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Tasked with reconstruction, U.S. envoy to Ukraine Pritzker speaks about nation's recovery



U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine's economic recovery and reconstruction Penny Pritzker meets with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv on January 12, just three months after her appointment by the U.S. State Department.

by Mark Raczkiewicz

CHICAGO – The third most populous city in the U.S. hosted Penny Pritzker, 64, the nation's special representative for Ukraine's economic recovery as a keynote speaker on February 14 at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

The billionaire ambassador spoke about ongoing reconstruction efforts for Ukraine

without explaining how more than \$300 billion worth of frozen Russian central bank reserve assets in the European Union and the U.S. would be legally transferred to Kyiv to help rebuild the war-torn country.

"We need to find a way use them," Ms. Pritzker said of the seized money while adding that the "lowest estimates of

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Ukraine, Russia exchange missile strikes with both sides reporting deaths as Moscow steps up aerial attacks

RFE/RL's Ukrainian and Russian Services

Ukraine and Russia on February 15 both reported missile and drone strikes that caused deaths and injuries among civilians and caused material damage.

Ukraine declared an all-out air-raid alert for the second time on February 15 after MiG-31 Russian warplanes were detected after having taken off from military airfields inside Russia.

Oleh Synyehubov, the governor of Ukraine's eastern region of Kharkiv, said that the number of people killed in an overnight Russian missile strike on the village of Velikiy Burluk near the Russian border had risen to five after the body of a 27-year-old woman was pulled from under the rubble.

"As of now, five civilians are known to have been killed – three women aged 74, 54 and 27, and two men aged 41 and 53," Mr. Synyehubov wrote on Telegram.

Local authorities said Russian S-300 guided missiles hit a two-story residential building and another one next to it.

Serhiy Popko, the head of Kyiv's military administration, said all missiles targeting the city were shot down and there were no casualties following an initial air-raid alert that lasted for more than two hours in the morning.

In Lviv, Mayor Andriy Sadoviy said the windows of several buildings were blown out by explosions, but there were no casu-

alties. Zaporizhia Gov. Ivan Fedorov said an infrastructure objective was hit in the city and one person was wounded.

The air defense of the Ukrainian military reported that it shot down 13 of the 26 missiles launched by Russia in the latest wave of strikes on February 15.

Meanwhile, Russian state media reported that Ukrainian missiles struck a shopping center in the western city of Belgorod, located some 30 kilometers from the Ukrainian border.

Vyacheslav Gladkov, the governor of the Belgorod region, said at least five people were killed and that there was considerable material damage.

"According to preliminary data, five people were killed in Belgorod, including one child, another 18 people were injured, five of whom were children. Ambulance crews transport victims to medical facilities. All necessary assistance is provided," Mr. Gladkov wrote on Telegram.

Videos showing a damaged shopping center were circulating on social media.

Russia's Defense Ministry said its air-defense forces had shot down 14 Ukrainian missiles over the Belgorod region. The ministry did not mention any casualties or damage.

An oil depot near the western Russian city of Kursk close to the border with Ukraine caught fire after being hit by

(Continued on page 4)

Dennis Ougrin becomes first Ukrainian to complete Antarctic marathon

by Roman Tymotsko

LONDON – In December, Dennis Ougrin traveled to Union Glacier in Antarctica to run some 26 miles in what is the southern-most marathon on Earth.

Mr. Ougrin, a Lviv-born Londoner, completed the challenge in 4 hours 47 minutes, taking 11th place overall and second place in his 45-plus age group.

Representing Ukraine and the United Kingdom, he was the fastest contestant from both nations, also becoming the first Ukrainian to complete the marathon on the icy continent.

Mr. Ougrin also used the extraordinary event to raise funds that will be used to buy an ambulance for Ukraine. In total, his fundraiser on the Justgiving platform raised some \$100,000 from 868 supporters.

Mr. Ougrin, a renowned psychiatrist, and his wife, Oksana Litynska, a chief financial officer, have dedicated a significant portion of their lives to preparing for and climbing



Dennis Ougrin became the first Ukrainian to complete the Antarctic Ice Marathon, which took place on Union Glacier in the Antarctic in December.

high mountains as part of their quest to complete the Seven Summits challenge, which involves reaching the highest peak on each continent.

Ms. Litynska entered the Seven Summits Club while a medical emergency halted Mr. Ougrin's attempt during their climb to the summit of Mount Everest. Now, Mr. Ougrin waits for another chance to reach the world's highest point, and, in the meantime, he works on getting himself into another exclusive club of athletes, completing seven marathons on each continent. In December, he checked the Antarctic Ice Marathon off of his list.

The Antarctic Ice Marathon is the only annual marathon held on the mainland of Antarctica, located at Union Glacier, a mere few hundred miles from the South Pole.

