



The Ukraine List #502

compiled by Dominique Arel (darel@uottawa.ca)

Chair of Ukrainian Studies, U of Ottawa

www.chairukr.com

www.danyliwseminar.com

3 November 2019

- 1- ASN 2020 Call for Proposals: Deadline Reminder (6 November)
- 2- Danyliw 2019 Research Seminar on Ukraine Program (7-9 November)
- 3- Kule Doctoral Scholarships on Ukraine, uOttawa (1 February 2020 Deadline)

- 4- Washington Post: “Ukraine is Not a Real Country” —Trump
- 5- AP: Mueller Documents — Manafort in 2016 Pushed Ukraine Hack Theory
- 6- BuzzFeed: The Dark Heart Of The Impeachment Investigation (Firtash)
- 7- Daily Beast: Firtash Seethed About ‘Overlord’ Biden for Years

- 8- Kyiv Post: Zelensky Clashes with Veterans over Donbas Disengagement
- 9- Bloomberg: Leonid Bershidsky, Fudging the Red Lines
- 10- Euractiv: Hungary Blocks NATO Statement on Ukraine over Minority Rights Row
- 11- New York Times: The Cost of Trump’s Aid Freeze in the Trenches of Ukraine’s War
- 12- Spiegel: A (Rare) Trip to the Pro-Russian Pseudo-State of Luhansk

- 13- Wall Street Journal: IMF Wants Zelensky to Get Back Stolen Money from Banks
- 14- Hromadske: Servant of the People Splits Over “Kolomoisky Question”
- 15- Kyiv Post: UK Accounting Firms Tied to Alleged Kolomoisky Fraud

- 16- Kyiv Post: Netflix Documentary Series on Trawniki Ivan Demjanjuk
- 17- U of Manitoba: Tenure-Track Position in Ukrainian and Russian Politics
- 18- U of Alberta: Search for a New Kule Chair in Ukrainian Ethnography

#1

****Deadline Reminder: Wednesday November 6, 2019****

Call for Papers

25th Annual World Convention of the
Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN)

International Affairs Building,
Columbia University, NY
Sponsored by the Harriman Institute
7-9 May 2020
<https://www.asnconvention.com/proposal-information>

*****Proposal deadline: 6 November 2019*****

Proposals must be submitted to:
darel@uottawa.ca and darelasn2020@gmail.com

Over 150 Panels/Events in 11 Sections

Nationalism Studies
Migration/Diasporas
Balkans
Central Europe
Ukraine
Russia
Caucasus
Eurasia (Central Asia and China)
Turkey (and Greece)
Book Panels
World Documentary Films

Thematic Sections

Populism, Radicalism, Extremism
The Refugee Crisis
Historical and Political Memory
Political Violence
The Russia/Ukraine Conflict

ASN Awards

Best Doctoral Papers
Best World Documentary Film
Best Book on Nationalism
Best Article in Nationalities Papers
Best Field Work Photos

The ASN World Convention, which annually brings 750+ scholars from 50+ countries to Columbia University, welcomes proposals on a wide range of topics related to nationalism, national identity, ethnicity, race, conflict and migration in regional sections of Central, Southern and Eastern Europe or cross-regional sections on nationalism and migration/diasporas.

In addition to the thematic sections on populism/radicalism, refugees, memory, violence and the Russia/Ukraine conflict, popular themes over the years have included gender, language, religion, EU integration/exit, security, nation-building, energy politics, parties and elections, youth, media, and civil society.

Disciplines represented include political science, history, anthropology, sociology, international studies, security studies, area studies, economics, geography, literature, and other fields of humanities and social sciences.

Prospective applicants can get a sense of the large thematic scope of ASN Convention papers and presentations by looking at the 2019 Final Program.

The ASN scholarly journal Nationalities Papers is now published by Cambridge University Press. The ASN 2020 Convention Opening Reception will celebrate this new partnership between ASN and Cambridge University Press.

Proposal Forms

Paper Proposal
Panel Proposal
Roundtable Proposal
Documentary Film Proposal
Book Panel Proposal
Discussant Proposal

To send a proposal, download the relevant form above, send it to darel@uottawa.ca and darelasn2020@gmail.com, and fill out a Fact Sheet online.

Applicants can be considered for only one paper (included either in a paper proposal or a panel proposal) and appear in a maximum of two proposals (paper, panel or roundtable).

An exception is made for book panels or films, although applicants can only be on one book panel proposal.

Applicants whose proposals is accepted are responsible for covering all travel and accommodation costs. *ASN has no funding available for panelists.*

The receipt of all proposals will be acknowledged electronically, with some delay during deadline week, due to the high volume of proposals.

An international Program Committee is entrusted with the selection of proposals. Most applicants will be notified between January and February 2020.

Practical information on the Convention, including registration costs, will be communicated in January 2020.

Publishers and companies wishing to exhibit at the Convention or advertise in the Convention printed program can contact ASN Executive Director Ryan Kreider at rk2780@columbia.edu.

For practical questions on the Convention, please contact ASN Executive Director Ryan Kreider at rk2780@columbia.edu.

The ASN website is at <http://nationalities.org>

The ASN Convention website is at <http://asnconvention.com>

To follow us on Facebook, go to <https://www.facebook.com/Nationalities>

To follow us on Twitter, go to [@asn_org](https://twitter.com/asn_org)

We very much look forward to receiving your proposal!

Dominique Arel, ASN Convention Director

Agathe Dudzinski, ASN Convention Assistant Director

Lisa Koriouchkina, ASN Communications Director

Ceren Belge, Evgeny Finkel, Tamara Pavasović Trošt, Program Committee Associate Directors

On behalf of the ASN Convention Program Committee

Deadline for proposals: 6 November 2019 (to be sent to both darel@uottawa.ca AND darelasn2020@gmail.com in a single attachment).

#2

15th Annual Danyliw Research Seminar on Contemporary Ukraine

Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Ottawa, Canada

Desmarais Hall 12102

7-9 November 2019

<https://www.danyliwseminar.com/program-2019>

Thursday 7 November

The Holocaust in Ukraine: Perpetration and Rescue

9.00-10.30 AM

Moderators: Daria Mattingly (U of Cambridge, UK, dm628@cam.ac.uk) and Mayhill Fowler (Stetson U, US, mfowler1974@gmail.com)

Marta Havryshko (Krypiakevych Institute, Ukraine, havryshko@gmail.com)

Local Perpetrators of Sexual Assaults against Jewish Women during the Holocaust in Ukraine

Raisa Ostapenko (Sorbonne U, France, raisa.s.ostapenko@gmail.com)

To Risk One's Life for Another: The Moral Psychology behind Rescuing Jews during the Holocaust in Occupied Ukraine

Coffee Break

Civil Society during the Crimean Annexation and the Donbas War

11.00 AM-12.30 PM

Moderator: Ioulia Shukan (U Paris Nanterre, France, ioulia.shukan@gmail.com)

Discussant: Natalia Stepaniuk (U of Ottawa, Canada, natalia.stepaniuk@gmail.com)

Elmira Muratova (Taurida National U, Crimea, Ukraine, murelmira@gmail.com)

Gender in Crisis: Women and "Crimean Solidarity" during the 2014 Annexation

Olena Andriushchenko (Open TV, Dnipro, Ukraine, anlena05@gmail.com)

Nick Kupensky (US Air Force Academy, nick.kupensky@gmail.com)

The Outpost of Ukraine: The Role of Dnipro in the War in Donbas

12.30-1.30 PM

Lunch Break

New Methods in the Study of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

1.30-3.15 PM

Moderators: Oxana Shevel (Tufts U, US, oxana.shevel@tufts.edu) and Dominique Arel (U of Ottawa, Canada, darel@uottawa.ca)

Jakob Hauter (U College London, UK, jakob.hauter@bath.edu)

How the War Began: Process Tracing, Open Source Intelligence Analysis and Conflict Escalation in the Donbas

Khrystyna Holynska (Kyiv School of Economics, Ukraine, cholynska@kse.org.ua) and Stephan de Spiegeleire (The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, Netherlands, sdspieg@gmail.com)

The RuBase Project: A New Tool to Study Russia's Coercion towards Ukraine

Coffee Break

3.45-4.30 PM

The Facts of Life in Donbas

Moderator: Ioulia Shukan (U Paris Nanterre, France, ioulia.shukan@gmail.com)

Oksana Mikheieva (Ukrainian Catholic U, Ukraine, mikheieva@ucu.edu.ua)

The Impact of the Non-Recognition by Ukraine of Civil Documents in the Donbas Uncontrolled Territories

4.30-5.30 PM

Ukrainian Studies in North America, 1960s-1980s:
A Conversation with Paul Robert Magosci

Moderator: Dominique Arel (U of Ottawa, Canada, darel@uottawa.ca)

Paul Robert Magosci (U of Toronto, Canada)

Author of On Becoming a Ukrainianist

Short Break

5.45-7.00 PM

The Danyliw Foundation and the Danyliw Seminar (2005-2019)

A conversation on the origins of the Foundation and the evolution of the Danyliw Seminar in the past 15 years

Moderator: Dominique Arel

Participants: Mayhill Fowler, Daria Mattingly, Oxana Shevel, Ioulia Shukan

Guest: Andrew Danyliw (Director, Danyliw Foundation, Toronto)

Friday 8 November

New Archival Evidence on Mass Violence in Ukrainian History

9.00-9.45 AM

Moderator: Daria Mattingly (U of Cambridge, UK, dm628@cam.ac.uk)

Artem Kharchenko (Center for Interethnic Relations, Ukraine, 81archil9@gmail.com)

Educators and Inmates: Orphanages in Soviet Ukraine during the Holodomor

9.45-10.30 AM

Moderator: Mayhill Fowler (Stetson U, US, mfowler1974@gmail.com)

Andriy Kohut (Director, SBU State Archive, Ukraine, andriy@kohut.in.ua)

Operation “Zapad” (“West”): The Forcible Deportations of Ukrainians as an Instrument of Soviet Counterinsurgency

Coffee Break

Researching the Holodomor:

A Conversation with Anne Applebaum

11.00 AM-12.30 PM

Moderators: Daria Mattingly (U of Cambridge, UK, dm628@cam.ac.uk) and Mayhill Fowler (Stetson U, US, mfowler1974@gmail.com)

Anne Applebaum (LSE, UK/Washington Post)

Author of Red Famine—Stalin’s War on Ukraine

Lunch

Chronicling Maidan and the Donbas War:

A Conversation with Mychailo Wynnyckyj

1.30-3.00 PM

Moderators: Ioulia Shukan (U Paris Nanterre, France, ioulia.shukan@gmail.com) and Dominique Arel (U of Ottawa, Canada, darel@uottawa.ca)

Mychailo Wynnyckyj (U Kyiv Mohyla Academy, mychailo@ukma.edu.ua)
Author of *Ukraine's Maidan, Russia's War: A Chronicle and Analysis of the Revolution of Dignity*

Coffee Break

Historical Memory in Eastern Ukraine since Maidan

3.30-5.00 PM

Moderator: Oxana Shevel (Tufts U, US, oxana.shevel@tufts.edu)

Ursula Wooley (U College London, UK, ursula.woolley.16@ucl.ac.uk)
Dnipro(petrovs'k): Discourses of Public History and Historical Politics (2012-2019)

Iuliia Skubytska (Internews Ukraine, iuliiask@sas.upenn.edu)
Defending the Right to Remember: Eastern Ukrainians and the Politics of De-Communization

Saturday 9 November

History and Culture in Soviet Ukraine

9.00-9.45 AM

Moderator: Mayhill Fowler (Stetson U, US, mfowler1974@gmail.com)

Nataliia Otrishchenko (Center for Urban History, Ukraine, n.otrishchenko@lvivcenter.org)
Architects and the Visions of Urban Development in Late Soviet Lviv

9.45-10.30 AM

Moderator: Daria Mattingly (U of Cambridge, UK, dm628@cam.ac.uk)

Mayhill Fowler (Stetson U, US, mfowler1974@gmail.com)
Soviet Ghosts: The Former Theater of the Soviet Army in Lviv and Post-Socialism as a Crisis of Infrastructure

Coffee Break

11.00 AM-12.30 PM

The Cold War and the Ukrainian Diaspora

Moderators: Ioulia Shukan (U Paris Nanterre, France, ioulia.shukan@gmail.com) and Oxana Shevel Tufts U, US, oxana.shevel@tufts.edu)

Markian Dobczansky (Columbia U, US, markian.dobczansky@gmail.com)
Cold War and the Fate of Ukrainian Culture

Simone Bellezza (U of Naples, Italy, sabellezza@gmail.com)
The Formation of a Transnational Diasporic Belonging in the Ukrainian Emigration

Lunch

Societal Change

1.30-2.15 PM

Moderator: Dominique Arel (U of Ottawa, Canada, darel@uottawa.ca)

Anna Vozna (U of British Columbia, Canada, annavozna@email.arizona.edu)
Reasons for Success and Failure of the Revitalization of Ukrainian in Eastern Ukraine

2.15-3.00 PM

Moderator: Oxana Shevel (Tufts U, US, oxana.shevel@tufts.edu)

Discussant: Oleh Havrylyshyn (Carleton U, Canada, olehhavrylyshyn@cunet.carleton.ca)

Oksana Huss (Leiden U, Netherlands, oksanahuss@gmail.com)
Civil Society against Corruption in Ukraine

#3

Kule Doctoral Scholarships on Ukraine

Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Ottawa

Application Deadline: 1 February 2020 (International & Canadian Students)
<https://www.chairukr.com/kule-doctoral-scholarships>

The Chair of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Ottawa, the only research unit outside of Ukraine predominantly devoted to the study of contemporary Ukraine, is announcing a new competition of the Drs. Peter and Doris Kule Doctoral Scholarships on Contemporary

Ukraine. The Scholarships will consist of an annual award of \$25,000, with all tuition waived, for four years (with the possibility of adding a fifth year).

The Scholarships were made possible by a generous donation of \$500,000 by the Kule family, matched by the University of Ottawa. Drs. Peter and Doris Kule, from Edmonton, have endowed several chairs and research centres in Canada, and their exceptional contributions to education, predominantly in Ukrainian Studies, has recently been celebrated in the book *Champions of Philanthropy: Peter and Doris Kule and their Endowments*.

