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# THE UKRAINIAN WEEKLY

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## Ukraine, Russia swap hundreds of POWs in U.A.E.-mediated deal

Poland says West needs to respond to Russian attacks 'in a language that Putin understands'



Office of the President of Ukraine

Ukrainian POWs embrace after a prisoner swap at an unknown location in Ukraine on January 3.

*RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service*

Amid the trading of heavy aerial attacks, Russia and Ukraine completed an exchange of hundreds of prisoners of war under a deal sponsored by the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.).

Authorities in Kyiv said on January 3 that 230 Ukrainian nationals were returned from Russian captivity, while Russia's Defense Ministry said 248 Russians were freed by Ukraine. The ministry said

the return of Russians "became possible thanks to the humanitarian mediation participation of the United Arab Emirates."

The U.A.E. Foreign Affairs Ministry acknowledged its role, saying in a statement that the swap was made possible by its "strong friendly relations" with both Moscow and Kyiv.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on X, formerly Twitter, that he was

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## Russia sends record aerial barrage on mostly civilian targets throughout Ukraine

Ukraine sinks another Russian Black Sea vessel and hits targets in occupied Crimea



Joint Forces Task Force of the Armed Forces of Ukraine

Ukraine's 45th artillery brigade tows a 155-millimeter self-propelled gun close to the nearly 600-mile front line as seen on January 4.

by Mark Raczkiwycz

CHICAGO – Russia launched a record barrage of various aerial projectiles and drones that targeted mostly civilian areas across Ukraine over five consecutive days from December 29 through January 2, killing dozens and causing millions of dollars in damage to non-military infrastructure.

Ukraine faced at least 500 missiles, varying from cruise, ballistic to supersonic, along with Iranian-provided drones that

targeted the most populous cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa, among other population centers, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told his British counterpart Rishi Sunak in a telephone conversation on January 2.

Although Ukraine intercepted a vast majority of the airborne attacks, others struck mostly residential areas, with debris from the projectiles causing further damage.

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## Ukraine says troops fend off 'terrorist' Russian attacks as Putin vows to intensify war

*RFE/RL's Ukrainian and Russian Services*

Ukraine said at least 56 combat clashes with Russian forces took place on the first day of the year after a "record number" of drone and missile attacks struck Ukrainian cities over 24 hours, while Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened to intensify attacks in the days ahead.

The Ukrainian military's General Staff on January 1 said clashes took place in the Donetsk region and near the long-fought-after towns of Bakhmut, Bohdanyivka, Klishchivivka and Andriyivka and that the Russian attacks had been repelled.

Ukrainian military authorities did not comment on casualties by the Russian side or their own.

In an interview with The Economist



Ukrainian Emergency Service

A photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service shows firefighters working at the site of a burning building in Dublyany, Ukraine, after a Russian drone attack on January 1.

published on January 1, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy again blasted Russia as a "terrorist country" and said the Kremlin is showing no signs of seeking peace despite its continued losses on the battlefield.

Mr. Zelenskyy said any indication that Putin is seeking talks is just a reflection that he is running out of troops and armaments.

Mr. Zelenskyy said a major focus of Ukrainian counterattacks going forward would be to diminish Russian forces' strength in Crimea, even as his military defends under-pressure cities in the east, where civilians increasingly are becoming victims of Russian drone and missile attacks.

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## NEWS ANALYSIS

# How the Russian state ramped up suppression of dissent in 2023: 'It worked in the Soviet Union, and it works now'

by Robert Coalson  
RFE/RL

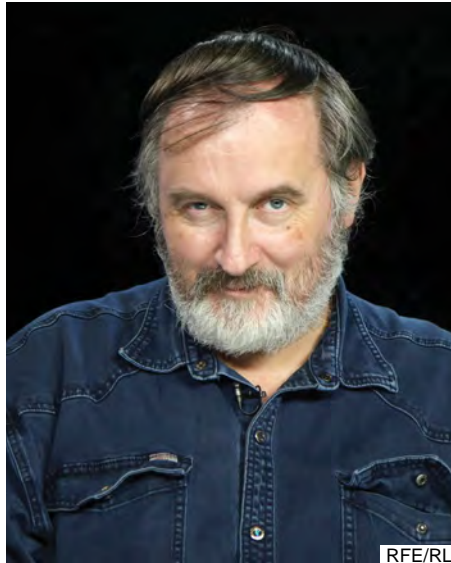
There were no mass protests in Russia in 2023. There were no hair-raising scenes of riot police in helmets and body armor beating students and shoving elderly demonstrators into police vans.

Nonetheless, the harsh repression of dissent was the daily business of President Vladimir Putin's security forces, with the action shifted to pretrial detention centers, the courts and the prison system.

"It is a return to the repressive system of the post-Stalin period," said human rights activist Aleksandr Cherkasov of Memorial, an organization that has been banned in Russia. "Maybe this has been ordered [from above] – that is possible. But it is the same logic as the campaigns of the Soviet Union.

"Now Putin has returned to the same thing, but the difference is that he is not just maintaining some kind of stability but is undertaking social engineering, building a new country," he added. "The scope of the repression turns out to be sufficient: One person is imprisoned and 100 have their hands tied because they already have an administrative offense, and the next violation means prison. It worked in the Soviet Union, and it works now."

Most dramatically, the year saw increasingly long prison terms handed down in cases widely seen as politically motivated. Opposition political activist Aleksei Navalny was handed a 19-year prison term in August 2023 on an extremism conviction.



Aleksandr Cherkasov

Mr. Navalny denounced the sentence as "Stalinist."

Fellow opposition politician Vladimir Kara-Murza was sentenced to 25 years on treason and other charges in April 2023. In November, St. Petersburg artist Aleksandra Skochilenko was sentenced to seven years in prison for an anti-war protest.

According to the end-of-the-year report by OVD-Info, a human rights project that monitors and reports on repression in Russia, typical prison terms for anti-war charges in 2023 were from 36 to 77 months. Typical sentences for publications on the internet were between 34 and 65 months.

### 'Satanic work'

The OVD-Info report presents a clear picture of the Kremlin's suppression of basic freedoms, using a tangle of new or recently modified laws criminalizing the spread of what the state deems "false" information about the armed forces, "justifying" terrorism, "rehabilitating" Nazism, and so on. The laws are notable for their vague language and unpredictable application.

In 2023, at least 2,830 cases were filed under the law on "discrediting" the armed forces – Article 20.3.3 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, or KoAP. This represented a small downturn from the previous year, when people arrested at anti-war protests were routinely charged under that article.

More ominously, however, there was a significant uptick in prosecutions under

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Siberian journalist Maria Ponomarenko was sentenced in February 2023 to six years in prison, after spending nearly a year in pretrial detention.

# Russian Armed Forces remain severely understaffed

by Pavel Luzin  
Eurasia Daily Monitor

The true organizational state of the Russian Armed Forces has been a "black box" since the start of Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The exact number of troops at the Kremlin's disposal is unclear, and the mix of contracted soldiers, volunteers and prisoners on the battlefield makes any accurate estimate extremely difficult. As of mid-December, the reported number of contracted soldiers and volunteers who officially joined the armed forces in 2023

stands at 490,000. The Russian military leadership planned that this number would reach 521,000 before the year's end. At the same time, the officially declared number of Russian troops in the combat zone is 244,000 (Kremlin.ru, December 14; Kremlin.ru, December 19). The high rate of casualties on the Ukrainian battlefield, a significant number of Russian military-age men fleeing the country and growing domestic discontent over the lack of leave for front-line soldiers cast doubts as to the veracity of Moscow's

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## NEWSBRIEFS

### NATO calls meeting of new Ukraine Council

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will hold a meeting with diplomats and officials from the alliance's members and Ukraine on January 10 to address the situation surrounding a wave of deadly Russian aerial attacks on Kyiv and other cities across the country. The military alliance's press chief, Dylan White, said in a post on X, formerly Twitter, on January 4 that Ukraine had requested the meeting through the format of the recently established NATO-Ukraine Council. In one attack on December 29, 32 people in Kyiv alone were killed by Russian missiles and drones. (RFE/RL)

### U.S. : reports it wants Kyiv to change strategy 'not true'

The U.S. State Department says reports that Washington wants Ukraine to change its strategy in the full-scale war against Russia are untrue. "No. This is not true," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said on January 3, answering a question about whether Washington wants Ukraine to change its strategy. Politico last month quoted an unnamed Biden administration official and a European diplomat as saying that U.S. and European officials were shifting their focus from supporting Ukraine's goal of total victory to improving its position in possible negotiations to end the war. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

### NATO, U.S. consult with Warsaw

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said he spoke with Poland's president about indications that a Russian missile entered Polish airspace on December 29 during a barrage of Russian missiles and drones fired at Ukraine. Mr. Stoltenberg said he consulted with President Andrzej Duda about the "missile incident" and said on X, formerly Twitter, that NATO "is monitoring the situation & we will remain in contact as the facts are established." Poland's defense forces said earlier that an unknown object had entered Polish airspace from the direction of Ukraine and then vanished off radar. "Everything indicates that a Russian missile intruded in Poland's airspace. It was monitored by us on radars and left the airspace. We have

confirmation of this on radars and from allies" in NATO, Poland's armed forces chief, Gen. Wiesław Kukuła, said. Poland's defense forces said the object penetrated about 40 kilometers into its airspace and left after less than three minutes. The defense forces said that both its radar and NATO radar confirmed that the object left Polish airspace. Mr. Kukuła said steps were being taken to verify those findings and eliminate the possibility of a technical error. Poland summoned the Russian charge d'affaires and demanded an explanation. Russia's RIA Novosti news agency quoted the Russian charge d'affaires as saying that Poland provided no proof of a border violation. U.S. national-security adviser Jake Sullivan spoke by phone with the head of Poland's National Security Bureau, Jacek Siewiera, to express the "United States' solidarity with Poland ... as it deals with reports of a missile temporarily entering Polish airspace," the White House said. Mr. Sullivan expressed U.S. solidarity with Poland and pledged technical assistance as needed and assured Mr. Siewiera that President Joe Biden is following the incident closely. It was not immediately clear where the object disappeared from radar or in which direction it had been going. Troops were mobilized to find it. Ukrainian officials have said the aerial barrage was the biggest since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. (RFE/RL, with reporting by Reuters, AP and AFP)

### Death toll rises to 32 from attack on Kyiv

The Kyiv City Military Administration said overnight on January 3-4 that criminal investigators examining the scene of the deadliest air attack on the capital so far in the 22-month-old full-scale Russian invasion discovered two more bodies, raising the death toll to 32. More than two dozen more were injured in Kyiv in the December 29 bombardment in which 158 missiles and drones targeted military and infrastructure and major population centers all over the country. More than 40 people died in total, and Russia launched another major bombardment on January 2. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

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Silver and gold Ukrainian tridents are seen attached to intricate chains that the DelBrenna family has been making for more than 45 years. They have kept the specifics of the design of the chains a well-guarded secret that is passed from generation to generation.



DelBrenna's silver trident (left), circle pendant (right) and shield are seen in close-up. The same designs are also offered in gold.

## Celebrity cook Rachael Ray teams up with Italian jewelry boutique to design unique Ukrainian pendants

### Proceeds of 'Wear Hope, Help Ukraine' campaign to benefit war victims

by Mychajlo Bondarenko

CORTONA, Italy – Megan and Sebastian DelBrenna, co-owners of the jewelry boutique Delbrenna in Cortona, Italy, were at Rachael Ray's house in Sarteano, Italy, brainstorming a jewelry collection when they noticed an ornate candelabra engraved with a trident. Ms. Ray had brought it with her from one of her many trips to Ukraine.

The celebrity cook grabbed it, saying, "How about that as a necklace?"

Delbrenna's small team began working the very next day.

Only six weeks later, DelBrenna released a special collection of pendants called "Wear Hope, Help Ukraine," with 55 percent of their sale price going to UNBROKEN, a national rehabilitation center based in Lviv, Ukraine.

"This candleholder that she had on her table was a moment of serendipity. If that candleholder wasn't on the table, I don't know if the design would've come so quickly. Once we started rolling, we decided that we wanted the designs out for August 24, Ukraine's Independence Day. So, we had about six weeks to do everything," said Ms. DelBrenna said.

DelBrenna is a family-owned boutique with a long history, known for designing incredibly intricate chains for their jewelry.

The family keeps the specifics of the design a well-guarded secret that's been passed from generation to generation. It's a design that is constantly refined and perfected. Unlike other brands, DelBrenna's designs are mostly handmade.

"We're not like Prada; we're not a corporate brand. We're a family business. In a store like Tiffany's, you work at the store and you're detached from the jewelry. In DelBrenna, our marketing room is right next to a room where the actual jewelry is being made," Ms. DelBrenna said.

The foundations of the company were laid by the grandparents of the company's current CEO, Sebastian DelBrenna. They were farmers who would design jewelry when they could get the necessary components. Without access to modern jewelry-making equipment, they developed an intricate style that could only be made by hand.

Mr. DelBrenna's father learned from his parents who passed on the tricks of the trade to their two sons, Sebastian and Alessandro. To this day, Mr. DelBrenna's father keeps tinkering with new designs, though the "Wear Hope, Help Ukraine" concept was developed by Mr. DelBrenna. Most of the design process is still done by hand, and the few steps that have to be outsourced are done by local Italian experts in the area.



Megan (left) and Sebastian (center, front) DelBrenna, co-owners of the jewelry boutique Delbrenna in Cortona, Italy, were joined by celebrity cook Rachael Ray (right) and her husband, John Cusimano.

The design of a collection is a team effort. More often than not, Mr. DelBrenna or his twin brother, Alessandro, comes up with a design first, and the team works to create a story around it. The Ukrainian pendant, however, was unique in that the inspiration for the look of the jewelry and the story behind it came together all at once, during the meeting with Ms. Ray.

What makes the collection all the more special is that DelBrenna's operations and finances staff member, Darya, is from Ukraine herself. Darya and her mother moved from southeast Ukraine to Italy when Darya was only eight. She joined DelBrenna five years ago and progressed to higher positions within the company.

"My family at home and my family at DelBrenna keep me going. It's very special to me," she said.

DelBrenna's focus on fostering a family-like work environment for all its employees ensured that Darya's identity as a Ukrainian, with all of its beauty and struggles, was appreciated. The start of the war and how it affected her made DelBrenna a brand that was conscious of the need to support Ukraine. The partnership with Ms. Ray tapped into DelBrenna's inherent love for the country.

"Rachael Ray often talked about the people of Ukraine and how strong they are. They are not just standing up for themselves but for democracy worldwide. And we completely agree with that. On a certain

level, we're now in sync with Darya and Ukraine as well," Ms. DelBrenna said.

The company has imbued every detail of the pendant with meaning and thought for the Ukrainian collection. The collection has three main concepts, all built around the trident, or tryzub.

One features a shield that encases the trident. Reminiscent of dog tags, it is an homage to Ukrainian soldiers on the front. Another is the same trident encased in a circle, a pendant that celebrates a more feminine side to the collection, representing unity and harmony. The last is the trident itself, with no shell surrounding it.

