarch Rinat Akhmetov lost control of 40 of his factories in the Russian-occupied



Ukrainian Yaroslav Didenko has his biometric passport checked at Boryspil International Airport near Kyiv on June 11, 2017. It was the first day of visa-free travel to most European Union countries for Ukrainians.

territory of eastern Ukraine. But his company DTEK still managed to net huge profits from the controversial Rotterdam+ scheme for coal pricing, which brought him \$1 billion throughout the year.

Due to IMF requirements, the Ukrainian government started to privatize its national network of electricity distribution companies, only to sell a quarter of state-owned stakes to Ukraine's richest man, Rinat Akhmetov, who already owned a majority stake in the same companies through DTEK Holding Shares.

It was seen as a step backwards for a country trying to achieve fair competition and energy security. As of 2019, the vast majority of Ukrainian electricity supply companies are still tied up in the shady holdings of Ukrainian or Russian oligarchs.

Saakashvili case

One of the defining disputes of the year was a bitter conflict between Poroshenko and former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.

In 2015, Poroshenko gave Saakashvili Ukrainian citizenship and appointed him as governor of Odesa Oblast. But Saakashvili soon turned into a political enemy for Poroshenko and started accusing him of blocking reforms.

Poroshenko rescinded Saakashvili's citizenship in July 2017 while he was out of the country. The former Georgian president says this was an unlawful political reprisal. In September 2017, he returned to Ukraine from Poland by breaking through the border with his supporters.

In December, the Prosecutor General's Office arrested and

charged Saakashvili with complicity in an alleged scheme by tycoon Serhiy Kurchenko's criminal group. Kurchenko was close to ousted former President Viktor Yanukovich. Saakashvili was allegedly receiving money from Kurchenko to finance protests against Poroshenko. Saakashvili says the case was fabricated and politically motivated.

The prosecutors' alleged evidence against Saakashvili was dismissed by independent lawyers as weak, and he was released from custody by Pechersk Court Judge Larysa Tsokol.

Incumbent Corruption

The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, or NABU, went after its first high-profile suspects in 2017. State Fiscal Service Chief Roman Nasirov, ex-People's Front party lawmaker Mykola Martynenko, Deputy Defense Minister Ihor Pavlovsky and Interior Minister Arsen Avakov's son Oleksandr were charged in corruption cases by the NABU.

However, the cases have not resulted in any convictions. Nasirov, Martynenko and Pavlovsky are still on trial, and the Oleksandr Avakov case was closed by prosecutors despite video evidence of his involvement in the scheme.

Control over the NABU

Another prominent feature of the year was an apparent attempt by the authorities to obstruct the NABU, which was the only body relatively independent of President Poroshenko.

In November, the Prosecutor General's Office and the Security Service of Ukraine disrupted a

NABU corruption investigation into the State Migration Service by publishing the personal data of NABU undercover agents, blowing their cover. The agents were arrested and charged with provoking an official to take a bribe. Pro-government lawmakers on Dec. 6 also submitted a bill that would enable parliament to fire NABU chief Artem Sytnyk without an audit of his performance. The bill was later removed from the agenda after Western criticism.

NAPC debacle

The National Agency for Preventing Corruption, which is supposed to check officials' electronic asset declarations, turned out to be a major failure in 2017. It failed to find any criminal or administrative offenses in any of the top officials' declarations.

Hanna Solomatina, a top official of the NAPC, said in November that the agency was involved in large-scale corruption and completely controlled by the Presidential Administration. The NAPC denied the accusations.

Supreme Court

The selection of judges for the new Supreme Court also drew sustained criticism in 2017. Poroshenko appointed 115 new Supreme Court judges. Out of these, 27 judges violated ethics and integrity standards, according to the Public Integrity Council, a civil society watchdog.

Members of the Public Integrity Council have also lambasted the High Qualification Commission for its arbitrary methodology and accused it of rigging the selection of Supreme Court judges. The High Qualification Commission denied accusations of wrongdoing.



Jan. 19, 2017 - #3
U.S. Vice President Joe Biden makes his final trip in office to Kyiv, with reassurances and a warning to fight corruption.



March 3, 2017 - #9
U.S. President Donald J. Trump surrounded himself with troubling Kremlin ties that alarmed Ukraine.



May 19, 2017 - #20
Ukrainians won travel freedom when the European Union dropped visa requirement for short-term stays of 90 days.



