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Kyiv Post

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Russian Repression

The Kremlin retaliates for Kyiv's Crimea Platform summit by detaining dozens of dissenters on the stolen peninsula

Zelensky's reelection hinges on deoligarchization



Opinion

Sergii Leshchenko
mail.pravda@gmail.com

It's that time again – Ukraine is entering a new political season. In less than 100 days, President Volodymyr Zelensky will reach the midpoint of his term. And although he didn't announce his reelection bid, I'm confident that Zelensky will try to seek a second term.

This is indicated not only by the mood in the President's Office, but also by the latest survey published by the Rating Sociological Group this week. The figures are a consolation for Zelensky: He's returning to a positive balance between public trust and distrust.

The latest poll shows almost the same picture as in the first year of Zelensky's reign, when he enjoyed his honeymoon with Ukraine's society.

Now the situation is not as rosy, but Zelensky still tops the ranking – he's supported by 50% of respondents, while 48% are not backing him. According to the poll, at least 31% would re-elect him in the first round – this is almost the same result he got in the first round of 2019 election.

For Zelensky, popular support remains the most important factor in his decisions. And, if ratings stay high during the second half of his presidency, his plans for 2024 are easy to predict.

Top focus

Deoligarchization is going to be the main topic of the second half of Zelensky's presidency.

The success of this campaign will eventually determine his reelection bid: This is indicated by both insiders' information and the very logic of the political process.

Removing the country's powerful oligarchs from any decisions of state importance was one of Zelensky's election promises. But

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Courtesy of Crimean Solidarity

See coverage on pages 2, 5, 6

Russian security forces detain Crimean Tatar activist Eldar Azizov, who came to the Russia's Federal Security Service in Simferopol, the second-largest city in Kremlin-occupied Crimea, on Sept. 4, 2021, to demand to know the whereabouts of five Crimean Tatars detained earlier. During a 48-hour period, Russian police detained more than 60 people on the peninsula, mostly Crimean Tatars, as revenge for the international Crimea Platform summit that Ukraine hosted on Aug. 23 in Kyiv.



Friday, September 10 | from 3 p.m. until 4.30 p.m. Kyiv time Livestream on [kyivpost.com](https://www.kyivpost.com), Twitter & Facebook

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Activists hold photos of detained Crimean Tatars at a rally in front of the Russian Embassy in Kyiv on Sept. 5, 2021. The Kremlin has accelerated its ongoing assault on human rights in illegally occupied Crimea, which Russia seized after a military invasion in 2014. The latest crackdown comes after an international Crimea Platform summit on Aug. 23 in Kyiv, during which nearly 50 nations committed to never recognizing Russia's land grab.

Russian authorities toughen their persecution of Crimean Tatars

Radio Free Europe/
Radio Liberty

More than 50 Crimean Tatars have been detained by the Russian intelligence service in Ukraine's Russia-controlled Crimea region, Ukrainian officials said on Sept. 4. Ukrainian Ombudswoman Lyudmyla Denisova said Russia's Federal Security Service, the FSB, had first detained five minority Crimean Tatar activists, including well-known activist Nariman Dzhelyal, the deputy chairman of the Mejlis representative body for the Tatars in Crimea, and raided their homes.

In response, more than 50 Crimean Tatars gathered in front of the FSB's branch in Crimea's capital, Simferopol, to protest the detentions.

"As a result, more than 50 Crimean Tatars have been detained," Denisova wrote on Facebook on Sept. 4.

Some of them were brutally forced onto police buses, Denisova said, adding that two journalists were among those detained.

"They were shoved into buses with force and beaten and taken to different police precincts in the temporarily occupied Crimea, where they're being questioned without lawyers present," she said.

Denisova called on "the entire international community to use all possible leverage...in order to end repressions against the indigenous population."

Russian authorities have not yet commented on the arrests.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy demanded the release of the detained Crimean Tatars in a tweet on September 4.

"The occupants of Crimea once again resort to persecution of Crimean Tatars. Regular raids and detentions take place in their homes," Zelenskyy wrote. "All those detained must be freed!"

Since Russia seized Crimea in



A Russian soldier stands near a Ukrainian Navy emblem painted on a wall outside the Ukrainian base in Perevalne, near Simferopol, during the Russian invasion on March 6, 2014. On the same day, pro-Kremlin officials in Crimea asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to make their region a part of the Russian Federation. The request was put up to a referendum that took place illegally in Crimea on March 16.

2014, Russian authorities have prosecuted dozens of Crimean Tatars for allegedly belonging to the Hizb ut-Tahrir Islamic group, which is banned in Russia but not in Ukraine.

Moscow's takeover of the peninsula was vocally opposed by many Crimean Tatars, who are a sizable minority in the region.

Exiled from their homeland to Central Asia by the Soviet authorities under dictator Josef Stalin during World War II, many Crimean Tatars are very wary of Russia and Moscow's rule.

Rights groups and Western governments have denounced what they describe as a campaign of repression by the Russian-imposed authorities

in Crimea who are targeting members of the Turkic-speaking Crimean Tatar community and others who have spoken out against Moscow's takeover of the peninsula.

Russia took control of Crimea from Ukraine in March 2014 after sending in troops, seizing key facilities, and staging a referendum dismissed as illegal by at least 100 countries. Moscow also backs armed forces in a war against Ukraine that has killed more than 13,200 people in the eastern Donbas region since April 2014.

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Akkerman Solutions LLC is the first company in Ukraine to be certified in accordance with the UN 17 SDG.



To achieve a better, more sustainable future for all, the United Nations in 2015 set up the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which were published in a UN Resolution in 2017. Companies and organizations can be evaluated and certified, if they live up to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. (UN 17 SDG)

UN 17 SDG include targets as No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Quality Education, Affordable and clean Energy, Decent work and economic growth etc. Bureau Veritas is one of the auditing companies that certifies companies in accordance with the UN 17 SDG. Generally, not many companies have been certified – just 20 in Denmark and none in Ukraine – until now. Danish-owned engineering and software company Akkerman Solutions LLC (former known as BIIR Ukraine) has just become the first company in Ukraine to be certified in accordance with the UN 17 SDG.

Company owner Thomas Sillesen explains “In reality, this was a no-brainer. Ever since I set foot in Ukraine in 2013, I saw Ukrainians huge potential, but also knew, that it would be my obligation to try to combine the best of Denmark with the best of Ukraine, to really make a special company. During all the years, we have tried to live up to this, and the UN 17 SDG is a natural proof we have actually achieved this goal so far.”

When asked of some specific examples of how Akkerman has worked on the goals, Thomas Sillesen mentions a project started in 2019 in Severodonetsk together with DAI/USAID, where Akkerman/BIIR Ukraine has taught university courses in use of western software so Severodonetsk University could prepare students to be attractive for western companies.

Since 2016 Akkerman has organized and financed several aid shipments for the poor in Ukraine. The orphanage Way Home in Odessa, has also had Akkerman’s support over the years.

Maryna Stiahailo, CEO of Akkerman Solutions explain “Naturally it was a huge task, to get all our procedures in compliance with the UN 17 SDG. However, at the same time we did the UN 17 SDG, we also worked on getting our own ISO 9001:2015. So our internal certification team could to some extent, reach procedures that

worked in compliance for both certificates. But it was a huge task, especially, because at the same time, we got lots of new clients, and naturally they needed to be helped to our usual high standards. We succeeded, and we have already seen even more customer interest, from potential customers, who place significance to both ISO 9001:2015 and UN 17 SDG”

Akkerman focus on Engineering and Software development for international customers, and have customers in Norway, Denmark, Germany and USA. Stiahailo explains “Traditionally, our customers have been in the Wind industry, but we see strong interest in our services from other industries. Lately, we got several customers in the robotics industry. It is interesting, because the robotics industry is also leading the way to a more sustainable future. But naturally we have all kind of customers. And we are proud of it, because we help them become more successful and efficient, while at the same time, we promote the huge potential not only in working with Akkerman, but the huge potential in Ukraine”

Akkerman (known as BIIR at that time) was the victim of a raiders attack in Odessa in 2017/2018. The company bought a building on Primorskaya on the harbor front of Odessa, only to find it being taken away in an absurd court case. Akkerman/BIIR lost the building and did not get its money back as the mortgage was not reinstalled. The company won an appeal in February 2018, becoming the first international investors ever, to win such a court case in Ukraine. Since then, the building has stood empty, while Sillesen considered what to do with it. First it was to be the headquarters for Akkerman/BIIR, but since then, Akkerman bought a new office in Odessa, which it just finished renovating and turning it into its new HQ, while Sillesen considers what to do with the old one. “We will develop it, however I have decided yet in what way. From time to time, I get offers on it, but for now, I am in no rush, especially since none of the offers has been really attractive” he said.

The story of the raid propelled it to third place in the Kyiv Post’s annual ranking of corruption cases in 2017. It also became a big story in Danish media. A story that only grew, when Sillesen raised a rune stone on the land of the building, to contemplate the Ukrainians who helped fight and win the case. Lately this Runestone

became a chapter in the book “From Odessa with Love: Political And Literary Essays in Post-Soviet Ukraine” written by Vladislav Davidzon, former editor of the Odessa Review, who now spends his life between Paris and New York, as an international journalist. Sillesen laughs and tell that the stone for sure has gotten a kind of a life of its own, and for many Danes visiting Odessa is a “must see” and is “the worlds second largest Rune stone, only the Jelling Monument, raised by king Harald Bluetooth, who gave name to the Bluetooth technology, has raised a larger Runestone”.

Sillesen moved permanently to Odesa in 2019. Akkerman also has offices in Lviv, Kyiv and Kharkiv, and plans to open office in Rubizhne in 2021. Asked why an office in the ATO Zone, Thomas Sillesen answers: “we have already been in that area of Ukraine, when I established our first office in Luhansk in 2013, so it is natural for us to go back, especially, since we for 2 years have had the corporation with Severodonetsk University and DAI/USAID. So would be nice, to be able to offer good jobs to the students when they graduate from the university”

“In Akkerman we strive to be the best engineering and software company” Sillesen said. “As such, it is only natural, that we focus on being best in all parameters you can evaluate a company on. Both because of the leadership we show, but naturally also, because our customers like to work with competent, reliable partners with a strong corporate responsibility. We already had the first new customer, who directly mentioned to us, that Akkerman’s commitment to UN 17 SDG was one of the reason for choosing us deliver a software team to help them with their development”

Sillesen added that Denmark has traditionally focused on sustainability and renewable energy, being among others the leader in wind energy worldwide. However, even in Denmark, achieving certification in the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals is rare achievement. Around 20 companies are certified in Denmark so far but interest from others is massive, and many companies are rushing to get certified. It is a movement, that will start slow, and then grow. Sillesen explains “we have seen the same with ISO9001 certifications. In the beginning nobody cared, but over time it changed, and now it is often a must, if you want to establish a business relationship with another company. In a few years’ time, UN 17 SDGs will also be a competitive advantage for companies that wants to do business. And I think most companies wants to do that” Sillesen says with a smile.