The race takes place amid sub-zero temperatures, which can drop to -25 C (-13 Fahrenheit) not including wind chill and it

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Baltics and Ukraine move to reduce Russian orthodoxy to smaller national church

by Paul Goble
Eurasia Daily Monitor

Russian President Vladimir Putin's expanded war in Ukraine and his increasing repression at home are claiming another victim: the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (ROC-MP). This is occurring both within the Russian Federation and in the former Soviet space, where the Moscow church formerly ruled in an unchallenged way. The process within Russia is one where urbanization and the patriarchate's unqualified support for Putin are reducing the already much-diminished number of Russians active in the church. It is also sparking divisions some see as the basis for the disintegration of the ROC-MP within the Russian Federation (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, December 8, 2022; Re: Russia, January 9; Window on Eurasia, January 10, January 14, January 28). The latter, however, is happening now, undermining both Patriarch Kirill's aspiration to make his church into "an Orthodox Vatican" that could dominate Eastern Christianity as well as calling into question Putin's proclaimed goal of solidifying a Russian world based on both language and culture (see Eurasia Daily Monitor; July 9, 2019).

The Orthodox church as a whole still plays a significant role in the politics of the post-Soviet space. Almost every former Soviet republic, regardless of whether its Orthodox believers constitute a large portion of the population or a microscopically small one, has church activists and their allies in the political regimes seeking inde-

pendence (autocephaly) for all or part of their churches. Some have succeeded, others are still struggling toward that end, and some have adopted compromises in which there are two or even more orthodox hierarchies on their territories, some loyal to Moscow and others independent. The overall trend is clear: Moscow is rapidly losing its position to the national hierarchies and the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople, which supports them (For surveys of this landscape, see Eurasia Daily Monitor, October 17, 2019, August 12, 2021, and January 25, 2023).

In the last week alone, there have been significant developments in Ukraine, Estonia and Lithuania. These developments are already echoing not only in other former Soviet republics, which view these three as models for possible emulation, but also within the Russian Federation where an increasing number of Orthodox faithful think that breaking with the Moscow Patriarchate is their Christian duty and the only way that Russia's Orthodox tradition can be saved (Window on Eurasia, January 8, January 10, January 28). Perhaps, to no one's surprise, the most dramatic of these moves occurred in Ukraine. Still, developments in Estonia and Lithuania, although less radical and affecting fewer believers, will almost certainly have a more significant impact across the former Soviet space.

At the beginning of February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for the Verkhovna Rada to adopt a law banning

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Russian economy feels bite of attrition

by Pavel K. Baev
Eurasia Daily Monitor

On February 1, the European Council unanimously approved the 50 billion euro aid package to Ukraine. Although this package will not alter the course of the battles for Avdiyivka or Kupiansk as it does not include funding for armor or ammunition, it will deliver a boost to Ukraine's struggling economy. In a long war of attrition, economic performance has a decisive impact. Russia's economy got a boost last year from the massive increase in military expenditures. However, even if this volume of funding is sustained this year, the economy's limits of growth have already been reached.

The Russian military-industrial complex has reached its peak performance, a level significantly higher than many experts had assumed possible. This level of performance, however, is still insufficient to cover the needs of those on active duty (Riddle, January 17). Official economic data from Russia is scarce and doctored, but the available figures unmistakably point to a stagnation in industrial production for the last two quarters (Re: Russia, February 7). The large-scale illicit import of artillery shells from North Korea provides proof of insufficient domestic production, which depends on the expanding and illicit import of nitrocellulose (also known as guncotton, an explosive agent) from Turkey and China (Current time, February 6; Moscow times, January 31).

The heavy priority placed on resource

allocation in the Russian defense industry has caused contractions in other sectors, particularly in consumer goods production (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, February 8). The illicit import of crucial technologies and microchips is still oriented primarily toward military needs. At the same time, critical industrial sectors such as civilian aircraft production cannot deliver on the politically prescribed plans (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, February 7). The volume of domestic air travel has recovered to the pre-pandemic level, but the frequency of technical failures pushes the limits of acceptable risks (Novaya Gazeta Europe, February 8). Another underfunded sector is communal infrastructure, and the incessant news about freezing cities in Russia adds to the downtrodden tone of public opinion (Levada.ru, February 2).

The Kremlin policy of completely funding every war-related expense inevitably generates inflationary pressure. To counter it, the Central Bank of the Russian Federation has kept the key interest rate at 16 percent (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, February 8). Many "patriotic" commentators are eager to condemn this credit tightening as a suffocating investment (TopWar.ru, February 8). The government ministers and economists, who have escaped the many cadre purges since the start of the war, counter these accusations by demonstrating the financial system's stability (RBC.ru, February 8). The budget deficit is estimated to be manageable. Still, these cal-

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NEWSBRIEFS

Russian forces getting access to Starlink

Russian troops in Ukraine increasingly have access to Starlink, the private satellite internet network owned by Elon Musk that Ukraine's military relies on heavily for battlefield communications. The findings from RFE/RL's Russian Service corroborate earlier statements from Ukrainian military officials, underscoring how Kyiv's ability to secure its command communications is potentially threatened. It comes as Ukrainian forces grapple with depleted weaponry and ammunition, and overall exhaustion, with Russian forces pressing localized offensives in several locations along the 1,200-kilometer front line. The industrial city of Avdiyivka, in particular, is under severe strain with Russian forces making steady advances, threatening to encircle Ukrainian defenses there. Ukraine has relied heavily on Starlink, a network for low-orbit satellites that provide high-speed internet access. The network is owned by SpaceX, the private space company that is in turn owned by Mr. Musk, the American billionaire entrepreneur. They are used on the front line primarily for stable communications between units, medics and commanders. Ukrainian troops have also experimented with installing Starlink antennas on large attack drones, which are an essential tool for Ukrainian troops but are frequently jammed by Russian electronic warfare systems. However, a growing number of Ukrainian military sources and civilian activists have pointed to evidence that Russian troops are using the network, either for their own communications or to potentially monitor Ukraine's. On February 11, Ukraine's military intelligence service, known as HUR, said Russian forces were not only using Starlink terminals but also doing it in a "systemic" way. HUR also published an audio excerpt of what it said was an intercepted exchange between two Russian soldiers discussing how to set up the terminals. Units like Russia's 83rd Air Assault Brigade, which is fighting in the partially occupied eastern region of Donetsk, are reportedly using the system, HUR spokesman Andriy Yusov was quoted as saying. Ukraine's Defense Ministry, meanwhile, said on February 13 that Russia was acquiring Starlink terminals