"Our hope is that someone wearing the jewelry will inspire other people to ask about the symbol. In our small way, as a jeweler, we can help remind people of Ukraine. We want to keep Ukraine in people's minds and in their hearts," Ms. DelBrenna said.

All the concepts come in gold and silver and feature the signature, family-secret chain.

The jewelry and pendants can be purchased online at <https://delbrenna.com/collections/ukrainian-trident>.

Proceeds from the sale of the pendants will go to the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA) to support UNBROKEN, which is providing adults and children affected by the war with quality medical care, including reconstructive surgery, orthopedics and robotic prosthetics.



DelBrenna's gold and silver tridents, circle pendants and shields are seen in the store's showroom in Cortona, Italy.



## 'Hot potato:' Ukrainian mobilization bill driving wedge between president and armed forces

RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service

KYIV – When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Ukrainians lined up to join the armed forces in an outburst of patriotism that both inspired the Western world and defied Moscow's expectations.

Now, two years later, amid horrific trench warfare, lack of recent progress on the battlefield and with tens of thousands of soldiers dead or wounded, the enthusiasm to enlist is clearly waning.

The lack of fresh recruits poses a serious danger to Ukraine's war effort as Russia – which has more than three times the population – continues to throw men, including convicts, into the fight despite mounting human costs.

Kyiv has proposed addressing the problem by lowering the age limit for new conscripts and cracking down on mobilization evasion. But officials are fearful of backlash and hesitant to publicly defend the measures, seeking instead to place the onus on the military, both experts and deputies say.

### Christmas surprise

On Christmas night, the Ukrainian government submitted the long-awaited bill on mobilization to parliament, triggering scorn from some opposition lawmakers.

Solomia Bobrovska, a deputy from the Holos party, said in an interview with RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service on December 27 that the timing was designed to ensure "no one would notice," deriding it as a "Bolshevik" tactic. She also criticized elements of the bill.

The mobilization legislation was submit-



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (left) with the commander in chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, in July 2023.

ted in the name of Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and Defense Minister Rustem Umerov and not President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is commander in chief. Some experts took that as a sign that the president feared his high popularity rating could take a hit.

"The president did not behave like a statesman, who should come out and start taking responsibility for himself and explain why this [bill] is necessary," Hennadiy Druzenko, a lawyer and activist, told RFE/RL.

Mr. Druzenko said the government may have been assigned the task of submitting the bill and taking any public heat because its trust is already low and probably won't fall much further. According to polling by

the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), only 26 percent of Ukrainians express trust in the government compared to 52 percent in December 2022.

Mr. Zelenskyy's popularity shot up following Russia's full-scale invasion when he refused to flee Kyiv even as Russian special forces reached the edge of the capital. It was bolstered by Ukraine's success in late 2022 in driving back Russian forces, prompting 84 percent of Ukrainians to say at the time that they trusted him, according to the KIIS. That has fallen to 62 percent as the war drags on with no end in sight.

While still high, the steady decline in trust could pose problems for Mr. Zelenskyy if he seeks reelection. Ukraine was due to hold presidential elections this

spring, but it will be postponed under the state of martial law imposed in the wake of Russia's invasion.

During a press conference on December 19, days before the mobilization bill was submitted, Mr. Zelenskyy said Ukraine's military leadership had proposed drafting up to 500,000 more troops, adding that he wanted an explanation for such a large request.

Days later, the chief of the general staff, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, told media that he needs more men to relieve those who have been fighting for an extended period, as well as to compensate for expected losses in the coming year.

He said the General Staff consulted with the Defense Ministry on the bill, but the final version was the work of the government since the military has no legislative power.

Mr. Druzenko predicted that the presidential administration and the military will toss responsibility for the bill toward one another "like a hot potato."

In an interview with RFE/RL, Iryna Friz, a parliamentarian from the opposition European Solidarity bloc, also suggested that Mr. Zelenskyy is trying to distance himself from the bill to protect his popularity ratings.

Oleksandr Korniyenko, first deputy chairman of the parliament and former head of Servant of the People, rejected the idea that Mr. Zelenskyy was trying to duck responsibility, adding that the bill was a joint product with the military.

Nonetheless, Mr. Zelenskyy steered clear of ownership of the mobilization legisla-

(Continued on page 15)

## Leshchuk sisters perform uplifting 'Kolaida' concert of Ukrainian Christmas carols

### Honor strength and sacrifice of Ukrainian soldiers

by Nicholas Gordon

NEW YORK – December in Ukraine can be a magical time of year: Fresh white snow, festive Christmas markets and the sounds and flavors of the holiday season in abundance. But for the Ukrainian soldiers still defending their country against the full-scale Russian invasion launched by the Kremlin 22 months ago, this December marks yet another holiday season spent away from their families and their homes, immersed in the harsh, dark, cold landscape of war in winter.

The sacrifice these soldiers are making was honored with gratitude and love in a recent "Kolaida" concert of Ukrainian Christmas carols, performed by the Ukrainian-American sisters Kalyna and Uliana Leshchuk at The Ukrainian Museum in New York City.

As the collaborative musical duo Duet Malvy, the Leshchuks – who both sing and play the bandura, a traditional Ukrainian stringed instrument – are making an impact by sharing Ukrainian musical heritage with a broad range of audiences.

Since the start of the war, the Leshchuks have given 24 fundraising performances across the U.S. and Canada, earning funds for humanitarian aid to soldiers and citizens injured by Russian attacks on Ukraine.

At their Kolaida concert, the Leshchuks paid tribute to the strength and resolve of Ukrainians fighting the war, and the legacy of Ukrainians who have fought for the country's independence in times past.

"Today, when you see Ukrainian soldiers on the frontlines fighting this war, you see

scientists and historians, you see musicians and doctors," Kalyna Leshchuk said to the audience between songs. "You see someone's younger brother, someone's sister, someone's son or aunt or uncle. They're all defending our country so we can sleep at night."

With a mix of traditional and contemporary Ukrainian songs and a sound at once wistful and uplifting, the Leshchuks have been performing for a range of different community centers, including concerts at rotary clubs, synagogues, consulates and women's centers.

"It's important for us to reach other communities within American society," Uliana Leshchuk said. "Music is an outlet for us, but we also have to keep playing to keep our Ukrainian traditions alive and share our beautiful culture."

As practicing musicians since childhood, the Leshchuks have now been performing together for nine years. They also play classical piano. Kalyna, 24, is a graduate of Fordham University who has delayed her plans to enroll in medical school as she continues giving concerts to support Ukraine. Uliana, 18, is currently a freshman at Georgetown University, studying law and public policy, while maintaining the duo's busy performance schedule.

In addition to their fundraising efforts, Kalyna and Uliana have given hands-on support to Ukrainians suffering from the war. Last October, they traveled to Ukraine with their mother, Rokslana, on a medical mission, bringing thermal clothing and medical supplies. While they were in Kyiv, Russia launched 84 deadly airstrikes on



Ukrainian-American sisters Kalyna and Uliana Leshchuk honored the sacrifice made by Ukrainian soldiers during a recent "Kolaida" concert of Ukrainian Christmas carols at The Ukrainian Museum in New York City.

Ukraine. Determined to help, Kalyna and Uliana quickly learned how to apply tourniquets and use first aid kits. They also provided moral support.

"We wanted to show Ukrainians who are living through the war every day that we haven't forgotten about them, and we're fighting for them too," Kalyna Leshchuk said.

One of the songs the Leshchuks performed at their Kolaida concert was a carol written in 1946 about young children missing their father who is away at war on Christmas Eve.

"Our traditional songs are applicable today because of the repetition of Ukrainian history," Uliana Leshchuk said. "Ukraine is always fighting for indepen-

dence, and there have been many heroes we honor who have helped us along the way."

Solidarity and gratitude were also shown in the rapturous applause from the crowd of about 50 attendees at the Leshchuks' Kolaida concert.

"At every concert, we see people tearing up and it's pretty powerful to be able to connect with people emotionally while also preserving our culture through song," Uliana Leshchuk said. "We're grateful for all of the support we've received, but this war is not over. Every day Ukrainians are fighting for democracy."

The Leshchuk sisters' upcoming performances can be found on their Facebook page, Duet Malvy.



# 'They keep coming and going by the thousands': Ukraine's frontline troops, residents brace for another year of war

by RFE/RL's Oleksiy Prodayvoda and Current Time

Near BAKHMUT, Ukraine – In the final days of 2023, snow and fog gave way to sunshine along Ukraine's eastern front, but the improved weather brings its own dangers for Ukrainian soldiers operating close to Bakhmut.

For Ukrainian tank crews, the sunny days mean that they need to camouflage themselves and their equipment even more carefully than usual as they continue to repel attacks launched by Russian forces from the nearby city.

A year ago, Bakhmut and other nearby areas were the site of some of the most intense fighting of the war since Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion. Artillery barrages have left the city decimated and under Russian control since the spring, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowing to retake Bakhmut in September.

Now, Oleksandr, a mechanic turned tank operator who asked to be identified by only his first name, spends most of his time holding the Ukrainian line on the outskirts of Bakhmut, where assaults and artillery exchanges have become a fixture of daily life. With the sun shining on a late December day, his crew had been tasked with being ready to shoot from closed positions, only risking open-field fighting – which leaves them exposed to attack drones – on rare occasions.

Conscripted a year ago after initially trying to enlist in the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion, Oleksandr says that his will to fight has only grown, especially amid the high casualty figures that prolonged bloody battles have brought.



Ukrainian soldiers near the village of Klishchivka, outside Bakhmut, hold the line in muddy mine-strewn battlefields.

"My arms and legs are intact. I understand that we don't have enough people, we really don't have enough people," Oleksandr told Current Time, a Russian-language network run by RFE/RL in cooperation with the Voice of America.

"They keep coming and going by the thousands," he added, referring to the Ukrainian soldiers killed and wounded fighting in eastern Ukraine. "Every arm and every leg in Ukraine is worth its weight in gold."

The strategic stasis outside of Bakhmut has come to reflect the war's reality as the new year came. Kyiv's once highly anticipated counteroffensive has largely stalled and Western funding for the war continues to falter amid rising living costs and declining approval ratings across the West.

The Biden administration's proposed \$60 billion aid package to Ukraine to cover

the country's anticipated needs through 2024 has been held up for months amid political deadlock in Washington. As a result, the administration has been forced since August to curtail the size of the bimonthly military aid packages to Ukraine as authorized funding runs dangerously low. The State Department announced on December 28 its latest weapons package for \$250 million, bringing the monthly total to \$450 million. From March 2022 through July 2023, U.S. military aid averaged more than \$1 billion a month.

Despite stalling progress on the battlefield, Ukraine has pressed ahead in recent days with an attack on Russia's Black Sea Fleet near the Crimean port city of Feodosia and December 29 air attacks on southern Russia's Belgorod and Bryansk regions.

Moscow has also stepped up its own

attacks, with Russia firing more than 150 missiles and drones at Ukraine on December 29 in one of the largest bombardments of the war. The aerial attack left 39 people dead, at least 160 wounded, and an unknown number buried under the rubble in the assault, according to Ukraine's Internal Affairs Ministry.

The scale of the bombardment appeared to confirm recent warnings from Western officials and analysts that Russia had been limiting its cruise missile strikes for months in an apparent effort to build up stockpiles for massive barrages during the winter, hoping to break the morale of Ukrainians.

## 'That's how we live'

Less than 12 miles west of Bakhmut, the town of Chasiv Yar's remaining 800 residents have adapted to the grueling reality of wartime life.

Constant barrages from the Russian military have become a fixture of life over the last year but have left much of the town in rubble or its buildings damaged.

Yuriy, a longtime resident of Chasiv Yar, says that it's so cold in his house that the tea in his cup froze. The town lacks any proper heating and most residents subsist on what wood they can gather to burn. But with temperatures dipping and supplies running low, that's proving more difficult by the day.

Yuriy spoke to Current Time while trying to contact his neighbor who had left town to tell him that the windows and doors on her apartment have all been knocked out from shelling. He says that he currently spends his time checking in on her apartment, looking for supplies and warming up

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## Ukrainian American community lobbies Michigan Congressman to address urgent needs in Ukraine

by Olga Tanner

WARREN, Mich. – Members of the Ukrainian-American community, spearheaded by the Ukrainian-American Civic Committee of Metropolitan Detroit (UACC), engaged in a constructive discussion with Rep. John James (R-Mich.) on December 20.

The meeting focused on the war in Ukraine, Russia's unprovoked and unjust war of aggression and the urgent need for military assistance to ensure Ukraine's survival.

The devastating consequences of the war – including civilian and military casualties, the decimation of cities and villages, and the heart-wrenching abduction of countless innocent Ukrainian children – were at the forefront of the agenda, which

was underscored by Vera Petrusha, president of the Ukrainian Children's Aid and Relief Effort (UCARE).

Participants included members of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), the Detroit branch of the Ukrainian National Women's League of America (UNWLA), Post 101 of the Ukrainian American Veterans (UAV), the Ukrainian American Archives and Museum, Ukrainian Selfreliance Michigan Federal Credit Union, Ukrainian Medical Association of North America, UCARE, the Saint Josaphat Ukrainian Catholic Church OLPH Sodality, the Ukrainian Orthodox League of the U.S.A., St. Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral-Pokrova, and other professionals, particularly legal consultants.

The meeting included proactive discussions on overcoming obstacles preventing Congressional approval of a comprehensive aid package for Ukraine. With urgency echoing in their voices, the community outlined Ukraine's critical need for anti-aircraft, anti-missile and anti-ship systems, as well as long-distance rockets. Every participant in the meeting emphasized the need to support Ukraine.

Significant issues that were broached during the meeting included an appeal by Dr. Olena Danylyuk for immediate support for Ukraine's pending \$61 billion supplemental aid package currently being considered by the U.S. Congress.

She also emphasized the need for military aid and the immediate delivery of needed munitions to Ukraine, and she underscored the importance of U.S. leadership in upholding justice and human rights. Supporting Ukraine is not an act of charity, Ms. Danylyuk said, but rather an investment in U.S. national security.

Lidia Gulawsky noted that U.S. weapons have been invaluable in Ukraine's fight for



Members of the Ukrainian American community engaged in a constructive discussion with Rep. John James (R-Mich.) on December 20.

its freedom and survival, but the delivery of those weapons during the previous year was too slow. The U.S. needs to provide Ukraine with the tools needed for success on the battlefield, Ms. Gulawsky said.

Marie Zarycky invited Mr. James to join the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, in which the Congressman's predecessor was influential.

Dr. Zenon Kossak noted that previous aid delivered to Ukraine has undergone stringent oversight and accountability procedures to ensure supplies delivered to the war-torn country are used as intended. He also underscored the critical timing of additional aid as Ukraine's survival hinges on its current defensive capabilities.

A noteworthy bond developed between Alexander Voronovich, a recent graduate of the United States Military Academy West Point, and Mr. James, who is also an alumnus of the prestigious school.