Students with a primary interest in contemporary Ukraine applying to, or enrolled in, a doctoral program at the University of Ottawa in political science, sociology and anthropology, or in fields related with the research interests of the Chair of Ukrainian Studies, can apply for a Scholarship. The competition is open to international and Canadian students.

The application for the Kule Scholarship must include a 1000 word research proposal, two letters of recommendation (sent separately by the referees), and a CV and be mailed to Dominique Arel, School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences Building, Room, 7067, University of Ottawa, 120 University St., Ottawa ON K1N 6N5, Canada.

Applications will be considered only after the applicant has completed an application to the relevant doctoral program at the University of Ottawa. Consideration of applications will begin on 1 February 2020 and will continue until the award is announced.

The University of Ottawa is a bilingual university and applicants must have a certain oral and reading command of French. Specific requirements vary across departments.

Students interested in applying for the Scholarships beginning in the academic year 2020-2021 are invited to contact Dominique Arel (darel@uottawa.ca), Chairholder, Chair of Ukrainian Studies, and visit our web site www.chairukr.com.

#4

A Presidential Loathing for Ukraine is at the Heart of the Impeachment Inquiry

By Greg Jaffe and Josh Dawsey
Washington Post, 2 November 2019
<https://wapo.st/2oHGyP5>

Three of President Trump's top advisers met with him in the Oval Office in May, determined to convince him that the new Ukrainian leader was an ally deserving of U.S. support.

They had barely begun their pitch when Trump unloaded on them, according to current and former U.S. officials familiar with the meeting. In Trump's mind, the officials said,

Ukraine's entire leadership had colluded with the Democrats to undermine his 2016 presidential campaign.

"They tried to take me down," Trump railed.

Energy Secretary Rick Perry, the senior member of the group, assured Trump that the new Ukrainian president was different — a reformer in Trump's mold who had even quoted President Ronald Reagan in his inaugural address, for which the three advisers had been present.

But the harder they pushed in the Oval Office, the more Trump resisted.

"They are horrible, corrupt people," Trump told them.

So far, a dozen witnesses have testified before House lawmakers since the closed-door impeachment inquiry began a month ago. One theme that runs through almost all of their accounts is Trump's unyielding loathing of Ukraine, which dates to his earliest days in the White House.

"We could never quite understand it," a former senior White House official said of Trump's view of the former Soviet republic, also saying that much of it stemmed from the president's embrace of conspiracy theories. "There were accusations that they had somehow worked with the Clinton campaign. There were accusations they'd hurt him. He just hated Ukraine."

White House officials did not respond to requests for comment.

Trump's animosity to Ukraine ran so deep and was so resistant to the typical foreign policy entreaties about the need to stand by allies that senior officials involved in Ukraine policy concluded that the only way to overcome it was to set up an Oval Office meeting with Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"I would like for you to do us a favor," Trump told Zelensky, according to a transcript of the call.

The roots of that request trace back to the earliest days of the Trump presidency, when Zelensky was still a Ukrainian sitcom actor and Trump's top foreign policy advisers were trying to make sense of Trump's distaste for Kyiv and map out a Ukraine policy.

In the fall of 2017, Trump was set to meet with then-Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko at the United Nations in New York. At the time, U.S. officials were working to convince Trump that Ukraine, locked in a long war with Russian-backed forces, was worthy of American support.

Then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told Volker that he would have about 45 seconds to brief Trump ahead of his meeting with Poroshenko. If Trump was interested in learning more, Tillerson said, the president would ask questions. Volker rushed through his pitch, according to former U.S. officials who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic topics.

Trump then peppered Volker with his negative views of Ukraine, suggesting that it wasn't a "real country," that it had always been a part of Russia, and that it was "totally corrupt."

Inside the administration, Trump's top advisers debated the origins of his ill-feeling. Some argued that Trump saw Ukraine as an impediment to better U.S. relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was angry about U.S. sanctions imposed on Moscow for its annexation of Crimea and for the Kremlin's ongoing support of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.

At the time of Trump's U.N. meeting with Poroshenko, U.S. officials were debating whether to sell antitank weapons to the Ukrainians. In the previous administration, President Barack Obama had decided against the sale, worrying that it would make the conflict bloodier.

Trump's entire national security Cabinet unanimously supported it. But Trump hesitated. "He kept saying it ... wasn't worth pissing off Russia and what a bad country Ukraine was," said the former senior White House official.

Trump told his top advisers that "everyone" was telling him not to do it because it would anger Russia, the former official said. In fact, his entire team was advising the opposite. After months of delay, Trump approved the sale of the weapons in December 2017. His skepticism and dislike of Ukraine, though, did not abate but, if anything, seemed to deepen over time, U.S. officials said.

Some advisers, such as Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who oversaw Ukraine policy on the National Security Council, told lawmakers that "outside influencers were promoting a false narrative of Ukraine" to Trump that was "harmful to U.S. government policy." Others wondered whether the president's disdain had to do with his well-known dislike of all U.S. foreign aid.

Ukraine was weak, war-torn and desperate for U.S. support. It had little to offer Trump, whose foreign policy focus was reversing the U.S. trade deficit.

Sondland, a Trump campaign donor turned diplomat, blamed Giuliani, who had publicly accused Ukraine of corruption and interference in the 2016 election, for the hardening of Trump's views. And he viewed Giuliani as key to reversing Trump's hostility.

"It was apparent to all of us that the key to changing the president's mind on Ukraine was Mr. Giuliani," Sondland told lawmakers in October.

U.S. officials were also at odds over how best to convince Trump of Ukraine's importance to U.S. policy. Ambassador William B. Taylor Jr., the acting chief U.S. diplomat in Kyiv, and many longtime foreign officials made an argument that was based on values and the principle of support for the international order. In testimony to House lawmakers, Taylor noted that by its assault on Ukraine's sovereignty, Russia had "violated countless treaties" and "dismissed all the principles that have kept the peace and contributed to prosperity in Europe since World War II."

In Congress, Republicans and Democrats cast support for Ukraine as a defense of American democratic principles. Ukraine was a fragile democracy battling both internal corruption and its powerful neighbor.

None of those lofty arguments worked with Trump. "Many Americans feel strongly about supporting Ukraine because it's the little guy and is fighting for values we consider fundamentally American," said Molly Montgomery, who served on Vice President Pence's staff and now works for the Albright Stonebridge Group. "But it's clear that Trump doesn't share that empathy. He's more attracted generally to the powerful party in any dispute."

Since his first days in office, Trump has made clear that he has little patience for alliances or anything that commits the United States to defending a weaker ally. He has repeatedly questioned the utility of NATO and harangued Europeans for not contributing more to the common defense. U.S. officials describe Trump's mind-set as short term and transactional. Instead of looking for allies, Trump is forever in search of a deal, they say.

This was the impulse that led him to see what he could squeeze out of the Ukrainians in exchange for an Oval Office meeting, officials said.

"The whole episode is sadly unsurprising," said a senior U.S. official familiar with U.S. policy on Ukraine. "It's the epitome of impulsive, self-serving decision-making at the top that has undermined American power."

In the end, most U.S. officials agreed that Trump's anger with Ukraine, like many of his grievances, was connected with the 2016 election and his feeling that Ukraine was responsible for the humiliating fall of Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign chairman. Trump's hatred, they concluded, was ingrained, irrational and possibly irreversible.

"Ukraine has always been problematic, from Day One," Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.), a close Trump ally and Russia hawk, said in an interview. "He's heard a lot about Ukraine from a lot of people."

#5

Mueller Documents: Manafort Pushed Ukraine Hack Theory

By Eric Tucker, Mike Balsamo, and Jonathan Lemire

Associated Press, 3 November 2019

<https://bit.ly/2pEc9RZ>

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort pushed the idea that Ukraine, not Russia, was behind the hack of the Democratic National Committee servers, Manafort's deputy told investigators during the special counsel's Russia probe. The unsubstantiated theory, advanced by President Donald Trump even after he took office, would later help trigger the impeachment inquiry now consuming the White House.

Notes from an FBI interview were released Saturday after lawsuits by BuzzFeed News and CNN led to public access to hundreds of pages of documents from special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation. The documents included summaries of interviews with other figures from the Mueller probe, including Trump's former personal lawyer, Michael Cohen.

Information related to Ukraine took on renewed interest after calls for impeachment based on efforts by the president and his administration to pressure Ukraine to investigate Democrat Joe Biden. Trump, when speaking with Ukraine's new president in July, asked about the DNC servers in the same phone call in which he pushed for an investigation into Biden.

Manafort speculated about Ukraine's responsibility as the campaign sought to capitalize on DNC email disclosures and as Trump associates discussed how they could get hold of the material themselves, deputy campaign chairman Rick Gates told investigators, according to a summary of one of his interviews.

Gates said Manafort's assertion that Ukraine might have done it echoed the position of Konstantin Kilimnik, a Manafort business associate who had also speculated that the hack could have been carried out by Russian operatives in Ukraine. U.S. authorities have assessed that Kilimnik, who was also charged in Mueller's investigation, has ties to Russian intelligence. American intelligence agencies have determined that Russia was behind the hack, and Mueller's team indicted 12 Russian agents in connection with the intrusion.

Gates also said the campaign believed that Michael Flynn, who later became Trump's first national security adviser, would be in the best position to obtain Hillary Clinton's missing emails because of his Russia connections. Flynn said he could use his intelligence sources to obtain the emails and was "adamant that Russians did not carry out the hack" because he believed that the U.S. intelligence community couldn't have figured out the source,

according to the agent's notes. Flynn later pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his contacts with the Russian ambassador.

Mueller's investigation concluded in March with a report that found insufficient evidence to establish a criminal conspiracy between Russia and the Trump campaign to sway the 2016 presidential election. The report also examined multiple episodes in which Trump sought to seize control of the Russia probe but did not conclude one way or the other about whether the president had illegally obstructed justice. Attorney General William Barr ultimately concluded that the president had not committed a crime.

Gates worked with Manafort in a lucrative international political consulting business that included Ukraine and later testified against him. Gates pleaded guilty last year in Mueller's investigation and has been one of the government's key cooperators. He has yet to be sentenced as he continues working with investigators. Manafort was sentenced to more than seven years in prison, in part for financial crimes arising from his Ukraine work.

During his interviews with investigators, Gates said that Donald Trump Jr. would ask where the hacked emails were during family meetings in the summer of 2016. Gates recalled that other key campaign aides, including future Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner and Flynn, also "expressed interest in obtaining the emails as well," according to an agent's written summary of one interview. The identity of one of the people who expressed interest in the emails is blanked out.

One time on the campaign aircraft, Gates told the FBI, candidate Trump said "get the emails." Gates also said that another point, Trump told him that more leaks were coming, though the heavily redacted documents do not indicate how Trump knew that.

Gates also described conversations with the chairman of the Republican National Committee, Reince Priebus, who later entered the White House as the first chief of staff. Gates described the RNC as energized by the emails and said that though Trump and Kushner were initially skeptical about cooperating with the RNC, "the WikiLeaks issue was a turning point," the FBI notes show. WikiLeaks was the website that published the stolen emails in the weeks before the election.

The campaign was also very pleased by the releases, though Trump was advised not to react to it but rather to let it all play out, according to the interview summaries.

The RNC would put out press releases to amplify the emails' release, Gates told the FBI. "The RNC also indicated they knew the timing of the upcoming releases," though Gates didn't specify who at the RNC had that information. "Gates said the only non-public information the RNC had was related to the timing of the releases."

Manafort, meanwhile, was trying to advise the Trump campaign even after severing ties with the campaign, causing alarm among some of the candidate's most senior advisers.

Manafort emailed Kushner, on Nov. 5, 2016, just days before the election, saying he was feeling good about the prospect of a Trump presidency. In the email, Manafort said he was “focusing on preserving the victory” and that he had sent a memo to Priebus and had briefed Gates and Fox News host Sean Hannity, a close Trump ally.

Kushner sent Manafort’s email to Trump adviser Steve Bannon, who replied: “we need to avoid this guy like the plague.”

“They are going to try and say the Russians worked with wiki leaks to give this victory to us,” Bannon wrote to Kushner and David Bossie, another Trump associate, in his reply. “Paul is nice guy but can’t let word get out he is advising us.”

#6

The Dark Heart Of The Impeachment Investigation Is A Powerful Oligarch

— With Close Ties To Vladimir Putin
BuzzFeed News, 24 October 2019
by Miriam Elder
<https://bit.ly/36xWkNF>

If you were wondering how Vladimir Putin’s “mafia state” was involved in the impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump, look no further than the Ukrainian oligarch wanted by the US.

Dmytro Firtash is usually described as a Ukrainian oligarch with admitted ties to organized crime, but he is much more than that. He has direct ties to Russia, and to President Vladimir Putin in particular, and those have only grown since he was arrested five years ago, awaiting extradition to the United States.

Now Firtash is at the nexus of Trump and Rudy Giuliani’s effort to undermine the president’s enemies — and behind Firtash is a whole lot of Russian money and cover.

The events that spawned the impeachment inquiry have shown how Trump uses his perch in the White House to serve personal goals (in this case pressuring the new Ukrainian president to investigate the 2016 election and events related to the upcoming one in 2020). Giuliani’s shadow investigation to serve those goals intersected perfectly with the interests of people with personal grievances in Ukraine, and with Ukrainian Americans in the US long used to hustling to make a quick buck.

Firtash understands those dynamics as well as anyone. He had long been in the sights of US investigators when he was indicted in 2013, charged with leading an international scheme to bribe Indian officials to win the rights to a mining project there and then sell the goods to a US company, reportedly Boeing. But those details, for the purposes of the

impeachment inquiry and for understanding Firtash's role in the world, don't actually matter. It's like getting Al Capone on charges of tax evasion.

Firtash was arrested in Austria in 2014, and has been fighting extradition to the US ever since. He swiftly posted 125 million euros (\$140 million) in bail and promised not to leave the country. The bail was the highest ever paid in Austria — and he got the funds to cover it via a loan from Russian billionaire Vasily Anisimov, who made his money in metals before switching to property development. Anisimov owns the luxury grounds on which a number of wealthy, well-connected Russian men have built their homes, including Putin's childhood friend, billionaire Arkady Rotenberg. Anisimov also heads Russia's Judo Federation — Putin often awards his associates plum spots on Russia's sports leagues, and judo is his favorite of them all. Anisimov told Reuters, in a massive investigation into Firtash's Russia ties, that the loan “was a purely business transaction.”