from unnamed Arab countries. Starlink has said that it does not do business with Russia's government or its military, and Mr. Musk himself published a statement on his social-media company X, formerly Twitter, in response to the Ukrainian assertions. "A number of false news reports claim that SpaceX is selling Starlink terminals to Russia. This is categorically false. To the best of our knowledge, no Starlinks have been sold directly or indirectly to Russia," Mr. Musk wrote on February 11. Russian troops may have acquired Starlink terminals from one of potentially dozens of companies within Russia that claim to sell them alongside household products, RFE/RL found. One Russian website, called Topmachines.ru, advertised a Starlink set for 220,000 rubles (about \$2,200), and a \$100 monthly subscription fee. Starlink appears to have lax oversight on the type of personal data used by new Starlink clients when they register for the first time, as well. One Moscow-based reseller told RFE/RL that new accounts were registered with random European first and last names and that there is no need to enter a valid European passport. The only important thing, the vendor said, is to have a valid bank card that uses one of the main international payment systems. Another vendor told RFE/RL that the terminals he sold were brought in from Europe, though he declined to specify which country. The vendor said a terminal costs 250,000 rubles (about \$2,400), and the monthly fee was 14,000 rubles. Additionally, Starlink's technology appears to be incapable of precisely restricting signal access; independent researchers say Starlink's system only knows the approximate location of its terminals, meaning it would have to restrict access for Ukrainian frontline positions to limit Russian battlefield use. IStories, an independent Russian news outlet, also identified at least three vendors in Moscow who claim to sell Starlink terminals. Asked by reporters whether Russian troops might be using Starlink terminals, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "This is not a certified system with us, therefore, it cannot be supplied and is not supplied officially. Accordingly, we cannot use it officially in

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With Ukraine defense aid stalled in U.S. Congress, fear of setbacks grows

by **Todd Prince**
RFE/RL

As Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine approaches the two-year mark, Russian forces are making small advances in some locations along the 745-mile front as President Vladimir Putin throws more and more men into battle.

Since New Year’s, Russian forces have captured 39 square miles in eastern and southern Ukraine, according to the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War.

In the coming days or weeks, Russian troops could overrun the heavily damaged industrial city of Avdiivka in the Donetsk region, marking Moscow’s first major victory since the capture of Bakhmut in May 2023.

Meanwhile, a potentially crucial battle is being fought in Washington, where U.S. President Joe Biden’s proposal for \$60 billion in military aid for Kyiv has been stymied in Congress for months.

After multiple twists and turns, the fate of the weapons package remains clouded – and the effects are being felt at the front, where Ukrainian troops are forced to conserve firepower.

U.S. military aid slowed to a trickle at the end of last year and came to a halt in January as authorized Congressional funding ran out.

“The Ukrainians are obviously suffering from shell hunger,” George Barros, an analyst at the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), told RFE/RL. “They are running low on critical supplies and the Russians understand that and timed their counteroffensive in order to capitalize on the situation.”

He was referring to small-scale advances that Russian forces have made around Avdiivka and in several other locations since Ukraine’s own counteroffensive, launched last June, fizzled out in the fall after falling far short of its objectives.

Russian forces are currently firing ammunition at about five times the rate of their Ukrainian counterparts, Michael Kofman, a military analyst at the Washington-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said in a podcast published on January 30.

That rate had been two to one in Ukraine’s favor last summer, Mr. Kofman said.

‘Huge impact’

If Congress does not pass a new aid

package, U.S. military equipment deliveries to Ukraine will fall 80 to 90 percent by the summer of 2024, Mark Cancian, a military analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, told RFE/RL. The flow of U.S. military aid peaked last summer at about \$1.5 billion a month, he said.

Deliveries will not run entirely dry anytime soon: Even though the United States has allocated all the funding approved by Congress, it takes months or even years for some of the military aid to arrive – so weapons and other items needed on the battlefield will continue to make their way to Ukraine throughout the year, Mr. Cancian said.

But if further aid is not approved, “ultimately, it will have a huge impact,” he said. “Armies in conflict need a continuous flow of replacement weapons, ammunition and supplies to keep operating. Ultimately, their line would crack in some place.”

Mr. Cancian said the war could progress along the lines of the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939-1940. The Finns initially inflicted heavy losses on the larger Soviet force but Moscow “kept on hammering at the line and the Finnish lines were breaking.