EDITORIALS

Reform or regress?

Ukraine has been reforming its law enforcement and economy for three decades. Yet, much has remained unchanged, and some things have even gotten worse.

“Reform” has become no more than a fig leaf. Constant reshuffles and cosmetic changes do not alter the substance of Ukraine’s corrupt, lawless and impotent law enforcement bodies.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, like his predecessor Petro Poroshenko, is continuing the tradition of pseudo-reforms that drag on for years and result in nothing.

In April Zelensky submitted an “urgent” bill to liquidate the Kyiv District Administrative Court, headed by judge Pavlo Vovk — the national symbol of corruption and injustice. Despite all the articulated “urgency,” the bill has been blocked for six months.

Anti-corruption activists say that Zelensky is not willing to liquidate the court. Instead, he wants to use criminal cases against Vovk to pull his strings for his own purposes, which Zelensky’s office denied.

But there is a similar tendency with the Constitutional Court, a tainted body that has destroyed asset declarations — a key pillar of anti-corruption infrastructure.

Its chairman, Oleksandr Tupytsky, has been charged with obstruction of justice. He must be tried and jailed if found guilty.

But Zelensky went far beyond his constitutional authority by firing him and another judge of the court in March. Zelensky is planning to replace the two judges with others, which would be unconstitutional.

His party has also refused to hold a transparent competition for Constitutional Court jobs with foreign experts’ participation when incumbents retire. Instead of reforming the court, Zelensky is trying to fill it with his protégés through unconstitutional methods.

Neither is the selection of the chief anti-corruption prosecutor, a key corruption-fighting role, going smoothly.

Since the government’s preferred candidates for the job were vetoed by foreign experts in May-July, the selection process has been effectively blocked by pro-government members on the selection panel.

Some hope that reforming of Ukraine’s two discredited judicial governing bodies, the High Council of Justice and the High Qualification Commission, will be more effective. In July, parliament approved two bills that gave foreign experts a crucial role in forming the bodies.

But we shouldn’t count our chickens before they hatch.

In 2019 Zelensky signed similar judicial reform legislation but it was not implemented due to the High Council of Justice’s refusal to carry it out.

There is no guarantee the new judicial reform won’t be sabotaged again. And while the leadership continues to show no political will to carry it through, chances are, there will be nothing to count again.

Russia’s revenge

Seven years after Russia’s seizure of Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula, international attention to the occupation has dwindled.

To reverse this distressing trend, Ukraine held a massive diplomatic event to put the Kremlin’s military invasion and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 back in the spotlight. Nearly 50 nations put Russia on notice that it will not forgive or forget until Vladimir Putin returns Crimea to Ukraine. The event, called Crimea Platform, took place on Aug. 23.

Russia reacted in the best traditions of an aggressor dictatorship.

Prior to the summit, Russia’s officials said that the Crimea Platform poses a threat to Russia’s territorial integrity and is a “hostile” move on Ukraine’s part. As absurd as it is, it’s not new. Russia keeps acting like a lucky thief who pretends that the stolen belongings are his own since no one cared enough to punish him.

We anticipated that, after the Crimea Platform, Russia would retaliate by pressuring Ukraine on various levels politically and economically.

But Russia did something much worse. It started individually persecuting those who supported the Crimea Platform, like Nariman Dzhelyal, a leader of Crimean Tatars, indigenous people of the peninsula.

Dzhelyal came all the way from Crimea to Kyiv to attend the summit. Soon after his return home, Russia’s security forces detained him for two months. He is accused of aiding a group of alleged saboteurs blow up a gas pipeline that was damaged in Crimea on the same day as Crimea Platform took place in Kyiv.

The charges are almost symbolic: Ukraine has unsuccessfully tried to block the construction of another gas pipeline, the Russian-German Nord Stream 2.

Now Dzhelyal faces 13.5 years in jail for the crime he denies committing. Along with him, the other four Crimean Tatars were detained. Almost 60 others were brought for questioning for protesting against Russian officials’ attack on Crimean Tatars.

Even for Russia, it’s a massive crackdown.

It’s also a continuation of Russia’s policy of pressure against Crimean Tatars in the occupied peninsula. It constantly persecutes members of Mejlis, a representative body of Crimean Tatars. Dzhelyal is the first deputy head of Mejlis. The most high-profile members — Mustafa Dzemilev and Refat Chubarov — had to move to mainland Ukraine. Dzemilev is banned from entering Crimea, and Chubarov was sentenced to prison in absentia by a Russian court.

Two deputy chairpeople of Mejlis, Akhtem Chygoz and Ilmi Umerov, were arrested under similar far-fetched grounds in 2016. They were released six months later thanks to the mediation of President of Turkey Recep Erdogan.

What world leader will help Ukraine release Dzhelyal and others this time? Any volunteers?

We do not want this brave and bright person to repeat the fate of his fellows and spend half a year — or even more — behind bars.

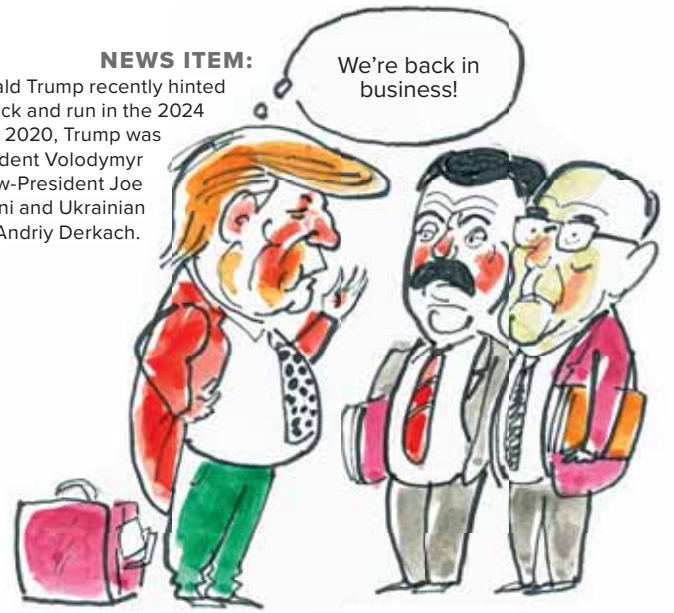
All the leaders who signed the declaration of Crimea Platform, declaring their support for Ukraine and Crimea as its part, must act now.

With this recent crackdown in Crimea, Russia is testing the West’s patience.

The West must respond. Put more sanctions on the aggressor. Act now, show the Kremlin that you’re not a crowd of impotent diplomats. Don’t be an accomplice to a crime against humanity.

NEWS ITEM:

Former U.S. President Donald Trump recently hinted that he could make a comeback and run in the 2024 U.S. presidential elections. In 2020, Trump was accused of pressuring President Volodymyr Zelensky to dig dirt on now-President Joe Biden, helped by Rudy Giuliani and Ukrainian lawmaker Andriy Derkach.



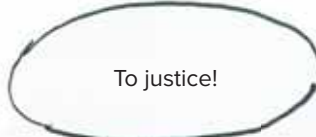
NEWS ITEM:

The 70-year-old mother of lawmaker Andriy Klochko acquired two apartments in Kyiv, a house, several land plots and a car — all worth about \$540,000 — since her son was elected to parliament with the Servant of the People party in 2019.



NEWS ITEM:

Interior Minister Denys Monastyrsky said in an interview published on Sept. 6 that runs key decisions by President Volodymyr Zelensky, even though his ministry is de jure independent of the president.



NEWS ITEM:

President Volodymyr Zelensky’s deputy chief of staff Oleh Tatarov, who was charged with bribery, celebrated his birthday on Sept. 8. Among his guests were top law enforcement officials. One of them authorized Tatarov’s bribery case to be taken away from the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, effectively ending the investigation.

See these features online at Kyivpost.com

Ukraine’s Friend & Foe Of The Week



Friend

George Chopivsky
The Ukrainian-American was recently honored by President Volodymyr Zelensky with the Yaroslav the Wise award. The unassuming business leader has been a major philanthropic force for the betterment of Ukraine through his Chopivsky Family Foundation, as his most ardent admirer, daughter Alexa, recently detailed.



Foe

Vladislav Klyushin
The United States is seeking to extradite the Russian, arrested in Switzerland, on charges that the cybersecurity chief made millions of dollars from corporate hacking. Let’s hope that America succeeds and is able to unravel the secrets of the Kremlin hackers.

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.

Why it's important to stay in Crimea



Nariman Dzhelyal

Editor's Note: This op-ed was published in "How We Will Get Crimea Back" – a one-time publication produced by Ukrainian journalists of Crimean origin. The project aims to "find solutions for the de-occupation and reintegration of the peninsula." The op-ed is republished with permission. It was published on Aug. 19. On Sept. 3, its author, Nariman Dzhelyal, was arrested in Crimea.

I often see the notion that everyone who does not agree with the Russian occupation of Crimea and its consequences has left the peninsula, and those who stayed are collaborators. That's incorrect. Even, despite the fact that a significant part of the peninsula's population was pro-Russian, the Kremlin carried out a crude staging of 'free expression of the will' in front of Russian machine guns and propaganda TV channels.

Hundreds of thousands of Crimeans protested the occupation of the peninsula, boycotted the Crimean 'referendum' and are sticking to their views today. Only some of them have left the peninsula, fearing prosecution. Most have stayed in Crimea.

«Къырымда яша!» or «Live in Crimea!» is a popular slogan among Crimean Tatars. It's a conscious position – living in your homeland no matter what.

Crimean Tatars were fully eradicated from Crimea in 1944. We lost half of our population, went through the difficult process of returning home and setting up lives in our homeland again. Most Crimean Tatars want to stay in their homeland whatever that takes. These convictions are a product of the memories of the older generations where Crimea is always viewed as the Promised Land.

This new occupation of the peninsula is not just a loss of state territory for Crimean Tatars, it's an encroachment on their moth-

erland. The Russian Empire had annexed Crimea in 1783, destroying the Crimean Khanate and kickstarting the process of mass emigration of a significant part of Crimean natives. This dramatically changed the demographic situation on the peninsula.