Why the interest from Russia? As one former US official who closely followed Firtash's case put it: “He knows where all the bodies are buried.”

Firtash built himself up to become a key player in the tug-of-war between Russia and Ukraine. In a State Department cable written in 2008 and publicized in a dump by WikiLeaks, then-ambassador Bill Taylor — who would go on to give explosive testimony in the impeachment inquiry this week — wrote up a meeting with Firtash and said, “he acknowledged ties to Russian organized crime figure Seymon Mogilevich, stating he needed Mogilevich's approval to get into business in the first place.” Mogilevich, one of Russia's most powerful organized crime figures and listed as most wanted by the FBI, lives freely in Moscow, under cover of the Kremlin.

When people talk about Russia being a “mafia state,” this is sort of what they mean — if the mob ran wild in the post-Soviet 1990s, in Putin's era it has been co-opted, and some of its tactics absorbed and deployed by the state. Subsequent court documents filed in the US called Firtash and his associate Andras Knopp — now also living freely in Moscow — “two upper-echelon associates of Russian organized crime.”

Firtash built much of his wealth and power through RosUkrEnergo, a needless intermediary that inserted itself into the gas trade between Russia and Ukraine. That trade served two purposes for Russia: It fed massive corruption, likely enriching Putin personally, and it was a key tool that Russia would deploy to try to bully Ukraine into doing what the Kremlin wanted.

“This RosUkrEnergo scheme is really as close as you get to Putin himself,” the former US official said. “It was this massive diversion of gas revenues through this scheme to, on the one hand, Putin's private accounts or those associated with his beneficiaries, and then the pro-Russian Party of Regions on the other hand, not to mention Firtash's own pocket. It all goes back to Putin, and that's why I think he knows where the bodies are buried. This is one of the most audacious frauds probably in Russian history, it's just a cash cow that keeps channeling money back into Putin's pockets but also helps support the whole pro-

Putin political architecture in Ukraine.” Firtash has repeatedly denied all accusations against him.

“He’s a power broker with close links to the Kremlin, who used to be the proxy to one of the most dangerous criminals in the world, who is interested to keep Ukraine closer to Russia,” said Daria Kaleniuk, the head of the Anti-Corruption Action Centre, a leading NGO in Kyiv. “The people whom he represents — those people in the Kremlin — are very much trying to block his extradition to the US, as he’s still needed as a proxy to manage some important assets.” Among those is a plant in Crimea, the Ukrainian peninsula that Russia seized in 2014. “In order to operate such a plant in Crimea, you need the blessing and cover of Russians and the Kremlin,” Kaleniuk said.

The flood of impeachment news has swirled around Firtash from the beginning, starting with Giuliani and his merry cast of Ukrainian and Ukrainian American characters. It was an affidavit for his case, written by fired prosecutor Viktor Shokin and published by John Solomon in the Hill, that fed Giuliani’s conspiracy theory that the Ukrainian had been fired for investigating Joe Biden’s son. Then, it emerged that the oligarch fired his longtime lawyer Lanny Davis, because he represented Trump’s (now remorseful) former lawyer Michael Cohen, and replaced him with two lawyers close to the president and Giuliani, Joe diGenova and Victoria Toensing. That hire, according to the Washington Post, was suggested by Giuliani associate Lev Parnas, who has pleaded not guilty to four counts of campaign finance violations. Parnas, a key player in Giuliani’s drive to get information on Democrats from Ukrainian officials, was working for Firtash’s legal team as a translator, a fact that seems to go unremarked upon, although it makes little sense that a man who spent enormous amounts of money and energy working his way into US political circles and private jets, and ran dozens of businesses in his lifetime, would take work as a translator.

A spokesperson for Firtash’s legal team declined to comment on how Firtash and Parnas met — though he said it happened in June, one month before diGenova and Toensing signed on. Parnas, and Giuliani associate Igor Fruman, who also pleaded not guilty, were en route to Vienna when they were arrested. DiGenova told the Wall Street Journal at the time that it was unconnected to Firtash’s case; CNN reported Wednesday that the two men were telling people they were heading there to set up an interview for Sean Hannity with Shokin. To cap it all off, Firtash this summer also hired Mark Corallo, who acted as spokesperson for Trump’s private defense team during the Mueller investigation.

Meanwhile, Parnas and Fruman were pushing for leadership changes at the Ukrainian gas company Naftogaz, to which Firtash still owes a massive debt. Outgoing Energy Secretary Rick Perry was pushing for a leadership shake-up there as well.

These connections make sense when you consider Firtash’s, and the Kremlin’s, ultimate goal — to prevent his extradition to the US, and some retention of his wealth and power. Some former US officials and agents who spoke to BuzzFeed News believe the US would likely seek to mine Firtash for information about Putin. There are constant rumors of a

plea bargain. But Firtash reportedly rejected an approach to cooperate with the Mueller investigation.

“I think Firtash would rather spend decades in an American prison than give up dirt on Putin because I think if he did, that would be the end of him and he knows it,” one former official said. (On top of that, the US has a history of jailing high-profile Russian targets, like arms dealer Viktor Bout, who refuse to spill.)

Much of the discourse around Trump’s ties to Russia and the Mueller investigation was misguided — seeking a smoking gun, or a backroom deal, that would reveal a secret plot between Trump and Putin to bring the unlikely candidate to power, when in fact much of that wooing was done out in the open. Two years into his presidency, Trump’s character and governing style was fully revealed — transactional, narcissistic, power-hungry, obsessed with vengeance. That is the type of person whom Firtash, the ultimate power broker and a man who grew wealthy managing the interests of some of the most powerful people in the world, knows how to deal with.

“What the Ukrainians are better than the American at is connecting the dots, because Americans say, look, for me to connect the dots, I need a call from that guy to that guy. It doesn’t work that way,” a second former US official said. “It’s all very behind the scenes, very few written communications, a lot of phone calls, a lot of get on a plane and fly out for a 20 minute meeting and fly back home. Come to Vienna, we’ll have dinner, things like that,” the former official said. “You have to think like they do and not like we do.”

#7

Ukrainian Oligarch Seethed About ‘Overlord’ Biden for Years

by Betsy Swan and Adam Rawnsley
The Daily Beast, 28 October 2019
<https://bit.ly/2PNpPES>

Indicted Ukrainian gas oligarch Dmytro Firtash spent more than \$1 million hiring key figures in Republican efforts to investigate the Biden family.

His lawyers—who often go on Fox News to defend President Trump—say they needed the dirt on former Vice President Joe Biden to demonstrate that Firtash’s prosecution was politically motivated.

But the two men have a history. Two Ukrainian gas industry experts say the gas-market reforms pushed by Biden and others in 2014 and 2015 hit Firtash in the wallet, and badly. One knowledgeable outside observer estimated that the 2014 and 2015 gas reforms and legislation cost him hundreds of millions of dollars.

On Dec. 9, 2015, Biden gave a speech to Ukraine’s parliament. He praised the protesters who forced out Ukraine’s Russia-friendly president, he recited Ukrainian poetry, and he called for reforms to Ukraine’s gas market, too.

“The energy sector needs to be competitive, ruled by market principles—not sweetheart deals,” he said, basking in the audience’s repeated applause.

Firtash, who built his fortune in part through a rather sweet gas-trading deal, hated it. Earlier this year—more than three and a half years after the talk—he was still seething. Firtash told *The Daily Beast* that the Ukrainian parliamentarians in the audience were humiliatingly subservient to Biden.

“He was the overlord,” Firtash said. “I was ashamed to look at this. I was repulsed.”

Now people linked to Firtash are at the heart of Republicans’ efforts to find dirt on Biden, and a document Trump’s personal attorney Rudy Giuliani has said is key to his theory of Biden World malfeasance was produced for Firtash’s legal team. The reporter who published that document, *The Hill*’s John Solomon, is a client of Firtash’s new lawyers, Victoria Toensing and Joe DiGenova. Over the summer, Trump pressured Ukraine’s president to cooperate with Giuliani’s efforts. That pressure stunned many Republicans and gave House Democratic leadership the impetus they had long sought to announce an impeachment inquiry.

And two Giuliani associates reportedly brought up Firtash’s name when talking about their plans for Ukraine’s energy sector. Those two associates also worked with Giuliani to find dirt on Biden, and they’ve both been charged with financial crimes. On top of that, Firtash’s lawyers say one of them, Lev Parnas, has worked as a translator for his legal team.

Firtash’s blunt assessment of Biden’s speech at the parliament and influence on Ukraine—shared earlier this year with *The Daily Beast* and published here in full for the first time—highlights how a battle over the future of Ukraine bled into the highest levels of American politics.

Firtash’s company did not respond to requests for comment. Biden’s campaign called Firtash “a Kremlin-friendly Ukrainian oligarch who’s been wanted on bribery and racketeering charges in the U.S. since 2014.”

Gas Man

Firtash was born in Ukraine and—like many other up-and-coming oligarchs—grew rich in the rubble of the Soviet Union. After spending some time in Moscow, he started trading gas from Central Asia to Ukraine. His renown as a gas trader grew, and he made deals with Russia’s state-owned giant Gazprom to move Russia’s abundant gas to energy-hungry Ukraine.

With Gazprom's blessing, he got deals widely characterized as of the sweetheart variety: Firtash bought cheap gas from Russia, sold it for a lot more in Ukraine, and profited. He then bankrolled Russia-friendly politicians in Ukraine. One such politician was Viktor Yanukovich, who hired Paul Manafort. American diplomats at the time saw Firtash as a vector of Russian influence—part of the connective tissue between the Kremlin and Kyiv.

And American law enforcement saw him as a crook. On April 2, 2014, the Justice Department announced that he had been indicted for authorizing \$18.5 million in bribes to Indian government officials. The case involved efforts to mine for titanium that would be used in Boeing planes.

Austrian authorities arrested Firtash a few weeks before the DOJ's announcement. He posted about \$174 million in bail and has since been living in Vienna, fighting extradition from his palatial corporate offices there. And while the allegation isn't part of the DOJ's indictment of Firtash, U.S. government lawyers have said in court that he's an "upper echelon" associate of a Russian criminal organization. Firtash says the claim is baseless.

In June of this year, an Austrian judge greenlit his extradition to the U.S. But his high-powered legal team is still fighting. And this July, that team got some new oomph: DiGenova and Toensing, a husband-and-wife duo who have worked on a host of contentious fights and have deep ties in Washington's tight-knit conservative legal community. They even reportedly secured a meeting about Firtash's case with Attorney General Bill Barr—a sit-down many criminal defense lawyers would kill for.

Firtash's team has long argued he's the victim of a political prosecution and that the U.S. government only targeted him to blunt his influence in Ukraine. That's where Biden comes in.

Direct Hit

In 2014, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians took to the streets in protest. After Yanukovich's government killed dozens of protesters, he was forced out and fled to Russia. He left behind a \$20 billion hole in Ukraine's economy, and the country teetered on the brink of fiscal collapse.

Enter Biden. The vice president helmed America's Ukraine policy, traveled to the country multiple times while in office, and said he spoke to the country's president and prime minister "probably on average once a week if you average it out over the last year." Kyiv was desperate for billions in support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), where the U.S. holds sway. The Americans and the IMF pushed Ukraine to roll out a host of reforms to get the cash.

"The Obama administration, and Vice President Biden in particular, led the international community to help advance gas sector reforms in Ukraine," said a former State Department official with knowledge of the dynamics. "The thinking of the United States

was that establishing an open, transparent gas sector would be vital to Ukraine's fight against entrenched oligarchic corruption and would shore up the country's strategic stability in the face of Russian aggression."

"Mr. Firtash's control of RosUkrEnergo, which exerted monopolistic control over regional gas distribution, would have been threatened by these reforms," the official added.

Biden has touted his leverage over Kyiv, including successfully pushing for the ouster of the country's then-chief prosecutor, Viktor Shokin. Biden wasn't the only one pushing for Shokin to leave as part of Ukraine's anti-corruption efforts. The prosecutor had put in anemic performance charging powerful and well-connected kleptocrats while in office and the IMF, the European Union, and Ukrainian anti-corruption activists all urged his ouster.

Shokin had also scrutinized a gas company whose board included Biden's son Hunter Biden, a fact that Trump and his allies have cited as evidence of corruption. They note that Shokin's replacement wasn't much better. But the reporter who broke the Hunter Biden story years ago reported that Joe Biden's overall anti-corruption push in Ukraine likely endangered the company his son was linked to.

The Americans and the IMF also pushed for a series of reforms to Ukraine's energy sector, including the gas industry. In 2014 and 2015, the Ukrainians unveiled a variety of changes: Kyiv changed the corporate governance of its state-owned gas company, Naftogaz; it passed its "Natural Gas Market" law, which the prime minister touted as having "de-oligarchized and de-monopolized" the gas market; and it rolled out a basket of regulatory changes to its gas sector—with Biden cheerleading along the way.

In a July 2015 speech, Biden praised Ukraine for "closing the space for corrupt middlemen who rip off the Ukrainian people."

"Middleman" was an epithet often aimed at oligarchs like Firtash, whose gas business had raked in millions by acting as a broker between Ukraine's state-owned gas company and Russia's Gazprom.

"There is one of the biggest state-owned enterprises, which is Ukrainian Naftogaz, a gas company, that had very shadowy and non-transparent deals with middlemen and with the Russian Federation," Arseniy Yatseniuk, the country's prime minister at the time, said in a speech just two days after Biden's. "So last year we eliminated this middleman. His name is Mr. Firtash. He is under FBI investigation and expected to be extradited to the United States."

Oleksandr Kharchenko, the director of the Center for Energy Industry Research Center in Kyiv, said the changes damaged Firtash's business interests.

"It hit him directly," he said.

Yessed to Death

Firtash, for his part, saw in Biden a swaggering politician overstepping his bounds—and a Ukrainian audience embarrassingly enchanted with what they saw.

“When Biden came to Ukraine and he spoke in parliament, I was reminded of an old story from the Soviet Union when the first secretary of the ObKom [the regional committee of the Communist Party] came, and on the one side all the komsomoltsi [youth members of the Communist Party] lined up, and on the other the communists, and they all took loyalty oaths. You understand? That’s how approximately it was with Biden,” Firtash told *The Daily Beast* in February.

Biden’s influence in Ukraine, he added, was “enormous.”

Firtash saw Yatseniuk, the prime minister at the time, as a pawn of Biden and other Americans.