“That is when the Finns made the peace deal,” he said, suggesting that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s government could come under increasing pressure to seek a cease-fire agreement with Russia, which currently occupies about 20 percent of Ukraine.

Many in Ukraine, and those among its backers abroad, warn that forging an agreement that leaves Russia in control of a chunk of Ukraine would weaken the West and encourage Moscow to seek more gains later.

Mr. Zelenskyy has vowed to regain control over all of Ukraine, but the military is facing manpower shortages in addition to a deficit of ammunition, and that goal seems far out of reach for now.

Gen. Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, who was dismissed by Mr. Zelenskyy on February 8 from his post as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, said in an article published last week that Kyiv must change its fighting strategy in the face of a “reduction in military support from key allies.”

Since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, the United States has approved four aid packages for Ukraine totaling \$113 billion. More than

half of that has been allocated for defense needs, such as anti-tank weapons, air defense systems, long-range rockets, armored vehicles and large quantities of 155-millimeter ammunition.

In August, as the fourth package approached depletion amid Ukraine’s counteroffensive, the Biden administration asked Congress to approve a fifth support bill totaling \$24 billion.

Right-wing Republicans in the House of Representatives balked, demanding that any aid to Ukraine be tied to immigration reform and greater funding for the U.S. border with Mexico. Mr. Biden later proposed a package that included about \$60 billion for Ukraine aid as well as billions of dollars for Israel and Taiwan, while also funding border security and immigration reform.

On February 7, after four months of bipartisan negotiations and several concessions by the White House on border security, Republicans shot that bill down.

In a speech to the nation a day earlier, as the fate of the bipartisan bill became clear, Mr. Biden accused the Republicans of seeking to kill the legislation at the behest of former President Donald Trump, who is on track for the Republican nomination to challenge him in the November 2024 election.

“The clock is ticking,” Mr. Biden said. “Every week, every month that passes without new aid for Ukraine means fewer artillery shells, fewer air defense systems, fewer tools for Ukraine to defend itself against this Russian onslaught. Just what Putin wants.”

Valeriy Chaliy, who served as Ukraine’s ambassador to Washington from 2015 to 2019, told RFE/RL that the reputation of the United States is on the line. If Congress fails to pass an aid bill for its allies, authoritarian governments such as those in China, Iran, Russia and North Korea will “see America’s weakness,” he said.

Eager to secure the long-stalled aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, Democrats have proposed a modified bill, stripped of the immigration reform. The Senate passed the bill on February 13.

It now moves to the U.S. House of Representatives, and experts say the modified bill will face a tough battle there, where Republicans hold a slim majority.

‘They need this stuff now’

Meanwhile, Russia has stepped up its ground and air assaults, including attacks

aimed at undermining Ukraine’s own ability to make weapons. It has been targeting Ukrainian military units and weapons production sites with missiles and drones, U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters on February 6.

Russia is trying “to eliminate Ukraine’s ability to organically produce many of the munitions that they need to defend themselves,” Mr. Kirby said, adding that the barrage of missiles is forcing Ukraine to use its stock of air defense munitions at a fast clip.

“Part of the [Russian] tactic here is to throw metal into the sky, knowing that the Ukrainians are going to have to throw metal back at it, and that there’s not a steady stream or reliable stream of backfill for those air defense capabilities,” he said, suggesting it was crucial to get Ukraine air defense supplies and ammunition.

“We know for a fact that some of their battlefield commanders on the ground are making tough decisions about how many munitions they’re going to fire on a given day at a given target. ... They need this stuff now,” he said.

Mr. Cancian said that the United States has been ramping up weapons production and should have stockpiles of ammunition and other supplies that can be shipped quickly to Ukraine if Congress approves new aid.

European Union countries are also stepping up to the plate, rebuilding their “atrophyed” defense industrial base in part to support Ukraine, Mr. Barros said. Some companies in the European Union – as well as in the United States – are planning to produce weapons in Ukraine to reduce Kyiv’s dependence on fickle foreign aid.

Mr. Barros said the Europeans are doing as much as they can at the moment, with some countries surpassing the United States in aid in gross domestic product (GDP) and per capita terms.

Nonetheless, Ukraine “can’t rely exclusively on Europe at this point. The United States is in a unique position to be able to help keep Ukraine in the fight,” he said.

(With reporting by RFE/RL’s Ukrainian Service)

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Baltics...

(Continued from page 2)

the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) (as the hierarchy and laity that did not join the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) when it achieved autocephaly in 2019). Ukrainian parliamentarians say that such a measure is already being prepared in committee and will be sent to the whole body in the near future. If the measure passes – and there are good reasons to think it will – Mr. Zelenskyy will be able to ban the UOC. This action could lead more of its followers to shift to the autocephalous OCU, but it is a move that will undoubtedly spark outrage in Moscow and also among some conservative churchmen and human rights activists (see Hromadske, February 6; Rusk.ru, February 8).

Ukraine already has a law that bans churches administered abroad. The UOC sought to escape that ban by declaring itself independent of Moscow. Still, despite its claims, there is mounting evidence that the

UOC is closely tied to the ROC-MP, which violates existing law. The new measure, however, would leave no doubt that Kyiv could issue a ban (Window on Eurasia, December 4, 2022, March 12, 2023). At least some of the UOC churches would shift to the OCU, but not all, likely depriving the ROC-MP of its current status as the largest Orthodox church in the world (Rfi.fr, June 17, 2022).