Today's Russia still actively deploys popular Soviet propaganda myths about the Crimean Tatar deportation being just. That's why Crimean Tatars greatly opposed Russia's actions in 2014 and are refusing to leave the peninsula now. But this comes at a price. People are forced to adapt to the occupation, integrate themselves into the Russian reality, and live according to the laws and rules imposed on them. Of course, with time, these social distortions face milder reactions. But the spirit of resistance lives on in Crimea, despite prosecutions.

It's unwise to think that Ukraine would gain something had all the pro-Ukrainian people left Crimea. Quite the opposite. Had Crimea had an absolutely loyal population, Kremlin propagandists would construct the illusion of the "Crimean nation" living in harmony and love for Russia. They're struggling with this now.

Crimean Tatars are also waging this struggle to preserve their national identity and habitat. Most of them cannot imagine themselves living outside of Crimea. Many Crimean Tatars are hiding their political views, suppressing their protest moods in order to reduce the threat to their safety. They switch their activity to economic and cultural fields, accepting that the political center of the national movement has moved from Simferopol to Kyiv.

But this forced behavior does not in any way indicate that the occupation was accepted. Qırımда яша! We are staying at home so that we'll have a place to come back to.



A group of Crimean Tatars, including Nariman Dzhelyal, Asan Akhtemov and Aziz Akhtemovs, stand at the top of Chatyr Dag mountain range in Crimea with the Crimean Tatar national flags on May 16, 2021, two days before before the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Deportation of Crimean Tatars.

Nariman Dzhelyal/Facebook



Bailiff handcuffs Nariman Dzhelyal in the courtroom on Sept. 6, 2021. Dzhelyal, a Crimean Tatar activist, was arrested by Russia's security forces on Sept. 3, 2021, shortly after he visited Kyiv and published an op-ed calling on the Crimeans who oppose Russia's occupation to stay in Crimea.

Elmaz Akimova

Nariman Dzhelyal is the deputy head of the Mejlis – the representative assembly of Crimean Tatars. On Sept. 3, after this op-ed was published, he was arrested by Russia's security forces. 🇷🇺

World in Ukraine: Pakistan

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Russia's revenge targets scores of Crimean Tatars for detention

By Anastasiia Lapatina
and Anna Myroniuk

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Nariman Dzhelyal woke up in the early hours of Sept. 4 to the sounds of a dozen armed men breaking into his home in Russian-occupied Crimea.

In the span of 48 hours after police hauled Dzhelyal off for questioning, almost 60 other people in Crimea were detained in a massive crackdown.

Dzhelyal is the deputy head of Mejlis, the representative body of Crimean Tatars. A week before the arrest he visited Kyiv to attend the Crimea Platform summit, Ukraine's diplomatic initiative to end Russia's occupation of the peninsula.

Now, Russian authorities are accusing him of helping blow up a gas pipeline in a small Crimean village.

Ukraine's officials believe that the recent wave of arbitrary arrests in Crimea is Russia's revenge for the Crimea Platform.

"This is how the Russian Federation reacts to the start of the Crimea Platform," President Volodymyr Zelensky tweeted soon after the arrests began.

Olga Skrypnyk, a co-coordinator of the expert network of the Crimea Platform, said it was easy to predict that Russia would punish people like Dzhelyal for their vocal support for the de-occupation of Crimea.

"Prior to the summit, during our meetings with international partners I told them that there is a risk of Russia not only pressuring Ukraine for holding Crimea Platform, but also going after each person who supported it," said Skrypnyk, a native of Crimea who fled to Kyiv after the Russian occupation of her home.

"Unfortunately, our worst expectations came true," she told the Kyiv Post.

When Skrypnyk told Dzhelyal about her concerns for his safety at the summit on Aug. 23, he responded that he must be there "because that is right." The same determination kept him in Crimea even after the 2014 occupation and Russia's ban on Mejlis.

"This was his position to stay in Crimea together with his people. For him as first deputy head of Mejlis, it was important to be around, especially in difficult times. When there were searches and arrests he was always there helping victims," Skrypnyk said.

But this time, Russian law enforcement did not let him get away with opposing them.

Russia's retaliation

On the morning of Sept. 4, Russian forces raided Dzhelyal's house, put him in an unmarked van and drove him away.

No one knew where he was until the next morning, when his lawyer Emine Avamileva found him in Russia's Federal Security Services, the FSB, building in Simferopol, Crimea's second-largest city.



Russian security forces detain Crimean Tatar activists, who came to the building of Russia's Federal Security Services in occupied Crimea on Sept. 4, 2021, to demand information about the whereabouts of five Crimean Tatars that the FSB earlier detained. Within two days, Russian police detained over 60 people in the peninsula, mostly Crimean Tatars, as apparent revenge for the Crimea Platform summit Ukraine held on Aug. 23 in Kyiv.

In a letter to his other lawyer, Nikolai Polozov, Dzhelyal wrote that the men took him to a basement with a sack on his head.

The FSB interrogated him, accusing of aiding in blowing up a pipeline in Perevalne, a small village in southern Crimea.

Trying to make Dzhelyal testify against himself, they threatened that he had only two options "a bad one and a very bad one," he writes.

In his cell, Dzhelyal saw messages from other political prisoners like himself.

"Freedom for political prisoners" was carved up on a wall. "Illegally imprisoned people are sitting here," another one says.

"I wonder who it is? Many Crimean Tatars passed through this cell," Dzhelyal writes in the letter.

63 arrests in 48 hours

At the same time as Russia's law enforcement detained Dzhelyal, it came after two of his close friends, activist cousins Aziz and Asan Akhtemov.

Prosecutors accused the trio of deliberately damaging the gas pipeline. A Simferopol court put them under arrest for two months, until Nov. 4.

Each of the Akhtemov cousins faces up to 15 years in prison for the alleged pipeline explosion, while Dzhelyal could spend 13.5 years in jail for allegedly aiding and abetting them.

"This is a completely fake case. Their political motivation is destroying the remains of whatever dissent that's left on the peninsula," Polozov, Dzhelyal's lawyer, told the Kyiv Post.

The FSB issued a statement blaming Ukraine's military intelligence for employing Crimean Tatars to blow up the gas pipeline. It was reportedly damaged on Aug. 23, when the Crimea Platform was being held in Kyiv.

The FSB accused Ukrainian law

enforcement of training Crimean Tatars on how to handle explosives and offering them \$2,000 to damage the pipeline.

Ukraine's intelligence service denied involvement.

"This is a number of systemic provocations against our state, against the Main Intelligence Directorate. They aim to justify repressive measures against Crimean Tatars," Mykola Krasniy, a spokesperson for the intelligence unit, told RFE/RL.

Sudden arbitrary arrests are common in Crimea. But the detention of 60 people in a single day is unusual.

Russian forces threw a diverse array of charges at the Crimeans they seized.

Furniture shop owner Eldar Odamanov and handyman Shevket Useinov were initially detained for blowing up the pipeline but then were suddenly let go. This was only done to detain them again on other charges, Odamanov's lawyer Lilia Gemedzhy told the Kyiv Post.

Minutes after their release, police officers approached them on the street and demanded to see their IDs. For their alleged disobedience, they received an administrative penalty of 15 and 14 days in jail, respectively.

Large crowds of people, mostly Crimean Tatars and families of the five detainees later came to the FSB building in Simferopol, demanding to know the location of five men who had been kidnapped earlier.

Russia's national guard detained almost every one of them. They received administrative charges, and all but two men were released.

History of repression

Since Russia illegally annexed Crimea in 2014, over 160 Crimean Tatars became political prisoners of the Kremlin for their opposition to Russia's occupation and its frequent crackdowns. Most have been thrown into Russian prisons on charges like terrorism.

The Mejlis leadership has been a nuisance to the Kremlin ever since it seized Crimea from Ukraine.

On June 1, Russian-controlled court in Crimea sentenced Mejlis's head Refat Chubarov to nine years in prison for allegedly organizing mass riots near the Crimean parliament in 2014 in protest of Russian occupation.

Chubarov fled the peninsula shortly after. His deputy, Dzhelyal, stayed.

Even though he's in jail, Dzhelyal insists he will not leave his home.

"I don't have the slightest desire to leave Crimea and my home," Dzhelyal says in the letter to his lawyer.

World reacts

World leaders called on Russia to immediately release Dzhelyal and other political prisoners.

The European Union, one of the 46 organizations and countries that participated in the Crimea Platform, condemned Russia's aggression against Crimean Tatars.

"The European Union considers the detentions to be politically motivated and illegal under international law," the EU's diplomatic service said in a statement on Sept. 7.

"The European Union calls on the Russian Federation to comply with its obligations under international law and stop human rights violations of Crimea residents, as also stated on 23 August 2021 in the common statement of the International Crimean Platform Summit," the statement reads.

The United States, another member of Crimea Platform, criticized Russia for persecuting Crimean Tatars as well.

"We call on the Russian occupation authorities to release them immediately. This is the latest in a long line of politically-motivated raids, detentions, and punitive measures against the Mejlis and its

leadership, which has been targeted for repression for its opposition to Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea," the U.S. Embassy to Russia said in a statement.

Canada Embassy in Ukraine also called on Russia to release Crimean Tatars in a statement, saying that "Dzhelal's group was simply exercising its right to freedom of speech and assembly."

Amnesty International's office in Ukraine said that the case against Dzhelyal and his friends was clearly fabricated.

"We are convinced that the only purpose of the criminal prosecution of Dzhelyalov is to silence him and stop independent civic activity on the territory of the peninsula. Russian authorities must immediately stop persecuting dissent in Crimea," said Oksana Pokalchuk, head of Amnesty International Ukraine.

However, statements are not enough to help, says Skrypnyk.

She called on world leaders to impose another series of personal sanctions against Russian authorities for the latest crackdown on Crimean Tatars.

"We have already prepared names of people that must be included in the sanctions list. Those are people responsible for detaining Dzhelyal and others," said Skrypnyk, head of the Crimean Human Rights Group.

"Additionally, we need to come up with a mechanism that would enable arrest of the real estate, other assets that the Russian leadership has outside Russia, in order to give those assets as compensation to those suffering from Russia's aggression," she suggested.

"There is a good reason to go beyond regular mechanisms. We have enough resolutions. The problem is that Russia does not comply with them," she said.

"We need to make Putin's actions cost him money." ❖

Centrenergo mismanagement puts energy security at risk

By Max Hunder

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Ahead of Ukraine's long, energy-consuming winter, coal reserves in the country's power plants are dangerously low.

As of Sept. 8, reserves in the nation's coal-fired plants were at 759,000 tons, less than half of the 1.8 million tons the government planned to have this time of year, according to the parliamentary energy and utilities committee.

Stockpiles at every plant owned by state energy company Centrenergo are below the legal minimum. Centrenergo burned through much of its supply after being asked to step up generation by the government throughout 2021.