“Who appointed whom, and who actually governed the country?” he said.

Firtash has also sparred with Andriy Kobolyev, who became CEO of Naftogaz under Yatseniuk. Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman—the indicted Giuliani associates—reportedly discussed an effort to oust Kobolyev earlier this year. Reuters has reported that Firtash financed their work.

Firtash’s lawyers say scrutiny of Biden’s role is necessary for his criminal defense. “The U.S. and Austrian legal teams have always been focused on Dmitry Firtash’s innocence,” a spokesperson for DiGenova and Toensing said in a statement provided to *The Daily Beast*. “The U.S. Justice Department has submitted false and misleading statements about Mr. Firtash and the evidence in his case to the Austrian courts. In the context of reopening the extradition case, the Austrian legal team sought former Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin’s sworn statement as one of numerous statements and other evidence submitted to the Austrian court. The former Vice President’s role in Mr. Firtash’s extradition is materially relevant to the Austrian lawyers’ argument that the prosecution is political.”

The 2015 reforms appear to have cost Firtash a lot of money. It’s difficult to estimate how much, as the oligarch’s finances are quite opaque. Victoria Voytsitska was a member of the eighth convocation of the Ukrainian parliament and a member of its committee on Fuel Energy, Nuclear Policies, and Security. She told *The Daily Beast* that the gas market reforms have likely cost Firtash about \$215 million to \$400 million a year since their 2015 rollout.

“Firtash really was pushed out of Naftogaz’s financial flow,” Kharchenko said. That said, many caution against overestimating the significance of the reforms Ukraine implemented. Firtash remains immensely wealthy and powerful, and controls Ukrainian

gas distribution networks, known as oblgazes. And in the wake of the Maidan Revolution, he kept control of his assets in Ukraine. Oligarchs still dominate Ukraine's energy sector, which is far from a bastion of transparency.

Ed Chow, an energy expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Biden and the U.S. didn't push hard enough for major, structural changes. "To be fair, Biden was the most senior U.S. official interested in Ukraine," he said. "Without Biden, even less would have happened in terms of the U.S. government pressuring Ukraine. Ukrainians would have moved forward even less on reform. I would give the U.S. government a mixed grade."

An American political consultant who's worked in Ukraine for years and spoke anonymously because of client sensitivities said Kyiv has honed its ability to satisfy Westerners without upending the status quo.

"The Ukrainians, if you look at their history, they've always been at the edge of one empire or another," the consultant said. "They were used to dealing with viceroys, representatives of the sultan, representatives of the Lithuanian empire, the Polish empire, the Russian and Soviet empires. They're masters at paying lip service to the guy who comes to town for a week. They will yes him to death, and then the minute he leaves, it's business as usual."

But business changed for Firtash after 2015. And Biden stayed on his mind.

#8

"I'm Not a Lose": Zelensky Clashes with Veterans over Donbas Disengagement

by Oksana Grytsenko
Kyiv Post, 28 October 2019
<https://bit.ly/2PCCoD8>

It started as an argument. On Oct. 26, President Volodymyr Zelensky locked horns with war veterans in the front-line town of Zolote in Luhansk Oblast.

The president was pushing a mutual disengagement of troops and armaments at the front line flashpoint. The veterans opposed this plan.

Soon, however, a video of their disagreement shot through Ukrainian social media, fueling passions across the country.

It left little understanding, however, of the real prospects that both Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed militants would pull one kilometer back shortly. That clarity is particularly lacking after the planned withdrawal was postponed several times due to shooting.

And locals remain as puzzled — if not more so — than observers. They don't know what to expect in the near future.

Viral argument

Zolote is a town of 14,000 people some 700 kilometers southeast of Kyiv. It is cut in two by the front line of Russia's war against Ukraine. In some parts of Zolote, the military positions of Ukrainian and Russian- led troops are less than 100 meters apart.

On Oct. 25, Zelensky unexpectedly arrived in Zolote for an overnight visit. He met with soldiers, residents and a group of army veterans who came there earlier this month to prevent Russian-led troops from taking control of the town when Ukraine's army withdraws.

Some locals fear they may be in danger once the Ukrainian army pulls back. Others believe the greater distance between the two sides' positions will make their town safer. That controversy rose to the surface when Zelensky met with the veterans, who took up residence in an abandoned house. Their first disagreement was about what residents of Zolote want.

Zelensky claimed that locals want disengagement and that the larger distance between the sides would decrease the number of soldiers being killed each month. But the veterans argued that troop withdrawal is effectively capitulation and that locals don't support it.

However, the biggest argument erupted when someone informed Zelensky that the veterans had illegal arms, which they allegedly stored under their beds. The president then demanded they remove the weapons from Zolote.

When one veteran, Denys Yantar, said they had no arms and wanted instead to discuss protests against the planned disengagement that had taken place across Ukraine, Zelensky became furious.

"Listen, Denys, I'm the president of this country. I'm 41 years old. I'm not a loser. I came to you and told you: remove the weapons. Don't shift the conversation to some protests," Zelensky said, videos of the exchange show. As he said this, Zelensky aggressively approached Yantar, who heads the National Corps, a political offshoot of the far-right Azov volunteer battalion, in Mykolaiv city.

"But we've discussed that," Yantar said.

"I wanted to see understanding in your eyes. But, instead, I saw a guy who's decided that this is some loser standing in front of him," Zelensky said.

Reaction

Captured on video, the incident sparked significant criticism on social media. Many claimed that Zelensky should have spoken more politely to war veterans. Shortly after the conversation, Zelensky admitted on social media that some of the talks were “emotional.”

Sviatoslav Vakarchuk, a rock musician and leader of the Voice party, which has 20 members in parliament, wrote on Facebook that disrespectful conversations with veterans “would not bring peace but rather would bring rage.”

Andriy Biletsky, head of National Corps and the Azov Battalion, threatened Zelensky on his YouTube channel that more veterans would head to Zolote if the president tried to evict them from the town. “There will be thousands there instead of several dozen,” he said.

Meanwhile, National Police Deputy Chief Vadym Troyan, who was previously Biletsky’s deputy in Azov in 2014, reported on Oct. 27 that the veterans had removed their weapons from Zolote. Troyan claimed the veterans had held the weapons legally, although military officials had previously stated the opposite.

Singer Sofia Fedyna, who is a lawmaker with the European Solidarity party of former President Petro Poroshenko, which has 27 seats in parliament, was particularly aggressive in her response. She issued physical threats against Zelensky.

“Mr. President thinks he is immortal,” she said in a video shared on Facebook. “A grenade may explode there, by chance. And it would be the nicest if this happened during Moscow’s shelling when someone comes to the front line wearing a white or blue shirt.”

Zelensky has previously visited the front line dressed in civilian clothing, rather than military fatigues.

Ruslan Stefanchuk, deputy speaker of parliament from Zelensky’s party, called on Ukrainian police to investigate Fedyna’s comments.

The Kremlin claimed that it was following Zelensky’s visit to Zolote. Dmitri Peskov, spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin, said the future of the talks between Zelensky and Putin would depend on the disengagement.

What locals think

For all the public resonance of Zelensky’s visit, it came out of the blue for residents of Zolote.

They were simply told that some VIP would arrive in their town. In a YouTube video filmed by the presidential office, the owner of the house where Zelensky spent the night appeared shocked to find out that the president would stay in his house.

Halyna Yeremeyeva, the principal of a school located in the most dangerous part of town, said she had a positive impression after meeting with Zelensky. However, Yeremeyeva said she had no idea which parts of the town would wind up in a gray zone between the two sides after disengagement.

A video posted by Zelensky's team on YouTube stated that the disengagement would be a maximum of one kilometer on both sides of the front line and Zolote would not become part of the gray zone. But the nearby village of Katerynivka would partially be in the zone.

Residents remain divided on disengagement. While Yeremeyeva says she supports it, Maryna Danylkina, a volunteer who is helping needy residents of the town, says she is collecting signatures against disengagement there.

Danylkina says she and other anti-disengagement residents of Zolote didn't know about the meeting with Zelensky. Had they known, they would have gone to meet with him, and his team's videos from the meeting would have looked less one-sided. "We are for peace, but not for peace at any price," Danylkina said.

#9

Ukraine Peace Talks Get Some Help From Putin

by Leonid Bershidsky

Bloomberg, 17 October 2019
<https://bloom.bg/2NeaXxP>

Russia is letting Zelenskiy lay out "red lines" to convince voters he can compromise without capitulating.

Under constant pressure from protesters who fear a "surrender" to Russia, the government of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy is laying out what it calls its red lines in peace talks on eastern Ukraine. A number of these are hard for Russia to accept, but that doesn't mean the peace process is doomed.

Unlike in the last three years or so, both sides actually want to end the conflict, and share the goal of having the Kiev government re-establish sovereignty over the regions in eastern Ukraine now held by pro-Moscow separatists. The question that any further talks must settle is to what extent Russia will be able to maintain its influence in the area, known as the Donbass. That's a gray area in which reality is likely to defy any formal red lines.

Zelenskiy, predictably, got into trouble at home after Ukraine accepted a key Russian demand - that it approve the so-called Steinmeier formula, proposed by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in 2016, when he was his nation's foreign minister. The formula says the separatist-held areas should get a special autonomous status under

Ukrainian law immediately after the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe recognizes the outcome of a local election.

These sequence's opponents include Zelenskiy's predecessor, Petro Poroshenko, and the well-armed veterans of the east Ukraine war. They say an election is only possible after Russia restores to Ukraine the control of its eastern border. For the Kremlin, this condition means Ukrainians may try to arrest its supporters in eastern Ukraine before the election - and before they're subject to an amnesty stipulated in Ukraine's law on the east's special status.

Zelenskiy could have ignored protests in Kiev and other Ukrainian cities. Though his popular support is dropping - a recent poll shows it at 66%, down from 73% in September - his desire for peace in the east remains overwhelmingly popular. But Ukraine is a country at war, and veterans are a powerful force. Some of them proved that by effectively scuppering an agreed pullback of both Russian and separatist troops near the village of Zolote.

Led by a nationalist former legislator, they have inserted themselves between the Ukrainian and separatist troops, saying they were there to prevent a Russian takeover of the territory that regular Ukrainian forces had been ordered to leave. Zelenskiy refused to remove them by force, saying persuasion was the better approach. The official reason Ukraine has halted its troop withdrawal is that the separatists haven't ceased fire.

Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin official in charge of eastern Ukraine, has called the mutual pullback at Zolote a precondition for restarting talks with Ukraine in the so-called Normandy format - mediated by Germany and France. Russian President Vladimir Putin and his aides doubt that Zelenskiy can stand up to the domestic opposition to the degree necessary for progress. But Zelenskiy is working to make the pullback happen, and eventually it will.

Meanwhile, Zelenskiy and his foreign minister, Vadym Prystaiko, are trying to reassure both Ukrainians and allies in Europe that they're not about to hand Putin a veto on Ukraine's future direction by letting him control the east. During a marathon 14-hour news conference last week, Zelenskiy told reporters that his team had "undercommunicated" its position. He has since used every opportunity, including a speech to the military in the east, to insist that no elections will be held in the crosshairs of Russian guns. "Believe me, I'm already getting an allergy to the word 'capitulation,'" he told service members.

At the same time, Prystaiko has traveled to Luxembourg and Brussels to communicate a similar message. He has named three distinct Ukrainian red lines: Eastern territories' autonomy shouldn't turn Ukraine, now a unitary state, into a federation; Ukraine won't change its constitution to incorporate expanded rights for these territories; elections will be held only after all Russian troops are withdrawn, pro-Russian military units disbanded and control of the border handed back to Ukraine.

Darka Olifer, spokesperson for Leonid Kuchma, who was the president of Ukraine for a decade starting in the mid-1990s and now represents the country in preliminary talks with Moscow, laid out the same position in a Facebook post on Tuesday.

This represents unprecedented clarity on where the Zelenskiy administration stands as the sides are trying to agree on a date for Normandy-format talks. At first glance, this clarity isn't encouraging. Russia has said many times it would reject border handover and disarmament demands because they run counter to the 2015 Minsk agreements, which serve as the basis for the talks. But there has been no official rebuff from the Kremlin to all the Ukrainian publicity concerning red lines.

Russia is the party holding back the final decision on the summit date. It's deliberately allowing Zelenskiy time for his persuasion campaign while it tries to establish what progress could be possible in the talks. It's clear, however, that Putin doesn't want the peace process to lapse; he's had, and skipped, plenty of opportunities to say that a summit makes no sense, as he'd done in previous years.

Putin is tired of the status quo and the European economic sanctions that come with it. It's a good moment for moving forward. The U.S. is distracted by its political scandals, the leaders of France and Germany want the Ukraine matter out of the way, and Zelenskiy is eager to keep his electoral promise to end the war.

Putin, an experienced negotiator, also knows red lines can be fudged during actual talks. A formal federation isn't necessary if some Ukrainian regions are run by Moscow-friendly administrations that Kiev can't remove. Other compromises also are possible, including the formation of an international peacemaking force to control the border in the run-up to the election. Even disbanding the unrecognized "people's republics" armed forces is not taboo if they're allowed to transform into the local police forces allowed by the Minsk agreements.

What's important for Putin is to make sure Kremlin-friendly forces prevail in the eastern Ukraine election. That would give him enough leverage in a reunited Ukraine to give up the people's republics. That outcome can be assured by finding a balance between giving Zelenskiy enough control to pacify the domestic opposition but not enough to take the pro-Russian leaders out of the running.

The complex maneuvering makes any kind of quick deal unlikely. But with both sides seeking closure, there's still some reason for optimism.

#10

Hungary Blocks NATO Statement on Ukraine over Minority Rights Row

by Alexandra Brzozowski
Euractiv, 30 October 2019
<https://bit.ly/36vpWLe>

Hours before a Russian state visit to Budapest on Wednesday (30 October), Hungary vetoed a joint NATO statement about Ukraine because it did not mention the “deprivation of rights” of the Hungarian minority in the neighbouring country’s Transcarpathia region.

“Hungary won’t surrender the Transcarpathian Hungarian community to geopolitics,” Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó announced after Budapest refused to approve the NATO Ambassadors statement.

Szijjártó said Hungary had submitted several amendment proposals to the declaration stating that Ukraine must fulfil its duties towards minorities according to international law.