In the Baltic countries, the situation is more fraught and likely more fateful for others. Almost two years ago, the Latvian government ordered the Orthodox church to separate itself from Moscow (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 13, 2022). Tallinn and Vilnius are moving to reduce or even eliminate Moscow’s influence on Orthodox church affairs in their respective countries, albeit in different ways and paces.

Many in the West and even in Russia have long viewed Estonia as a model for other post-Soviet states. Since the 1990s, there has been both an independent ROC subordinate to the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople and a second ROC subordi-

nate to Moscow, the kind of peaceful coexistence among churches that appeared to be the best way out of the current problems (Window on Eurasia, October 21, 2018). The Moscow Patriarchate’s support for Putin’s war in Ukraine and rising anger in Estonia about Russian aggression, however, have made that unsustainable. Tallinn now has rescinded the residence permit of the head of the Moscow church in Estonia, Metropolitan Yevgeny, something that he is required to have as a citizen of the Russian Federation (ERR.ee, January 18; Window on Eurasia, January 21; TASS, February 1). The Russian metropolitan has denounced the move as a violation of his rights, notes that he has criticized the Russian invasion of Ukraine and appointed two men to act in his stead in the hopes of keeping the Moscow church there functioning. The collapse of the compromise in Estonia means the church is unlikely to be sustainable anywhere else in the post-Soviet space (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, February 6; RITM Eurasia, February 9).

Meanwhile, on the very same day that

Metropolitan Yevgeny was compelled to leave Estonia, Vilnius officially recognized the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s exarchate in Lithuania as a legal person and, thus, an institution able to supervise about a dozen dissident Orthodox congregations and, more importantly, to receive state funding. On the surface, this looks like a move toward the Estonian situation before the metropolitan’s expulsion. In the current environment, however, it almost certainly is a significant defeat for Moscow and the basis for more challenges to ROC-MP churches there and in other post-Soviet states (Charter ‘97, February 7; Rusk.ru, February 8; Planeta Press, February 9). Moscow has been put on the defensive in church affairs, and it is a near certainty that the Kremlin will strike back to limit its losses. How and where, however, remains uncertain.

The article above is reprinted from Eurasia Daily Monitor with permission from its publisher, the Jamestown Foundation, www.jamestown.org.

With battlefield woes mounting, Ukraine gets new top general. Who is he?

by Mike Eckel and Todd Prince
RFE/RL

Wounded, exhausted, rag-tag columns of Ukrainian troops withdrew from Debaltseve in February 2015, after Russia-backed separatist fighters encircled the city in the eastern Donbas region and forced the retreat.

It was a stunning defeat. Ukrainians were livid, and they blamed the country's leadership – Petro Poroshenko was president then – and the military commanders in charge of the Debaltseve defense.

Commanders “knew they would give it up a month ago,” one angry retreating soldier told RFE/RL as the retreat was underway. “Just give it up. They should’ve moved everyone out earlier and not waited for those deaths.”

“They” includes Oleksandr Syrskiy, now a colonel general and commander of Ukraine's ground forces who, on February 8, was tapped by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to take over as the country's top military commander.

The change in command comes at a precarious moment for Ukraine's leadership. Mr. Zelenskyy's decision to promote Mr. Syrskiy follows his order dismissing the longtime commander in chief, Gen. Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, a figure widely admired among both Ukraine's military and society more broadly, as well as in the West.

Mr. Syrskiy's elevation has stirred mixed feelings and grumblings among some Ukrainian troops who remember Debaltseve and, more recently, the fight for Bakhmut, a Donbas city that Russia captured in May 2023 after a brutal 10-month offensive.

Some Ukrainian and Western experts questioned the decision to suffer substantial losses in Bakhmut, given that the city had questionable strategic importance. As commander of Ukraine's ground forces – subordinate to Mr. Zaluzhnyi – some blamed Mr. Syrskiy for that decision, though Mr. Zelenskyy is said to have been determined not to cede it to Russian control.

But Mr. Syrskiy was also praised for helping prevent invading Russian forces from capturing Kyiv in the days after the start of the full-scale war on February 24, 2022. He was decorated with Ukraine's highest honor.

“[Mr.] Syrskiy will still be compared to [Mr.] Zaluzhnyi, and therefore you don't envy him,” Oleh Saakyan, a Kyiv-based political scientist, told Current Time. “He'll be compared to the legendary image of [Mr.] Zaluzhnyi; not to the actual person. To win this match is just impossible. [Mr.] Syrskiy will be headed to the electric chair from the start.”

“[Mr.] Zelenskyy believes he needs someone else but what sort of equipment,



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (second from the left) in discussions with Oleksander Syrskiy (second from the right) in the Kharkiv region in November of last year.

troop numbers is this new head going to get?” said Will Pomeranz, director of the Kennan Institute in Washington, D.C. “I don't think [Mr. Syrskiy] will be in a better position to wage the war.”

“Taking back territory was always going to be a major challenge. We got used to victories for Ukraine in the first year of the war,” Mr. Pomeranz told RFE/RL. “Russia can still dig trenches, still mine fields, and I don't know if any new general can deal with that. Frankly, it makes [Mr.] Zelenskyy more exposed, especially if he is suffering a decline of popularity.”