Mr. James, who is well-versed in the complexities of the Russia-Ukraine war, offered words of hope, assuring the meeting's participants that their impassioned appeals would resonate within Congress. He committed to acting as a conduit of their concerns.

As the meeting concluded, a unified sentiment resonated that everything must be done to aid Ukraine as it fights to win the war.

The collective determination to defeat Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime and support the Ukrainian people in pursuing peace and freedom was palpable. The gathering with Mr. James served as a pivotal moment in the ongoing fight for justice and solidarity with Ukraine on the international stage. The participants agreed on continued partnership and a commitment to work together for the betterment of Ukraine and the United States.



Alexander Voronovich (left), a recent graduate of the United States Military Academy West Point, was among a group of Ukrainian Americans who met with U.S. Rep. John James (R-Mich.), who is also an alumnus of the prestigious school.



## THE UKRAINIAN WEEKLY

# A reprehensible display of brutality

As the world bid farewell to 2023, Ukrainians found little solace at the turn of the new year. Russia, in a reprehensible display of brutality, launched its largest aerial attack on Ukraine during the Christmas and New Year holidays, further deepening the wounds of a nation already battered by a 22-month-old full-scale invasion.

The Kyiv City Military Administration reported a grim update on January 3, revealing that the death toll from the deadliest air attack on the capital had risen to 32, with an additional two bodies discovered during criminal investigations. The attack on December 29 unleashed a horrifying barrage of 158 missiles and drones, targeting military installations, critical infrastructure and densely populated areas across the country. In total, over 40 lives were lost, and more than 150 individuals were left injured, marking it as the deadliest missile assault on Kyiv since Russia's invasion began in February 2022.

Amidst the tragic aftermath, Ukraine retaliated with a drone attack on Russia's Belgorod, leading to an escalation in hostilities. The conflict spilled over into the new year, with Russia's Defense Ministry claiming the destruction of 12 Ukrainian-launched missiles over the Belgorod region. The purported Ukrainian shelling on December 30 allegedly resulted in more than two dozen casualties, a stark reminder that the spiral of violence shows no signs of abating.

Ukrainian Joint Forces Commander Serhiy Nayev acknowledged that their mobile air defenses, though resilient, would require additional Western aid to endure more potent attacks. The situation remains dire as Russia persisted with major bombardments, launching another assault on January 2 that claimed five lives and injured dozens in Kyiv and Kharkiv.

The Ukrainian people, already weathering the trauma of persistent missile strikes, greeted the new year with trepidation. Death and destruction loomed over their celebrations, as Russian missiles continued to terrorize cities and dampen the spirit of the holiday season.

Both Russia and Ukraine consistently deny deliberately targeting civilian areas, yet the mounting evidence of civilian casualties inflicted by the Kremlin paints a grim picture of the toll exacted on innocent lives. The tragic irony of these assaults occurring during a time traditionally associated with peace and goodwill underscores the heartlessness of Russia's actions.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in a New Year's Eve message, rallied his countrymen to stand resilient in the face of adversity. He emphasized the collective responsibility to shape a better future, acknowledging the sacrifices made to defend the nation. Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin's annual address sidestepped the Belgorod incident, urging Russians to focus on the future and praising the military's actions in Ukraine.

As the conflict intensifies, the international community must condemn Russia's attacks on civilians and arm Ukraine with the weapons it needs to finally end this war and ensure it has a protective aerial dome that can continue to knock Moscow's projectiles out of the sky. The tragic loss of life during the holiday season serves as a somber reminder of the urgent need for Ukraine to win this war and allow its long-suffering people to rebuild their lives and usher in a new year free from the specter of war. May the new year bring a decisive Ukrainian victory and peace throughout the country, once and for all.

Jan.  
11  
1952

## Turning the pages back...

Seventy-two years ago, on January 11, 1952, more than 100 U.S. Congressmen of the Republican Party, including Minority Leader Joseph W. Martin, Jr., and Minority Whip Leslie Arenda, urged U.S. Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson to take up a call for an immediate investigation by the United Nations General Assembly of genocide being perpetrated by the Soviet Union.

An appeal was issued by some 12 million American citizens of Eastern European descent that urged Mr. Acheson to try to place an investigation of Soviet genocide on the agenda of the U.N. General Assembly.

Rep. Charles J. Kersten of Wisconsin, spokesman for the Republican Congressmen, said that, from the time when the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, the Soviets "have been engaged in genocidal acts against their subjugated people ... and have followed a systematical plan of annihilation of the peoples they fear so greatly."

Mr. Kersten enumerated several examples of Soviet genocide. "The slaughter of the Polish Army Officers at Katyn [Forest]; of thousands of Ukrainians at Vinnytsia; the present mass deportation of Hungarians; and the forced replacement of Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian husbands and fathers with men who have been imported from behind the Urals, are only some of the examples of Soviet genocide."

Mr. Kersten said that the U.S. had been too timid in its actions in the United Nations. "We are continually apologizing and defending ourselves against false charges but make no effort to proffer any charges ourselves," he said. "To date, the record of the United Nations shows a multitude of the false charges made by the Soviets against the United States, but virtually none of the true charges which the United States could levy against the Soviet Union. If an archaeologist 10,000 years hence digs through the United Nations ruins and succeeds in translating the hieroglyphics, he would reasonably but erroneously conclude that in the 20th century the United States was a most

(Continued on page 7)

## How the Russian...

(Continued from page 2)

Article 280.3 of the Criminal Code, which criminalizes the "repeated" discrediting of the armed forces. That law stipulates prison terms of up to five years for defendants who have already been punished under KoAP 20.3.3. For instance, on December 28, 86-year-old Orthodox Archbishop Viktor Pivovarov was charged under the law in the Krasnodar region.

"I said during interrogation that the current government is acting illegally," Mr. Pivovarov, whose small confession is separate from the state-allied Russian Orthodox Church, told RFE/RL. "It is the heirs of those who carried out the Bolshevik coup in 1917 and is continuing their Satanic work."

The year 2023 also saw a dramatic uptick in the application of the criminal law against disseminating "false" information about the war in Ukraine, particularly cases allegedly motivated by "political hatred" (Criminal Code Article 207.3). At least 794 defendants were charged under the article in 2023, OVD-Info reported. Siberian journalist Maria Ponomarenko was one of the most prominent defendants convicted under this article. In February, she was sentenced to six years in prison, after spending nearly a year in pretrial detention.

In May, she was transferred to a prison more than 1,000 kilometers away from her under-aged children, and in November she was charged with attacking a prison official, which could add another five years to her sentence.

### 'Significantly harsher'

There were also at least 16 criminal cases opened in 2023 on the charge of "justifying terrorism," which is covered by Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code. Many of the cases involved people who commented on the wave of attacks on military recruiting offices around Russia or on the attacks that damaged the Crimea Bridge, which connects Russia to the occupied Ukrainian peninsula.

Also in 2023, lawmakers criminalized the "justification" of extremism, which OVD-Info analysts predicted could portend a coming wave of prosecutions for anyone commenting on any individual or organization figuring on the Kremlin's list of purported extremists.

Lawmakers also added Article 280.4 to the Criminal Code in 2023, criminalizing statements or actions running counter to national security. In recent months, at least 134 cases have been opened under the new law, at least 10 of which were connected with statements criticizing Russia's 2022 military mobilization for the war against Ukraine.

At least 43 journalists were caught up in the wave of repressions in 2023 on a variety of charges usually related to statements about the war in Ukraine. Two American journalists – Evan Gershkovich of The Wall Street Journal and Alsu Kurmasheva of RFE/RL – were arrested in Russia in 2023 and remain in pretrial detention.

In 2023, 217 individuals and organizations were added to the Justice Ministry's list of "foreign agents." Fifty-three organizations were declared "undesirable" in Russia, compared to 23 in 2022. The non-existent "international LGBT social movement" was banned and labeled extremist on November 30. At least 75 Jehovah's Witnesses were charged with crimes related to "extremism" in 2023.

There were at least 45 cases under laws criminalizing the "rehabilitation of Nazism," including a case in Kurgan where a man was fined 2 million rubles (\$22,300) for



Video screen grab

**"The foundation of civil society has been destroyed," says Mariana Katzarova, the first United Nations special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Russia.**

lighting a cigarette using the local eternal flame war memorial. Volunteers with the banned Memorial human rights group were charged under the article after it was discovered that three of the tens of thousands of names included in the group's database of victims of Stalinist repression were people who had collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.

"This year laws concerning public statements, 'foreign agents,' and 'terrorist activity' were made significantly harsher," said OVD-Info analyst Yelizaveta Shtiglits. "Apparently, the latter was in response to the attacks on recruiting centers and railroad lines. They have begun adopting new laws on public statements, including calls for anti-government activity or the repeated display of banned symbols and so on."

### What the future holds

In April, the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed Bulgarian activist Mariana Katzarova as the first-ever U.N. special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Russia.

She told Current Time, the Russian-language network run by RFE/RL in cooperation with the Voice of America (VOA), that the situation in Russia is "very difficult."

"This doesn't mean that activists and rights monitors are not still working in the Russian Federation," she said, noting that she has received more than 200 reports from activists in the country so far. "They are working, but the foundation of civil society has been destroyed."

Since Moscow's unprovoked massive invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, she said, "we see ... a situation in which all law-making and state activity is aimed at stifling the voices of the people, the voices of civil society and the anti-war messages of the people."

"I believe that the war became possible because of the enormous repressions within Russian society," Ms. Katzarova added.

Such trends will continue and intensify in 2024, OVD-Info's Shtiglits said.

"We can't forget that during the last year, a whole raft of new articles have been added to the security agencies' arsenal that will enable them to even more actively prosecute expressions of opinion or cooperation with various organizations," she said. "The laws on state-security crimes have been made significantly harsher."

(Written by RFE/RL's Robert Coalson with reporting by Current Time)

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# Russian Armed...

(Continued from page 2)

alleged success in its recruitment efforts.

The table on the right shows Russian recruitment numbers for contracted soldiers and volunteers since January 1, 2023.

The linear dynamics of Russia's military recruitment was explained earlier and continues to follow the same general pattern (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 28; November 16). A significant portion of the officially reported statistics on newly-recruited contracted soldiers come from existing conscripts whose contracts of 15 months have expired, since September 2022. In addition, the Kremlin counts many volunteers and prisoners who signed short-term contracts, for less than 12 months, and then signed new contracts as fresh recruits. In this way, they are being "double-counted" during the calendar year. The inclusion of volunteers and prisoners in these statistics remains dubious, as combat formations of prisoners (e.g., "Storm-Z" units) and volunteer formations are separated from the regular army. As a result, the true number of those who actually signed initial contracts with the Russian Armed Forces during 2023 remains unclear, but it is likely several times lower than 490,000.

Russia's more "creative" means of military recruitment have also struggled to maintain pace. For example, Moscow has continued to recruit labor migrants, primarily from Central Asia, to shore up its manpower deficits on the front. The Kremlin has access to hundreds of thousands of labor migrants and has offered

Date	Russian Official	Number of Recruits
May 19	Dmitry Medvedev	117,400
June 1	Dmitry Medvedev	134,000
June 13	Vladimir Putin	156,000
June 22	Sergei Shoigu	166,000
August 3	Dmitry Medvedev	231,000
September 3	Dmitry Medvedev	280,000
September 15	Vladimir Putin	300,000
September 26	Dmitry Medvedev	325,000
October 12	Dmitry Medvedev	357,000
November 9	Dmitry Medvedev	410,000
December 1	Dmitry Medvedev	452,000
December 14	Vladimir Putin	486,000
December 19	Sergei Shoigu	490,000

additional monthly payments to attract more "volunteers." Yet, Moscow's coercive methods only managed to recruit 22,000 soldiers between January 1 and November 15. The Moscow authorities even organized police raids with the aim of forcibly recruiting more migrants for military service (Mos.ru, November 15; Contract.mos.ru, accessed December 20, 2023; Agents.media, November 24; Bbc.com/Russian, December 1).

In contrast, the declared number of 244,000 Russian troops deployed in the combat zone is likely more reflective of reality. There is growing evidence, however, of severe understaffing for regular military units. Daily combat operations are consistently conducted by small tactical groups that rarely exceed the size of a platoon (about 30 soldiers) and are usually even smaller.

Some officers of the 70th Motor Rifle

Division have been replenished with captain-lieutenants from the Russian Navy's ranks (T.me/vanek\_nikolaev, December 2). The 25th Combined Arms Army, which was formed this summer, has been partially reinforced with military personnel from other ground force units and even from other branches of the Russian military (Vk.com, June 5). A Russian prisoner of war who served as a contracted soldier at the Plesetsk Cosmodrome revealed in a recent interview that he was recruited to the ground forces and sent to the front with minimal training (Youtube.com/dmytro-karpenko, December 7). Another Russian prisoner of war recently claimed that he commanded a motor rifle platoon that consisted of only eight soldiers (Youtube.com/VolodymyrZolkin, December 10).

All this testifies that Moscow's military recruitment efforts over the past year have done little to reverse the trend of growing

manpower deficits on the front. The "horizontal" recruitment of military personnel from other branches of the armed forces who are not directly participating in the war together with the recruitment of prisoners and those Russians suffering from poverty and unemployment have been the main sources of the Kremlin's "new" recruits (Istories.media, November 2).

The understaffing of military units remains a systemic problem for the Russian Armed Forces. The Kremlin will presumably continue to report inflated statistics to save face with an increasingly frustrated domestic population. The Russian military leadership has promised to increase the number of contracted soldiers to 745,000 by the end of 2024, up from 695,000 by the end of 2026 as was planned last year (Kremlin.ru, December 21, 2022; Kremlin.ru, December 19). Consequently, the Russian Ministry of Defense is either doomed to develop further tricks for manipulating recruitment statistics or plans to reach 745,000 only on paper to justify further increases to the defense budget. This approach may correlate with the growing number of Russian generals needed to command the increased number of military units (Publication.pravo.gov.ru, December 6). These units will likely remain permanently understaffed but would serve as "evidence" for the Kremlin's claims of success in its military recruitment efforts.

The article above is reprinted from Eurasia Daily Monitor with permission from its publisher, the Jamestown Foundation, [www.jamestown.org](http://www.jamestown.org).

# Russia sends...

(Continued from page 1)

More than 40 people were killed and at least 160 civilians were injured alone countrywide on December 29, Ukrainian authorities said.

Defending against the airborne attacks is quickly depleting Ukraine's air defenses.

Ukraine will have to eventually "start rationing what supplies they do have" left, Matt Duss, executive vice president of the Center for International Policy, told The Hill.

Air defense remains Kyiv's "number one priority," Mr. Zelenskyy said in his nightly address to the nation on January 4. "Our defenders of the sky are doing everything possible to protect the state. The entire team of our diplomats, all those responsible for communication with partners, and Ukrainian representatives abroad are doing everything they can to ensure the delivery of additional air defense systems and missiles."

"The mounting attacks and casualties come as both sides settle in for a protracted war after Russia's full-scale invasion, launched in February 2022, failed to achieve its aims despite the killing or wounding of hundreds of thousands of troops and civilians," the London-based Financial Times reported.