This has now led to a crisis at the enterprise, which is short on coal and lacks funds to replenish its supply. Centrenergo's only hope to work through the winter is to receive emergency government funds to purchase coal.

However, Oleksandr Kharchenko, managing director of energy consultancy Energy Industry Research Center, believes that the crisis can be blamed on the company's poor governance.

"The quality of management is very low. I don't see Centrenergo's management team doing the right things at the right time," he told the Kyiv Post.

"Coal is a huge market, it's very open, you have a lot of logistical options, it's not a problem at all," he said. "It's just a question of how you manage your supply."

Troubled history

Centrenergo is no stranger to scandal. From July 2019 to May 2020, it was run by Volodymyr Potapenko, whom the media linked to controversial oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky.

A Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFERL) investigation revealed that two companies linked to Kolomoisky overcharged Centrenergo by 20% when selling it \$150 million worth of coal.

Kolomoisky denied that Potapenko was under his control, but told reporters that Potapenko is a director he "understands."

Investigative outlet Bihus.Info wrote in April how a company called Ukrvuhlezbahachennya Group, also linked to Kolomoisky, made at least \$4.5 million in the first two months of 2021 by buying coal from Ukrainian mines at \$45 per ton and selling it to Centrenergo at \$61 per ton.

In the fall of 2020, D. Trading, part of Rinat Akhmetov's DTEK Group, which owns most of the coal power plants in Ukraine, sold coal to Centrenergo for 10–20% more than what DTEK's own plants were paying. D. Trading refused to comment to RFERL.

In May 2020, Dmytro Sennychenko, the head of the State Property Fund, which owns 78% of Centrenergo, told reporters that \$3.75 billion had been "siphoned off" from the company since 2004.

Oleg Petrasliuk



A bulldozer loads coal onto the conveyor belt at the Trypil'ska Thermal Power Plant in Kyiv Oblast on Sept. 8, 2021. After the closure of the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant, Trypil'ska became the largest power station in Kyiv Oblast.

That month, the Fund appointed Oleksandr Korchinsky, an industry veteran, to replace Potapenko.

Korchinsky didn't last long — acting CEO Yuriy Vlasenko replaced him in February 2021. In spite of all these management changes, Centrenergo lost \$22 million in the first half of this year.

In August, the enterprise requested financial assistance from the government and is likely to receive it soon.

Deputy Energy Minister Yuriy Vlasenko, who is not related to his namesake at Centrenergo, announced on Sept. 8 that his ministry is adding provisions to the state budget to purchase 1 million tons of coal for the beleaguered energy company.

Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko said the company will need to import a total of 3.5 million tons during the upcoming heating season.

State railway operator Ukrzaliznytsia makes Centrenergo's problems worse. Ukrzaliznytsia does not have enough functioning coal trucks to make all the necessary deliveries, Andriy Gerus, the head of the parliamentary energy and utilities committee, told the Kyiv Post.

"It's a crazy situation, when coal gets stuck at mines instead of being taken to power stations," said Gerus.

Overall, Kharchenko believes that the State Property Fund is shortsightedly trying to find a buyer without first fixing its governance and procurement structures.

In its current state, Centrenergo will be waiting a long time for a takeover bid. "I can't see how any private investor in their right mind would buy it," Kharchenko said.

Low electricity prices

Centrenergo's coal shortage can be

traced back to DTEK. Centrenergo had to pick up the slack when DTEK decided not to run its plants at full capacity due to low energy prices.

The nadir came at the beginning of July, when D. Trading suddenly halted almost all activity on the day-ahead energy market, where grid operators and traders can bid on electricity for the following day.

This caused energy prices on the day-ahead platform to crash by 70% in a week, forcing the National Energy and Utilities Regulatory Commission to step in and set a price floor.

An investigation into the crash is ongoing, but officials have suggested

that D. Trading crashed the market to squeeze out competitors and put pressure on the Commission.

"The price collapse in July, which was caused by the excessive market dominance of certain companies, made life more difficult for other companies," Gerus said.

Gerus emphasized that Centrenergo isn't the only operator breaking regulations with its low coal stockpiles: DTEK and Donbasenergo, the other two coal-power operators, are also running deficits.

Without replenishment, the stockpiles of G-grade coal, the main type used in Ukrainian power stations, at DTEK's plants will currently last for

an average of 18 days; far below the government's schedule, but still higher than the Centrenergo average of seven days.

The difference is that DTEK has plenty of funds to buy emergency supplies of coal on the global market in the event of an emergency, while state-owned Centrenergo doesn't.

Despite having the eighth-largest proven coal reserves in the world, Ukraine has been a net importer of the fossil fuel for years due to the deteriorating quality and high cost of coal being dug up by badly run, unprofitable mines.

Ukraine now imports almost half its coal, and 70% of that comes from Russia, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Future phaseout

Coal currently produces about 30% of Ukraine's electricity, but the Energy Ministry plans to significantly lower this proportion within the next decade due to the global shift away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy.

Under the terms of the Paris Climate Agreement, Ukraine has pledged to cut emissions to 65% of 1990 levels by 2030. The government has also promised carbon neutrality by 2060.

From 2026, the European Union plans to introduce a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, a form of carbon tax on imports which will punish goods from countries with 'dirty' energy sources.

The need to switch to alternative power is all the more urgent because Ukraine's coal plants are 50 years old on average, well over their 40–45 year technical lifespan.

"I don't believe that the Ukrainian government can prolong the lifespan of coal power stations any longer," said Kharchenko. ❁

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Legal reforms facing sabotage on many fronts under Zelensky

Editor's Note: The Kyiv Post renews Reform Watch, a series that highlights the reform progress — or obstruction — in key areas in Ukraine. The series initially ran in 2014–2017.

By Oleg Sukhov
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Ukraine's legal reform drive has faced continued obstruction in recent months.

Some of the country's most important reform targets include choosing a new chief anti-corruption prosecutor, changing how discredited judicial governing bodies work, liquidating the country's dirtiest court and overhauling the Constitutional Court.

All four of these initiatives have shown recent signs of sabotage, either from lawmakers, the President's Office or members of the judiciary. Here is how.

Anti-graft prosecutor

Selection of a new chief anti-corruption prosecutor has been blocked since July. Watchdogs suspect the President's Office of being behind it.

"Currently, the competition has been blocked on the orders of the President's Office because their main candidate Andriy Kostin has been kicked out of the competition," Vitaly Shabunin, head of the Anti-Corruption Action Center's executive board, said on Facebook on Sept. 2. "Loyalist members of the selection panel not just run to the President's Office, they are constantly fulfilling orders by (Zelensky's deputy chief of staff Oleh) Tatarov."

Zelensky's spokesman Serhiy Nikiforov denied accusations that the President's Office meddled in the selection process. Tatarov did not respond to requests for comment.

The panel that selects the prosecutor consists of four experts chosen by international organizations and seven members chosen by parliament. At least two international experts and five parliamentary nominees are needed to approve a candidate.

The selection panel doesn't appear to be free from influence.

At least some of the pro-government members on the panel have been handpicked by Tatarov, according to a May 13 report by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's investigative program Schemes. Commission members are either his personal acquaintances or are otherwise connected to him.

In June international experts on the panel vetoed the candidacy of Andriy Kostin, a member of parliament from President Volodymyr Zelensky's ruling 243-member Servant of the People party. Activists believe Kostin was the government's top choice.

Tatarov, who is reportedly overseeing the law enforcement bodies for the President's Office, is a suspect himself. In December, Tatarov was charged with bribing a forensic expert in 2017, which he denies. In February, a court refused to extend the Tatarov investigation and prosecutors effectively killed it



People watch an investigative film by the Slidstvo. Info journalism project about infamous judge Pavlo Vovk's attempts to influence the Constitutional Court on Sept. 8, 2021. The film was projected to the wall of the Constitutional Court building.

by missing the deadline for sending it to trial.

In May through July, the selection panel vetoed all of the 37 short-listed candidates for chief anti-corruption prosecutor, except for two. Anti-corruption activists say that foreign experts vetoed people who failed to meet integrity standards, while pro-government panel members mostly vetoed the best, most independent candidates.

Drago Kos, one of the foreign experts on the panel, said in a Sept. 6 interview with the Babel news site that the commission's work is being delayed for unknown reasons. He also complained that some panel members vetoed the best candidates and supported dubious ones.

Kos said he believed there was political pressure on the selection panel.

Pro-government panel members have denied the accusations of wrongdoing.

Oleksandr Klymenko, one of the two candidates to successfully pass an interview, is a detective of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU), who spearheaded the corruption case against Tatarov.

The other candidate who is still in the running, Andriy Synyuk, has been criticized by anti-corruption watchdogs. He has been a prosecutor since 2010 and is a direct subordinate of Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova, which raises questions about his independence.

Shabunin argued that pro-government members on the selection panel would try to rig the selection in favor of Synyuk.

After they met on Sept. 1, Zelensky and U.S. President Joe Biden jointly stated that a new anti-corruption prosecutor must be chosen with the best international practices.

Vovk's court

Pavlo Vovk is Ukraine's most infamous judge. His Kyiv District Administrative Court, a uniquely powerful court that can influence the work of the government, has become a symbol of injustice and lawlessness in Ukraine.

In April, Zelensky submitted an "urgent" parliamentary bill to liquidate this court. But Kostin, a lawmaker from Zelensky's party, has effectively blocked it.

Zelensky's spokesman Nikiforov told the Kyiv Post that the bill's fate is up to parliament, where the president's party holds an absolute majority. Kostin did not respond to requests for comment.



The Anti-Corruption Action Center believes that Zelensky's efforts to shut the court down are lip service and that the president wants to keep it around to make decisions he wants. For example, this court can cancel the selection of the next chief anti-corruption prosecutor if the winning candidate doesn't suit the president.

One of the candidates for this role has already filed a lawsuit with Vovk's court, disputing the results of the selection. The court has accepted it for consideration.

Tatarov and Zelensky's deputy chief of staff Andriy Yermak are trying to disrupt the competition through the Kyiv District Administrative Court, Shabunin argued on Sept. 6.

"This is one of the reasons why the Zelensky administration halted

the liquidation of the Kyiv District Administrative Court. Yermak and Tatarov are fine with Vovk," Shabunin said. "Zelensky's so-called 'immediate' liquidation of the court has been going on for six months and will continue for another six months."

Yermak did not respond to requests for comment.

All attempts to hold Vovk responsible for corruption and obstruction of justice have run into an impenetrable wall. Courts have refused to extend investigations against the judge while prosecutors missed deadlines for sending the cases to trial.