June 9, 2017 - #23
Not even a \$5.5-billion bank fraud could stir Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko to file charges against Ihor Kolomoisky.



Nov. 24, 2017 - #47
Anne Applebaum's book "Red Famine" is a riveting history of the Holodomor that killed nearly 4 million Ukrainians.

2018

Russia imprisons sailors as murder of Kherson activist sparks outrage

By Askold Krushelnycky,
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2018 was largely a disturbing year with two big events dominating the news: Russians captured and imprisoned 23 Ukrainian sailors near annexed Crimea while the horrifying murder of anti-corruption activist Kateryna Gandziuk's unsettled the whole country.

Amid this happening, ex-President Petro Poroshenko was also on his way to merge three Orthodox churches in Ukraine into one, creating the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Meanwhile, the country's politicians were getting ready for the upcoming 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections.

Ukraine beats Gazprom

In a morale-boosting decision, Ukrainian state-owned energy company Naftogaz won a ruling in Stockholm's arbitration court that Russia's Gazprom must pay it \$2.56 billion in resolution of a pricing and supply dispute which began after Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine.

Savchenko goes to prison

Former Russian-held prisoner, volunteer fighter and helicopter pilot, Nadia Savchenko, who was hailed as a heroine during her imprisonment and became a member of the Ukrainian parliament after her release, was arrested in the same parliament on charges of terrorism and planning to blow up government premise.

She was released from detention a year later, on April 15, 2019.

Kivan buys Kyiv Post

Ukraine's only international news media outlet Kyiv Post got a new owner on March 21, 2018, in its 23rd year.

The Kyiv Post has been operating since 1995, which means the news-

paper will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2020. The credit goes to hundreds of journalists who over the years upheld the highest professional standards in journalism, and to the Kyiv Post's owners who backed its editorial independence: Jed Sunden (1995–2009), Mohammad Zahoor (2009–2018) and current publisher Adnan Kivan, owner of the Kadorr Group in Odesa.

Reportedly, Kivan paid at least \$3.5 million for the newspaper, but he refused to disclose the exact price.

Kivan is one of the largest real estate businesspeople in Ukraine: his company has around 70 residential and office buildings as well as shopping centers and mosques. Most of his construction projects are in Odesa, but several are under construction in Kyiv as well.

US gives weapons

In April, officials reveal that the United States transferred 210 Javelin anti-armor man-portable weapons to Ukraine. It is the first time any allies of Ukraine had provided lethal weapons.

Since Kyiv received them, the Ukrainian military credit the mere presence of the cutting-edge "tank-killer" rockets with deterring pro-Kremlin forces from using tanks in eastern Ukraine.

Crimean bridge goes up

In May, Russian President Vladimir Putin opened a 19-kilometer, \$3.7 billion worth bridge between the Russian mainland and Crimea, providing Moscow's only direct road link to the occupied Ukrainian peninsula.

Arkady Babchenko stages own murder

Ukrainian authorities staged a high-profile journalist's murder, winning mixed response.

In a bizarre sting operation that set the world's media abuzz, the Security Service of Ukraine, known as the SBU, staged the murder of Russian dissident journalist Arkady Babchenko in Kyiv. The SBU jus-



People hold a vigil for Kateryna Gandziuk in front of the Interior Ministry on Nov. 4, 2018 on the day the Kherson anti-corruption campaigner died in hospital, months after falling victim to an acid attack in July 2018.

tified the fake crime as part of a special operation to uncover a Kremlin plot to kill at least 30 other people, many of them journalists. Babchenko cooperated with the authorities.

While some praised the agents for the operation, others, including some Western diplomats, pointed out that it undermined the world's trust in Ukraine and dismissed it as a publicity stunt.

Confronting Kolomoisky

In June, in the High Court in London, lawyers for the new, state-appointed owners of PrivatBank outlined how the bank's previous owners, Ihor Kolomoisky and Gennady Boholyubov, siphoned \$5.5 billion. The hearings lasted for 10 days.

The lawyers argued to retain a freeze on billions of dollars of the two oligarchs' assets as the first steps to recover money missing from PrivatBank.

Kolomoisky and Boholyubov deny the allegations. Their lawyers won a ruling that the frozen assets should be released, but an appeal against that decision was allowed and the funds were ordered to remain frozen. The final outcome of court proceedings is pending and it may take years.

Horror murder of activist

In July, Kateryna Gandziuk, a civil rights and anti-corruption activist, who exposed corruption in her hometown of Kherson, was attacked by assailants who doused her face and body with sulphuric acid. She succumbed to her painful and hideous injuries on Nov. 4, 2018.