“We even made recommendations that refer to the Council of Europe and the United Nations in regards to minority issues,” said the foreign minister.

Since these proposals were rejected, “we had no other choice than to veto the declaration”, Szijjártó added.

According to Szijjártó, “it would be a sign of at least some minimal allied solidarity” for a joint statement to say something about infringements on the rights of an ethnic minority group related to one of the member states.

The recent incident is not the only occasion where Budapest, a NATO member since 1999, has obstructed Ukraine’s ambitions to tighten military and economic links with the EU and NATO.

Relations between Kyiv and Budapest have been strained ever since Ukraine’s Parliament adopted the law “On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language” in September 2017.

Budapest insists that changes to Ukrainian education and language laws curtail minority rights and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s government is also at odds with Ukraine because it does not allow ethnic Hungarians there to hold dual citizenship.

Due to the dispute, Hungary continues to block Ukraine’s cooperation with NATO and the holding of Ukraine-NATO Commission talks.

Hungary is “holding NATO’s relations with Ukraine hostage”, a European diplomat said after the veto on the declaration.

Although Ukraine’s embassy to Hungary told EURACTIV in May it expected talks between foreign ministers of Ukraine and Hungary to take place “in the nearest future”, hoping they would improve bilateral relations and help remove Budapest’s blockage of the talks, recent comments suggest the issue is here to stay.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Washington have been urging Hungary and Ukraine to resolve their differences over Ukraine’s minority language law.

“I hope Ukraine and Hungary will resolve the differences, which we all know are there. And I hope that through dialogue between Budapest and Kyiv, it’s possible to find solutions to the disagreements. We will continue to provide support to Ukraine,” Stoltenberg said when the dispute started.

Budapest, meanwhile, has said it would lift the veto on Ukraine-NATO talks and provide €50 million for border infrastructure development only after Hungarians living in the Transcarpathia are granted full rights.

Hungary is on course to be the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to host a NATO headquarters after Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia sent a joint letter to Stoltenberg about their plans to establish a regional military command centre.

During last week’s NATO defence ministers meeting in Brussels, the four countries signed a memorandum of understanding to establish a ‘Multinational Division Command for Central and Eastern Europe’, which would be responsible for training the special operations troops of the four NATO countries, in the city of Szolnok, from early 2021.

Szijjarto’s comments came ahead of a visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Budapest on Wednesday afternoon, where Orbán and Putin are expected to discuss the Paks II power plant expansion, built by the Russian state-owned Rosatom, as well as the possible construction of a new stretch of the TurkStream gas pipeline in Hungary. Critics have repeatedly suggested that the Hungarian government might be undermining Ukraine’s western integration efforts due to Orbán’s relationship with Putin.

Earlier in 2018, Szijjarto spoke about a “campaign” targeted at Budapest, where “they came up with the vile lie that Hungary defends the Transcarpathian Hungarians, when in reality it is acting in accordance with the expectations of a third party, namely Russia.”

Speaking at the Eurasia Forum in Budapest on Wednesday, Szijjarto rejected criticism that the Hungarian relationship with Russia is too cosy or that Hungary advocates for “pragmatic relations with Russia because we are Russian spies.” Szijjarto said such comments represented “laughable insults on the part of our Western friends.”

Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov, however, stated just ahead of the visit in Budapest that both leaders may touch upon the situation of national minorities in Ukraine at their meeting.

"It is not about discussing the old [Ukrainian] government or the new one because it is the country's internal affair," Peskov noted according to Russian news agency Tass.

"At the same time, there definitely are some issues that cause concern both to us and the Hungarians," Peskov said, pointing to "the issue of minorities living in border areas." "Hungary has repeatedly said that the processes going on there were unacceptable," he added.

There are "definitely some issues that cause concern both to us and the Hungarians," Peskov said.

#11

The Cost of Trump's Aid Freeze in the Trenches of Ukraine's War

By Andrew E. Kramer
New York Times, 24 October 2019
<https://nyti.ms/36tC1AB>

As President Trump froze military aid to Ukraine and urged it to investigate his rivals, the country was struggling in a bare-bones fight against Russian-backed separatists.

ZOLOTE, Ukraine — Lt. Ivan Molchanets peeked over a parapet of sand bags at the front line of the war in Ukraine. Next to him was an empty helmet propped up to trick snipers, already perforated with multiple holes.

In other spots, his soldiers stuff straw into empty uniforms to make dummies, and put logs on their shoulders to make it look like they are carrying American antitank missiles — as a scare tactic.

"This is just the situation here," he said, shrugging as he held the government's position. "The enemy is very close."

Fought in muddy trenches cut through hundreds of miles of farmland, the war in Ukraine has killed 13,000 people, put a large part of the country under Russia's control and dragged on for five years almost forgotten by the outside world — until it became a backdrop to the impeachment inquiry of President Trump now unfolding in Washington.

Ukraine, politically disorganized and militarily weak, has relied heavily on the United States in its struggle with Russian-backed separatists. But the White House abruptly suspended nearly \$400 million in military aid to Ukraine in July and only restored it last month after a bipartisan uproar in Congress.

The impeachment inquiry hinges on whether Mr. Trump froze the aid to pressure Ukraine into investigating his political rivals, especially former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., one of the leading candidates in the 2020 American election.

In closed-door testimony on Tuesday, the top American diplomat in Ukraine, William B. Taylor Jr., said Mr. Trump halted the aid to Ukraine and refused to meet the country's leader until he agreed to investigate Mr. Biden and his son. Mr. Taylor called the decision "crazy" because it undermined a vital ally, strengthened Russia's hand and put Ukrainian lives in jeopardy — all for the sake of a political campaign in the United States.

Ukrainian soldiers here at the front line were jolted by the suspension, too. While the aid was restored in time to prevent any military setbacks, it took a heavy psychological toll, they said, striking at their confidence that their backers in Washington stood solidly behind their fight to keep Russia at bay.

"It was very unpleasant to hear about this," Lieutenant Molchanets said about the halt in American military assistance. But with or without allies, he added, he would continue to fight. "I tell you that as an infantryman and commander."

Even at the tip of the spear of Ukraine's armed forces, signs are everywhere of the poverty of the army.

The war began in 2014, after street protesters deposed Ukraine's kleptocratic, pro-Kremlin president. Russia responded by helping stir up rebellions in two eastern provinces, and since then Russia has wielded the military advantage, able to slip tanks, antiaircraft weapons and soldiers into Ukraine at will.

Ukraine has fought back with repeated appeals for aid, diplomatic pressure, Western sanctions against Russia — and with an army that is holding on by its fingernails. The war is fought in trenches, like World War I, owing to a peculiarity of the conflict: Neither side uses aviation. Russian antiaircraft systems have cleared the skies.

Soldiers live in log-covered dugouts smelling of socks and earth, warmed by wood stoves. Ukrainian troops cook their own meals from potatoes, carrots and onions, delivered in crates, and from handmade preserves kept in glass jars on wooden shelves. Their weapons are also basic. Hanging on nails hammered into logs in Lieutenant Molchanets's bunker were binoculars and a Kalashnikov rifle.

Both sides use heavy artillery, but the only piece of American military aid at the position was a much-prized infrared spotting scope for night fighting. Soldiers also carry American tourniquets in their medical kits, used to stanch bleeding.

“Our allies help us, but the hard and dirty work we do ourselves,” Lieutenant Molchanets said.

Even the most sophisticated weapons the United States offers are of little use here — at least, not in the way they are intended.

In 2018, the Trump administration authorized sales to Ukraine of a shoulder-fired anti-tank missile called the Javelin, reversing an Obama administration policy of supplying only non-lethal aid.

But there is a big catch. The Trump administration provided the missiles on the condition that they not be used in the war, Ukrainian officials and American diplomats have said, lest they provoke Russia to slip more powerful weaponry to the separatists.

“They are not to be on the front line,” Iryna Herashchenko, a former chief settlement negotiator, said of the missiles. Their precise deployment positions are kept secret.

So, Ukrainian soldiers at the front have improvised: They prop up the dummies of straw and extra uniforms that appear to hold the missiles, as a ruse, an army spokesman said. Soldiers at Lieutenant Molchanets’s position said the fake missiles are conjured from logs and empty ammunition boxes, roughly mimicking the silhouette of a Javelin.

The American military aid suspension hurt Ukraine in another way as well, Ukrainian officials said: It signaled their weakness, just as they were trying to project strength in negotiations with the Russians and needed solid backing from Washington.

Since taking office in May, Ukraine’s new president, Volodymyr Zelensky, has wanted the United States to take a more active role in pressuring Russia to withdraw its forces from eastern Ukraine — which the Kremlin does not even acknowledge are there — and accept a peace deal to end the conflict.

Mr. Trump has also showed a clear desire for a peace deal on Ukraine, part of his longstanding effort to remove an issue that has driven a wedge between Russia and the West, and has made his cozy relations with Russian President Vladimir V. Putin harder to defend.

Soon after the July 25 phone call in which he urged Mr. Zelensky to investigate his political rivals — the call at the heart of the impeachment inquiry — Mr. Trump seemed confident that he would get a peace deal on Ukraine after all.

“I think he’s going to make a deal with President Putin, and he will be invited to the White House,” Mr. Trump said of the Ukrainian president.

But Mr. Trump has not pressed Russia and sided with Ukraine in the negotiations in the way Mr. Zelensky has urged. To the contrary, at a news conference in New York last month, Mr. Trump backed away from Mr. Zelensky and his troubles in the war, telling the Ukrainian leader, “I really hope you and President Putin get together and can solve your problem.”

By distancing himself from Mr. Zelensky in negotiations, Mr. Trump has made it harder for the Ukrainian government to defend the concessions it is making to end the war.

To revive settlement talks, Mr. Zelensky has already ordered his troops to pull back at some locations on the front line, a move that earned derision from his domestic critics, who called it a capitulation to Russia. Tens of thousands of people in Kiev, the capital, protested the decision this month in Independence Square, the site of the demonstrations that toppled Ukraine’s pro-Kremlin president five years ago.

Here in eastern Ukraine, the war is far from over. On a crystalline fall day, the contact line, as the front is known, opened onto a meadow of dry grass, stretching a few hundred yards to the opposing positions in a tree line, the oaks and maples in the brilliant autumn colors of orange and yellow.

Lieutenant Molchanets, who is 23, commands a platoon. On the second day of his command, the position came under heavy machine-gun fire. When it was over, he said, “there was a light euphoria. I had no sense of danger. Only later I realized we made mistakes, and we were just lucky.”

The luck soon ran out. A week later, on Sept. 17, two of his soldiers stepped on one of the area’s ubiquitous mines and were gravely wounded.

Kept under the pillow of his bunk was a Ukrainian flag inscribed by friends in Kiev, where he also left a girlfriend behind. “We believe in you,” one note on the flag said.

In the pale fall sunshine last week, soldiers chopped wood for their heating stoves and grilled a shish kebab over a campfire, unconcerned by the explosions in the distance. “It’s not us” getting hit today, Lt. Ivan Dyachyk said. “It’s our neighbors,” a unit a few miles away.

Mr. Zelensky wants to move the Ukrainian front line back — from a few hundred yards away from the separatists to about 1,000 yards in several locations, including around the town of Zolote, the site of Lieutenant Molchanets’s position.

Separatist forces are also supposed to pull back in these areas, to put both sides out of sniper range and reduce skirmishing, paving the way for settlement talks.

The problem in the town Zolote — and what has set off protests here and in Kiev — is that pulling back will leave some neighborhoods in front of the army’s new trenches, exposing them to the enemy side.

“All of this is scary for me,” worried Larisa Prizova, a clerk in the mayor’s office of Zolote. Her home near the front line now seems likely to wind up inside the buffer area: a shooting gallery between the two armies.

“Maybe Mr. Trump, because of the election in the United States, wants a success in Ukraine” by pushing Mr. Zelensky into a settlement deal that Russia will accept, said Ms. Herashchenko, the former chief negotiator. “But peace and the illusion of peace are not the same things.”

#12

A Trip to the Pro-Russian Pseudo-State of Luhansk

by Christian Esch

Spiegel Online, 22 October 2019

<https://bit.ly/329Lt8Y>

The coffin wobbles slowly across the bridge, four men carrying it with a fifth following along behind bearing a decorated cross. The coffin tips forward as they carefully make their way down the steep wooden staircase. It then tips backward as they make their way up the other side. Not even the dead have an easy time of it in Stanytsia Luhanska

The destroyed bridge spanning the Donets River is symbolic of divided eastern Ukraine. The war may have come to an end, but peace hasn’t yet begun. The driving surface has collapsed, and the resulting chasm has been made navigable on foot with the help of two wooden staircases. Every day, thousands of people struggle across, primarily pensioners. The sick and the crippled are carried across, as are baby strollers and sacks full of plums and apples. It is the only crossing far and wide over a border that divides families, friendships and business partnerships.

North of the Donets flies the blue-and-yellow national flag of Ukraine, signifying territory under the control of Kiev. South of the river and on the bridge itself, a kind of Russian tricolor is flapping in the wind, with a light-blue stripe in place of white. It is the flag of the self-declared Luhansk People’s Republic, which split off from Ukraine with the help of Russia -- an unrecognized state entity that legally belongs to Ukraine but which is a de facto appendage of Russia, with 1.5 million residents, 17 ministries and a Soviet star in its coat of arms.

It is rare for Western journalists to be allowed to report here. And the criteria used by the communications ministry of the “People’s Republic” to grant permits are unclear. But such permits do, apparently, exist.

The trip through the republic begins on a dusty square in Stanytsia Luhanska. The settlement on the northern banks of the Donets used to be a non-descript suburb of Luhansk, and when the Donbass rebellion began in spring 2014, Stanytsia Luhanska briefly fell into the hands of the separatists. But then, Ukrainian government forces showed up and were able to push the front back to the river. Since then, Stanytsia Luhanska has played a new role -- as a border town, transshipment center and transportation hub. There is a lot going on right in front of the bridge access point, including kiosks, market stands, a savings bank besieged by pensioners, aid organizations, porters waiting for business, taxi drivers and buses.

At the checkpoint on the Ukrainian side, armed customs officials examine every bag. Uniformed officers work on donated laptops onto which U.S. flags have been affixed. Passports are stamped. From the checkpoint, it’s still 800 meters to the bridge.

Significant Resistance

Ukraine withdrew from this broad strip in summer as part of the troop separation negotiated between the two sides. Looking almost like an act of defiance, though, every single flagpole is flying the blue-yellow flag of Ukraine.