Moscow's massive aerial attacks came amid a three-week U.S. Congressional recess that is scheduled to end on January 19 with U.S. President Joe Biden still asking for over \$60 billion worth of mostly security assistance.

Brussels, where most of the European Union's institutions are based, is also still wavering on a 20-billion-euro (\$21.4 billion) security assistance package for Kyiv.

The White House has exhausted what Congress – which wields the "power of the purse" – was authorized to give Ukraine, U.S. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said on January 3.



Explosions at a military Russian command and control center in Sevastopol and a sophisticated radar system in Yevpatoriya – both on the occupied Crimean Peninsula – were reported by various open-source intelligence groups on January 4.

"There's no other magical pot to dip into," Mr. Kirby said as a cohort of radical Republican lawmakers have stalled on reconvening an ad-hoc session to vote to approve additional funding for Kyiv.

Overall, the U.S. federal government's total public debt "has reached \$34 trillion for the first time," Reuters reported, citing the Treasury Department.

**Russian losses**

Before Russia's five-day bombardment, Ukraine severely damaged Russia's Novocherkassk tank landing ship at the Crimean port city of Feodosiya on December 28 to the further embarrassment of Russia's navy.

Kyiv is estimated to have destroyed or rendered combat-incapable 20 percent of Russia's Black Sea naval fleet despite not having any warships.

A Russian Sukhoi-34 "Fullback" multi-role strike jet was shown on January 4 burning at an airfield in Chelyabinsk, more than 1,242 miles from the Ukrainian border, according to a video that Ukraine's defense intelligence agency published on its Telegram channel.

The same day, the strategic communica-

tions department of Ukraine's Armed Forces said that a Russian command and control post was struck in the Black Sea port city of Sevastopol, which serves as the headquarters of its Black Sea Fleet.

Open-source intelligence sites recorded another explosion at the Crimean city of Yevpatoriya, reportedly at a radar center.

**Russia using rockets from North Korea**

Mr. Kirby also separately noted on January 4 that Russia has begun firing rockets at Ukraine provided by North Korea, corroborating a Wall Street Journal (WSJ) story published earlier in the day.

"We anticipate that Russia will use additional North Korean missiles to target Ukraine's civilian infrastructure," he said on C-SPAN.

The Kremlin is also moving "forward with plans to buy Iranian ballistic missiles," the WSJ story reported.

Responding to the Russian aerial attacks, U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink said that Moscow has "only strengthened the resolve of Ukrainians to defend their freedom and ours to support Ukraine in their existential fight."

To further bolster Ukraine's air defenses, the German government announced on January 4 that it will provide a Skynex air-defense system to Ukraine, as well as 10 Marder armored vehicles, ammunition for Leopard tanks that it has already provided and more IRIS-T air-defense systems, among other materials.

of the enslaved peoples both in the Soviet Union and satellite countries, particularly the underground movements within the Soviet Union. Practical assistance to dissidents and defectors was also among the aims of the Kersten Amendment to the Mutual Security Act of 1951.

Source: "Republican Congressmen demand expose of Soviet genocide," *The Ukrainian Weekly*, January 21, 1952.

# Turning...

(Continued from page 6)

reprehensible nation and the Soviet Union a most exemplary one."

A Kersten Amendment, drafted by Dr. Lev E. Dobriansky of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, was being prepared to support the liberation struggle



# Plast members share Bethlehem Peace Light

by Roma Hadzewycz

WHIPPANY, N.J. – The Bethlehem Peace Light was shared on Saturday, December 9, during a special ceremony at St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church in Whippany, N.J., that was organized by Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization. Participating were members of the local Plast branch, as well as parishioners and community members.

The Peace Light had arrived in the United States a few days earlier, landing on December 3 at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York, where a special ceremony was held at Our Lady of the Skies Chapel. In attendance were scouts of various nationalities who accepted the holy flame to share in their communities.

The light had come from Vienna, brought there by Austrian scouts who lit a lantern from the everlasting flame that burns in Bethlehem. Scouts worldwide, including Plast members in Ukraine, partic-



Walter Hanchuk

Members of Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization with the Rev. Stepan Bilyk at St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church in Whippany, N.J., are seen following the Bethlehem Peace Light ceremony.

ipate in distributing the light.

Members of Plast's "Ti, Shcho Hrebli Rvut" sorority ("Hrebli") travel each year to JFK Airport to receive the flame and then distribute it further. This year, members of the sorority came from New Jersey and Ontario for the ceremony marking the 22nd anniversary of the Peace Light in North America.

The "Hrebli" then organized and conducted the annual Bethlehem Peace Light ceremony at St. John's Church in Whippany, N.J., with the participation of scouts of Plast's Newark branch (Through chartered in Newark, the branch is now based in Whippany, N.J., at the Ukrainian American

Cultural Center of New Jersey.)

Addressing the gathering, Larissa Wowk described the Peace Light as a symbol of hope, love and unity, emphasizing that, "In a world marked by conflict, it is essential for us to embrace the responsibility of spreading this message of peace."

Speaking of Ukraine, she pointed out that "the echoes of war continue to reverberate for a second year." The toll of this war includes countless "loved ones lost, families torn apart, ... towns and cities completely destroyed and millions displaced, their lives disrupted and dreams shattered."

(Continued on page 11)



Roma Hadzewycz

The Bethlehem Peace Light is shared with Plast members.

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STAND WITH UKRAINE



## Spartanky Plast sorority holds annual retreat and conference, elects new leadership



Courtesy of Anya Tomko

The Spartanky sorority of Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization held its annual retreat and conference on October 27-29 on Long Beach Island in New Jersey.

by Irene Sawchyn Doll

SURF CITY, N.J. – The Spartanky Plast sorority held their annual retreat and conference on October 27-29 on Long Beach Island in New Jersey.

Forty-nine members from the northeast of the United States, including 32 and 17 members from the senior and younger divisions, respectively, gathered to refresh their commitments to the Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization and the Spartanky sorority by reviewing their accomplishments from the past year and planning projects for the coming 12 months.

The conference took place amid extraordinarily warm and balmy weather that was ideal for the beach location. The attendees were housed primarily in the private homes of member Anya Tomko and adjacent neighbors, with the beach

just a stone's throw from the conference meeting.

The reunion started on Friday night with an informal dinner at a local restaurant, followed by games played gleefully and icebreakers organized by members of the younger Spartanky division.

Both divisions enthusiastically welcomed new candidates: six to the younger division, and three candidates to the senior division. Five of last year's younger candidates were inducted as full members.

The formal deliberations started on Saturday morning with a review of the accomplishments of the past year. The New York/New England chapter had a very successful "Winter Outing Day" at Holiday Mountain Ski and Fun Park in Sullivan County, N.Y.

During the summer, members from both divisions collaborated to test over 100

older campers for Plast's Physical Fitness Badge requirements at the Vovcha Tropa campground in East Chatham, N.Y.

The New Jersey chapter organized a successful Ecology Day event, and a one-day horse-riding trip was already set for the following week. The younger division organized a fundraiser for scout camps in Ukraine, as well as a volleyball tournament during Labor Day weekend.

Plans were made to continue these projects in the coming year and provide additional support for Plast scouting in Ukraine.

The highlight of the meeting was an emotional Zoom call with younger Spartanky from western Ukraine. These dedicated young women organize a two-week Scout camp called "KVEST," which Spartanky members in Ukraine organize with the Plast fraternity Xmelnychenky. The camp had 60 participants last year. The

call concluded with an emotional singing of the Ukrainian national anthem.

A new leadership board was elected for the senior Spartanky division: Vira Myskiw agreed to continue as president for a third year, Oresta Olexy was elected vice-president, Katya Savvitsky was elected secretary and Kiki Zynych Nalyvajko was elected treasurer.

The new chapter leaders are Christina Centore and Alexandra Petrenko for N.Y./New England; Roma Maksymovych and Danusia Mandicz were elected for New Jersey, and Anna deVassal and Funia Luchanko were chosen for Philadelphia.

The rest of Saturday afternoon was spent at the beach, with everyone rejoicing in the last warm rays of sun for the year, before returning home refreshed and enthusiastic for continuing their work as Spartanky scouts.

## Carnegie Hall to host gala performance of inaugural Ukrainian Music Competition

by Oksana Sorochan

NEW YORK – The Ukrainian Music Competition was established in May 2023 to celebrate Ukraine's rich musical heritage by encouraging the younger generation to learn and perform music by Ukrainian composers, nurture the musical talents of the young generation and provide them with a platform to showcase their skills.

The competition was organized by the Young Performers Foundation together with the New Jersey Regional Council of the Ukrainian National Women's League of America (UNWLA).

The first round took place on June 3, 2023, and the second round was held at the Ukrainian National Home in New York City on June 11, 2023.

Some amazing young musicians from different cultural backgrounds performed for the cause. After careful deliberation and consideration by a panel of judges, 30 winners in five age groups have been invited to perform in a gala recital that will be held in Carnegie Hall on January 12.

For the first edition of the competition, participants were invited to perform a composition by a Ukrainian composer, an original composition on a Ukrainian theme or a free program to show their support for the people of Ukraine.

The next competition will begin in May. Participants are invited to perform one or several compositions by a Ukrainian composer, an original composition or a composition by a composer born in Ukraine.

Teachers of three or more winners are invited to perform at the same recital as their students. Applications for the next competition can be found online at <https://youngperformersfoundation.com/#ukrainiancompetition>.

The event is more than just a competition. It is a cultural exchange where participants share their favorite musical styles and influences, and it is a celebration of Ukraine's musical heritage, a nurturing ground for young talent and a symbol of hope and unity. As it evolves, it promises to continue shining a spotlight on the rich tapestry of Ukrainian music and culture.

Winning or even participating in the competition can be a significant milestone in a young musician's career. It opens doors to new opportunities, such as scholarships, invitations to perform at various events and recognition from established musicians and institutions.

As the event continues to grow, it has attracted attention from international audiences and musicians. The competition is dedicated to Yuriy Leonidovych Kerpatenko, a conductor from the Kherson Philharmonic, who was murdered by Russian forces.

The southern Ukrainian city of Kherson, where the Dnipro River meets the Black Sea, was under Russian occupation from March 2, 2022, to November 9, 2022. During that time, the citizens of Kherson continued to resist but were largely overpowered by the Russian military.

Mr. Kerpatenko, who chose to remain in

Kherson, was asked to conduct an international concert on October 1, 2022, by Russian occupation forces to demonstrate the so-called improvement of peaceful life in Kherson. He fiercely refused. For that act of protest, he was shot and killed in his home.

For centuries, during the occupation of Ukraine first by the Russian Empire and then by the Soviet Union, Ukrainian culture and language was heavily suppressed. Many talented composers were executed, among them Mykola Leontovych, whose famous Carol of the Bells was performed all over the world during the Christmas season. Others, such as Vasyl Barvinsky, were denounced and sentenced to more than a decade of imprisonment by Soviet authorities.

The final gala performance of the inaugural Ukrainian Music Competition will take place on January 12 at 7 p.m. in Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall.

Presented by the UNWLA's New Jersey Regional Council, the performance will showcase the winners of the first Ukrainian Music Competition in support of those fighting to defend the Ukrainian nation and its culture.

The evening will also include performances by renowned musicians who also served as judges of the competition, among them violinist Dr. Solomiya Ivakhiv, a soloist, recitalist, chamber music collaborator, champion of new music, dedicated educator and an associate professor of violin and viola at the University of Connecticut; cellist Valeriya Sholokhova, who is an active

soloist and chamber musician based in New York City; pianist Dr. Michael Bulychev-Okser, who is the founder and artistic director of the George Gershwin International Music Competition in New York and the Baltic Stars Music Festival in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland; violinist Gene Hahn, who is the founder of Eclectic String Music Ensemble; pianist Dr. Pavel Gintov, who served as head of jury and is among the brightest concert pianists in the Ukrainian music scene.

The program will include performances on the piano, strings and vocal music of well-known and contemporary Ukrainian composers, among them Borys Lyatoshynsky, Gennady Sasko, Elena Cobb, Hanna Havrylets, Igor Shamo, Krystyna Prisyazhnyuk, Ludmila Shukailo, Mykola Leontovych, Mykola Lysenko, Myroslav Skoryk, Serge Bortkiewicz, Taras Petrynenko, Theodore Akimenko, Valentin Silvestrov and Viktor Kosenko.

The evening also will include a premier of Nocturne and Sonata Allegro dedicated to the heroes of Ukraine, composed and performed by Olga Alino, who is a pianist and teacher of four winners of the competition. The gala will also include the premiere of sonata for violin and piano by Philina Zhang, the grand prize winner of the Chamber Music competition category.

The evening will include a range of styles, from Ukrainian folk songs to contemporary music. Proceeds from the ticket sales for the event will go to continued advocacy for Ukrainian culture.



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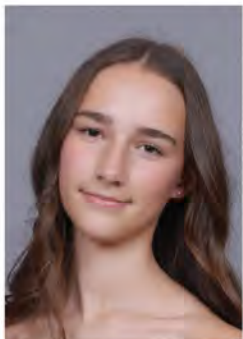
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# Plast members...

(Continued from page 8)

"Amidst this darkness, the Bethlehem Peace Light serves as a beacon, reminding us of our shared humanity," she said. "We can all contribute to a global atmosphere of peace through small acts of kindness, empathy and cooperation. Share the warmth of the Bethlehem Peace Light with those around you. In doing so, we will amplify the flame of hope."

Lada Bidiak spoke about the history of the Peace Light and its remarkable global journey.

The Rev. Stepan Bilyk, pastor of St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church in Whippany, N.J., asked all to share this holy

light with their families, friends, neighbors and colleagues.



Finally, as Plast members under the direction of Ksenia Salewycz sang the beautiful Bethlehem Peace Light song written by Solomiya Keyvan of Ukraine, all present had the opportunity to light their lanterns and candles from the Peace Light.

The "Ti, Shcho Hrebli Rvut" sorority has managed the distribution of the Peace Light since 2009, when the National Executive Board of Plast in the U.S. requested that it take charge of this scout project for the organization. The "Hrebli" have continued this mission ever since, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, when a virtual sharing of the Peace Light took place via Zoom for Plast members throughout the United States.



Peace Light Plast North America

Members of the "Ti, Shcho Hrebli Rvut" sorority of Plast who traveled from New Jersey and Ontario to New York's JFK International Airport to receive the Bethlehem Peace Light: (from left) Daria Kowalyk, Mary Kolodij, Larissa Wowk and Chrystia Kolos.