Gandziuk's murder unsettled the country, sparking large protests and the foundation of a movement "Who killed Katya Gandziuk?" which has named several Kherson officials as potentially behind the murder.

Gandziuk herself believed that the attack was connected to her efforts to expose corruption in Kherson city and oblast.

McCain dies

A great friend of Ukraine, Senator John McCain, died on Aug. 25 after a long battle with cancer.

McCain was a U.S. pilot during the Vietnam War. After being shot down by Communist forces, he spent seven years as a prisoner in a war camp where he was routinely tortured. His father was the U.S. admiral in senior command of the war in Vietnam and the Vietnamese offered to release John McCain ahead of other prisoners — a breach of a sacred American military honor code. McCain refused the offer.

After leaving the Air Force he embarked on a political career and became one of his country's most influential and admired politicians. He ran, unsuccessfully, for president.

As a senator, he staunchly supported Ukraine and came to the mass protests of the EuroMaidan Revolution in 2013–2014. He was key in securing U.S. military aid, including anti-tank Javelin missiles for Ukraine after the Russian invasion.

Russia attacks ships

Russian naval ships attacked and captured three Ukrainian Navy vessels that were passing from the Black

Sea through the Kerch Strait to the Azov Sea.

The Russians captured 23 Ukrainian sailors and imprisoned them in Moscow. The Ukrainian sailors stalwartly refused to cave in and criticize their country despite threats and blandishments by their Russian captors. They were released in a prisoner swap in September 2019.

Independent church

After some 300 years of being subordinated to the Russian Orthodox Church in the Eastern Orthodox global hierarchy, the Ukrainian church became independent.

A conference of senior Church figures at Kyiv's Saint Sophia Cathedral appointed Metropolitan Epiphany to head a new Ukrainian Orthodox Church. It comprises of the faithful who split from Moscow after Ukrainian independence in 1991 to form their own church and another that was established in the diaspora a century ago.

The conference called on parishes under Moscow's auspices to switch to the new Ukrainian Church. That independent church was recognized a few weeks later by a charter called Tomos conferred by the world Orthodox Church hierarchy in Istanbul.

Svitolina shines

Elena Svitolina maintained her reputation as Ukraine's top woman tennis player who had been ranked number three in the world the previous year. In 2018, she won the World Tennis Association's Australian open competition adding to her 12 other WTA singles titles. 🎾



Jan. 26, 2018 – #4
Ukraine's most powerful people are able to do whatever they want, facing no investigations into alleged wrongdoing.



March 30, 2018 – #13
Odesa businessman Adnan Kivan buys the Kyiv Post, becoming the newspaper's third owner since its start in 1995.



Aug. 3, 2018 – #31
Russia seized control of the Azov Sea, hurting Ukraine's maritime economy and exposing the nation's weak navy.



Aug. 10, 2018 – #32
Who paid for Paul Manafort, the political consultant who helped bring Viktor Yanukovich to power in 2010?



Aug. 17, 2018 – #33
Activists say a triumvirate with alleged ties to organized crime is misruling Ukraine's Black Sea port city.

2019

A new political era dawns as TV comedian comes to power

By Bermet Talant
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In 2019, Ukraine underwent another revolution of sorts. Television comedian and successful businessman Volodymyr Zelensky won power in the March-April presidential elections, soundly defeating then-President Petro Poroshenko.

Zelensky followed the script of his popular television series, *Servant of the People*, where he played a nobody president of Ukraine.

But real life followed an even more enthralling scenario. Zelensky's party, a group of hastily assembled newcomers, then won early parliamentary election in July, giving the novice president unprecedented political power.

Zelensky's mandate is broad, but so is the daunting list of issues he has to solve, including corruption, weak rule of law, a struggling economy and Russia's seemingly endless war in Donbas. His performance will determine whether Ukraine becomes a functioning democracy on the path to European Union and NATO membership or remains mired in its swamp of oligarchic rule.

Memorable campaign

Riding his television fame and wielding a savvy social media campaign, Zelensky cashed in on the disaffection of ordinary Ukrainians with empty promises from a rotating cohort of old politicians.

Zelensky disrupted the rules of the game, leaving his more experienced competitors far behind in polls with their busied-in supporters for rallies and their standard appearances on political talk shows.