The separation of forces is one of the very few significant steps forward since the Minsk Protocol of February 2015. That deal affirmed a cease-fire and formalized the frontlines between Ukrainian government troops and the pro-Russian rebels. But the skirmishes have continued nonetheless. Indeed, Stanytsia Luhanska is the only place along the entire 400-kilometer front separating Ukraine from the separatists where the separation has been successful. After all, retreating from territory paid for in blood requires a significant amount of political courage. Recently elected Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who won the election on a promise of bringing peace to the Donbass, has demonstrated that courage. But resistance is significant.

Anything that looks like a concession to Moscow is enough to trigger protests in Kiev. And the situation is similar when it comes to the “Steinmeier Formula,” that Zelensky recently agreed to. The formula is a diplomatic compromise named for Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who was German foreign minister when the Minsk Protocol was hammered out and is now Germany’s president. It outlines when and how Kiev will allow the separatist areas a special status within Ukrainian state territory. Such a status is provided for in the Minsk agreement, but isn’t widely supported in Kiev. Hence, the protests.

A free bus ferries passengers to edge of the gap in the bridge, blasted there by the Ukrainian army in March 2015 to prevent a possible separatist advance.

The separatist checkpoint at the southern end of the bridge is little more than a trailer. A young man in a training suit examines passports and, in this case, journalist IDs. Visitors must fill out a form from the “Ministry for State Security,” including religious confession and hotel room number. Bags are not searched. Then, the journey continues up a range of hills, through checkpoints and into the city.

Provisional Burials

Luhansk was never a particularly attractive city. In the coal-mining region of Donbass, it was always the smaller, poorer sister to Donetsk. But now, the city seems empty as well. The train station is as quiet as a museum and there are only two connections -- one is a long-haul line toward Donetsk and the other is a regional connection. The centrally located Hotel Luhansk with its 19 floors has few guests and no café, but it does have bullet holes in the windows. The stores are empty and the local football club Zorya has been playing elsewhere for quite some time. Only cash is accepted, no matter how high the sum, and all payments are made in Russian rubles. There are no cash machines.

Luhansk suffered mightily in the fighting. In summer 2014, the Ukrainian military fired heavy artillery into the city. There was no water for a time and some of the dead were buried provisionally in front yards because of the heat. Many victims were later moved to the outskirts of the city, where a small memorial lists their names.

The government of the People’s Republic is headquartered in the former regional administration building. Taking pictures is strictly prohibited. Even the press accreditation card, signed by the communications minister, doesn’t open any doors to senior officials.

But Gleb Bobrov is happy to talk, a hulking man with a beard and small, animated eyes. He’s the head of the writers union and is the most prominent intellectual among the local rebels. Over a decade ago, long before the beginning of the war, he predicted in lurid prose that a civil war would be fought in eastern Ukraine. “I correctly foresaw about 70 percent of it, right down to the location of the frontlines and the Minsk negotiations,” he says proudly.

Like most separatists, Bobrov didn’t want an independent mini-state in Luhansk, which is why he vehemently rejects the term “separatist.” He says he wants to “return home to Russia,” and that this is “the national idea behind the People’s Republic.” Unfortunately, he adds, it didn’t work quite like it did in Crimea.

To Bobrov, the Ukrainian state is a meaningless leftover from the disintegration of the Soviet Union, propped up by a corrupt elite, a national-socialist ideology and brutal oppression.

The Other Side of the Bridge

But doesn't Zelensky's election disprove this caricature? And couldn't the new president, with his peace initiatives and charm born from a past as a television comedian win over a number of hearts in Luhansk? Bobrov discounts such suggestions. Those in Luhansk who pined for Ukraine have long since left, he says, and Zelensky has no effect on the ones who have remained. "All that is taking place in a foreign country," Bobrov says. He is referring to the country on the other side of the bridge.

After our discussion, he invites us to the city's Russian theater for a premiere. For the first time, a piece about the war is being staged, a dramatic reading of wartime poetry. And it turns out to be surprisingly free of ideology, free of the standard vituperations according to which all government troops are fascists.

Alexey Karyakin, born in 1980, is one of the fathers of the People's Republic and was the first president of its parliament -- though there are no political parties in parliament, with all of them having been banned. There are only "movements." One of them is called "Freedom for Luhansk" and the other is the "Economic Union."

The fact that Karyakin is still alive is anything but a given. The People's Republic has been run with mafia methods. One Luhansk "prime minister" was apparently tortured to death in prison while several military leaders have died in arson attacks. Karyakin also had to flee Luhansk for a time.

The situation has calmed significantly since a 2017 coup. Plus, what happens in Luhansk is ultimately decided by curators in the Kremlin anyway. Karyakin is now head of the "Public Chamber of the People's Republic of Luhansk," a largely ceremonial position. A portrait of Vladimir Putin hangs on the wall above his desk.

From the perspective of Kiev, Karyakin is nothing but a Putin puppet anyway, and people in the Ukrainian capital refer to Luhansk and Donetsk as "occupied territories." But Karyakin has a different view. He says it bothers him that people in Kiev act as though people like him don't exist, as though Putin has full control and there is nobody else. "They want the territory back, but not the people," he says.

A Dream of Russian Affiliation

The question is, though, what the separatists actually want. The Minsk Protocol, to which they are bound, calls for the reintegration of their territories into Ukraine, with certain special privileges. Wouldn't that represent the end of their dream of affiliation with Russia?

No, says Karyakin, they would then have a special status within the country of Ukraine, just like Crimea did prior to 2014. Then, the people could decide what they wanted in a referendum. And he has no doubt that the people of Luhansk would decide in favor of Russia.

It is precisely this interpretation of the Minsk Protocol that officials in Kiev are afraid of -- special status as a steppingstone to definitive secession. No wonder Kiev is concerned about applying the Minsk agreement.

And so, the standoff continues. The government in Kiev wants to regain control over the lost territories, and that means first and foremost control over the border with Russia. Moscow, meanwhile, doesn't want to relinquish control and insists on taking the reverse approach: First, special status must be established for the region, including their own security forces. Only then can control of the border be returned to Ukraine.

It's difficult to say what Luhansk residents themselves actually think. They are leery and distrustful. There are still those who would like to be part of Ukraine, or at least find that preferable to being citizens of a pseudo-country that has 17 ministries but no cash machines. A place where there are no free elections, hardly any work and no discernable future. But they avoid saying as much out loud.

The younger ones move away from Luhansk, some to Russia and others to Ukraine. "In 2014, we fell out with many friends," says one married couple who didn't share the pro-Russia enthusiasm many felt at the time. "The euphoria has since vanished, which makes things easier for us. But now, everybody avoids politics altogether. Essentially, we are waiting, but we don't know what for."

They say they would long since have left if it wasn't so difficult to sell their apartment in Luhansk. At the same time, it hurts them that many in Ukraine see them as traitors just because they've stayed.

One of the Few Advantages

The Ukrainian state also doesn't make things easy for those who don't live outside of its control. To receive their pensions, Luhansk retirees have to establish a permanent address in government-controlled territory and then register there as being internally displaced. The measure was originally intended as a kind of economic sanction against the separatists. But it forces Luhansk pensioners to make their way across the destroyed bridge once every eight weeks or so to personally verify their status as displaced people and prove that they are still alive.

At the equivalent of around 110 euros per month, pensions in Ukraine are low, but they are still significantly higher than the 40 euros in financial support received in the People's Republic. Many people receive both pensions, one of the few advantages they have relative to pensioners in government-controlled territory -- in addition to subsidized gas prices.

As far as the Ukrainian state is concerned, the agencies of the People's Republic don't exist, which means that there is no contact with them at all. The only channel through which separatist representatives and Kiev communicate is the Trilateral Contact Group, a forum established to implement the Minsk Protocol. The term trilateral refers to the group's three initial members: Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and

Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The separatists were only included later at Russia's request.

Olga Kobtseva represents the People's Republic in the subgroup for humanitarian questions. She is a resolute woman who took up arms in the conflict five years ago. Her birthplace of Rubizhne is now under the control of Kiev.

The bridge over the Donets is among the issues discussed in Kobtseva's subgroup. Negotiations focused on repairing the bridge have been ongoing since May 2015 and every question imaginable has been a source of disagreement. Where exactly does the line of contact run, the border that isn't really a border? It was never precisely established during the Minsk talks. How wide should the driving surface be? Kiev wants it to be narrower so that tanks and trucks can't make it across.

Ironically, even after the bridge is repaired, the plan is to only open it to foot traffic. The entire political clamor, the media attention, the visit by Ukrainian President Zelensky and European Council President Donald Tusk -- all that has only been for a modest pedestrian crossing. Nothing demonstrates better just how small the steps made in the peace process have been.

Sacks of Cash

And there's an even bigger irony: There are already two road connections not all that far away. They would just have to be opened. But the separatists are fighting with the government in Kiev over which one to open, with each side following its own military logic. Kiev prefers the road in Zolote, while the People's Republic is arguing in favor of the bridge in Shchastya. Already, that crossing is being used once a month to hand over money to Ukraine to pay for its part of the shared water system. In several sacks of cash, of course.

But for Stanytsia Luhanska and the pensioners of the self-proclaimed Luhansk republic, an improved pedestrian bridge would be a significant step forward. And the work has, in fact, begun. In early October, the wooden staircases were cleared away with the plan calling for the gap in the middle now to be fixed. To ensure that the important crossing wouldn't have to be closed even for a single day, a detour for pedestrians was set up. In the People's Republic, few actually thought that the bridge would ever be repaired, believing even as recently as September that the whole thing was just a PR ploy by the new Ukrainian president. But the detour is in place.

The bridgeworks were made possible by the withdrawal of troops from the most advanced positions. Zelensky now wants to repeat the troop separation operation in Zolote and Petrovske, as agreed to with the OSCE. The withdrawal is also a key demand of Moscow's, as a prerequisite for a planned, high-level meeting between Zelensky and Putin in France,

together with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

But in October, Ukrainian war veterans made their way to Zolote in an attempt to prevent the controversial withdrawal there. Clashes with the police were the result. For those who see any withdrawal as a capitulation to Putin, there is no room for the compromises the peace process requires. That would leave only one solution. When asked what he desires for his small town, Yuri Zolkin, the Stanytsia Luhanska district head, said tersely: “A NATO base.”

In summer, Zolkin engaged in a heated debate on the bridge with Olga Kobtseva, of all people, the Luhansk negotiator. Kobtseva had come over to the northern side of the damaged bridge to welcome a United Nations visitor and escort her across. She was joined by the Luhansk “foreign minister,” who was wearing the coat of arms of the People’s Republic with the red star.

As chance would have it, Zolkin was there at the same time. This side is under Ukrainian control, he said to the separatist. “As far as I’m concerned, you can go to Minsk or to your side of the bridge,” he said. “And what kind of weird symbol are you wearing? What kind of a strange republic is that?” Kobtseva responded angrily. Stanytsia Luhanska actually belongs to the People’s Republic, she shouted, not to government-controlled Ukraine.

A camera team filmed the altercation. And as the two argued, the usual border traffic trudged past -- more and more people, loaded down with heavy bags and even heavier worries. Worries that, even after four-and-a-half years, haven’t been made any lighter.

#13

Fund Wants President to Recoup Billions-Including Money that Vanished from a Supporter’s Bank

by Ian Talley in Washington and Alan Cullison in Kyiv, Ukraine
Wall Street Journal, 1 November 2019
<https://on.wsj.com/36x9zOg>

The International Monetary Fund has put off a bailout for Ukraine because it is worried the country’s president won’t recoup billions of dollars allegedly looted from banks-including one once controlled by a close supporter-according to people familiar with the negotiations.

The IMF told President Volodymyr Zelensky he must aggressively pursue the missing money to deliver on his vow to clean up a financial system sapped by fraud, money laundering and theft.

The fund hinted at these concerns when it said it had delayed approval of the new bailout in September. IMF officials found “shortcomings in the legal framework, pervasive corruption, and large parts of the economy dominated by inefficient state-owned enterprises or by oligarchs,” Ron van Rooden, the fund’s mission chief for the country, said at the time.

Ukrainian central bank officials told The Wall Street Journal they are committed to allaying the IMF’s worries and recovering the missing bank deposits.

“The expectation of the IMF and other international partners is that we have to put all our efforts to return this money,” said Kateryna Rozhkova, the central bank’s first deputy governor, in mid-October.

The central bank’s governor, Yakiv Smoliy, told the Journal he hopes to secure new IMF credit by the end of the year.

Ukraine secured a \$3.9 billion IMF package in December, ahead of Mr. Zelensky’s election in the spring, and seeks more funds to help it get through a series of debt repayments coming due in the months ahead.

Among Kyiv’s challenges in winning IMF approval is Ihor Kolomoisky, a tycoon and supporter of Mr. Zelensky who is under investigation in the U.S. Mr. Kolomoisky and another businessman each held 45% stakes in Ukraine’s largest financial institution, PrivatBank, until it was nationalized in 2016 by government officials who said it was necessary to avert a financial-system meltdown.

Ukraine’s central bank governor that year said PrivatBank had a \$5.6 billion hole in its balance sheet when it was seized.

The IMF is holding up the next set of loans until it is convinced Mr. Zelensky’s government will aggressively try to recoup an estimated \$15 billion stolen from more than 100 banks, including PrivatBank, over the past decade.

The central bank officials said in the interview that most of the \$15 billion was secreted out of the country through companies owned or controlled by shareholders, leaving ordinary depositors empty-handed.

PrivatBank, under new management, blamed Mr. Kolomoisky and the other large shareholder, Gennadiy Bogolyubov, for the disappearance of most of the money missing from the bank’s accounts. The bank has accused them in a lawsuit filed in Delaware of laundering hundreds of millions of dollars through real-estate purchases in the U.S. The two men have rejected the allegations.

Mr. Kolomoisky said the central bank orchestrated the seizure for political reasons and is fighting in Ukrainian courts to regain control of PrivatBank.

Since he was elected president, Mr. Zelensky has said he has a cordial relationship with Mr. Kolomoisky and denied that he would do any favors for him. Mr. Zelensky's spokeswoman declined to comment for this article.

At an investor conference this week in the city of Mariupol, Mr. Zelensky said his government would uphold the nationalization of PrivatBank. "I will only defend Ukraine's interests," he said, according to Ukrainian media reports. "The rumors that I or someone from the presidential office is going to return the bank to its former owners are false."