‘Such failures or misguided approaches’

Born in a Russian province east of Moscow, the 58-year-old Mr. Syrskiy, like many senior Ukrainian military officers, received his initial training in the Soviet era, studying at the prestigious Moscow Higher Military Command School and then serving as a Soviet artillery officer.

After moving to Ukraine following the Soviet breakup, Mr. Syrskiy rose through the ranks. When Russia launched its first invasion in 2014 – a stealth effort that used military intelligence to fund and arm local fighters in the Donbas – he was appointed the top commander of what Ukraine called its Anti-Terrorist Operation, to battle the Russia-backed fighters.

Debaltseve was one of the first large-scale defeats of Ukrainian troops and was a shock to many Ukrainians.

One year later, Mr. Syrskiy defended his decisions there.

“For us, the withdrawal from Debaltseve was a key moment that delayed the enemy's best forces,” he said. “After these battles, there were no serious, large-scale attempts to launch an attack. The enemy suffered heavy losses.”

In 2019, he was appointed commander of Ukraine's ground forces and was a pivotal figure in the run-up to the Russian invasion in February 2022, including the defensive preparations around Kyiv. In the days after February 24, Russian forces moved to seize the capital – but were thwarted by what observers later said was a combination of smart decisions by Ukrainian commanders, botched maneuvers by Russian officers, and the ingenuity of mid-level Ukrainian officers.

Mr. Zaluzhnyi was widely hailed, as was Mr. Syrskiy, who was decorated as a Hero of Ukraine in 2022 for his role.

Mr. Syrskiy was also credited with some of the command decisions that resulted in one of two counteroffensive successes in late 2022 and early 2023 – a push in which Ukrainian forces took back a substantial amount of territory in the Kharkiv region in the northeast.

But he was also in charge of decisions to dig in and hold on to Bakhmut, a crossroads city in the Donbas that Russia was hellbent on capturing, and Ukraine was hellbent on defending – despite dubious battlefield value. The battle cry “Fortress Bakhmut” was embraced by civilian and military leaders alike.

Dubbed the “meat grinder,” Bakhmut fell after roughly 10 months of a relentless assault that included soldiers from the private mercenary company Wagner, and inmates recruited from Russian prisons.

“The reputation of certain Ukrainian generals has plummeted to the point where they are now likened to Russian counterparts known for deploying careless frontal assaults,” according to a post published on February 7 by Frontelligence Insight, a Ukrainian open-source research organization run by a Ukrainian reserve officer. “This situation is exacerbated by the lack of

accountability for such failures or misguided approaches.”

In June 2023, Ukrainian commanders launched a major counteroffensive, aiming to punch through Russian lines in several places. Those efforts, however, faltered by year's end, thwarted by deep, well-constructed trench lines and anti-tank defenses that inflicted major losses on Ukraine's North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) trained brigades.

For some observers, blame falls squarely on Mr. Zaluzhnyi's shoulders.

“The fact is [Mr.] Zaluzhnyi presided over a counteroffensive that failed,” Mark Cancian, a military analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, told RFE/RL. “If you are not succeeding, you need to get someone else in there.”

Further straining Mr. Zaluzhnyi's standing in the eyes of the Zelenskyy administration: an article that Mr. Zaluzhnyi published in *The Economist* last fall, in which he described the war as a “stalemate.” The article irked Mr. Zelenskyy, who publicly rebuffed the statement. That, plus Mr. Zaluzhnyi's deep and wide popularity inside and outside the military, added to the perception that he was a political threat to Mr. Zelenskyy.

The two had also publicly disagreed about whether, and how, to mobilize up to 500,000 new personnel for Ukraine's military, a politically fraught decision.

In ousting Mr. Zaluzhnyi, Mr. Zelenskyy heaped praise on him, and cited Mr. Syrskiy's successful defensive experience, including his command of the Kyiv defense and the Kharkiv offense. And in his public statement on his dismissal, Mr. Zaluzhnyi wrote that he and Mr. Zelenskyy “made a decision on the necessity to change approaches and strategy.”

“In [Mr.] Syrskiy, President Zelenskyy may be expecting a commander in chief who keeps his views out of the public view more than [Mr.] Zaluzhnyi while also receiving the best military advice from him,” Mick Ryan, a retired Australian army major general, said in a blog post.

Among the rank and file

Expectations of Mr. Zaluzhnyi's ouster had stoked grumblings among some Ukrainian troops. With Mr. Syrskiy's promotion to commander in chief, they grew louder.

“Under [Mr.] Zaluzhnyi, there was confidence that decisions were being made by professionals based on military, not political expediency,” an infantry soldier named Iryna who, like other military personnel, asked that only her first name be used. “There is no such certainty now. It's not just

(Continued on page 7)

Ukraine, Russia...

(Continued from page 1)

Ukrainian drones early on February 15, regional Gov. Roman Starovoi said on Telegram, adding that there were no casualties.

Ukraine has not commented on the Russian claims, which could not be independently verified immediately.

Earlier, on February 13, Russian shelling and drone strikes killed at least three people and caused damage to critical energy infrastructure in several Ukrainian regions, regional officials and the military reported.

A 64-year-old man was killed by Russian shelling in the southern city of Nikopol

early on February 13, Serhiy Lysak, the governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region, said on Telegram, adding that a private house was also damaged.