Ukraine's presidential campaign captured international headlines, as Zelensky and Poroshenko challenged each other to a televised debate at Kyiv's Olimpiysky Stadium. Before the debate, they even had their blood drawn in front of the cameras to prove they don't take drugs. And they finally faced off in verbal duel in front of thousands of viewers on April 19.

New ruling class

Elected on anti-elite sentiment as a new face from the people, Zelensky dissolved the old parliament during his inauguration speech and brought with him a fresh ruling class of political newbies like himself.

Many established parties didn't



President Volodymyr Zelensky celebrates the landslide victory of his political party, Servant of the People, in the parliamentary elections on July 21, 2019. He is joined on stage by chief of staff Andriy Bohdan (L), future speaker of the parliament Dmytro Razumkov (2L), deputy chief of staff Kyrylo Tymoshenko (R), and aide Serhiy Shefir (2R).

make it into the new parliament. Now, 80% of lawmakers have no prior political experience. So powerful was Zelensky's Servant of the People brand that it left no chance for many political heavyweights in single-member districts either.

Zelensky's administration mostly consists of his old friends and colleagues from the entertainment industry. His government is young reformist technocrats. His faction is a hybrid mix of no-names, prominent experts, controversial public figures and celebrities.

That diverse faction — under a common brand, but not shared values — has already begun showing signs of fracture, prompting talk that parliament could be dissolved early.

Kolomoisky's comeback

Zelensky's rapid climb to the top of the political ladder also brought back billionaire oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky, who had lived in self-imposed exile between Switzerland and Israel under Poroshenko's rule.

The two men have been well acquainted for years: Zelensky produced comedy shows and television series for Kolomoisky's TV channel 1+1. During the election campaign, Zelensky enjoyed the support of 1+1, which fueled public concerns over the oligarch's influence.

Suspensions still haunt Zelensky in

his presidency. Kolomoisky returned to Ukraine days before the new president was sworn in and spent the following months making scandalous claims to journalists. One of them was that he will get back the nation's largest bank, PrivatBank, which was nationalized and recapitalized by the government in 2016, costing taxpayers \$5.5 billion.

The prospect of Kolomoisky's resurgence alarms investors and international donors. Zelensky and his government have tried to convince the public that he is independent of Kolomoisky and that the billionaire will never regain control of PrivatBank. Now the final word belongs to the courts.

Trump impeachment

On July 25, a few days after Zelensky's party won the parliamentary elections, he received a call from U.S. President Donald Trump.

The details of that now-fateful phone call went public three months later after a whistleblower complaint set the ground for the impeachment process against Trump. In the call, the U.S. president asked his Ukrainian counterpart "for a favor": to dig up dirt on ex-U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden and to investigate whether Ukraine interfered on behalf of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election.

In the following months, top diplomats and State Department officials testified before House of Representatives lawmakers, exposing a back-channel foreign policy carried out by some members of the Trump administration and led by Trump's personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani.

The U.S. public got a crash course in the intricacies of Ukrainian politics. Giuliani sourced his false narratives — which he's still pushing through right-wing media — from a few aggrieved former prosecutors and dubious lawmakers in Ukraine.

Trump has been impeached by the Democratic-controlled House for abuse of power and obstructing Congress. It's not clear when the will stand the trial in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Zelensky's administration has generally sought to distance itself from the U.S. domestic scandal, fearing the loss of Ukraine's coveted bipartisan support in Congress.

Peace talks resume

Bringing peace to Ukraine's war-torn east was one of Zelensky's electoral promises.

In the six months that Zelensky has been in office, there have been a number of important developments in a bid to advance long-stalled peace agreements. First, Ukraine and Russia exchanged a total of 70

political prisoners in the first major swap since the beginning of the war. Among them were Oleg Sentsov, Roman Suchenko, 24 sailors, and nine other prisoners who became symbols of Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression.

Then, the pedestrian bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska was repaired, easing the commute across the front line for residents of the war zone. Next, the Ukrainian military and Russian-backed militants withdrew their forces at three locations on the front line.

This preceded the first Normandy summit of leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and France in over three years. The four leaders agreed on a plan to move forward: the Steinmeier Formula, the peace plan that must be incorporated into Ukrainian legislation.

According to it, Ukraine will grant the now-occupied parts of the Donbas a self-governance status — but only after they hold free elections under Ukrainian law and monitored by OSCE observers. Additionally, all armed groups and weaponry must be withdrawn from the area.