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## NEWSBRIEFS

(Continued from page 2)

### Ukraine says 'no plan B' on assistance

Ukraine has expressed confidence in its hopes for ongoing international aid to help beat back the 22-month-old Russian full-scale invasion despite talk in the West of Ukraine fatigue and Kyiv's dwindling ammunition for air defenses, saying there's no "plan B" and calling military and other assistance an "investment" in transatlantic security. Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Minister Dmytro Kuleba told CNN on January 3 when asked about U.S. lawmakers' rejection so far of billions more in aid that "We don't have a Plan B. We are confident in Plan A." "Ukraine will always fight with the resources given to it. And ... what is given to Ukraine is not charity. It's an investment in the protection of NATO [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and in the protection of the prosperity of the American people." The remarks coincide with a warning from the commander of Ukrainian joint forces, Serhiy Nayev, following two massive Russian bombardments of Ukrainian cities and other targets that his country will soon struggle to withstand such attacks with its present supply of air defense ammunition. "The current situation with man-portable air defense systems for mobile air-defense groups is that there is enough ammunition to withstand the next few powerful attacks," Mr. Nayev said. Russian hypersonic and other missile attacks combined with drone strikes blanketed Ukraine on December 29 and again on January 2, killing more than 40 people and injuring dozens more. U.S. President Joe Biden has argued that continuing aid to Ukraine is essential to U.S. and Western security against an increasingly aggressive Russia three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The State Department on January 3 denied as "not true" a report suggesting that Washington and European officials want Kyiv to adopt a new strategy

focused on talks to end the war rather than the total victory that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pledged. Pressure mounted after the commander of Ukrainian forces, Gen. Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, said in The Economist on November 1 that "the level of technology" had put the conflict with Russia "into a stalemate." Mr. Zelenskyy responded by saying that, "We cannot afford any stalemate," spurring talk of a growing rift between the wartime president and his generals. Some European leaders have pledged to boost Ukraine aid, but a U.S. congressional deadlock and the ongoing war between Israel and the U.S.- and European Union-designated terrorist organization Hamas in the Gaza Strip have highlighted potentially shifting priorities. In his remarks to CNN, Foreign Affairs Minister Kuleba rejected the idea that Ukraine was in an "attention war" with the Israeli conflict in Gaza, adding that "every war is a tragedy by definition wherever it takes place." Mr. Kuleba cited media and journalists' focus but said, "We don't feel any lack of attention when it comes to officials, when it comes to our negotiations with partners." He downplayed fears that what's been dubbed Ukraine fatigue would end, rather than slow or complicate, efforts by the United States and other allies to provide military and other aid to his country. "As far as we see it from here, from Kyiv, the debate is centered on the domestic issue of border [security] in the United States, and therefore we understand that support to Ukraine is not being questioned as such," Mr. Kuleba said. He called the recent massive missile-and-drone bombardments by Russia "an alarm, a reminder to everyone that something unprecedented is happening in this part of the world, that this war is not frozen, the war is not forgotten, and the aid should be provided as soon as possible." (RFE/RL)

### Ukraine's economy registers growth in 2023

Despite the Russian invasion, Ukraine's economy registered a spike in growth in 2023, the economy minister said on December 28. "The main figure that charac-

terizes this year in the economy is an almost 5 percent GDP growth. Our economy not only did not fall but grew at a pace that no one expected," Yulia Svyrydenko, the economy minister, said on Facebook. Ukraine is looking to strengthen its financial resources for what could be a protracted war as fighting grinds on through the winter and likely into a third year after Russia launched its unprovoked, full-scale invasion in February 2022. Ms. Svyrydenko's comments come after a civilian cargo ship struck a Russian mine in the Black Sea

near Ukraine's Danube River ports earlier on December 28, injuring two sailors, officials said. The Panama-flagged vessel struck the floating mine during stormy weather as it went to pick up grain, according to Ukraine's southern command. After Russia pulled out of a United Nations-brokered export agreement last summer, Ukraine launched a new Black Sea shipping corridor to get grain and other cargo to world markets. That has given a boost to

(Continued on page 19)



We are heartbroken to announce the passing of

## Sofia Wacyk

(née Balycka)

on December 3rd, 2023 at 98 years of age.

She was born on July 26, 1925 in Zolota Sloboda, Berezhany district, Ukraine.

Sofia was:

- a member of the of UNWLA Branch 1 for over 50 years
- a member of Mariyska Druzhyna at St. George Ukrainian Catholic Church in New York City for over 30 years
- a longtime volunteer at Stricha at St. George Church

She is survived by:

- her son Ihor with wife Marta and daughter Roxolana
- her son Steven with wife Lori and son Nicolas

Donations in Sofia's memory may be sent to The Ukrainian Museum, 222 East 6th Street, New York, NY 10003; (theukrainianmuseum.org)

May her memory be eternal.



## Maria (Wawa) Iwanna Baczynskyj

January 19, 1947 - December 26, 2023

After a lengthy illness, Wawa passed away on December 26, 2023.

Wawa was born in Vienna, Austria, the daughter of Ukrainian World War II refugees, her father an Auschwitz survivor. Arriving in the US in 1948, she grew up in Philadelphia. Wawa participated in the Ukrainian American community throughout her life, as an active member of PLAST Ukrainian Scouting Organization, and the Federation of Ukrainian Student Organizations of America (SUSTA). One of her favorite pastimes was telling animated stories at Plastovi vatri.



Wawa attended University of Pennsylvania (1968), went on to attain a Master's Degree in German at Tufts University (1969) and a second Master's Degree in Social Work at Smith College (1979). For many years she lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts devotedly working at Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute (HURI). Afterwards, she dedicated herself to helping Indochinese refugees and other immigrants with trauma. In between, she taught German. In Cambridge, her home was always open to hosting Harvard Ukrainian Summer Program students and dissidents from Ukraine as well as helping families with children affected by the Chernobyl disaster.

In 2003 she moved to Ukraine after being awarded a Fulbright scholarship to conduct a pilot project in social work at the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) in Lviv. Following this, she joined the faculty of the UCU, and also lectured at the Lviv Polytechnic University. She spent the next 14 years in Ukraine working as a social worker, faculty member, lecturer, trainer, and translator, as well as monitoring Ukrainian media on behalf of international broadcasters. She worked supporting Ukrainian soldiers who suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of the Russian invasion of 2014.

Wawa was an outgoing personality who cared deeply about people, and valued the many close friendships she made throughout her life.

Wawa was predeceased by her brother Boris, and is survived by her sister Ulana, brother-in-law Roman, sister-in-law Zwen, and many other grieving family members and friends, here and in Ukraine.

Funeral Services were held on December 30, 2023 at St. Michael the Archangel Ukrainian Catholic Church in Jenkintown PA. Interment was private.

May she rest in eternal peace.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in memory of Wawa Maria Baczynskyj to:

- Ukrainian Catholic University Foundation  
2247 West Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622
- RAZOM: Razom With You - Psychological Support Program  
140 2nd Ave., Suite 305, New York, NY 10003

The 40th Day memorial services will take place in:

**Philadelphia area:** Saturday, February 3rd, at 9:00 am at St. Michael the Archangel Ukrainian Catholic Church, 1013 Fox Chase Rd., Jenkintown, PA;  
**Boston area:** Sunday, February 4th, at 11:30 am at Christ the King Ukrainian Catholic Church, 146 Forest Hills St., Jamaica Plain, MA.

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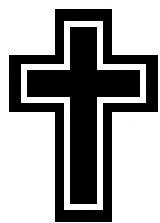
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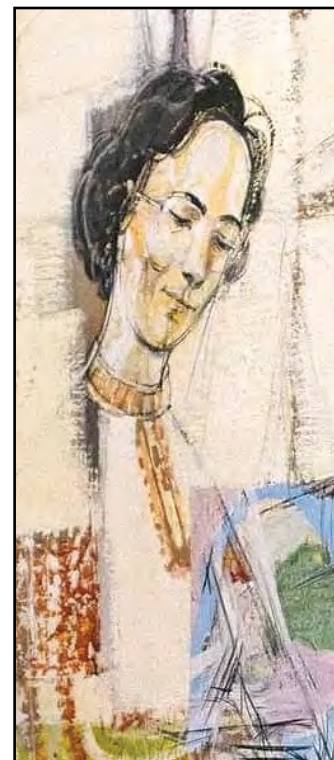
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## In Memoriam Stephanie Volodymyra Szypula (1929–2023)



On December 19, 2023, at the age of 94, Stephanie (Stefania) Szypula reposed in the Lord. The deceased was the aunt of Metropolitan Borys Gudziak and Dr. Marko Gudziak, sister of their late mother Yaroslava. A native of Ukraine, Stefania resided in New York City for almost 75 years.

Born on January 6, 1929, in Zolochiv, Lviv Region, into the family of Mykhailo Szypula and Oksana née Skorna, she was the youngest of three daughters.

Stefania grew up in a household full of love, integrity, and a sense of social responsibility but at the age of 10, the outbreak of the Second World War scarred her family and changed her life forever. The devastation of WWII experienced by young Stefania affected her life. The tragedy of an unjust aggression and genocidal crimes against humanity returned to her beloved Ukraine at the twilight of Stefania's earthly journey. In 1941 — much like in Bucha and other towns occupied by Russians last year — after the retreat of the Soviet army, mutilated corpses of Ukrainian community leaders and activists were found in prisons throughout western Ukraine, including the one located in the Zolochiv castle. She often recounted how as a 12-year-old she carried buckets of water to assist people in washing and identifying the decomposing bodies of their executed loved ones. Many of the Szypula family members and friends were killed by the Soviets or sent to Siberia. With pain, she shared memories of the Holocaust, of a Jewish girl, her neighbor, and schoolmate who perished, as did most Zolochiv Jews.

The war and the post-war displacement, during which she lost her mother and sister, deprived the talented girl of the opportunity for a normal secondary and higher education. In America, where the family arrived in 1949, she took courses to become a medical technologist and thereafter worked in the Sloan Kettering Cancer Center for 40 years, where she was known for her punctuality, attention to detail, and exemplary sense of responsibility. Stefania had many gifts, including an excellent memory: she knew by heart the poems of Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko. She was fluent in five languages: Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, German, and English. She was an avid reader. Stefania sang gently and loved opera. She was a refined cook and baked exquisite tortes. Her delicate varenyky were a family legend.

The independence of Ukraine, the revival of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), and the establishment and development of the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) were dreams that motivated Stefania throughout her life.

Without a family of her own, Stefania cherished her sister and her sister's family, doting on nephews Borys and Marko, and later Marko's family — wife Roma and children Kateryna (João), Gregory, and Zachary, demonstrating quiet generosity and moral solidarity.

\*\*\*

Stephanie Szypula was the youngest of the three daughters of Mykhailo and Oksana Szypula. Her sister Iryna was born in 1924 and Yaroslava in 1926.

Mykhailo Szypula, a veteran of both the Austrian and Ukrainian Galician Armies, was a master blacksmith, could generally fix anything and everything — in the shop and in intractable and menacing life and death situations. Returning weary—the last days by foot—from the shattered Italian front, where he served in a Hungarian artillery unit, he immediately joined the Ukrainian Galician Army (UHA) and participated in independence battles in Right-Bank Ukraine. He was practical and efficient in his endeavors, a true survivor, repeatedly willing to sacrifice himself to save others. Through two world wars, he upheld his principles and dignity while protecting his family. He had a strong sense of civic purpose, was a staunch patriot, and maintained a subtle sense of humor.

Oksana Szypula was tender yet determined, an exemplary mother and homemaker who never spared effort for her family. She painstakingly cared for the well-rounded upbringing of her daughters. The girls were always dressed neatly, with starched white aprons, beautifully braided hair adorned with ribbons.

Stefania's maternal grandfather, Petro Skorny, a Polish Roman Catholic, decided to spend his last years with his daughter, who was raised with a Ukrainian, Eastern Catholic identity. His dignified presence in the household was formative during the granddaughters' early years. Each winter morning, on his way to church, he would carry the girls' bags to school so that their hands wouldn't get cold. He regularly read the Holy Scriptures in Polish, and with him the family celebrated holidays according to the Gregorian calendar. The family was characterized by ethnic tolerance and service to the poor offering refuge to the village children during a time of famine.

The girls received a thorough primary education. The work of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate at the nursery in Zolochiv inspired their spiritual development. The renowned author of children's literature Roman Zavadovych taught at the elementary school.

The tumultuous war years left a dramatic and tragic impact on the Szypula family. The Soviet occupation of 1939-1941 was brutal. The

NKVD demanded that Mykhailo Szypula, a respected Zolochiv citizen, become a neighborhood informant, something repugnant to him. Pursued by the NKVD, Stefania's father had to flee abroad. Thus, Stefania and her family were without a father for about a year and a half. Amidst the difficult circumstances of the Soviet occupation of Galicia, her mother managed to continue raising three teenage daughters on her own. She gamefully spun a still story to the NKVD — my delinquent husband left the family and we do not know where he is. Throughout it all the constant threat of evacuation or deportation to Siberia loomed over their heads.

The end of this occupation was especially cruel and heart-wrenching, as the Soviet regime brutally murdered over 750 prominent citizens — priests, lawyers, teachers, entrepreneurs — and patriotic Ukrainians from the Zolochiv region in the Zolochiv Castle.

The Nazi terror was even worse. The western Ukrainian Jewish community was annihilated, and many Ukrainian activists were executed. The family attempted to help their Jewish neighbors, victims of the Holocaust, offering food and refuge in the family barn.

Her eldest sister, Iryna, joined the underground national resistance and later enlisted in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). In February 1945, she sacrificed her life for the freedom of Ukraine. The exact circumstances of her death and location of her grave remain unknown.

In March 1944, the family left Zolochiv, departing in a rented truck. Thus began the irreversible process of gradual migration westward. After several months in Saryi Sambir, the family moved by car to Komanche and later by freight train from Poland to Austria.

The Szypulas settled in the town of Dornbirn in western Austria, where unexpectedly on October 21, 1944, at the age of 45, Stefania's mother, Oksana, passed away. It was another painful blow for the refugee family. Given the challenging post-war circumstances, acquiring further education was difficult as they had to work to sustain themselves. In Dornbirn, where there was a small Ukrainian refugee community, Yaroslava and Stefania worked in a textile factory. Both sisters were enthusiasts of cinema, music, particularly opera.

In June 1949, Mykhailo Szypula, along with his daughters and a circle of relatives, immigrated to the United States of America, to New York City. An intimate relationship forged by shared untold hardship with her father and sister Yaroslava characterized Stefania's subsequent life. In America, Stefania Szypula completed courses to become a medical technologist and for four decades was a valued staff member at Sloan Kettering.

Stefania Szypula was an avid embroiderer. Her intricate artwork took many forms reflecting Ukrainian folk traditions. She crafted the vestments for her godson Borys Gudziak's priestly ordination — 15 years before it occurred. Marko on whom Stefania fitted the vestments was in on the secret of the surprise gift. Together they maintained the conspiracy for all those years. She also embroidered the altar cloths for the Studite monastery in Rome when the future cardinal and head of the UGCC, Lubomyr Husar was archimandrite there.

For many decades, she cared for her father Mykhailo, who died at the age of 104 (1898-2002). Together with her father, she participated in Ukrainian community life in the States. They attended Divine Liturgy every Sunday, supported the Church and Ukrainian causes, particularly the projects of Patriarch Josyf Slipyj.