For months, Vovk dodged summonses from the NABU. Zelensky's loyal Prosecutor General Venediktova repeatedly refused to authorize an arrest warrant. She also refused to let NABU search Vovk's office or wiretap him and fired her deputy who authorized corruption charges against the judge.

Responding to accusations of sabotage, Venediktova said in March that she cannot take Vovk to court by force. She added that she doubted the effectiveness of the investigation and said that she did not see any "trial prospects" in the case.

Judicial reform

In July, parliament approved two judicial reform bills that gave foreign experts a crucial role in forming the High Qualification Commission of Judges and the High Council of Justice, the judiciary's governing bodies.

Giving foreign experts a central role has been a requirement of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and Ukraine's other foreign partners.

To hire and fire members of the High Council of Justice, the reform legislation would create the Ethics Council, made up of three Ukrainian judges and three foreign experts. The Ethics Council's decisions would require the agreement of four members. If the vote is split three to three, foreign experts' opinion will prevail.

Similarly, the selection panel for choosing the High Qualification Commission would consist of three Ukrainian judges and three foreign experts. At least four panelists will be needed to approve candidates, and foreign experts' opinion will prevail when the vote is split three to three.

However, there are numerous ways for the government to get around this reform.

First of all, it is not clear whether the legislation will be implemented at all. In 2019, Zelensky signed similar legislation to reform the High Qualification Commission but it was not implemented due to the High Council of Justice's refusal to carry it out.

Some civic activists and legal experts praised the bill as an unprecedented reform, while Vitaly Tytytch, ex-head of judicial watchdog Public Integrity Council, argued that the passage of the legislation was a trick by Zelensky's administration to get a loan from the IMF. After the money is disbursed, the authorities will likely derail the judicial reform to avoid losing control over judges, similar to what happened in 2019, he said.

The controversial High Council of Justice has publicly criticized foreign experts' expanded role, prompting fears that it would block or undermine the reform.

Unsolved issues: Anti-corruption prosecutor, Vovk, Constitutional Court & others

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Under one new clause, a selection committee picks 32 candidates and the High Council of Justice chooses 16 of them to advance. Legal think tank DeJure believes that the Council can use this clause to pick the 16 worst candidates, sabotaging the point of the reform.

Ukraine is also coming up on an important deadline that the Council of Judges may miss on purpose to block the reform, Mykhailo Zhernakov, head of DeJure, wrote on Aug. 31.

The Council of Judges must delegate members of the Ethics Council and the selection commission by Sept. 13. Both bodies must be formed by Sept. 18. The Council of Judges did not respond to a request for comment.

Constitutional Court

Another controversy surrounds Ukraine's unreformed Constitutional Court, which has faced mounting

criticism since it destroyed Ukraine's entire asset declaration system for state officials in 2020, eliminating a crucial pillar of the country's anti-corruption infrastructure.

In December the Prosecutor General's Office charged Oleksandr Tupytsky, chairman of the Constitutional Court, with bribing a witness to make him give false testimony.

Zelensky suspended Tupytsky and another Constitutional Court judge, Oleksandr Kasminin, in December and issued a decree to fire them in March. The Constitutional Court refused to implement Zelensky's decrees, saying that they were unconstitutional.

In July the Supreme Court canceled Zelensky's decree on the dismissal of Tupytsky and Kasminin as unlawful. Zelensky appealed the decision with the court's grand chamber. In August, he decreed that competition to replace Tupytsky and Kasminin must take place.

Several leading anti-corruption



Volodymyr Petrov

A wanted notice for judge Pavlo Vovk, a suspect in a graft case, in Kyiv on Dec. 1, 2020. Despite being caught on audiotape admitting to widespread corruption, Vovk remains as entrenched as ever in charge of the Kyiv District Administrative Court.

watchdogs condemned Zelensky's move in a joint statement. Anti-corruption activists argue that Tupytsky and other judges of the court should be investigated but they also maintain that the president has no constitutional authority to fire judges of the Constitutional Court.

According to the Ukrainian Constitution, only the Constitutional Court itself can fire its members, which is supposed to guarantee its independence.

"The president will only deepen the crisis around the Constitutional Court," the watchdogs said. "Instead of restoring trust in this body, this will destroy the legitimacy of (the court)."

To reform and cleanse the Constitutional Court, anti-corruption watchdogs and the Venice Commission have proposed holding a transparent competition for Constitutional Court jobs with foreign experts' participation when incumbent judges retire. However, the Verkhovna Rada's legal policy committee on Sept. 2 rejected amendments to launch a transparent competition with foreign experts.

"The Servant of the People refused to reform the Constitutional Court," DeJure said on Sept. 3.

Zelensky's spokesman Nikiforov said he could not comment on the

issue, while Kostin did not respond to a request for comment.

In June, the legal policy committee also approved an amendment allowing members of parliament to become judges of the Constitutional Court, eliminating the political neutrality criterion.

Olga Sovhyria, a lawmaker from the Servant of the People, is both a co-sponsor of the amendment and the leading candidate for a Constitutional Court job.

"Instead of reforming the Constitutional Court, the Servant of the People wants to fill it with its own members of parliament," Zhernakov said.

NATO & Ukraine: The Way Forward



Brian Bonner
Chief editor of the Kyiv Post



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



Glen Grant
expert on Ukrainian defense reforms



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



Mariana Bezuhla
Member of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament; deputy head of the committee on national security, defense & intelligence



Olena Halushka
director of the international department for the Anti-Corruption Action Center in Kyiv



September 14, 2021

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Livestream on kyivpost.com Twitter & Facebook

Head of Economic Security Bureau Melnyk: ‘We will know everything’

By Natalia Datskevych
datskevych@kyivpost.com

The government’s creation in January of the Bureau of Economic Security to investigate economic crimes was initially hailed as a step forward in fighting the massive economic crimes in Ukraine that go unpunished – from multi-billion-dollar bank fraud to offshore tax evasion.

The bureau aims to replace the country’s corruption-mired tax police.

However, when the Cabinet of Ministers appointed Vadym Melnyk, a tax police veteran with 16 years of experience, as the head of the bureau on Aug. 20, the news got a mixed reaction.

Yaroslav Zheleznyak, deputy chairman of the Voice party, with 20 members in parliament, said there’s a “99% chance that nothing will change,” while ex-Finance Minister Oleksandr Danyliuk said that the “reform choked before it even started.”

Others, like Danylo Hetmantsev, the head of the parliamentary committee on finance, taxation and customs policy, said that “people can change” and that the results can be assessed in the next six months.

Melnyk’s mind is at ease. He said

Kostyantyn Chernichkin



Vadym Melnyk, the head of the Bureau of Economic Security, speaks to the Kyiv Post in Taras Shevchenko Park in central Kyiv on Aug. 31, 2021.

he will change everything and prove that the new state body will work in a completely different way. Failure is not an option, he said.

“Passing a lie detector test is not mandatory in our country, but if a person refuses, then it raises questions,” said Melnyk.

The first 40 analysts will be enough to create a “strategic level” force, he believes. These analysts, who have law enforcement experience, will identify threats to the economy, including corruption and loopholes in legislation.

“The analysts will tell us how to eliminate such threats,” said Melnyk.

Still, the question of where to find future employees remains open. Melnyk gave up the idea of hiring former tax police officers en masse.

The eight-month term spent leading the State Fiscal Service before his new position left him disappointed. Nearly 70% of all tax police employees lacked professionalism, he said.

“A lot of them have been spoiled by their unwillingness to work but they understand that analytics is important now,” Melnyk said.

Besides detectives and analysts, Melnyk wants to “strengthen special law enforcement activities.” The bureau will have units of undercover agents to detect criminal groups.

“I don’t want to bury my name and my experience. I will do everything to make it work,” Melnyk told the Kyiv Post. “If I can’t launch the reform, I’ll just be worthless.”

Bureau’s team

“He will begin to build the only thing that he can – a corrupt and punitive machine,” Danyliuk wrote on Facebook.

In fairness, Danyliuk wanted the job badly. Last summer, he even punched ex-Economy Minister Timofiy Mylovanov, whom he blamed for sabotaging his selection. Melnyk, 49, is currently the only person in the bureau. With a full workload of 4,000 employees, he is in a hurry to find a core team of at least 200–300 people by November.

Overall, Melnyk estimated that around 600–700 people will be enough in the very beginning.

The bureau will likely stay at its current location, the former Kyiv headquarters of the tax police.

“We already have weapons rooms there, premises, equipment,” Melnyk said. “It will save money for the budget.”

“It’s not a question of which building we will be sitting in, it’s about the model of future work,” he said.

Melnyk plans to spend his budget on computer programs for the bureau’s team of analysts and on salary bonuses for those “who work well.” The salary of detectives will start from \$1,500, three times higher than average wages in the country.

Melnyk wants to have roughly 200 investigators, 200 data analysts and 300 people working in various other fields.

Every potential candidate working for the bureau will have to go through a polygraph.



“Those who commit crimes will not even know that we already know about it,” said Melnyk.

“We will be everywhere, we will know everything.”

Economic effect

Melnyk promised that businesses operating in Ukraine will feel the first positive signs of the economy being cleansed of illegal schemes in the next four to five months.

“There will be no immediate effect, but everyone will understand in which direction we are moving,” he said.

Melnyk believes that by fighting illegal schemes, Ukraine’s \$40 billion’s budget could be doubled because half of the economy is in the shadow.

“The task of the bureau is to reduce criminal systems in the economy,” said Melnyk. “My task is to contribute to filling the budget at any price.”

He also vowed that his investigators will not be for sale. Bribes used to be a long-running problem in the tax police, where the price to close a case started from \$100,000, according to Melnyk.

“With our new system, bribery won’t solve any problems,” he said. “Melnyk will see everything and find those who do it.”

TOP 10 KYIV POST exclusives online this week

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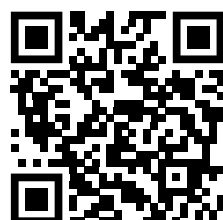
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Sergii Leshchenko: Decisive political season coming up

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there is also a pragmatic reason for him to do it.

Zelensky, who doesn't have his own media, will benefit from minimizing the influence of Ukraine's oligarchs through the TV channels they own. That is why deoligarchization will remain the key message for Zelensky.

Split with speaker

Another thing that will mark this political season is the split between Zelensky and the speaker of parliament, Dmytro Razumkov, which will become even more obvious. Especially after Razumkov has publicly stated that he doesn't agree with the president's proposal to create a registry of oligarchs and authorize the National Security and Defense Council to fill it.

Razumkov, who once helped run Zelensky's election campaign, is now distancing himself from the President's Office, and sometimes even acts in opposition to it.