Zelensky called his debut face-to-face meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin "a draw." While he seems to be genuinely willing to negotiate the Minsk agreements, the ball is, unfortunately, in Russia's court.

Pushing for delayed reforms

Shortly before Zelensky headed to Paris for his first meeting with Putin, the International Monetary Fund approved a new \$5.5-billion three-year loan program for Ukraine.

Zelensky has been praised by international partners for bringing in some reputable officials and passing some important anti-corruption legislation.

But amid massive public and political resistance to some of the reforms, Zelensky seems to have started to counterbalance. After lawmakers lifted parliamentary immunity, they also made it harder for law enforcement to prosecute them. After passing a hugely unpopular law on farmland sales in the first reading, the president gave in to protesters' demands and promised to hold a referendum on whether foreigners should be allowed to buy land. He also agreed to limit the size of land plots for sale. 🇺🇦



Feb. 1, 2019 — #5
More than two dozen candidates ran for president. After two rounds of voting, Volodymyr Zelensky won the prize.



April 26, 2019 — #17
Political novice Volodymyr Zelensky capitalized on discontent to win 73 percent of the vote, defeating Petro Poroshenko.



Oct. 18, 2019 — #42
U.S. President Donald J. Trump's quest for dirt on his Democratic rivals was abetted by a shady cast of characters.



Nov. 8, 2019 — #45
Donald J. Trump: "Ukraine is a terrible place, they're all corrupt, they're terrible people, they tried to take me down."



Dec. 13, 2019 — #50
The Kyiv Post's 8th annual Tiger Conference also celebrated winners of the 4th annual Top 30 Under 30 Award.

Lifestyle

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

Merry Christmas
and Happy New
Year!



Where to ring in the new decade



People celebrate New Year's Eve at Alchemist Bar in central Kyiv on Dec. 31, 2018. The Ukrainian capital offers a range of entertainment and events on the last day of the year.

By Daria Shulzhenko
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One of Ukraine's most anticipated holidays is rapidly approaching — the New Year.

Ukrainians traditionally welcome the new year with loud celebrations, dances, fireworks and lots of champagne in the Ukrainian capital. And whether one is looking for a huge party or a nice restaurant to celebrate with a family, Kyiv has it all.

For those who have not yet decided where to ring in 2020, the Kyiv Post has picked out some of the best venues offering great New Year parties in the capital.

Atlas

Kyiv's Atlas concert hall traditionally arranges a huge New Year party on Dec. 31.

This time, Atlas invites everyone to dance their hearts out to the songs of Ukrainian pop-rock band Antytilla ("antibodies" in English). The party will also feature music shows by 10 local DJs and three dance floors.

The celebration at Atlas will start at 10 p.m. Entrance to the fan zone costs Hr 900 (about \$38) and the price for table seat starts from Hr 2,000 (\$85) and includes some tasty snacks.

There will be no dress code at the party and even people wearing pajamas will be allowed to celebrate at Atlas, the organizers say.

Atlas. 7-41 Sichovykh Striltsiv St. 10 p.m. Ticket to fan zone — Hr 900, table seat — Hr 2,000-4,000. Get tickets at www.concert.ua/uk/booking/atlas-new-year-2020/

Closer

Kyiv's hottest nightclub Closer invites you to meet the New Year dancing to electronic music by local and foreign DJs all night long. The party's full lineup, however, is yet to be announced.

Like last year, visitors to Closer's New Year party need not stick to a particular dress code. Everyone is welcome to wear what they want.

According to organizers, the party will start one minute before the New Year, at 11:59 p.m. But those who would like to start the celebration earlier can visit the Savage Food cafe, which is located nearby. There the celebration will start at 11 p.m. Entrance is Hr 2,000 (\$85) and includes seven vegetarian dishes and a bottle of sparkling wine for two.

Additionally, those who start the New Year celebration at Savage Food can enter the party at Closer for free after 1 a.m. However, visitors to the

party must be over 21.

Closer. 31 Nyzhnoiurkivska St. 11:59 p.m. Ticket price in advance — Hr 700, at the entrance — Hr 800. +38067 658 8951. Get tickets at www.residentadvisor.net/events/1336701

Bursa

The Bursa hotel is another trendy spot that arranges a huge party on the last day of the year. Located in Kyiv's historic Podil district, the hotel building houses two bars, a cafe, a library, a gallery and a recently-opened cinema.