In the southern region of Kherson, an 83-year-old man was killed in the shelling of a village early in the morning, regional Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin reported. On February 12, Mr. Prokudin said, two civilians were wounded in the region.

In the Kupiansk region in the east, a 55-year-old farmer was killed by Russian shelling of the village of Kurylyivka, Kharkiv regional Gov. Oleg Synyehubov said on Telegram.

Several people were also wounded by Russian shelling in the Zaporizhia and Donetsk regions, authorities said.

Russia also launched drone strikes on the Dnipropetrovsk region for the second day in a row on February 13, targeting energy infrastructure facilities, Mr. Lysak said.

“Our defenders downed 10 drones over the city of Dnipro,” Mr. Lysak wrote on Telegram. “But there were several hits on energy facilities in the city, and a fire broke out.”

Ukraine's largest private energy provider DTEK said a power plant sustained significant damage in the attack, but there were no casualties.

Dnipro Mayor Borys Filatov said schools were being closed in one neighborhood and one hospital was being evacuated ahead of an expected cold snap that would put additional pressure on the electricity grid.

With nearly 1 million inhabitants, Dnipro is Ukraine's fourth-largest city.

Mr. Lysak said workers had restored the power supply to the small town of Pavlohrad, east of Dnipro, which had been targeted by Russian drones the previous day.

Separately, Ukraine's air defense said it downed 16 out of 23 drones Russia launched at the Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson regions on February 13.

(With reporting by Reuters)

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'Kidnapped Childhood' panel discussion focuses on Ukrainian children abducted by Russian forces

by Nicholas Gordon

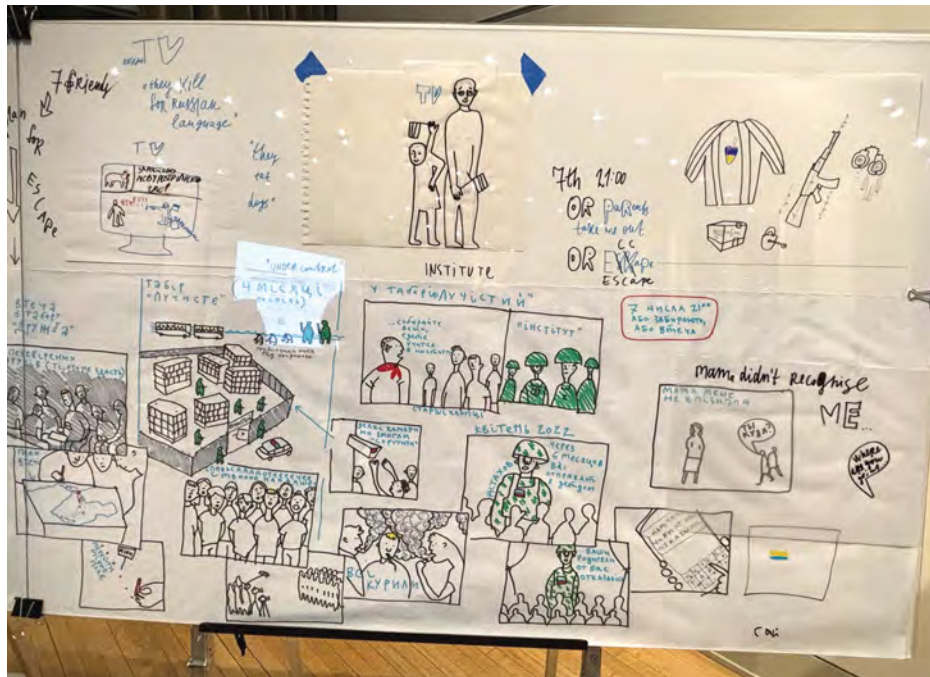
NEW YORK – Activists, artists and legal scholars came together for the panel discussion "Kidnapped Childhood: Russia's War on Ukraine's Children" at Columbia University's Harriman Institute on February 8. Roughly 80 people attended the event.

Five Ukrainian children age 13-18 who were repatriated from Russia were welcomed at the start of the event as "surprise guests" by moderator Valentina Izmirlieva,

a professor in Columbia's Slavic department and director of the Harriman Institute.

Giving her first speech in English, one of the children, Ksenia, said: "Despite our horrors and traumas, I believe in the victory of Ukraine. I believe that all children will be returned to their families and that Russia will be punished for its crimes."

Mykola Kuleba, a Ukrainian social and political activist who founded Save Ukraine, an organization supporting Ukrainian citizens affected by war, has been working



Ukrainian children, whom Russia kidnapped and later repatriated to Ukraine, created graphic novel-style art to process their trauma and share their stories. The children's artwork was displayed at Columbia University's Harriman Institute during a panel discussion on February 8.



Nicholas Gordon

Five Ukrainian children age 13-18 who were kidnapped by Russia and rescued by the human rights organization Save Ukraine were welcomed and recognized at the opening of a panel discussion at Columbia University's Harriman Institute in New York on February 8.

with these children and meeting with U.S. political leaders to continue drumming up aid and support to rescue more kidnapped Ukrainian children.