There is nothing new here: In Ukraine, almost every speaker of parliament used the position to fulfill their ambitions. Oleksandr Moroz and Volodymyr Lytvyn were the most prominent leaders of parliament who tried to use the speaker's seat to win the presidency, but failed.

Now Razumkov aims to form a core of like-minded people in parliament that he can lead. It already includes several heads of parliamentary committees, such as Serhiy Babak, chairman of the education committee; Dmytro Natalukha, chairman of the economic policy committee; and Yaroslav Zheleznyak, chairman of the 20-member Voice faction.

Another goal for the ambitious speaker is to establish a separate channel of communication with each oligarchic group, which guarantees him access to television. Razumkov regularly appears in favorable broadcasts on the TV channels of Rinat Akhmetov and even Petro Poroshenko.

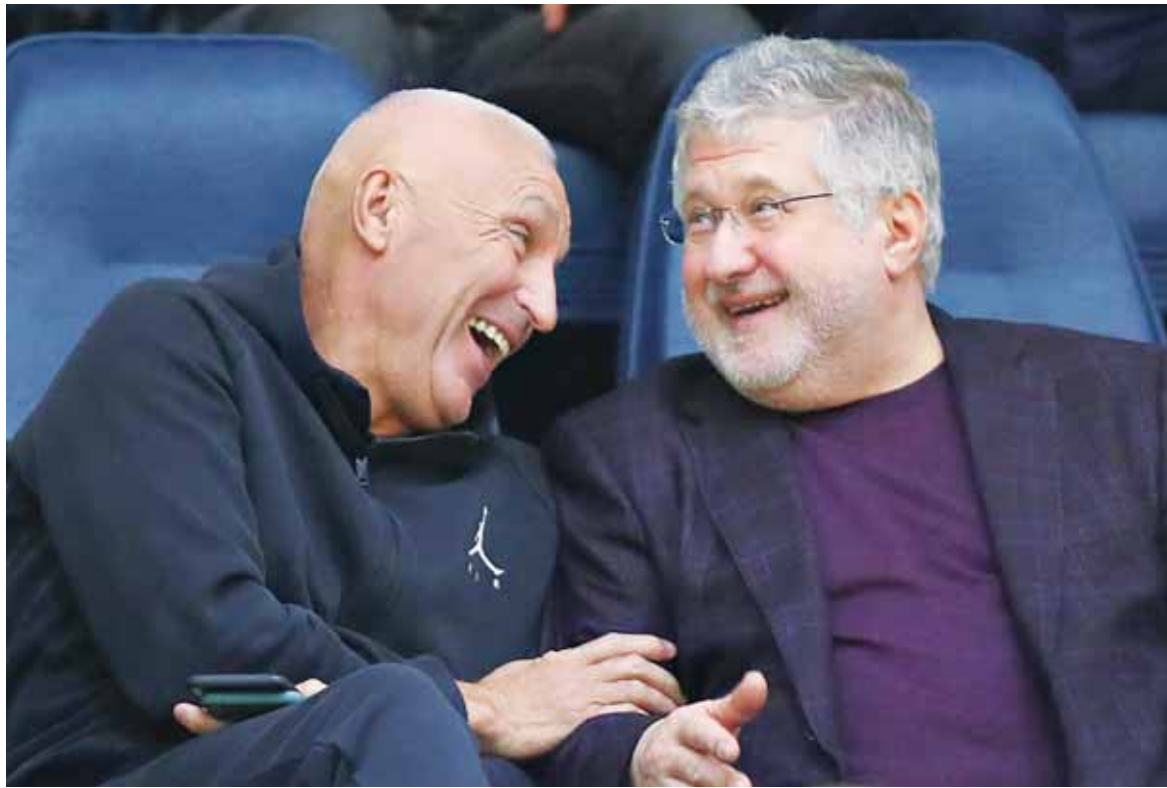
Oligarchs to fight back

Zelensky's desire to carry out deoligarchization — whether it is real or not — was met with the opposition of most oligarchs. Now they seek to replace the current government and increase their influence. Sometimes, resentful former members of Zelensky's team come in handy.

For example, in the last six months, Oleksandr Danyliuk, the former finance minister and former secretary of the National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksandr Danyliuk has been a regular guest on Akhmetov's TV channels.

In September, former Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk, who had spent several months in the U.S. on an internship at Atlantic Council, appeared on several of Akhmetov's TV shows as well.

Both former allies have criticized Zelensky's de-oligarchization idea,



Ihor Kolomoisky (R) and Alexander Yaroslavsky attend a basketball game in Kharkiv on Feb. 13, 2020. Kolomoisky founded PrivatBank and ran it until it was nationalized in 2016 when the bank faced collapse after independent auditors found that \$5.5 billion was missing, allegedly looted through bank fraud and insider lending. Kolomoisky faces civil lawsuits but no criminal charges.

among other things.

But the main blow to the deoligarchization scenario can be struck by a team play of Razumkov and Arsen Avakov.

The former interior minister, who had been in office for 7.5 years and seemed omnipotent, handed over his office keys without a fight in summer 2021 and, after voting for his resignation, went to Italy, where he owns real estate.

After Zelensky successfully took on the main villain in Ukraine's media world Viktor Medvedchuk and a notorious chairman of the Constitutional Court Oleksandr Tupytsky, Avakov's conflict-free resignation was another important operation to limit the potential risks that could emanate from centers of influence not controlled by the president.

Avakov's departure was a serious loss for the opponents of deoligarchization. He was a reliable ally for the richest Ukrainians, none of whom were harmed during the years of his rule in the Interior Ministry.

Avakov was not afraid to try to sabotage the imposition of sanctions on oligarchs like Pavel Fuchs and Dmytro Firtash at the National Security and Defense Council meeting, in Zelensky's presence. Avakov also backed Razumkov's idea that sanctions can't be imposed against Ukrainian citizens.

But Avakov's departure from public politics didn't mean the end of the backdoor deals.

Blow from ombudsman

Avakov found an opportunity to attack deoligarchization — he did it with the help of his ally Lyudmyla Denisova, the parliament's ombudsman for human rights. In the past, both Denisova and Avakov were members of the People's Front party.

Recently, Denisova sent a letter to Razumkov demanding that the law on deoligarchization doesn't get passed in its current version as it violates human rights.

It's interesting that the ombudsman made it her priority to play along with the 10 richest families in a country where the rights of much less protected groups are systematically violated.

“

Avakov's departure was a serious loss for the opponents of deoligarchization.

”

Sergii Leshchenko

Denisova was outraged that “a certain category of citizens will be discriminated against as a result of their assets disclosure” — meaning, discriminated against based on their wealth.

She is also worried that officials will be forced to report about their contacts with oligarchs. According to her, if such a meeting was “personal,” reporting it will mean “interference in personal and family life.” It is difficult to imagine a personal meeting between an oligarch and an official. Denisova also saw an “indirect introduction of censorship” in this law.

Finally, she promised to appeal to the Constitutional Court if the law is passed and advised Razumkov to send the draft to the Venice Commission, or European Commission for Democracy through

Law, for examination.

This idea has become a real lifeline for those who seek to remove the law. According to my information, Razumkov's intention to send the law to the Venice Commission is supported by Poroshenko's faction, as well as pro-Russian Opposition Platform For Life, Yulia Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna, and even Holos (Voice), whose leadership follows Razumkov.

However, Zelensky has already promised to respond to such a scenario with a referendum, and its outcome is predictable — the people of Ukraine will overwhelmingly back deoligarchization.

Such a referendum could be the best gift for Zelensky on the eve of the presidential election, as it will allow dividing the political arena into “friends of the people” and “friends of the oligarchs.”

Washington watching

At the same time, oligarchs must have been disappointed with the results of Zelensky's visit to Washington on Aug. 31. The U.S. leadership didn't publicly criticize the deoligarchization bill. It wasn't mentioned at all in the joint statement of Biden and Zelensky. Some pro-Russian media in Ukraine noted it and tried to spin it as the U.S. giving Zelensky a greenlight for his deoligarchization project.

The same was the impression of Yuri Vanetik, a U.S. lawyer and lobbyist who is suing Ukrainian oligarch Pavel Fuks in California.

“I know from my sources that Biden gave (Zelensky) a certain carte blanche,” he told me. “Ukraine will soon begin a legal attack on oligarchs, who remain a source of corruption and economic stagnation. Ukraine will liberalize markets and take back control of strategically important industries now controlled

by a handful of people, using the practice of compulsory purchase. Those (oligarchs) who will cooperate will get a more loyal attitude. In the future, the U.S. will encourage Ukraine to take even more aggressive steps to eradicate the corrupt system.”

Kolomoisky in trouble

Ironically, the oligarch in the most trouble is Ihor Kolomoisky. The same oligarch who was considered to be a puppeteer of Zelensky and the biggest winner of his presidency may turn out to be its biggest loser.

The oligarch, imperceptibly to himself, had become too toxic for Ukrainian politics and too appealing a target for the U.S. to demonstratively punish cross-border corruption.

Although Kolomoisky recently celebrated an interim victory in the U.S. when the Delaware Court of Chancery postponed PrivatBank's lawsuit against him, this euphoria is short-lived.

Kolomoisky is still spending millions on lawyers in the U.S. to no avail, as he seeks to avoid much more serious problems in connection with the FBI investigation against him. The investigation focuses on the alleged money laundering by Kolomoisky in the U.S., the case in which the U.S. Department of Justice has already filed three lawsuits to confiscate Kolomoisky's property in Ohio, Texas, and Kentucky.

Possible criminal charges are looming and that can turn Kolomoisky into an easy target for the FBI around the world.

The noose is tightening around Kolomoisky — not only in the U.S. but also in Israel, the country where he is a citizen and which he saw as an option to escape justice.

Israel is also becoming unreachable for him, as local authorities are hearing the claims of the state-owned PrivatBank against Kolomoisky in connection with money laundering through the local Discount Bank and are awaiting his questioning.

At the same time, Israeli police have reportedly opened a fraud investigation regarding Kolomoisky and several of his associates. The case allegedly revolves around a 2019 deal between Kolomoisky's partners and a company belonging to Belarusian oligarch Nikolay Vorobei. Kolomoisky's associates allegedly failed to pay \$20 million for the coal they bought in 2019 from Vorobei's company and resold to Centrenerg, a major Ukrainian state energy company.

And there is every reason to expect that Kolomoisky will become the next Ukrainian oligarch after Pavlo Lazarenko and Dmytro Firtash who will feel the grindstone of international justice.

But whether Kolomoisky faces justice in Israel and the U.S. is not that important — what's important is whether he faces it in Ukraine.