Special moments of joy for Stefania Szypula were the pilgrimages to Rome in 1969, for the consecration of St. Sophia's Cathedral, and in 1982, marking Patriarch Josyf's 90th birthday.

In 1990 and 2003, Stefania Szypula visited Ukraine. She closely followed the development of the Institute of Church History, the Lviv Theological Academy, and later the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU). To these causes, she devoted all of her savings. A woman always scrupulous about etiquette and rules, timid in most things, often joked: "If I could, I would rob a bank and give all the money to UCU!"

After retiring, Stefania continued living in New York City. She was often visited by close relatives. The challenges of Stefania's last years were alleviated by the loving care of Lyuba Pavlyshyn and Dr. Ivanka Pavlyshyn and by the prayerful pastoral attention of numerous priests, including the Archbishop of New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, for which the Gudziak family expresses heartfelt gratitude.

A difficult, but God-blessed, dedicated and honest life has come to its culmination in the Lord.

**Eternal Memory! Vichnaya pamiat'!**



## Khmelnychenky Plast fraternity holds annual meeting, highlights efforts to support Ukraine

by Ivan Wolansky and  
Peter D. Lenchur

EAST CHATHAM, N.Y. – Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the Ukrainian community has been steadfast in its commitment to supporting Ukraine through a myriad of initiatives, including fundraisers, volunteer efforts and donation drives at both local and national levels.

Among the organizations championing ongoing support for Ukraine is the Plast Ukrainian Scouting Organization's Khmelnychenky fraternity.

The group convened for its semi-annual meeting, known as a "rada," from September 23-24 at the Vovcha Tropa campground in East Chatham, N.Y.

During the gathering, members not only reconnected but also meticulously planned events, such as a dance ("zabava") held in Wildwood, N.J., and the Chervona Kalyna Debutante Ball.

Additionally, they strategized to provide vital resources for various Plast youth camps, all while maintaining a dedicated focus on supporting Ukraine.

In response to Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine, the Khmelnychenky have raised over \$25,000 earmarked as donations to Plast in the U.S. The funds were allocated to support shipments of much-needed medical aid to Ukraine.



Courtesy of Plast Khmelnychenky

**Members of the Khmelnychenky Plast fraternity gathered for a semi-annual meeting, held on September 23-24 at the Vovcha Tropa campground in East Chatham, N.Y.**

Notably, the Khmelnychenky organized fundraisers that successfully raised \$10,000, enabling the purchase of Individual First Aid Kits (IFAKs) sent directly to Ukraine. Over the past year, at the annual Wildwood zabava and Christmas Sweater Party, the Kurin has achieved remarkable success in raising close to \$10,000 worth of aid for Ukrainian soldiers.

The Khmelnychenky take great pride in showcasing the ongoing efforts of individual members within the Kurin: Over the past year, Dr. Andrew Loginsky dedicated his

time to humanitarian efforts, shuttling between eastern Poland and Ukraine. His altruistic endeavors encompassed providing medical assistance to refugees in Poland, orchestrating the evacuation of Ukrainians with severe disabilities to Germany for crucial care, volunteering with Med-Psy at the Lviv train station, and offering counseling at camps tailored for children affected by the war.

Notably, Ivan Wolansky joined Dr. Loginsky for a two-week stint in Lviv to contribute to the efforts of Med-Psy.

Together, they successfully raised \$2,600 within 24 hours. Those funds were used to procure water for Ukrainians fleeing the Nova Kakhovka dam breach.

John Latyshko, hailing from Canada, has demonstrated unwavering commitment in spearheading grassroots fundraising initiatives, amassing an impressive sum exceeding \$70,000.

These ongoing efforts stand as a testament to his dedication in supporting the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The funds have been judiciously allocated toward the procurement of military-grade tactical and medical supplies, with a keen focus on ensuring direct distribution to the front lines.

Since the onset of the invasion, member Peter Rakowsky has fervently raised \$20,000. This notable achievement has been instrumental in acquiring essential gear, including body armor, helmets, thermal scopes and other critical equipment for soldiers. Notably, these resources are being directed to the brave members of the fraternity currently serving on the front lines of the war in Ukraine.

Regrettably, the war continues, underscoring the need for continued support. Now, more than ever, help is needed. Additional information about the Khmelnychenky fraternity and the organization's aid to Ukraine can be found online at [www.xmel.org](http://www.xmel.org).

## Descendants of Andrew Green Foord, who built what is now known as Soyuzivka Heritage Center, visit Suzy-Q

by Roman J. Wasyluk

KERHONKSON, N.Y. – The descendants of Dr. Andrew Green Foord, the man who built what is now known as the Soyuzivka Heritage Center, paid a visit to the resort this past fall.

Mr. Foord built what was then called Nonkanawha to be a sanatorium where people went for their health – not to be confused with a sanitarium, which were used to treat mental disorders. The Ukrainian National Association purchased the property in 1952. In 2015, Soyuzivka was transferred to an independent 501(c)3 charitable organization, named the Ukrainian National Foundation, Inc. (UNF).

Many stories were shared during the family's brief visit to Soyuzivka on October 26. Among them was that the Poltava building was made for Mr. Foord's mother, while another was that John Foord's father,



Courtesy of Roman J. Wasyluk

**Dr. Andrew Green Foord's descendants and other guests are seen during a visit to the Soyuzivka Heritage Center. The group included (from left to right) Andrew (Andy) Foord (great-grandson), Mimi (Miriam) Foord (granddaughter), Marko Shuhan (local artist), Joan Foord (granddaughter), Janet Foord (wife of John Foord), Roman J. Wasyluk (Soyuzivka Business Administrator), Barclay Foord (great-grandson), Andrew Foord (great-grandson), Laura Foord (wife of Andrew Foord), John Foord (grandson) and Daryl Foord (partner of Barclay Foord)**

Emil (Dr. Foord's oldest son), was born in the Uzhhorod building, which at the time was used as a carriage house.

Mr. Foord's grandchildren and great-grandchildren reminisced about the times when they were young and played on the property. They toured the Kyiv building and pointed out that the right side of the building, where the honeymoon suite is located, was where the kitchen for the building was located.

While touring an area that is now known as Sofia's Garden in memory of Sofia Semenyshyn, faint remnants could be seen of an old pool and diving board that were once located there.

Although the family's visit was brief, they group had a marvelous time reminiscing about what once was. It had been years since they visited Soyuzivka, and one could see the love they all had for the place that was once fondly known to them as Nonkanawha.

## 'They keep...'

(Continued from page 5)

at one of the small heating tents that local officials have set up for the remaining residents.

"That's how we live. It's minus 3 [degrees Celsius] in the room," Yuriy said. "So, we came, warmed up and then we go there again."

Yuriy says that today he is lucky, as Chasiv Yar's mayor and his team brought him a cylinder with gas to help with heating and cooking. He explains that, with fuel in such short supply, he uses it strategically to heat one small room and then conserve the rest for cooking, which can be used to boil a kettle or warm a small stovetop.

Natalya, another Chasiv Yar resident, says that she worries about what's next for her town and Ukraine.

"I'm worried. The United States is holding back help. There are fewer munitions,"

she said. "The manpower [and resources] on the other side is greater than in Ukraine. So, I'm worried."

### 2024's new phase

Uncertainty over the level of Western military assistance for Ukraine will follow Kyiv into 2024.

The recent funding announced by Washington provides a stopgap, but it gives no long-term clarity on helping Ukraine resolve its ammunition shortages and military planning for the coming year.

White House officials have suggested that this weapons package, known as a "drawdown" from Pentagon inventories, was the last one they could make with existing funds. Any new assistance will require the approval of Congress, and the legislation for a new package put forward by the White House is currently stalled as negotiators try to find a compromise on border security and immigration policy, key demands from Republicans in agreeing to

any future deal.

Political battles have also stalled aid from Kyiv's other Western backers. In Brussels, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban is blocking a proposed plan of 50 billion euros (\$55 billion) in new assistance for Ukraine from the European Union.

According to the Financial Times, the bloc is preparing a back-up plan worth up to 20 billion euros (\$22 billion) for Ukraine, using a debt structure that sidesteps Mr. Orban should he refuse to drop his veto by a planned European Union summit on February 1.

Securing future military assistance is vital for Ukraine if it is to make progress in its goal of pushing back Russian forces. Speaking at a press conference in late December, Mr. Zelenskyy said that Ukraine's military leadership submitted a plan to him to mobilize up to 500,000 more troops for the fight against Russia. That plan is estimated to cost some \$13 billion. "I would like to know where the money will come from,"

the Ukrainian president remarked.

Elsewhere, Western officials have been pushing for more military assistance for Ukraine and warning of the consequences should support for Kyiv dry up.

"Wars develop in phases," North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said in an interview on December 3 with the German broadcaster ARD. "We have to support Ukraine in both good and bad times."

"We should also be prepared for bad news," Mr. Stoltenberg added, without offering specifics.

(Written by Reid Standish based on reporting by Oleksiy Prodayvoda of Current Time in eastern Ukraine.)

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# Ukraine, Russia...

(Continued from page 1)

“grateful to everyone who achieved this result” but did not mention the U.A.E. or any other countries involved in the negotiations.

A video he issued showed the prisoners being greeted by fellow soldiers and loved ones as they stepped off a bus. Some of them wrapped themselves in Ukrainian flags.

“Initially, there was no information about some of them being held captive. They were considered missing in action. It is critical to keep hope alive,” Mr. Zelenskyy said.

He said that, while prisoner swaps have been on hold for a long time, “negotiations have not ceased for a single moment.”

News of the swap came as Poland called for the West to respond to Russia after it launched two massive waves of deadly air attacks on Ukraine. Kyiv, meanwhile, responded with its own strikes on Russian border regions and in Russia-occupied Crimea on January 3.

At least five people were killed and dozens wounded in Russian drone and missile strikes in and around Kyiv as well as Kharkiv on January 2 that Ukraine’s military said were similar in scale to a massive Russian attack just days earlier.

Those attacks came after an attack on the Ukrainian capital on December 29 that killed 30. The Kyiv City Military Administration announced the new, higher death toll on January 3, adding that 29 people were injured. Russia fired 158 drones and mis-



Office of the President of Ukraine

**Authorities in Kyiv said on January 3 that 230 Ukrainian nationals were returned from Russian captivity, some of whom are seen posing for a photograph shortly after their release.**

siles across Ukraine in the attack. The attacks killed 10 others across the country and injured scores.

As crews continued to clear widespread damage to buildings and infrastructure on January 3, Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said the West needs to respond to the attacks “in a language that [President Vladimir] Putin understands: tightening sanctions so that he cannot make new weapons with smuggled components and by giving Kyiv long-range missiles that will enable it to take out launch sites and command centers.”

Putin has said in recent days that his

country would “intensify” its attacks on its neighbor, prompting Germany Foreign Affairs Minister Annalena Baerbock to accuse Moscow of seeking to “annihilate” Ukraine.

Germany will “stand by the people in Ukraine for as long as they need us,” she wrote on January 2 in a post on the social media site X, formerly Twitter.

The increase in deadly attacks, many of which hit residential areas, prompted French United Nations Ambassador Nicolas de Riviere to say he is pessimistic about the course of events in Ukraine.

“The situation in Ukraine remains

extremely dire,” he told a news conference as France assumed the U.N. Security Council’s rotating presidency. “I think it’s not improving. I think it’s deteriorating.”

Mr. Zelenskyy has vowed that Russia “will answer for every life [that it has] taken away.”

Early on January 3, Ukrainian drones attacked Crimea, which Russia illegally annexed in 2014, and two Russian regions neighboring Ukraine.

According to the governor of Russia’s Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, the situation in the region remains “tense,” while the governor of the Kursk region just north of Belgorod said power cuts had been caused by Ukrainian aerial attacks.

No casualties from the January 3 attacks were reported by Russian authorities. Last weekend, Belgorod officials said 25 people were killed by Ukrainian attacks.

Ukraine has been calling on its Western allies to accelerate supplies of air defense systems, long-range missiles and combat drones given the scope and intensity of Russia’s latest air attacks.

Mr. Zelenskyy has said that a major focus of Ukrainian counterattacks going forward would be to diminish Russian forces’ strength in Crimea, even as his military is struggling to defend cities in the east.

(With reporting by Reuters)

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# ‘Hot potato...’

(Continued from page 4)

tion, saying on December 26 that “it is only right” that deputies and the military decide on the troop count and other needs for next year and do so in open hearings. He said his office will be “waiting for the final text of the law.”

## Mobilization measures

The mobilization bill calls for lowering the age limit of conscripts from 27 to 25, ending the service exclusion for citizens with minor disabilities, legalizing digital draft notices and restricting the ability of draft dodgers to carry out transactions such as buying or selling property. It also places greater responsibility for mobilization on local governments.

Experts said local officials could drag their feet on implementation out of the same fear of a hit to their popularity. Meanwhile, Digital Transformation Minister Mykhaylo Fedorov rushed to declare that the government super app, Diia, rolled out under his leadership and downloaded by millions of Ukrainians, will not be used for sending draft notifications.

Opposition deputies have criticized various aspects of the bill, such as the restrictions on financial transactions by draft dodgers, and many parliamentarians expect the final bill to look different.

The first reading is expected to take

place before January 14. Some experts say the bill could be adopted as early as the end of the month.

Ukraine has banned most men between the ages of 18 and 60 from leaving the country, but some continue to do so, paying off border guards or other officials. Some avoid drafts with medical exemptions that can be bought, while others ignore draft notifications.

The struggle to recruit Ukrainian men has prompted police to grab draft dodgers off the street, creating scenes that – when they go viral on social media – generate backlash against the authorities.

While one-third of Ukrainians said they were ready to take up arms to defend their country, according to a summer poll, Yevhen Holovakha, director of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, told RFE/RL that people may act differently if they actually receive draft notices.

He said pessimism has grown among Ukrainians in recent months following the meager results of the summer counteroffensive. Mr. Holovakha said officials and the media had created public expectations of success that were unrealistic.

At the same time, the number of people willing to serve would be greater if the drafting process appeared fair and clear, he said. People want to know why they are being drafted, how long they will be required to serve, how much they will earn, how much their families will receive, and what will happen when they return, he said.

“People get sick from uncertainty,” Mr. Holovakha said. “And these stresses, and these illnesses, both physical and psychological, most often arise from the fact that they live in uncertainty.”

Dozens of wives and mothers of combatants took to the streets earlier this year on a couple of occasions in rare wartime protests to demand the demobilization of their loved ones and the recruitment of new men. Under martial law imposed following Russia’s invasion, public protests are banned.

Mr. Zelenskyy has sought to address some of the public concerns around mobilization. Earlier this year, he fired the heads of the regional recruitment offices amid corruption allegations. He also said he wants to see the general staff’s plan for demobilization.

Mr. Holovakha said that Mr. Zelenskyy is proceeding cautiously because he is in a “very difficult situation.”

## Tensions

The debate over the bill and who takes responsibility for it could exacerbate the reportedly tense relations between Messrs. Zelenskyy and Zaluzhnyi.