This year, Bursa welcomes guests to celebrate the New Year in its stylishly-designed halls and is organizing a "gangster-themed" party. All guests are asked to adhere to a dress-code that Bursa calls "business noire" — a style that combines items bright pink jackets, velvet dresses, leather coats and golden necklaces — and be ready to party all night long.

The party will start at 8:20 with a music show by the duo 99 and last until the morning of Jan. 1. Its lineup also includes local DJs Sasha Tessio, Hahabibi and Dj Miura.

Apart from that, the organizers promise savory food from the cafe White Noise and a movie screening at the new cinema Kino42. Entry to the party costs Hr 1,800 (about \$77)

and includes food until 12 a.m. and a welcome drink.

Bursa. 11 Kostiantynivska St. 8:20 p.m. Ticket with food until 12 a.m. and a welcome drink — Hr 1,800. +38044 537 7007. Get tickets at www.concert.ua/uk/event/bursa-new-year-2020

Alchemist Bar

Kyiv's "dancing queens and kings" can join a New Year celebration dedicated to legendary Swedish pop band ABBA at Alchemist Bar.

The bar is located at Kyiv's busy Shota Rustaveli Street and welcomes all to start the new year dancing to ABBA's biggest hits. The party will start at 10 p.m., and the entrance price of Hr 4,000 (\$170) includes a table for two and drinks.

Apart from ABBA, the party's lineup also includes DJs Stacy Miller, Jurgen Shustov and others.

Alchemist Bar. 12 Shota Rustaveli St. 10 p.m. Table for two and drinks — Hr 4,000, entrance after 12 a.m. — Hr 500. Book in advance at +38096 008 7070

11 Mirrors Rooftop Restaurant & Bar

This pricier restaurant is a great choice for those who prefer celebra-

Innovative Ukrainian toys, gadgets, services that make great holiday gifts

By Artur Kornienko
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Christmas and New Year's Eve will soon be upon us, so it's time to get presents for friends and loved ones.

Fortunately, plenty of Ukrainian companies and startups have created innovative toys, games, gadgets, and services that will make for good gifts.

Time for Machine

With its sleek functioning designs, Time for Machine takes children and their parents back in time when there were no gadgets. The startup produces mechanical models that, after they are assembled, make for great toys or beautiful pieces of interior design.

The best models — which include a train, a tank and a plane — are constructed out of metal cogwheels, struts and panels that can be put together with no glue.

Assembled, all of them move or have movable parts. The plane model, for example, has spinning propellers that move once wound up. Meanwhile, the cars can move, have opening doors and compartments.

Each model comes with a manual in several languages and can be assembled with tiny pliers and by hands. Some have plywood molds that help adjust the form of some elements.

Time for Machine also has a few wooden models — a nod to its founder Denys Okhrimenko's previous business Ugears. Okhrimenko was pushed out of this million-dollar company by his former partner, but he bounced back to create new, more sophisticated wooden and metal models.

Prices for Time for Machine metal models range from \$26 (a card case) to \$160 (a train), and for wooden models — from \$34 (a spider) to \$46 (a bulldozer). Most models can be bought right away, but some have to be pre-ordered.

Time for Machine: \$26-\$160 at www.timeformachine.com

PAGL

Another of Okhrimenko's innovative projects is PAGL — large-scale construction kits for children to build structures the size of a person.

The kits consist of brick-sized blocks made of cardboard, which makes them light, safe and 100% environment-friendly. They are colored with natural dyes.

When designing PAGL, Okhrimenko wanted to create a universal building material for children to build houses, forts and towers when there's no snow or sand for these purposes.

Bright lights of Christmas

Holiday celebrations begin on Sofiivska Square in Kyiv, where Ukraine's 30-meter main Christmas tree got lit traditionally on St. Nicholas Day on Dec. 19, 2019. Prior to the lighting of the Christmas tree, hundreds of children, costumed musicians and dancers walked up to Sofiivska Square in a carnival led by St. Nicholas himself.



(Oleg Petrasjuk)

Still time to shop for some of these great presents for those on your list

page 28 →

PAGL is available in four kits, each containing 111 multi-colored building blocks. Taken apart, the blocks can be neatly packed away in a box the size of a suitcase, taking up little space at home.

PAGL blocks resemble egg cartons. Their creator Okhrimenko says they were carefully designed to have perfect dimensions, weight, density and elements that allow even 3-year-old children to build tall towers. They won't lose their shape even under weight or when exposed to water.

Prices for PAGL kits in Ukraine range from \$55 to \$72. For international sales, the price of PAGL kits is higher due to shipment costs — from \$102 to \$114.