This will be not only a precedent for punishing an oligarch but also a guarantee of a successful presidency for Zelensky. ☪

Donbas veteran gives decent burial to fallen WWII soldiers

By Illia Ponomarenko

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BERDYCHIV, Ukraine — Oleksandr Afanasiev, a young man dressed in khaki fatigues, walks through a recently harvested field of wheat.

His combat boots tread upon fresh stubble. He carries a shovel and a metal detector in his hands.

Today, this place near Berdychiv, a Zhytomir Oblast city of 75,000 people located 150 kilometers southwest of Kyiv, is a pleasant paradise of cow pastures and fruit gardens.

But exactly 80 years ago, in the days of World War II, these meadows were a hellscape of gore and fire.

In July 1941, the Soviet Army's 44th Armored Division desperately charged through this field, yelling in terror, their bayonets fixed. German machine guns and mortars mowed them down, wave after wave.

The suicide attacks through open terrain were meant to push back the Wehrmacht's 11th Panzer Division occupying the village of Semenivka nearby.

Very few managed to come anywhere close to the Nazi lines through the mayhem of thousands of mutilated bodies.

"If there can be an illustration of blood-soaked earth, it was here," says Afanasiev.

Many decades have passed. But the fallen never left this old battlefield.

Unidentified and unrecognized, they were forgotten in their unmarked mass graves. Nowadays, Afanasiev returns to these fields again and again to lift them out of their sad oblivion.

As a combat veteran, he and a handful of fellow enthusiasts have given themselves a mission to finally give the fallen a proper resting place and official military honors.

"It is not okay when soldiers' bones rot in old shell craters plowed over by tractors for decades," he says. "We give them what they deserved in battle."

Killing field

The metal detector in Afanasiev's hands never stops beeping as he scans the field.

The topsoil still teems with scores of rusted remnants: shell fragments, cartridges, pieces of bayonets. It sometimes takes no more than a couple of strikes with a spade to unearth another half-decomposed cylinder: a Soviet RGD-33 hand grenade. The traces of the old war are everywhere.

Human remains are sometimes the most frequent find.

As Afanasiev walks through the field, he points out dozens of sites where he and his mates had unearthed old bones.

The discoveries paint a dreadful picture of the events of 1941.

The infantrymen sent to storm the Nazi lines were all doomed. Many of them were killed before they could



Oleksandr Afanasiev, an amateur archeologist, scans the ground in search of World War II artefacts in a field near the city of Berdychiv on Aug. 11, 2021.

make a single shot. Some met their end while holding grenade clusters in their hands, trying to get up and throw them into enemy foxholes.

Germans were battering the field with mortars, leaving scores of torn-off limbs. Many troops — injured, scared, or shell-shocked — tried to escape the hail of lead and roll down into impact holes. And some died in there, clutching their heads in terror.

Inevitable death was in front of them, and there was no way back as well.

"Almost all of them were aged between 19 and 21, judging by their skull structure," Afanasiev says. "They were newbies, often with no real combat experience, drafted in 1939 or 1940."

Once in a while, Afanasiev and his mates find skulls with pistol bullet holes: Germans would sometimes walk the scorched battlefield to finish off the injured with two headshots from their Lugers.

Skeletons often tell their stories through everyday items preserved in graves: water jars with barely legible letters or carvings; decayed pieces of newspapers with poetry in Ukrainian printed just days before the fatal battle; simple hand-made pen-knives; sometimes, even canned stewed meat or jars of what used to be milk 80 years ago.

Unfortunately, the bodies never reveal their names.

Their dog tags issued in 1941 in the Soviet Union have decayed so much, they're almost indecipherable.

"Sometimes we find spoons, or metal mugs, with some names or

nicknames scribbled on them," Afanasiev says. "But we can't be sure these items identify the remains. Soldiers could swap belongings many times over."

After years of work in fields and kitchen gardens in Semenivka, Afanasiev's group has unearthed hundreds of skeletons. Many more probably remain to be found. By mid-July 1941, the village outskirts were literally cluttered with dead bodies.

As Afanasiev says, the fallen soldiers were most probably buried by local civilians.

"They didn't take their weapons, or their money, or ammunition," he says. "Germans in the city would quickly put them against the wall for that."

Many graves tell horrific stories of how the people of Berdychiv had to bury the dead.

In some locations, Afanasiev and his fellows found rusty meat hooks — the civilians used them to grapple the dead bodies quickly decaying in the summer heat and ditch them into impact holes.

The team has never found remains of German soldiers. The Nazi collected their fallen and buried them at the center of Berdychiv. A month later, Adolf Hitler visited Berdychiv and the German soldiers' graves.

The Soviets' losses were in vain.

The attacks lasted several days, after which the Soviets managed to retake Semenivka — but not for long. A German counter-offensive pushed the Soviets farther east. And several weeks later, the 44th Armored

Division was fully destroyed, together with many other formations, in the disastrous Battle of Uman.

The German victory was tragic to Berdychiv. Nazis set up a death camp near the city, where over 38,000 local Jews were slaughtered. Over 11,000 other civilians were forced into slave labor in the Third Reich.

Wrongs of the past

Old-timers of Berdychiv still remember the days when patches of local farmland produced especially rich wheat or corn. It was obvious that the plants fed on nutrients from the decomposing bodies in the mass graves left over from the war.

The Soviet authorities did nothing about this. The old pits were left untouched.

When Afanasiev got back from his own war in 2016, he decided to do something about it.

Originally from Crimea, he volunteered to fight the Russian invasion from the very beginning, and later served as a recon unit soldier with the 92nd Mechanized Infantry Brigade.

Two years on the front line damaged his hearing and made him strongly aware of the sad fates of soldiers during a war.

Together with a handful of locals, some of whom are also combat veterans, Afanasiev closely studied available documents on all WWII operations near Berdychiv: from Soviet battle logs to German aerial surveys archived in the United States.

He knows about every maneuver performed near the city, which led his team to many forgotten graves where young soldiers had been cut down.

The team spent its own money to install a small memorial stone near a garden where they exhumed over 100 bodies. It bears no names.

"Someone brings flowers to this stone time after time," Afanasiev says. "That's what we can do for these guys. Otherwise, no one would even know anything about them."

The quiet outskirts of Semenivka have just one official World War II memorial — a standard Soviet soldier monument bearing the names of locals killed in action.

Behind it are six small mounds where unknown soldiers found by Afanasiev have been given their final resting place. Multiple remains were bagged and buried in six coffins to the salute of rifle shots.

After eight decades in limbo, the fallen were finally honored as soldiers.

Afanasiev and his friends will continue with their mission. He currently works as a lawyer in Berdychiv, but still pays much of his time to local war history studies and excavations.

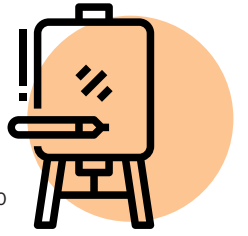
"As soldiers, we know what it's like to be at war," he says.

"We do what needs to be done now. I want people to see what we find in the ground, all these traces of war, how terrible war is. People need to see that we're better off learning from the wrongs of the past." ❁

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Beleniuk's quest to promote sports after his gold medal

By Asami Terajima
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Three weeks before the Tokyo Olympics, Ukrainian wrestler Zhan Beleniuk suffered one of the worst injuries of his long athletic career.

It was supposed to be a light practice session to get him ready for the Games. Beleniuk landed poorly on his elbow where the mat was covered in sweat and it slipped. Suddenly, five years of preparation were in jeopardy.

Doctors were against him competing in the first place but his coach reassured him that "everything was fine." In fact, Beleniuk believes that the injury made him mentally stronger at the competition.

Just weeks later, Beleniuk achieved his lifelong ambition of becoming an Olympic champion.

"It's every athlete's dream," Beleniuk, 30, told the Kyiv Post.

Beleniuk, who is also a lawmaker, juggles athletics and politics. He has previously talked about retiring from sports after the Tokyo Olympics but no announcement has been made yet. "After a performance like that, you feel a new surge of energy again, making you feel like you can continue competing," he said, and "it's possible" that he will compete again.

But for now, Beleniuk wants to dedicate himself to politics. Ever since becoming Ukraine's first black lawmaker in 2019, he's served as the first deputy head of the parliamentary Committee on Youth and Sports, representing the 243-member Servant of the People faction.

Beleniuk's vision of Ukraine's future involves building the necessary infrastructure to support athletes and the improvement of public health by promoting sports.

"We are not providing enough for people interested in sports and this is a big problem that needs to be solved," he said. "We need to make sure that sports become popular so people understand how important and necessary it is in their lives."

Access to sports

Growing up in the lower-middle-class Vynohradar district in Kyiv, Beleniuk never took things for granted. His family was poor. He was raised by his mother who worked as a seamstress and his grandmother, a cleaner at a silk mill. He never met his father, who died when Beleniuk was only 13 soon after fighting in the Rwandan civil war.

Oleg Petrasjuk



Olympic champion Zhan Beleniuk poses for a photograph holding his gold medal in Mariinsky Park in central Kyiv on Aug. 27, 2021. Beleniuk won his first Olympic gold at the 2020 Tokyo Games.

Beleniuk's athletic career began with a lucky chance. He went to his first wrestling practice at the age of nine since it was offered at his school. He immediately liked it.

Now that he is older, he knows that not every kid is blessed with the same opportunity in Ukraine. Local schools provide only several classes of physical training per week. They are designed to suit children with different levels of athletic capabilities and are often not enough to spark children's interest in sports. And if a child happens to be from a poor neighborhood where there is no sports infrastructure available, then the chances of them discovering their athletic potential are even smaller.

Even if there is a stadium or a playground around, in Ukraine, many of them are falling apart. As most of the sports infrastructure was built during the Soviet Union, it now either needs to be replaced or rebuilt. The old equipment discourages kids from taking up sports, Beleniuk said, including those who might have potential to become professional athletes. If Ukraine wants to grow star athletes, it should provide access to modern sports infrastructure to all children, he said.

"We have many talented kids," he said. "If we want these talents to grow, we should make sure that all

the necessary conditions are there."

A reconstruction plan like that would cost Ukraine billions of dollars. It has unfortunately never been a priority, according to the politician and athlete. For many years, sports financing has been based on the principle of giving "whatever that remains in the budget."

But the officials are now beginning to understand the importance of sports, Beleniuk said. In part thanks to his committee's advocacy, this year, the Ministry of Youth and Sports' budget was a record-breaking Hr 7.76 billion (\$291 million).

Though it's a good start, Beleniuk said Ukraine needs to keep prioritizing sports funding.

Nation's health

Investing in sports infrastructure not only helps the country produce top-notch athletes but also improves the overall health of the population, Beleniuk said.