The military leader in November told The Economist the war had entered a stalemate, a dour assessment that undermined the presidential administration’s more upbeat view of Ukraine’s progress and complicated efforts to secure U.S. military aid.

Mr. Zelenskyy immediately rejected the view that the war was in a stalemate, while

members of his administration cautioned the military against making such public comments.

Last month, Maryana Bezuhla, deputy head of the parliamentary Defense Committee and a member of Mr. Zelenskyy’s party, publicly criticized Mr. Zaluzhnyi for allegedly failing to present a 2024 war plan, all the while demanding greater mobilization. She raised the specter of his dismissal, which some took as a message from the administration.

Oleksiy Haran, director of research at the Ilko Kucheriv Foundation for Democratic Initiatives, told RFE/RL that firing Mr. Zaluzhnyi would backfire on the administration as the military leader enjoys a higher popularity rating than the president.

Mr. Holovakha said Ukrainians associate their nation’s victories in the war with Mr. Zaluzhnyi, and it would be hard for Mr. Zelenskyy to convince the public otherwise.

Mr. Haran said that firing Mr. Zaluzhnyi would be “a failure, first of all, for [Mr.] Zelenskyy.”

(Written by RFE/RL’s Todd Prince based on reporting from Ukraine by RFE/RL’s Ukrainian Service.)

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## Ukrainian pro sports update

by Ihor N. Stelmach

### IOC dismisses Ukraine's demands

President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Thomas Bach reiterated that Russian and Belarusian athletes will be allowed to compete in the 2024 Summer Olympics as neutrals in individual events provided that they meet certain criteria. He said he does not fear a potential boycott of the Games by Ukraine.

"Not meeting all of Ukraine's demands doesn't mean supporting the war, especially since we have shown unprecedented solidarity with Ukrainian athletes since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Why should Ukraine punish its athletes for the actions of the Russian army and deprive them of their dream of the Olympic Games?" Bach said during a December 26 interview with German newspaper Welt am Sonntag.

Bach added that the IOC's decision to admit Russian and Belarusian athletes will not affect the war in Ukraine.

Officials from Ukraine and Russia responded to the IOC decision, with the Russian Federation saying that it fears its top athletes may not be allowed to compete at the Games because the IOC has ruled that Russian athletes must maintain a 'neutral' status concerning Russia's unprovoked war on Ukraine.

Bach told the German newspaper that the IOC's position is a balanced and fair solution to the issue of allowing Russian athletes to compete at the Games.

#### All-Ukrainian Athlete Forum held in Kyiv

On the 33rd anniversary of the forming of the National Olympic Committee of Ukraine (NOC), an All-Ukrainian Athlete Forum took place at the Koncha-Zaspa Olympic Training and Sports Center. This extensive event was organized in conjunction with the Athletes' Commission of the NOC of Ukraine.

The leadership of the NOC of Ukraine, the head and representatives of the Athletes' Commission of the NOC of Ukraine, Ukrainian Olympic athletes, Ukrainian World and European champions and media officials all took part in the event on December 22.

Also present were the head of the IOC Athletes' Commission Emma Terho and the Director of the IOC Athletes' Department Kaveh Mehrabi.

In his welcoming speech, the President of Ukraine's NOC Vadym Gutzeit thanked those currently defending Ukraine and stressed that all Ukrainians are united by their desire to win the war and win sporting competitions.

Chairman of the Athletes' Commission of the NOC of Ukraine Georgiy Zantaraya, along with Ukrainian Olympic medalists Yuriy Cheban, Anastasia Kozhenkova, Alexander Abramenko and Marta Redina, spoke about their commission's projects for 2023. A priority in the past year was to ensure that Russian and Belarusian athletes are banned from international competitions.

Guest lecturers spoke about being proactive, preserving and increasing personal resources, restoring mental health and sharing support programs and platforms available for personal development. Forum participants learned about the work of the National Anti-Doping Center and athletes received practical advice on creating a personal brand on social media and utilizing it for future success.

Forum attendees actively participated in discussions of topics raised during the event. The athletes were urged to cooperate, express initiatives to implement practical projects and continue the development of the Olympic movement in Ukraine.

#### Olympic committee selects outstanding athletes for 2023

The NOC of Ukraine posted an announcement on its website listing the country's top athletes and coaches of 2023.

The best athlete of 2023 was Yaroslava Mahuchikh, a World and European champion high jumper. She made history when in 2023 she became a World champion, successfully defended her Diamond League title and captured gold at the European Athletics Indoor Championship. The top coach was Tetiana Stepanova, personal trainer for Mahuchikh. The best young athlete of 2023 was Oleksandr Zheltiakov, World and European junior swimming champion who qualified for two events at the upcoming 2024 Olympics. The top young athlete coach was Oleksandr Kulyk, personal trainer for Zheltiakov.

The Central Sports Club of the Ukrainian Armed Forces

and the Athletics Federation of Ukraine also receive awards for their help in training Mahuchikh.

The NOC of Ukraine's judges selected the year's best athletes and coaches based on results achieved at major international competitions in Olympic sports.

#### Swiatek's former coach joins Kostyuk's team

Iga Swiatek's former conditioning coach, Jolanta Rusin, has joined Marta Kostyuk's coaching team four years after splitting from the Polish World No. 1 ranked female player. Rusin worked as Swiatek's physical preparation trainer from 2015 to 2019. She played an important role in the Pole's development early in her career. Swiatek's ranking jumped from below 900 to the top 50 during their time together.

The two split up after the 2019 U.S. Open. At the time, the four-time Grand Slam champion referred to their collaboration's ending as "one of the saddest moments" of her career and praised Rusin for her support and assistance.

Kostyuk's off-season preparations for the 2024 season included an Instagram post where she referenced her new association with Rusin. Polish tennis coach Sandra Zaniewska is also a fairly new addition to Kostyuk's team, with the two teaming up after the World No. 39's 2023 Wimbledon run. Zaniewska previously coached World No. 14 Petra Martic from 2017 to 2019.

Kostyuk emphasized the need for Women's Tennis Association (WTA) players to hire female coaches. She told the WTA that some male coaches struggle to communicate with female athletes. Kostyuk has been coached by her mother for most of her career and has been very happy with her career development. She hopes to be an example for WTA players and she wants to encourage them to hire more female coaches.

#### Knicks sign Skapintsev to two-way contract

There is a sixth Ukrainian playing in the National Basketball Association (NBA) this season. Cherkasy native Dmytro Skapintsev, 25, signed a two-way, emergency contract with the New York Knicks. Key injuries to big men Mitchell Robinson and Jericho Sims necessitated the acquisition of Skapintsev from the G League's Westchester Knicks. The 7-foot-1, 215-pound center received one minute of playing time in the Knicks' 130-111 loss to Milwaukee on December 23.

Robinson was projected to be out for the remainder of the season following ankle surgery. Sims could miss a few weeks due to an ankle injury. A disability player exception on Robinson's contract would give the team almost \$4 million to spend on another player.

Skapintsev serves as an insurance policy for the Knicks who also have Isaiah Hartenstein and 38-year-old Taj Gibson. In 15 games with Westchester, the Ukrainian pivot averaged 18.6 minutes, 5.9 points and 4.3 rebounds per game, shooting a very healthy 51.5 percent from the field.

He went undrafted in 2020 and signed with New York last season for their G League roster. The NBA allows two-way players to be on the active team's roster for 50 regular-season games.

Knicks head coach Tom Thibodeau gave Skapintsev a solid endorsement, saying that his size is terrific, he can pass the ball and he does a little bit of everything. Thibodeau called him a great communicator on defense and thinks he will be a good addition to the team. Despite the positive endorsement, Skapintsev is expected to be on the roster primarily for practice and emergencies.

His professional journey began on his hometown team Cherkaski Mavpy where he played six years. In 2021, he moved to Kyiv-Basket. After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 leading to the suspension of the Ukrainian Basketball Super League season, Skapintsev finished the season with Pieno Zvaigzdes in Lithuania.

He represented Ukraine at Euro Basket 2022, where he played in two out of five group stage games, but he was not in the lineup in Ukraine's Round of 16 loss to Poland.

#### UAF appeals to FIFA, UEFA and Serbia to prevent Russian football return

The Ukrainian Association of Football (UAF) raised the issue of a scheduled friendly match between the national football teams of Serbia and Russia with an appeal to FIFA, UEFA and Serbia's Football Union.



Dmytro Skapintsev, a center with the Westchester Knicks, signed an emergency two-way contract to play with the New York Knicks on December 23.

The FIFA Council and UEFA's Executive Committee both adopted a suspension of the Russian national team and clubs from participation in FIFA and UEFA competitions in February 2022 in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They subsequently extended the suspension into the 2023 season and also said that it is imperative to ensure the suspension remains in effect until Russia stops its war on Ukraine.

The UAF said the friendly match scheduled for March 21 in Moscow's Dynamo Stadium should not be supported by football's governing bodies since it contradicts FIFA's and UEFA's position on Russian football.

The UAF also reached out to the Football Association of Serbia to remind them that Russia continues to commit war crimes in Ukraine and it is not acceptable to let Russian football teams play official matches until the war ends. It added that Serbia should not cooperate with Moscow and should not schedule any international matches with Russia.

#### Svitolina's foundation to manage Billie Jean King team

On December 18, a statement posted on the social media site X by Elina Svitolina detailed a new arrangement between the Ukrainian tennis star's foundation and the Ukrainian Billie Jean King Cup team.

"A new chapter in our history: for the next four years, the Elina Svitolina Foundation will manage the Ukrainian women's national team in the Billie Jean King Cup team tennis championships. Elina will be actively involved in strategy development and preparation of the national team, ensuring Team Ukraine is competing at the highest levels," Svitolina wrote.

An active player, Svitolina has been given the responsibility of overseeing the country's female division of tennis in a unique setup not seen before in the sport. Svitolina has played for Ukraine's Billie Jean King Cup team, has carried the sport forward for her country and won an Olympic medal in Tokyo. Since the Russian invasion and unprovoked war, she has worked on humanitarian relief projects while returning to the WTA Tour following her pregnancy.

Over the ensuing four years, Svitolina will have an even bigger impact on tennis in Ukraine with her foundation's management of the Billie Jean King Cup team.

#### Ukrainian lugers compete in World Cup

Oleksandra Mokh's brother is fighting Russian invaders as an enlisted member of the Ukrainian army. Nazarri Kachmar's classmates are also fighting in the army. The other four Ukrainian luge athletes and two coaches who were in Lake Placid, N.Y., competing in the FIL Luge World Cup on December 8-9 all know someone who is fighting in the war. Nearly all of them know people who have died.

"The people who did sliding in Ukraine, some of them died in the war," Ukrainian national team head coach Taras Hartsula said through a translator during a December 7 interview with the Adirondack Daily Enterprise. "The director of the Sports Council, he's in the army right now," Hartsula added.

On December 5, Ukrainian luge athletes met with Olympic alpine skiing silver and bronze medalist Andrew

(Continued on page 17)



# Ukrainian pro sports...

(Continued from page 16)

Weibrecht, whose parents own the Mirror Lake Inn in Lake Placid, N.Y., and have donated to Ukrainian relief efforts since the start of the war nearly two years ago.

The athletes were proud to see Ukrainian flags throughout the village of Lake Placid, N.Y., and they called for additional support from the U.S. Congress, which has not approved additional aid for Ukraine.

The Ukrainian luge team was originally not supposed to compete in the FIL World Cup season opener. The team had to make appointments with the U.S. Embassy in Latvia, where they were told they would have to wait until August to obtain visas because they were not from Latvia. Through U.S.A. Luge, they connected with the United States Olympic Committee and received help in obtaining visas. After 48 hours of driving from Romania to Poland and Germany before finally getting on a plane, they were able to arrive in Lake Placid, N.Y., a few days early to prepare for the week-end event.

Ukrainian lugers endured challenges in training this past summer due to the war. In the fall, the national team trained on luge tracks in Latvia, Germany and Norway. In Ukraine, there is only one luge track made out of wood. In winter, track officials prepare it by placing snow on it and then spraying it with water.

Most of the current team started luge sliding around the age of 10. In 2022, the youth and junior luge programs totaled some 90 athletes.

Three-time Olympian Andriy Mandziy was extremely proud to represent his homeland in Lake Placid, N.Y. He and Ukraine's other lugers want to show the world that they can compete in international sporting events and represent Ukraine even as the war continues.

Ukraine's best finishers were Anton Dukach (14th in men's sprint) and the duo of Oleksandra Mokh and Olena Stetskiv (10th) in the women's doubles sprint.

## Skarlat-XTRM Team partners with wounded veterans

Vadim Pritulyak wants to provide more racing opportunities for wounded Ukrainian war veterans in 2024 by bringing his SKARLAT-XTRM Team to the FIA World Baja Cup and other European rallies. The team debuted in October at the Spanish Rallye TT Cuenca, where wounded soldiers Sergey Romanovsky and Olexandr Gonzul took part as co-drivers. By increasing the team's presence in 2024, Pritulyak wants to raise foreign interest and investment in his team's car to add additional vehicles.

The Baja World Cup will have eight rounds in 2024: four races in Europe including a Spanish date in July and the Baja Poland in August. Half of the schedule is in the Middle East, which is very convenient for Pritulyak and SKARLAT as they are based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE will host the Dubai International Baja in November.

Aside from scheduling more racing events, SKARLAT-XTRM has plans to bus between 50-100 personnel from the Ukrainian Armed Forces to each race to support the Ukrainian team. Those engaged in the project have stressed the importance of utilizing motorsports to help veterans with physical and emotional scars from the war transition back to civilian life. The team also wants to have a crew of only Ukrainian soldiers compete in the Dakar Rally. It is a plan that has been successfully executed by Anglo-American and French teams in the past.

## Ukraine wins eight medals in cross-country skiing

The first competition of the 2023-2024 FIS Cross-Country Continental Cup was held in Strbske Pleso, Slovakia, over the weekend of December 16-17. The Slavic Cup saw Ukrainian skiers capture a total of eight medals, including three gold, three silver and two bronze medals. Viktoriia Olekh was Ukraine's outstanding performer, earning two gold medals in the women's 1.4-kilometer sprint and women's 10-kilometer interval start classic. Dmytro Drahun won gold in the men's 1.4-kilometer sprint.

Ukrainian women swept the podium in the 10-kilometer classic with Sofia Shkatula (silver) and Anastasiia Ivanchenko (bronze) joining teammate Olekh as medal winners.

## Ukraine qualifies for 2024 Futsal World Cup

With their 5-3 away win over Poland in Lodz on December 20, the Ukrainian national futsal team won first place in Group B and earned a ticket to the 2024 World Cup. It will be Ukraine's first Futsal World Cup appearance since 2016.

There were many Ukrainians in the stands to witness



Ukraine's national futsal team celebrates a 5-3 win over Poland in Lodz on December 20. With the win, the team qualified for the 2024 FIFA Futsal World Cup in Uzbekistan.

head coach Oleksandr Kosenko's squad jump out to a commanding 4-0 halftime lead. Ihor Korsun scored a double for the blue-and-yellow, which, despite conceding three second-half goals to Poland, hung on for the 5-3 victory.