PAGL: In Ukraine, \$55–\$72 at www.pagl-corp.com and the Antoshka toy stores. Internationally, \$102–\$114 at www.paglcorp.com.

Game 'The Sinking City'

For adults that like video games, a horror investigation game "The Sinking City" could be a gift to give at least 20 hours of fun and immersive play.

It's the latest game by the Ukrainian Frogwares studio, where it used its innovative "free investigation" concept. Unlike other detective games, where investigations are heavily scripted and set in a linear environment, "The Sinking City" lets players freely pursue any cases without much in-game guidance.

Frogwares is best known for its "Sherlock Holmes" game series that are among the world's most popular in the detective video game genre. But instead of using their new "free investigation" techniques for



A boy assembles a model car called "Glorious Cabrio" from a kit made by Time for Machine company. The firm produces wooden and metal kits for assembling vehicle and other models that move or have movable parts.

another game based on the books by Arthur Conan Doyle, the studio turned to another classic author — horror fiction writer Howard Phillips Lovecraft.

"The Sinking City" is set in a world inspired by the books of Lovecraft, the kind that scares readers with phenomena beyond human comprehension. The video game tells the story of a war veteran who investigates the mysteries of a flooded city in Massachusetts, the United States, in the 1920s while trying to remain sane.

The studio says that their decision to turn from the rationality of Doyle to the madness of Lovecraft was in many ways informed by the sudden start of Russia's war against Ukraine in the Donbas in 2014.

"The Sinking City" would not be as dark and grim without Donbas," Sergey Oganessian, Frogwares' community manager, told the Kyiv Post.

"The Sinking City" is available for the three major video game

platforms — computers, Sony's PlayStation 4 and Microsoft Xbox One. It ranges from \$56 to \$76, depending on the edition.

"The Sinking City": \$60–\$76 at www.thesinkingcity.com.

Nuka

This gift can last forever.

Or at least for many years. Meet Nuka, an "eternal" stationary that combines a notebook and a pen, which paper and ink never runs out.

The Nuka notepad is made of durable, waterproof materials resistant to tearing and other physical damage. Notes can be written there and then easily erased. A mobile app that goes with it stores photographs of the notes online.

The pen — which is in fact a metal stylus — is made of a special metallic alloy. It doesn't need to be sharpened and lasts forever. For its design, Nuka won the prestigious Red Dot design award in 2019.

Three young Ukrainians invented Nuka when they were just 17 years old. One of them is Kateryna Mykhalko, now 18, this year's winner of the Kyiv Post's Top 30 Under 30 Award.

Nuka notebook and pencil can now be pre-ordered for \$69 through Indiegogo crowdfunding website. It will start shipping in January.

Nuka: \$70 for a notebook and pencil pack at www.nuka.me.

Ajax

The year 2020 — and the years that follow, in fact — can become much safer if one gets the Ajax Systems wireless security alarms as a gift.

The Ukrainian company founded in 2011, now produces 20 devices that monitor and control most aspects of people's homes, making them smart and secure.

The high-tech company produces a wireless security system for homes and businesses that includes sensors to detect intruders, fire and flooding. It also makes gadgets to control household appliances, climate, locks, and lighting. The system reacts to real dangers but ignores false alarms, such as animals running around or thunderclaps.

All Ajax devices connect to the system's central hub that collects their information via Ajax's own radio technology called Jeweller. The hub, in turn, connects to a mobile app via both Ethernet and GSM (GPRS), allowing users to take full control of their homes from far away.

Besides, the Ajax devices have a sleek design and come in two colors, black and white, so they can suit any home.

Ajax kits range from \$245 to \$320 and can be complemented with additional cameras and sensors ranging

from \$40 to \$135.

Ajax: \$245–\$320 at www.ajax.systems.

Grammarly

Since English writing skills have become so crucial for professional success around the world, one of the best gifts to give is a subscription to Grammarly — a service that helps improve any English-language text.

The Ukrainian company founded in 2009 with only some simple grammar and spell-checking tools, now provides suggestions on context-specific language, clarity, engagement and delivery. This year, Grammarly also released a tone detector tool, which identifies whether a message sounds friendly or formal, for example, and helps tailor the tone to a specific audience.

The program uses machine learning and artificial intelligence to improve any text the user inputs. It works with messengers, email clients or online word processors through a web browser extension. It can also check text in desktop apps, on smartphones with special Grammarly keyboards and as an add-on for Microsoft Office.