Mr. Kolomoisky said in an interview that he had been under investigation by American authorities for months.

"Let them check, I'm not worried about it," he said.

William Taylor, the Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, when asked about a possible probe, told reporters in late June, "I can't talk about ongoing investigations."

Mr. Zelensky, a former comedian whose shows aired on Mr. Kolomoisky's television networks, campaigned on an antigraft platform. His political fame grew largely from his starring role in "Servant of the People," a show in which he played a history teacher catapulted into the presidency after the character's rant against corruption goes viral.

Mr. Kolomoisky, one of Ukraine's richest men, was vocal in his support for Mr. Zelensky during his presidential campaign. Mr. Kolomoisky returned to Ukraine from self-imposed exile in May after Mr. Zelensky won the presidency, and since then has met with the president publicly. Their relationship has been closely watched by the IMF, according to people familiar with the fund's negotiations with Ukraine.

The U.S. House impeachment inquiry into President Trump's dealings with Ukraine has drawn additional scrutiny to Mr. Zelensky's government, putting greater pressure on Kyiv to address the IMF's concerns, according to people familiar with the fund's negotiations.

While Mr. Trump has expressed desire for Ukraine to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden and matters related to the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the IMF is focused on the country's troubled financial system.

Efforts by Ukraine's central bank to battle corruption have faced pushback, said Ms. Rozhkova. Former governor Valeria Gontareva, who led the bank when it seized PrivatBank, was hospitalized in London in August after a driver ran over her foot and fled the scene. Police in the U.K. are investigating. Ms. Gontareva's house in Ukraine was raided by men in masks and then burned to the ground in September.

“It’s a war against reformers,” Ms. Rozhkova said.

“We closed around 100 banks, stopped a lot of fraudulent and criminal transactions,” she said. “That’s why we say we have a huge fan club,” she said sarcastically.

The IMF sees weak rule of law as the critical obstacle to Ukraine’s healthy long-term economic growth. The economy has made some progress in recent years, after taking a hit following Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the opening of a war with Russia-backed separatists for control of the country’s east.

Since contracting by 10% in 2015, Ukraine’s economy is now expanding at a 3% annual rate. Overhauls required under previous IMF financing programs have helped stabilize the country’s currency. That, in turn, has reduced inflation to the single digits from a recent peak just under 50% in 2015.

But Ukraine’s per capita gross domestic product is the second lowest of all Central and Eastern European countries.

Many foreign investors are likely to withhold capital from the country until the IMF signals its confidence with new funding, the central bank officials acknowledged. Ukraine’s new request is likely larger than the \$3.9 billion package approved last year, according to some of the people familiar with the negotiations.

The IMF, however, remains skeptical after a history of broken promises. Kyiv hasn’t successfully completed any of a series of IMF bailout packages over the past two decades, with systemic corruption at the heart of much of that failure, according to IMF records and officials.

“While there has been progress in setting up new institutions to fight corruption, tangible results have yet to be achieved,” Mr. van Rooden said.

#14

Servant of the People Splits Over “Kolomoisky Question”

Hromadske, 30 October 2019

<https://bit.ly/32bVAKo>

The governing party, and the president who leads it, has long been the target of rumors that it bears undue loyalty to one of Ukraine’s more infamous oligarchs, Ihor Kolomoisky. Kolomoisky, the former owner of Ukraine’s largest bank, Privatbank, left Ukraine under the administration of Petro Poroshenko, entering self-exile when the bank was nationalized due to a \$5.5 billion hole in the bank’s finances – the money Kolomoisky

allegedly stole. However, his return the previous month has sparked concerns that the oligarch is looking to put pressure on the new government, which resulted in the Office of President putting out an official statement saying that there is no basis for the bank's return.

In early October, the president did not rule out an *“amicable agreement”* between now state-owned Privatbank and its former owner Kolomoisky. Such an agreement, however, is kind of a red line for Ukraine's international partners. Indeed, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission visiting Ukraine at the end of September was expected to come to an agreement regarding a \$6 billion loan package, but instead left without fanfare, due to what some commentators think was the risk of Privatbank's re-privatization or return to Kolomoisky.

Kolomoisky and the IMF have had an adversarial relationship, with the former advising Zelenskyy to *“risk a default”* if necessary, while the IMF has consistently made the return of funds from Kolomoisky to the nationalized bank a cornerstone of its loan conditions. But the Zelenskyy team – which contains high-profile officials formerly connected to Kolomoisky (such as Chief of Staff Andriy Bohdan) – is working to calm Ukraine's partners and creditors. And not just with official statements (repeated at a recent investment forum in Mariupol), but with a new law, designed, it seems, to target oligarchs and Kolomoisky in particular.

A New Bill Brings Intra-Party Conflict

This law, nicknamed “deoffshore-ization”, has revealed fault lines in the Servant of the People's party. It's meant to “counter tax base erosion and tax avoidance on profits” by forcing beneficiaries of holding or managing companies located offshore to pay taxes as individuals instead of as legal entities, according to the bill's sponsor, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Finance and Servant of the People MP Danil Getmantsev.

And while the law doesn't discriminate, Kolomoisky remains the only oligarch who doesn't have a holding company registered in Ukraine – instead, he is the ultimate beneficiary of a network of offshore firms. But Getmantsev says that the law is not specifically pointed at Kolomoisky. Speaking to Hromadske, the MP said that the law is “unprofitable for all oligarchs. It doesn't differentiate.”

The first hearing on the law is planned to be held this week, and will serve as a ‘marker’, according to comments made by the leader of the Servant of the People parliamentary faction David Arakhamia. Arakhamia said that the bill has even attracted “different groups who walk around offering up to \$30,000 to MPs.”

But a group of 11 MPs from Servant of the People on the Finance Committee have shown an unwillingness to cooperate, dissenting on another bill involving the removal of electronic middlemen and government-owned real estate. Their dissension on the bill has drawn the attention of the specialized anti-corruption prosecutor's office, which

has opened investigations into the 11 MPs. And Arakhamia even called for all 11 MPs to undergo lie detector tests, which has been sharply countered by one MP from the group, Oleksandr Dubinsky, who retorted that Arakhamia himself should take the test.

Dubinsky, who also once worked at the Kolomoisky-owned 1+1 channel, also referred to allegations that MPs from Servant of the People are paid under-the-table, instead of legally, allegations echoed by Kolomoisky in comments to Hromadske on the “deoffshore-ization” law: “Let them first pay from their shady incomes in envelopes,” said the oligarch.

Whether or not Kolomoisky really has influence on the Servant of the People party, or in the president’s office, will become clear once a vote on the “deoffshore-ization” bill is held in the coming weeks. And action on that bill will send a clear message to Ukraine’s partners – whether the new government is committed to reforming the country, or if it’s only passing fig-leaves over the old system of oligarchs and patronage.

Original article by Maxim Kamenev, adapted by Romeo Kokriatski

#15

Investigation: UK Accounting Firms Tied to Alleged Kolomoisky Fraud

by Jack Laurenson, Anna Myroniuk, Igor Kossov
Kyiv Post, 1 November 2019
<https://bit.ly/33cpvn0>

Britain is known for its strong rule of law. Yet London is also a global hotspot for money laundering, tax evasion and other financial crimes. Experts say that a no-questions-asked approach to opening U.K. companies has exacerbated this problem.

However, the U.K.’s transparent registries and its freedom of information laws make it easier to detect potential wrongdoing than in many parts of the world, including Ukraine.

And that may become a problem for Ukrainian billionaire oligarchs Ihor Kolomoisky and Hennadiy Boholyubov, who face a London civil suit alleging they used fake purchasing agreements and fraudulent loans to embezzle \$1.72 billion from Ukraine into offshore firms through three U.K. companies.

A Kyiv Post investigation has uncovered two accountancy firms, a law firm and multiple individuals in the U.K. and Cyprus connected to these companies that may have played a role in the alleged scheme.

Billions gone

PrivatBank — Ukraine’s largest lender, co-owned by Kolomoisky and Boholyubov until its nationalization in 2016 — claims a total of \$5.5 billion was looted from the bank into

offshore holdings. The Ukrainian central bank and Ministry of Finance said the bank faced insolvency without a bailout financed by Ukrainian taxpayers.

Since then, state-owned PrivatBank has been suing its former owners in the U.K., U.S. and Cyprus, trying to reclaim its assets. PrivatBank's total claim in the U.K. was \$1.9 billion, which has ballooned to at least \$3 billion as interest and legal costs accrued. The London case is built around three U.K. companies involved in the alleged schemes, which fall under U.K. jurisdiction.

Lawyers acting for the bank claim that \$721 million was embezzled through the firm Collyer Ltd, \$494 million via Teamtrend Ltd, and \$501 million went through Trade Point Agro Ltd, to offshore companies owned by the defendants in locations like Cyprus and the Carribean. Another \$100 million was allegedly funneled through three more companies in the British Virgin Islands (BVI).

PrivatBank allegedly "loaned" the funds to 42 Ukrainian shell companies connected to the defendants and incorporated in different offshore havens in the Caribbean.

According to a recent judgment from the U.K. Appeal Court, Kolomoisky and Boholyubov accept that there is "a good arguable case that the Borrowers (in Ukraine) and the English and BVI Defendants were knowing participants in the fraudulent scheme" and the three English companies and three BVI companies were "at all material times owned and/or controlled" by the defendants.

Despite that, Kolomoisky and Boholyubov have repeatedly denied any wrongdoing in relation to PrivatBank. They maintain that the state takeover — backed by the International Monetary Fund — was politically motivated.

Accountants, lawyers

The three English firms under scrutiny appear to be shell companies. But behind them are a number of real accountancy and law firms in the U.K. and Cyprus.

Collyer Ltd is registered to the North London address of NA Associates, an accountancy firm with strong ties to Cyprus and majority-owned by a well-known British Cypriot accountant, Nicholas Antoniou. Some 412 firms with ties to the U.K. and Cyprus have been registered at the firm's address.

Teamtrend Ltd. is registered to the Central London address of Edwin Coe LLP, a major law firm. Another 81 companies are registered there.

NA Associates has acted as the accounting firm for both Collyer and Teamtrend, according to both companies' documents in public registers.

Trade Point Agro Ltd. is registered at 869 High Road, North London. A property title acquired from HM Land Registry by the Kyiv Post shows that the building was purchased for 800,000 pounds, and this purchase was financed by a London-based bank with ties to Cyprus, Cynergy Bank Limited. Until recently, it was the U.K. subsidiary of Bank of Cyprus.

Property titles show that the building is owned by four individuals of Cypriot origin: Evagoras and Maria Evagora and Andreas and Erene Christoforou. The address is also home to the accountancy firm EA UK LLP and the Cypriot names of the building owners appear multiple times throughout its company records and filings. The accounting firm has registered some 545 companies.

Edwin Coe LLP, NA Associates and EA UK LLP did not respond to multiple requests for comment and did not answer questions about their ties to Collyer, Teamtrend or Trade Point Agro.

PrivatBank and its lawyers declined to comment on the Kyiv Post's findings, stating that many elements of the ongoing proceedings remain confidential.

Hollow accounting

Limited liability companies are popular tools in the U.K. because their accounts do not have to be audited, according to Graham Barrow, a London-based banking and anti-money laundering expert.

“Potentially, you could just shove a set of books in front of an accountant's firm and they can say ‘on the basis of what we see, these are fine,’” said Barrow. Companies reviewed in this way would not be considered audited.

Collyer and Teamtrend filings show that NA Associates signed off on the books of both companies for a number of years but has not audited or reviewed them. In 2016 for Teamtrend and 2017 for Collyer, NA Associates noted in its accounting that it did not accept responsibility for the companies' bookkeeping.

Those years came after details of the alleged fraudulent PrivatBank scheme had already been made public.

“It is your duty to ensure that (the firm) has kept adequate accounting records,” the accountancy wrote then as a disclaimer on the books. “We have not been instructed to carry out an audit or a review of the accounts... For this reason we have not verified the accuracy or completeness of the accounting records...”

Another possibility is that an accounting firm could prepare an account, knowing full well that it is false. That carries much more stringent penalties, Barrow said. “If an

accountancy firm is actively involved, it would be preparing the accounts, often without having sight of the underlying bank statements or invoices.”

According to the expert, it is often the case that when a limited liability company shares an address with an accounting firm, it is because that firm “probably created the company in the first place.” But this is not always the case.

The Kyiv Post did not find any direct evidence of wrongdoing by NA Associates, Edwin Coe or EA UK, only a strong connection to defendant companies in the London proceedings.

Cypriot nominees

Several directors, most of them from Cyprus, tie together the U.K. defendants and the lawyers and accountants with whom they share addresses.

Giannakis Savvidis is a Cypriot from the city of Limassol who has been listed as a director of Collyer since 2014 and of Teamtrend since 2017. Savvidis is also the director of Dagosel Investment Ltd, which owns a 5.21% stake in Kolomoisky’s oil refining company Ukrtatnafta, according to Ukrtatnafta’s 2018 financial statement.

Michalakis Tsitsekkos, another Cyprus national and lawyer from Nicosia, was named director of both Trade Point Agro (between 2007 and October 2019) and Teamtrend (between 2003 and 2017). He was also the director of the now-dissolved Andrena Great Ltd., which was a Cypriot company registered at 869 High Road London, the address of EA UK LLP.

Tsitsekkos appears to act as a nominee or proxy director for firms and can be linked to 167 different companies based in Cyprus. He is also named in the Offshore Leaks Database of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists as connected to multiple offshore schemes.

The Kyiv Post previously reported that Tsitsekkos had served as the nominee owner of Alstrom Business Corp, an offshore business used in a 2009 media deal, where Kolomoisky was the beneficiary, according to a filing with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Cypriot lawyer Andreas Marangos was director of Collyer between 2007 and 2014, throughout the peak of the alleged fraudulent scheme. According to public registries in the U.K., he is also the director of another firm, Soccer Marketing International, registered at Edwin Coe LLP.

Tsitsekkos and Savvidis could not be reached for comment. Marangos told the Kyiv Post that he no longer works with any of the mentioned companies, but added “it may have been the case that we provided fiduciary and/or legal services and/or acted as nominee directors for said companies through a law firm which I previously worked for.”