"People who dedicate enough time to sports are less likely to need medical help later on in their lives," Beleniuk said. "If the country spends more money in sports, then it will ultimately mean that health care expenditure will decrease."

Beleniuk believes that Ukraine needs to follow the good examples of developed countries. They have higher life expectancies because

people are generally more active. Studies have found that regular physical activity and a high fitness level reduces the likelihood of premature death.

Switzerland, for instance, has the highest life expectancy in Europe — 86 for women and 82.4 for men. Swiss people often live an active lifestyle, as well over 70% of the population meets the physical activity recommendation, according to the World Health Organization. Physical activity can save up to five million lives a year globally, the WHO writes.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's life expectancy is 77.3 for women and 68.6 for men. According to Health Minister Viktor Lyashko, 60% of Ukrainians do not engage in any physical activity in their spare time.

Beleniuk thinks that opportunities to practice sports should be accessible to the public whether in a stadium or a public park. "The problem is that even if someone wants to exercise, there often isn't a place to do it. You can always go for a run and I like doing it, and maybe do some pushups on the ground. But it's not the same for everyone," he said.

Recently, initiatives like implementing a QR code system in parks

This pop-up gallery unites artists in war-ravaged east

By Elina Kent
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In war-torn eastern Ukraine, artists often feel isolated and alone.

They are scattered across the half-empty towns, affected by Russia's war that started in 2014. The area has little, if any, art life. It seems to only liven up when creatives from big cities like Kyiv or Kharkiv come to Donbas for guest residencies or temporary exhibits.

Vitalii Matukhno, a local from Lysychansk, a city in Luhansk Oblast 735 kilometers east of Kyiv, says he liked events with visiting artists but the absence of the local art scene was always striking.

"Even if we had something here, there hadn't been any discussion about it or acknowledgement," Matukhno told the Kyiv Post.

Matukhno decided to bring together the spread-out artists and give them a platform to showcase their work. That's how his pop-up gallery emerged in 2020.

Called Gareleya Neotodryosh, which means "a gallery that cannot be torn off," in Russian, it travels to damaged structures through Donbas, throwing pop-up exhibits and creating a new community within the region.

Symbolic start

The gallery's first exhibit took place in a symbolic place, under the bridge between the cities of Lysychansk and Severodonetsk that was blown up by Russian-led militants in 2014 and reconstructed by Ukrainian authorities in 2016.

Local artists, many meeting for the first time, glued printed pictures to an unfinished room in the underpass.

When explaining the unnamed project to the group, Matukhno stumbled over his words, mistakenly saying gareleya rather than galereya ("gallery" in Russian). The twisted name of the initiative was born.

Several days after the exhibit was put up, an artist who noticed the gallery added his own pictures to the walls, inspired to share his work by others.

Matukhno considered it another proof his region needed a platform for creatives to display their art. It pushed him to write up a manifesto for the project and launch an Instagram account so that other artists in the east can discover his initiative.

"And it just took off," Matukhno says.

Uniting artists

Since the launch a year ago, the pop-up has carried out 13 exhibi-

In depleted, war-torn Donbas, a campaign to unite with art

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tions, spotlighting nearly 100 local artists.

The gallery travels all across the region each time arriving at a new location. Its exhibits were held at a two-story abandoned house deep in the woods, an abandoned bowling alley in Mariupol city, a shot-up television station in Lysychansk and more.

Contemporary artist Yehor Gordotko was showcasing his own exhibit in a destroyed building on the outskirts of his native city Kramatorsk when someone told him about the gallery for the first time.

"It really resonated, their method of work," Gordotko told the Kyiv Post. "Vitalik (Matukhno) and I have similar opinions on the crisis of art institutions in our regions."

Few spaces show quality art in the east. Small towns usually have one state museum that showcases old, permanent exhibits about the history of the town and the war in the east.

"These museums in small villages look the same, it's just boring," Gordotko says. "There isn't any art that brings discussion."

Unlike the state museums that often stick to conservative approaches, Gareleya Neotodryosh, welcomes bold art on all topics.

One of the exhibits showcased the work of Zhenya Tramvay, an openly gay artist whose pieces focus on queer themes, expressively. His work would have been censored by a regular museum, according to Matukhno.

Gordotko says it feels special to be able to start discussions by displaying his work, as well as to be recognized within his own region.

He also says he was surprised to



A local visitor takes photos of Gareleya Neotodryosh's exhibit at an abandoned building in Lysychansk, Luhansk Oblast, on June 26, 2021. Aimed to spotlight the artists of Donbas, the initiative holds exhibitions displaying their work in areas damaged by Russia's war in eastern Ukraine.

see how many artists there were around. He believes that the project is healing some of the broken ties within the community.

"I felt that the gallery became a platform for the uniting of those who live here, work here and create," Gordotko says.

And that community doesn't exclude those who live in the occupied territories, including cities of Luhansk and Donetsk.

"If we deny ourselves from the people that live in those territories, then we are consciously not considering them as part of Ukraine," Matukhno says. "Then what are we

fighting for?"

Instead of cutting Ukrainians stuck in occupied areas, Matukhno wants to connect people.

"Those people have the gallery as a path to be a part of Ukraine, to show their work, and to essentially prove that they exist," Matukhno says.

Connecting locals

Gareleya Neotodryosh has been a breakthrough project not only for artists, but regular locals in Donbas.

One of their exhibits was put up outside of a Nova Poshta private postal office in Lysychansk. "A gal-

lery that people would accidentally end up at when picking their packages and mail," Matukhno says.

It took many locals by surprise.

One of them was an internally displaced woman who had lost her regular life after she fled occupied Luhansk and settled in Lysychansk.

"She said she had been in a state of constant transit, not paying attention to anything," Matukhno says, as her "life had become trivial."

She happened to be near the post office when she noticed a photograph of her home, Luhansk, that she couldn't return to. Matukhno says she stopped and burst into tears. "It

really touched her."

Matukhno says that many passers-by at first didn't understand what their project was about, but "they were happy that they happened to experience it."

The initiative's exhibits are especially valuable for the local youth in rural eastern Ukraine. One of them is Valeriia Kovtun, 18, who comes from the small town of Rubizhne, close to Lysychansk. She says that throughout her whole life she has interacted with a meager number of people, struggling to find like-minded friends.

But Gareleya Neotodryosh opened up a whole new world for her.

"I started to come to Lysychansk more often," Kovtun told the Kyiv Post, "started to participate more, met so many new people."

Kovtun volunteered to help the initiative with setting up exhibits. She has now visited at least seven exhibits, traveling around and discovering her own region.

The gallery once visited Kovtun's native Rubizhne, showcasing art at an abandoned movie theater. Kovtun was surprised when strangers other than her friends arrived and discussed the displayed art.

"The locals were surprised that Rubizhne had something (happening)," Kovtun says.

Though initially founded to spotlight and unite artists within the east, Gareleya Neotodryosh now wants to show the rest of Ukraine that there is a thriving art community in the east. One of the ways they plan to achieve that is by launching a printed zine with locals' art and distributing it throughout the country.

"We want to have more people know about our project, our region, our people," Matukhno says. ☪

'It's always more attractive to help develop your own country,' says lawmaker Beleniuk

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so that the visitors can scan it and watch an exercise video tutorial have become more common. Beleniuk said this is a good example but there needs to be more.

Another way to get more people interested in sports is making tickets for athletic events cheaper, the lawmaker believes. To achieve that, Beleniuk co-initiated a bill that decreases tax rates for sports events and will allow organizers to lower the ticket prices.

He also said that competitions should be broadcast on television more often so that athletes are regarded as role models and inspire the nation to start exercising. Beleniuk says now is the perfect timing to start because the Tokyo Olympics finished

a little over a month ago and sports are still on people's minds.

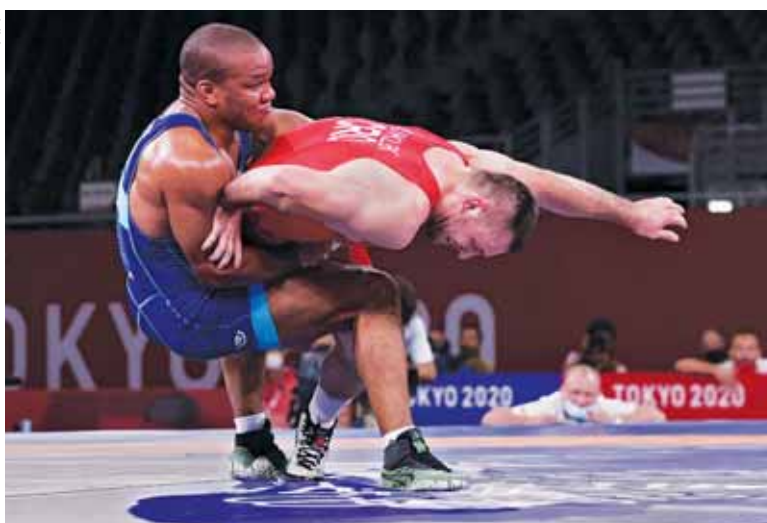
"We need to use this momentum," he said.

Giving back

Despite the poor state support of professional athletes, Beleniuk has always been a patriot. Even when he was offered to compete for other countries where he would be paid more, he refused.

"It's always more attractive to help develop your own country than work elsewhere and be a 'guest' to another nation," he said.

Having experienced racism since the early days of childhood, Beleniuk tries his best to show that a person can look different and still be Ukrainian. He remembers how normal it was to call a black person



Ukraine's Zhan Beleniuk (blue) wrestles Croatia's Ivan Huklek in their men's greco-roman 87kg wrestling semi-final match during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Makuhari Messe in Japan on Aug. 3, 2021.

a "negro" and people didn't understand how offensive it was. "People also stared at me a lot."

Though he just recently encountered racism in central Kyiv when a group of men insulted him on the street for the color of his skin on Aug. 13, he said the situation is getting better in Ukraine.

"There will always be people who have complexes and think it's okay to get rid of them by hurting other people, but this is not just in Ukraine," he said. Yet, "there is still room for improvement."

Despite all the difficulties he went through in Ukraine, it's here that Beleniuk trained to grow into an Olympic champion. He now works to give back to his home, but humbly says "everyone wants to help improve their own country." ☪

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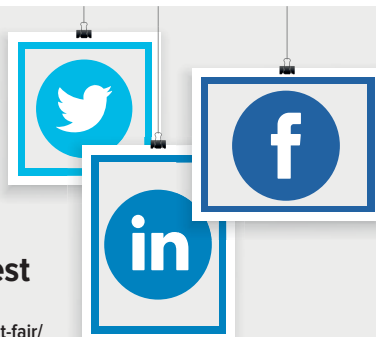
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