Grammarly learns from the vast amount of writing it processes and adjusts its recommendations based upon usage. Users can select whether they want to write in American or British English.

Grammarly's basic spelling and punctuation checker is free. A subscription to the more sophisticated tools that check for genre-specific writing, tone and consistency as well as detect plagiarism ranges from \$30 for a month to \$140 for a year (\$12 per month).

Grammarly: \$23 per month and \$140 per year at www.grammarly.com.



On Dec. 14 in Kyiv, the Ukrainian Catholic University held its 12th Annual Charitable Evening and Silent Auction. During the event, at which more than 350 friends of the Lviv-based university participated, 90 scholarships for students and 10 stipends for teachers were pledged. The total amount of donations exceeded 13 million hryvnias, or \$550,000. In 2018, 270 students graduated from the university.

1 Entertainers Volodymyr Ostapchuk and Kateryna Tymoshenko host the 12th Fundraising Dinner & Silent Auction organized by the Ukrainian Catholic University on Dec. 14, 2019.

2 Former first lady Kateryna Yushchenko attends the annual charity event.

3 Guests at the fundraising event have dinner before the charity auction takes place at

the Parkovy Congress and Exhibition Center in Kyiv on Dec. 14, 2019. The Kyiv Post was a media partner.

4 Ukrainian singer Oksana Mukha performs during the event.

5 Two vice rectors of Ukrainian Catholic University, Natalia Klymovska and Myroslav Marynovych, dance during the annual charity event organized by their university in Kyiv on Dec. 14, 2019.

6 A guest looks at a painting that is being sold for charity.

7 Borys Gudziak, the current Archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, gives a speech.

8 Guests network after the official part of the charity event at the Parkovy Congress and Exhibition Center. (Photos courtesy of UCU)

Where will you be when the clock strikes 12?

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tions with a warm atmosphere, great food and drinks, fun entertainment and live music shows. Additionally, the rooftop restaurant offers an amazing view of the capital.

The celebration here will start at 10 p.m. and feature Ukrainian pop-rock singer Alloise and DJ Vinegreta. A table seat is Hr 7,000–8,500 (\$298–363) depending on the hall of the restaurant.

The price includes a six-course meal with various appetizers, salads, main courses, dessert, a glass of sparkling wine and two alcoholic cocktails. Those who plan to celebrate with children under 5 can order a special menu for Hr 1,500 (\$64) or get a 50% discount for the restaurant's New Year menu for children under 12.

11 Mirrors Rooftop Restaurant & Bar. 34A Bohdana Khmelnytskoho St. 10 p.m. Ticket with food and drinks – Hr 6,500–8,500. Book in advance +38044 581 0011



People dance to music at the Atlas concert hall in Kyiv as they celebrate New Year's Eve on Dec. 31, 2018. This year, Atlas is arranging another huge party to ring in the New Year.

Urban Space 500

Kyiv's Urban Space 500 is holding a "White Tie" party this year, featuring stars of the Ukrainian electronic music scene Vlad Fisun, Sivash and Masha Efy.

Even though the white tie dress code is strict and formal, at Urban Space 500 it is more a "mood to ring in the new year," the organizers explain.

The celebration will start at 10 p.m., and entrance on Dec. 31 will be Hr 800 (nearly \$34). The price does not include food and drinks, which have to be purchased separately. However, Urban Space 500 offers drinks and meals at reasonable prices.

According to the organizers, they will install a new sound system and a stage for the performers so that all the visitors can enjoy the great music and celebrate New Year to the fullest.

Urban Space 500. 9 Borysa Hrinchenka St. 10 p.m. Ticket price in advance – Hr 500, at the entrance – Hr 800. +38063 161 8400. Get tickets at www.concert.ua/uk/event/white-tie-new-year

EMPLOYMENT / CV



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

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

For the Reform Projectisation Unit in the Government of Ukraine:

- Senior Expert (multiple positions).

Deadline for applications: December 29, 2019.

For the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine:

- Anti-crisis Communications Manager;
- Energy Reform Communications Manager;
- Regional Development Communications Manager;
- Social issues, medicine, education - Communications Manager;
- Strategic Communications Manager;
- Tax and Finance Communications Manager;
- Writer;
- Designer;
- Office Manager.

Deadline for applications: January 03, 2020

Applications must be prepared in English and delivered electronically to the following address: valeriias@agriteam.ca.

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

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