In Group B action, Ukraine defeated Belgium 10-2, lost to Poland 3-2, beat Serbia 6-2, drew 1-1 with Serbia, beat Belgium again 8-2 and finished with their 5-3 win over Poland. Ukraine ended with a 4-1-1 record, a plus-20 goal differential and 13 points.

The 2024 FIFA Futsal World Cup will be played in Uzbekistan from September 14 to October 6 with 24 national teams in the competition.

## Kostyuk refuses to play Russian

Ukrainian tennis star Marta Kostyuk withdrew from a final match at the Negometal Open de Bourg-de-Peage tournament in France on December 17. She pulled out of her scheduled match against Russian rising star Mirra Andreeva. Kostyuk withdrew some three hours before the match was supposed to start at 12:30 p.m. local time.

Ukrainians on the tour have been playing against Russians, opting not to shake hands before and after matches. Since this was an exhibition tournament, Kostyuk was not obligated to play and pulled out due to reasons "beyond the will" of the organizers.

Tournament officials confirmed in a statement that Kostyuk's decision was due to the "geopolitical context in Ukraine."

A male player, Yanis Ghazonani Durand of France, stepped in to play Andreeva, who lost 7-5, 6-2.

Kostyuk chose not to comment on the matter when questioned by Ubitennis. Kostyuk was selected as a replacement for Donna Vekic of Croatia in the exhibition tournament.

In a December 19 update, journalist Xavier Coffin reported that Kostyuk withdrew from her match against Andreeva due to public pressure and she received threats on social media.

## Enforcement of 'neutral' athletes under scrutiny

Since the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided to allow some Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete at the 2024 Paris Olympics, concerns have been raised over how neutrality rules will be enforced.

A case in point is Russian taekwondo fighter Vladyslav Larin, who chose to appear in a video calling on residents of his home region to donate money for medicine and ammunition for Russia after the invasion of Ukraine. Ukraine's acting sports minister, Matviy Bidnyi, said he believes that support should cost Larin a spot in the Olympics.

In an interview with German news service DW, Bidnyi said, "He is an example of the complicity of Russian athletes and Russian occupiers. Even if athletes in no way expressed their opinion about the war, they express solidarity with the killers."

In the video, the 2020 Olympic gold medalist said, "Friends, let's unite and help those who are defending our motherland." The 28-year-old was banned for three months by his sport's governing body, World Taekwondo, which said it "accepted" his testimony. Larin secured his Olympic berth at the season-ending Grand Slam Champions Series in China on December 16.

Bidnyi went on to say that any neutral athlete who participates will be a "resource and a tool for Russian propaganda. When one nation has unleashed the largest aggressive war in Europe since World War II and is trying to destroy another nation, calling these people neutral means supporting murder."

Cases like Larin's demonstrate the problems the IOC will face in the lead up to the Games. Even those Russian and Belarusian athletes cleared to compete by their sport's governing bodies will be questioned about possible ties to Russia's war effort.

The IOC has said it will study information from each sport's governing body and seek an "independent evaluation" of each qualified neutral athlete.

While Russia continues to complain about "unacceptable" criteria, Ukraine's Bidnyi says his country will do "everything possible to make the IOC listen to common sense."

Bidnyi added, "We will prove that the vast majority of Russian athletes are connected to the bloody regime. Russian athletes have the same passports as Russian occupiers who are killing Ukrainians."

Two other Olympic-qualified Russian athletes have been accused of supporting Russia's invasion by attending a televised pro-war rally in Moscow in 2022 – Olympic champion wrestlers Zaurbek Sidakov and Zaur Uguev.

When United World Wrestling was asked about the athletes taking part in Olympic qualifying competitions, the federation told the Associated Press in September that their "participation in certain events is not [of] their own will."

## Shakhtar Donetsk plays charity match in Tokyo

Japanese club Avispa Fukuoka and Ukrainian club Shakhtar Donetsk played to a 2-2 draw in a charity exhibition match at Tokyo's National Stadium on December 18. In attendance were some 600 Ukrainian refugees, and all proceeds from the event were directed to Ukraine's reconstruction.

The match was organized by the Apaman real estate brokerage group, the majority shareholder of the Japanese League Cup champions Fukuoka and a big supporter of the Ukrainian refugees.

More than 18,000 people were present at the venue where both teams entered the pitch draped in Ukrainian flags.

Shakhtar players were somewhat tired from travelling after their defeat at Porto in Portugal the prior Wednesday, but they were happy to play the game and see fellow countrymen in the stands.

Danylo Sikan headed in a right-wing cross to give the visitors a lead in the seventh minute that was negated by a Daiki Miya header 27 minutes later. After a second Avispa goal, Marian Shved again tied the score in the 53rd minute when he curled in a shot while coming in from the right of the pitch.

(Based on reporting by Inside the Games, Global Happenings via Oboz Revatel, Yahoo Sports, Sportskeeda, Heavy Sports, Eurohoops, UAF, Tennis Infinity, the Adirondack Daily Enterprise, The Checkered Flag, Express, Tennis World, DW and The Japan News.)

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# OUT & ABOUT

January 13 Jenkintown, PA	Malanka, Ukrainian Educational and Cultural Center, <a href="http://www.ueccphila.org">www.ueccphila.org</a>	January 24 Online	Webinar, "Dispossession: Anthropological Perspectives on Russia's War Against Ukraine" by Catherine Wanner, Harvard University, <a href="http://www.huri.harvard.edu">www.huri.harvard.edu</a>
January 14 Chicago	Annual Festival "Caroling Together," St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral, <a href="https://stnicholaschicago.com">https://stnicholaschicago.com</a>	January 25 New York	Book talk, "Ukraine 22: Ukrainian Writers Respond to War, Columbia University, <a href="https://harriman.columbia.edu">https://harriman.columbia.edu</a>
January 20 Somerset, NJ	Seminary graduation ceremony, St. Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Theological Seminary, <a href="https://stsuots.edu/">https://stsuots.edu/</a>	January 27 Philadelphia	Presentation of Debutantes, Ukrainian Engineers' Society of America, Hilton Philadelphia at Penn's Landing, <a href="mailto:hewka@verizon.net">hewka@verizon.net</a> or 610-277-1284
January 20 Elkins Park, PA	Commemoration of Ukraine's Sovereignty and Unity Day, with requiem service at St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Cemetery, 215-962-5830	January 28 New York	Concert, "Impressions, featuring art of Preston Trombly," Ukrainian Institute of America, <a href="http://www.ukrainianinstitute.org">www.ukrainianinstitute.org</a>
January 20 Buffalo, NY	Malanka, "2024 Traditional Ukrainian New Year's Malanka," Ukrainian American Youth Association Buffalo Branch, <a href="mailto:ansnerediuk@cym.org">ansnerediuk@cym.org</a> and <a href="mailto:adriannaliddell@cym.org">adriannaliddell@cym.org</a>	February 2-3 Cambridge, MA	Conference, "Decolonizing Ukraine in Theory and Practice," Harvard University, <a href="http://www.huri.harvard.edu">www.huri.harvard.edu</a>
January 21 Carnegie, PA	Annual meeting and elections, Organization for the Defense of the Four Freedoms for Ukraine, The Ukrainian Club, 412-334-7555 or <a href="mailto:ywowczuk@vovkfoundation.org">ywowczuk@vovkfoundation.org</a>	February 9-10 Cambridge, MA	Conference, "The European Dream. 2024: A Continent at the Crossroads," Harvard University, <a href="https://euroconf.eu">https://euroconf.eu</a>
January 23 Online	Virtual presentation by Fr. Bohdan Hladio, "Ukrainian Winter Festivals: Faith, Music, Traditions," Ukrainian History and Education Center, <a href="http://www.ukrhec.org">www.ukrhec.org</a>	<i>Entries in "Out and About" are listed free of charge. Priority is given to events advertised in The Ukrainian Weekly. However, we also welcome submissions from all our readers. Items will be published at the discretion of the editors and as space allows. Please send e-mail to <a href="mailto:mdubas@ukrweekly.com">mdubas@ukrweekly.com</a>.</i>	

## NEWSBRIEFS

(Continued from page 12)

Ukraine's agriculture-dependent economy. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the alternative Black Sea export corridor had sent out 12 million tons of cargo so far. He added in his nightly video address on December 28 that the corridor had produced "particularly significant results for December, and this is felt at the level of our entire economy." The mine incident occurred about 130 kilometers southwest of Chornomorsk, which is near Odesa on Ukraine's southern coast, according to Ambrey, a global maritime-risk-analysis company. Quoted by AP, Ambrey said the ship with 18 crew was on its way to Izmayil, a Ukrainian port on the Danube. The mine detonated at the ship's stern, causing equipment and machinery failure and resulting in the vessel losing power, Ambrey said. The captain reportedly maneuvered into shallow water to prevent the ship from sinking. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian Air Force said air defenses shot down seven out of eight Shahed drones launched by the Russian military overnight. Drones were downed in the Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovohrad, and Zaporizhia regions, it

said early on December 28. Ukraine's much-anticipated counteroffensive last summer largely failed to shift the front line, giving confidence to the Kremlin's forces, especially as further Western aid is in question. Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov suggested that the United States and European Union countries plan to continue sending help to Kyiv. "Neither Washington nor Brussels refrain from assisting the Kyiv regime [the Ukrainian government] because they realize it would be doomed without such assistance," Mr. Lavrov said in an interview with state news agency TASS that was released on December 28. North Macedonia, however, announced on December 28 that it would be unable to comply with a fresh Ukrainian request for military aid submitted a month ago. Speaking at an annual press briefing, Defense Minister Slavjanka Petrovska said North Macedonia needed the equipment requested by Kyiv. Ms. Petrovska did not say whether North Macedonia was ready to train Ukrainian soldiers on its territory. (RFE/RL, with reporting by AP and Reuters)

### Russia admits to bombing own village

Moscow said its military accidentally bombed a village in the southern Voronezh region on January 2 during a massive

Russian attack on Ukraine. The Russian Defense Ministry said six buildings had been damaged but there were no casualties in Petropavlovka, some 150 kilometers east of the border with Ukraine. It came on the same day that Russia's military launched a barrage of missiles and drones at Ukraine, with four killed and nearly 100 injured in Kyiv and Kharkiv, the two cities targeted in the Russian attacks. (RFE/RL's Current Time)

### Norway allows sales of defense products to Kyiv

A policy by the Norwegian government allowing direct sales of weapons and defense-related products to Ukraine went into effect on January 1, authorities in Oslo said. "Russia's war of aggression threatens Ukraine as a state and nation," Foreign Affairs Minister Espen Barth Eide said in a statement. "It is crucial that we continue to support Ukraine. Support for Ukraine is important for Norwegian and European security." It said the policy change means that Norwegian companies can apply to the Foreign Affairs Ministry for export licenses for direct sales of such products to Ukraine and that approval will be decided on a case-by-case basis. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

### Putin praises military in New Year's address

In a brief New Year's address by Russian

President Vladimir Putin broadcast on state television, the Kremlin leader called on Russians not to look back but to "move forward and create the future." He praised Russia's military, which launched an unprovoked full-scale invasion of neighboring Ukraine in February 2022 and has been fighting there ever since. Putin stood against a background of the Kremlin during the low-key address. He did not mention a December 30 incident in the western city of Belgorod in which Moscow claimed a Ukrainian air strike killed 24 people and injured more than 100. (RFE/RL's Russian Service)

### 74 sailors died in attack on Novocherkassk

The Russian Black Sea Fleet press service was quoted as saying that 74 Russian sailors were killed and 27 injured in Ukraine's missile attack on Russia's Novocherkassk landing ship near the Crimean port city of Feodosia. The figure appeared on the Novosti Sevastopolya news website. Ukrainian authorities said earlier that the December 26 air strikes caused an explosion that indicated that ammunition on the large landing ship had detonated. The Russian training ship UTS-150 was also damaged in the attack. (RFE/RL's Russian Service)

## Ukraine says...

(Continued from page 1)

"I see only the steps of a terrorist country," he said in the interview.

In his New Year's Eve video address, Mr. Zelenskyy thanked his country's citizens for resisting the Russian invasion and called on them to live by the rule "either you work or you fight."

"Because the world's largest terrorist organization is against us," he said. "And it is obvious how much more we should do, how more actively we should work and how much stronger our unity and our struggle should be."

Meanwhile, Putin, speaking at a military hospital in the Moscow region on January 1, called the December 30 shelling of the Russian city of Belgorod, which reportedly killed 25 people, a "terrorist attack" and vowed to intensify attacks against Ukraine.

"What happened in Belgorod is, of course, a terrorist act," Putin said. "They want to intimidate us and create uncertainty within the country. We're going to step

up the punches."

Putin accused Ukraine of attacking civilian areas, while claiming that Moscow targets only military sites, despite Russian missiles and drones routinely hitting residential and civilian areas in Ukraine.

Kyiv has not commented on the attack on Belgorod, although officials regularly state that Russia has used the region to launch assaults against Ukrainian sites.

Attacks from the air by both sides were reported on the first day of 2024 as the anniversary of Russia's February 24, 2022, full-scale invasion moves closer.

The Ukrainian Air Force wrote on Telegram that it had destroyed 87 of the Iranian-made Shahed drones fired at its cities overnight, adding that air defenses were working across the country.

The air force later said it had shot down nine of 10 additional Russia-launched drones "from the north" during New Year's Day and two additional Shahed drones near Kryviy Rih in the south.

Battlefield claims made by either side cannot immediately be verified because of the fighting in the regions.

Oleh Kiper, the Ukrainian head of the Odesa regional administration, said that one civilian was killed and nine were injured in a Russian attack on the Black Sea port city.

Ukraine's military said the drone attack on Odesa targeted port infrastructure and that a fire had broken out at one port terminal.

"A large number of drones were directed from the sea toward the coastal zone," the Southern Military Command said in a statement on Telegram.

The command also said that Russia had three surface-to-air missile carriers on duty in the Black Sea armed with 24 Kalibr cruise missiles.

"The missile threat level is extremely high," the statement said.

In the western city of Lviv, a drone strike destroyed a museum devoted to controversial World War II-era military commander Roman Shukhevych, who fought for Ukrainian independence from the Soviet Union.

Although the building was destroyed, most of its holdings had been removed in the early days of the full-scale Russian invasion.

A drone strike also damaged a university in the Lviv region city of Dublyany, where there is a museum to Ukrainian nationalist Stepan Bandera, who led an insurgent war against Soviet forces and who studied in Dublyany in the 1930s.

In the northeastern Ukrainian city of Sumy, the regional administration said a Russian-launched Shahed drone hit a two-story residential building, killing one woman and trapping several other people under the rubble.

In the Russia-occupied city of Donetsk, Moscow-installed officials said four people were killed and 13 others injured in overnight shelling. A local official said one of the killed was a journalist with Russia's state-run TASS news agency, although the person was not identified.

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