Questioned about ties to Collyer, Edwin Coe and Ihor Kolomoisky, he said, “information of this nature is... confidential and legally privileged,” adding that the law firm he previously worked with “offered such services to a multitude of companies and individuals.”

Barrow said that people listed on limited company records can be nominal directors who have nothing to do with operating the companies’ actual bank accounts. The people in control of suspicious money flows are often not listed on company records at all.

“I think they’re just directors in name only,” he said, referring to the directors in the public records. “The bank would have been given a list of authorized signatories... who are actually allowed to operate the bank account, and often they’re very different.”

Cyprus web

Cyprus is widely known as a haven for shady finance, especially among Eastern European oligarchs. Kolomoisky is no exception, reportedly holding triple citizenship in Ukraine, Cyprus and Israel.

Many of Kolomoisky’s extensive assets are held through Cypriot firms. One of his top trusted officials is Panikos Symeou, a Cypriot and managing partner at Symeou & Konnaris LLC. According to research by the Anticorruption Action Center, Kolomoisky entrusts Symeou with steel, tire production, water terminal and media assets in multiple countries, including Ukraine and the U.S.

When PrivatBank still belonged to Kolomoisky and Boholyubov, its Cyprus branch was an alleged key transit point for the billions of dollars extracted from Ukraine. Insider loans for bogus transactions would allegedly be transferred from Kolomoisky’s companies’ PrivatBank accounts in Ukraine to their PrivatBank accounts in Cyprus before being cycled through dozens of affiliated bank accounts and into external companies in other jurisdictions.

According to former central bank head Yakiv Smolii’s statements to the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, Ukrainian authorities did nothing to regulate the huge sums funneled out of the country, as Ukraine treated the Cyprus branch the same as any domestic branches.

The Central Bank of Cyprus only conducted investigations in 2015, after which it alerted Ukrainian authorities. In 2016, as the nationalization of PrivatBank loomed, billions of dollars from PrivatBank’s Cyprus branch were rapidly shuttled to other European jurisdictions where the Ukrainian authorities could not get to them, according to the PrivatBank.

Who is Serhii Melnyk?

One person appears to connect the dots between different firms and Kolomoisky more than any other individual: Ukrainian national Serhii Melnyk.

Both Collyer and Teamtrend were, according to U.K. records, briefly and mysteriously controlled by Melnyk between Feb. 21 and March 12, 2018, before he was removed as a person of significant control.

Melnyk is directly linked to Kolomoisky and his business partner Hennadiy Boholiyubov. The 38-year-old resident of Kolomoisky's native city Dnipro is the nominee director or beneficiary owner of a number of companies linked to the oligarch, both in Ukraine and worldwide.

But Melnyk is also something of an enigma. There is not much about Melnyk in the public domain, in the press or on social media.

This may be explained by the role he appears to play in Kolomoisky's dealings, suggests Volodymyr Arieiev, a lawmaker in the European Solidarity party. "He is just a nominal actor, no one in fact. One of the people in Kolomoisky's environment, just a person with a passport. It is a syndicate."

However, Melnyk may not even exist, suggests Vadim Shulman, a former business partner and now nemesis of Kolomoisky. Their 15-year friendship and business relationship turned extremely sour, ending in multiple court cases.

Shulman currently resides in Monaco and is wanted in Ukraine, where he faces allegations of fraud and embezzlement. He claims the charges are Kolomoisky's revenge. "This person does not exist, trust me. I am 100% sure. I know Kolomoisky, and it is hard to imagine him registering so many companies to one person," said Shulman. "He might have existed a while ago but passed away and no one knows about it. The entire Kolomoisky system works this way," he added.

The Kyiv Post found evidence of a Serhii Melnyk, born Jan. 17, 1981 in Dnipro, registered in the public database of Ukrainian citizens. The name, address and birth date match the person who controlled the U.K. firms Collyer and Teamtrend for less than a month in 2018.

The same person is a beneficiary owner of EstateGlobal, a Dnipro-based company incorporated in 2008. Public records show that EstateGlobal was controlled by PrivatBank and two other firms related to Kolomoisky's Privat Group, Dolma and Spectrum-Energo, before the bank's nationalization in 2016.

In 2017, EstateGlobal was briefly controlled by the Cypriot lawyer Panagiotis Zevlaris. His name appears in the Paradise Papers offshore leaks, connecting him to multiple offshore schemes.

Zevlaris follows Melnyk on the list of founders of the company. Currently the main stakeholder at EstateGlobal, with 94% of the shares, is Lux-Office, a company tied to Kolomoisky's unofficial Privat Group of companies.

When Melnyk resigned from EstateGlobal, it was acquired by Edinor, the beneficiaries of which are Kolomoisky and Boholyubov.

Melnyk also used to be director of another firm, Ricona LTD, also part of Privat Group. According to Arieiev, Melnyk controls over 40 companies that have accounts in PrivatBank in Cyprus and sits on the editorial board of the company Privat TV Dnipro, owned by Privat Group.

Serhii Melnyk could not be reached for comment. An employee of EstateGlobal, reached by phone, suggested that Melnyk was the company's beneficiary owner, but then declined to comment further.

London laundromat

In the case of PrivatBank v. Kolomoisky, which is still ongoing, the High Court has already recognized that "fraud on an epic scale" took place, and the Appellate Court recently ruled that PrivatBank has a "good arguable case" against its former owners, who even accept that a fraudulent scheme existed.

Aside from the flagship PrivatBank case, however, tax base erosion and profit shifting costs the Ukrainian economy some \$50 billion per year, multiple tax experts told the Kyiv Post.

And the U.K. is a perfect laundromat for looted money, as there is no compulsory auditing for LLCs and minimal disclosure is required when opening a firm.

A 2018 study by the anti-corruption NGO Global Witness and data scientists from DataKind UK found troubling levels of suspicious activity throughout public registers of British companies.

More than 335,000 companies in the U.K. declare they have no beneficial owner, while at least 10,000 companies declare a foreign company as their beneficial owner, and 72% of these are linked to a secrecy jurisdiction.

Britain's National Crime Agency estimates that money laundering in the U.K. may extend to hundreds of billions of pounds each year. "The ease with which U.K. companies can be opened, and the appearance of legitimacy that they provide, means they are

used extensively to launder money derived both from criminal activity in the U.K. and overseas,” states a 2018 report by the crime agency.

#16

Netflix to Release Docu-Series on Trial of Alleged Ukrainian Nazi Collaborator

Kyiv Post, 30 October 2019
<https://bit.ly/2oFcweD>

Netflix has published a trailer for its upcoming true crime documentary series, *The Devil Next Door*.

The five-part series, set for release on Nov. 4, focuses on Israel’s trial of John Demjanjuk, a retired Ukrainian-American auto worker living a comfortable suburban life in Cleveland, Ohio who was reputed to be the Nazi death camp guard known as ‘Ivan the Terrible.’

‘Ivan the Terrible,’ was one of the most infamous guards at the Treblinka extermination camp in Poland, known for his extreme cruelty and violent behavior. He tortured and killed nearly one million Jewish prisoners during World War II.

“The crimes he was accused of were horrid...” a voice-over says in the trailer. However, the guard’s identity was never definitively established, making Demjanjuk’s trial for his crimes an extremely controversial chapter in the international quest to bring Nazi war criminals to justice.

The series covers the initial accusations by Holocaust survivors, Demjanjuk’s 1986 extradition to Israel and the reactions that followed. It is compiled of news footage from the trial and recent interviews with witnesses, family members and those involved in the case in 1986.’

Ted Henry, a well-known anchor on Cleveland’s News 5 channel, wrote on Facebook that footage from his station “plays a major role in this series with the miles of file footage used in the production of the program.”

It is directed and produced by Daniel Sivan and Yossi Bloch, as well as six prominent executive producers that include Ben Braun and Dan Braun, who produced Netflix’s *Wild Wild Country*. *The Devil Next Door* comes from the *One Man Show* and *Submarine Deluxe* production studios, in association with Yes Studios.

A Jerusalem court convicted Demjanjuk in 1988 and sentenced him to death by hanging. However, in 1993, the Israeli Supreme Court overturned to ruling citing additional evidence.

Later, in 2011, Demjanjuk was convicted in Germany of being an accessory to the murder of 27,900 Jews at the Sobibor concentration camp, but died in the process of appealing the ruling.

“As the case uncovers dark corners of memory and the horrors of war, the Demjanjuk case becomes a race against time for the defendant and his alleged victims,” Netflix wrote.

#17

Department of Political Studies and Department of German and Slavic Studies

Faculty of Arts, University of Manitoba

Position Number 28177

Assistant Professor (tenure-track) in Ukrainian and Russian Comparative Politics

The Departments of Political Studies and German and Slavic Studies in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Manitoba invite applications for a full-time tenure-track position at the rank of Assistant Professor. The position is located 50% in Political Science and 50% in Slavic Studies. The ideal candidate will have a PhD, or be very near completion, in Political Science, Slavic Studies, or a related field; a specialization in contemporary Eastern European politics, society, and culture, with an emphasis on Russia and Ukraine; expertise in the evolution of political structures, systems, and ideas in the region; and expertise in international relations between Russia, Ukraine, and the Western world. Expertise in the political effects of new information and communication technologies would be an asset.

The successful candidate will be expected to develop and maintain a productive research program, teach courses in Political Studies and Slavic Studies from first-year to the Master's level, and to engage in the advising of honours and M.A. students. Preference will be given to candidates who have strong potential for research and teaching related to Ukraine. The ideal candidate will have a demonstrated record of excellence in research and teaching; potential to teach and develop a range of courses at all levels of instruction in both units, including cross-listed courses between both units, and a demonstrated commitment to university and department service including community outreach. Excellent language skills in Ukrainian and Russian would be an important asset; excellent reading skills in both languages are required.

The starting salary will reflect the qualifications and experience of the chosen candidate. The appointment will begin on July 1, 2020.

The University is located in Winnipeg, a city of over 800,000, the largest city in the province of Manitoba. The city has a rich cultural environment, including a vibrant arts community, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre, and one of Canada's largest and most vibrant Canadian-Ukrainian communities, as well as other substantial Canadian-Eastern-European communities.

The University of Manitoba is the province's largest, most comprehensive post-secondary educational institution. More than 28,000 students from all over the world currently study in a wide range of programs in the liberal arts and sciences, the creative arts, and the professions. Research is a priority at the University of Manitoba and the success of its faculty in securing substantial research support in national and international competitions attests to this fact. The university is home to the Centre of Ukrainian-Canadian Studies, the Archives of the Ukrainian-Canadian Experience, the Slavic Collection at Elizabeth Dafoe Library, and the Centre for Defence and Security Studies.

The University of Manitoba is strongly committed to equity and diversity within its community and especially welcomes applications from women, racialized persons/ persons of colour, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, persons of all sexual orientations and genders, and others who may contribute to the further diversification of ideas. All qualified candidates are encouraged to apply; however, Canadian citizens and permanent residents will be given priority.

Applications for this position must include a letter of application, a curriculum vitae, a writing sample of up to 30 pages, a teaching philosophy, and further evidence of effective teaching, such as teaching evaluations and sample course outlines. As well, three confidential letters of reference must be received directly from the applicant's referees.

Further information about the departments is available via http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/political_studies/ and http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/german_and_slavic/. Inquiries about the position can be sent to Dr. Stephan Jaeger, Chair of the Hiring Committee (stephan.jaeger@umanitoba.ca).

Electronic (preferred) or hard copy applications and letters of reference should be sent to Dr. Stephan Jaeger (artsgmsl.reach@umanitoba.ca), Department of German and Slavic Studies, 328 Fletcher Argue Building, 15 Chancellor's Circle, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 5V5.

All materials should arrive no later than November 28, 2019.

Application materials, including letters of reference, will be handled in accordance with *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (Manitoba). Please note that curricula vitae may be provided to participating members of the search process.

#18

Kule Chair of Ukrainian Ethnography

Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies
University of Alberta
<https://bit.ly/2WDJyZa>

The Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta invites applications for the tenure-track or tenured position as Kule Chair of Ukrainian Ethnography at the rank of Associate or Full Professor, effective July 1, 2020.

Candidates will already hold the rank of Associate Professor or equivalent or higher at the time of appointment. The successful candidate will have a PhD or equivalent in Ukrainian Folklore or related discipline (such as Cultural Studies, Ukrainian Studies, Slavic Studies, or others), native or near-native proficiency in Ukrainian, an excellent record of significant high-quality publications, and demonstrated teaching excellence.

The successful applicant will demonstrate familiarity with the diversity and interdisciplinary nature of contemporary folklore theories, methods, and fieldwork techniques as well as knowledge of social, material, and oral Ukrainian traditions and cultures in the 21st century and their foundations in earlier times. They will have expertise in one or more of the following specializations: Ukrainian cultural studies, diaspora culture in Canada and other nations, digital humanities, archiving, ethnographic methods, general folklore and cultural theory, gender and sexuality studies, critical race studies, (post) coloniality, popular culture, material or visual culture, health humanities; intersectional approaches are encouraged. The successful applicant will be willing to collaborate with other colleagues in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies as well as the Kule Centre for Ukrainian and Canadian Folklore. The successful candidate will also be expected to contribute to the broader program in Ukrainian and Slavic Studies in language, literature, culture, media, or linguistics as well as to the interdisciplinary and transnational graduate program in Modern Languages and Cultural Studies. Fluency in another Slavic language, or in a Germanic or Romance language, would be an asset.

Established in 1908 as a board-governed, public institution, the University of Alberta has earned the reputation of being one of the best universities in Canada based on strengths in teaching, research, and service. The University serves over 39,000 students in almost 400 undergraduate, graduate and professional programs (www.ualberta.ca). The Faculty of Arts is the oldest and most diverse faculty on campus and is one of the largest research and teaching centres in Western Canada (www.arts.ualberta.ca). The University's main campus is located in Edmonton, Alberta's capital city. The Edmonton metropolitan area is the sixth largest in the country with a population of approximately one million.

Edmonton and the University of Alberta are situated on Treaty 6 territory and are a traditional meeting ground and home for many Indigenous Peoples, including Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Dene, Métis, and Nakota Sioux.

More information: <https://bit.ly/2WDJyZa>

UKL 502, 3 November 2019

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Dominique Arel, Chair of Ukrainian Studies
University of Ottawa
559 King Edward Ave.
Ottawa ON K1N 6N5
CANADA
darel@uottawa.ca