"As we gather here, we carry an urgent plea for the more than 19,000 children that have been kidnapped by Russia and need to be brought back to Ukraine," Mr. Kuleba said. Mr. Kuleba was the former presidential commissioner for children's rights in Ukraine from 2014 to 2021.

Save Ukraine's rescue efforts began as the organization was helping to evacuate more than 100,000 women and children from combat zones. During that time, they discovered that many of the children had

disappeared from these combat zones. In the city of Mariupol, Ukraine, in particular, thousands of children whose parents were killed by Russian forces were missing.

Mr. Kuleba described the Russian propaganda strategy of "brainwashing and weaponizing our children, of trying to instill hatred of Ukraine in them." He said that he and his team have been overwhelmed with what they are learning from the children, many of whom did not know that Ukraine still exists, based on what they've been told by Russia. A group of psychologists are also working closely with the returned children.

(Continued on page 7)

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STAND WITH UKRAINE

THE UKRAINIAN WEEKLY

The Russian threat in space

For those among us who still believe the Russian threat is limited to Eastern Europe and that Moscow poses no danger to the North American continent, the recent confirmation from the White House regarding Russia's emerging anti-satellite capability is a stark reminder of Moscow's reach in an increasingly complex world. While the National Security Council's acknowledgment of Russia's pursuit of such technology underscores the gravity of the situation, it also serves as a wake-up call for global leaders to address Russian President Vladimir Putin's desire to destroy not just Ukraine, but a rules-based international order that grew after World War II and that has kept world powers from launching a third world war.

The confirmation, delivered by White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby, signals a troubling advancement in Russia's military capabilities. While Mr. Kirby emphasized that the anti-satellite capability has not yet been deployed and does not pose an immediate threat to human safety or physical destruction on Earth, it nonetheless represents a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape.

The concern expressed by Rep. Mike Turner, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, underscores the seriousness of the issue. Mr. Turner's call to declassify information regarding the emerging threat reflects the urgent need for transparency and collaboration in addressing security challenges that transcend borders.

Russia's response, dismissing the U.S. concern as a ploy to manipulate congressional support for aid to Ukraine, is nothing more than Kremlin double-speak. Such matters must be approached with a sense of responsibility and cooperation rather than used as propaganda or political leverage.

The potential implications of Russia's efforts to develop space-based weapons cannot be overstated. Reports suggesting the possibility of a space-based, anti-satellite nuclear weapon raise concerns about the militarization of space and the violation of international treaties aimed at preserving the peaceful use of outer space.

The existence of such weaponry would not only destabilize the delicate balance of power among nations but also undermine longstanding efforts to prevent the weaponization of space. The international community must remain vigilant in upholding the principles enshrined in treaties governing peaceful space exploration and disarmament.

The urgency of addressing the Russian threat and supporting Ukraine's defense capabilities was underscored as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) defense ministers convened in Brussels on February 15. Against the backdrop of Moscow's emerging anti-satellite capability, its increasingly aggressive assault in Ukraine's east and relentless attacks on civilians and infrastructure, the need for continued military aid and solidarity with Ukraine has never been more apparent.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg's call for continued U.S. support for Ukraine's defense efforts is a testament to the alliance's commitment to collective security and solidarity in the face of external aggression. The \$95.34 billion military aid package, which includes substantial support for Kyiv, represents a crucial lifeline for Ukraine's embattled forces as they confront the daunting challenges posed by Russian aggression and as the world learns about Putin's plans in space.

The imperative to stand in solidarity with Ukraine must transcend partisan divides and geopolitical calculations. The fate of Ukraine is not merely a matter of strategic significance but a test of the international community's commitment to upholding bedrock democratic principles.

As Ukraine braces for the challenges ahead, the international community must stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Kyiv in defense of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. The Russian threat to Ukraine is not just a regional concern but a grave danger to the stability and security of the entire international order. If helping secure that order costs the U.S. another \$90 billion, it is a small price for us to pay, and we would be wise to pay it.

Feb.
24
2019

Turning the pages back...

Five years ago, on February 22, 2019, the Ukrainian National Association celebrated the 125th anniversary of its founding. President and CEO Stefan Kaczaraj's statement in The Ukrainian Weekly's celebratory issue recounted the history of Ukrainian immigrants in the United States, and the origins of the Ukrainian National Association (UNA).

"On September 15, 1893, the Rev. Hryhoriy Hrushka and like-minded colleagues published the first issue of the newspaper Svoboda, 'a true beacon of light in the prevailing darkness of hopelessness and despair among Ukrainian immigrants in America,' Anthony Dragan wrote in his history of the UNA (1964). [...] These pioneers of our community life were able to combine national values with human values. Each issue of Svoboda promoted the enlightenment of its readers and adopted as its credo Taras Shevchenko's immortal words: 'Study my brothers. Think, read. Learn what others have to offer, but do not forsake your own.'"

And it was Svoboda, just a few months later, which called for the establishment of a national organization "that would embrace each and every Ukrainian no matter where he lives," for "in unity there is strength, and it is not easily defeated."

The founding convention of the UNA was held on February 22, 1984, and the March 1, 1894, issue of Svoboda proclaimed the birth of the fraternal society known as the Ukrainian National Association.

Mr. Kaczaraj's statement underscored the leadership role of the UNA in the Ukrainian community of North America for more than 12 decades. Although too numerous to include all of the achievements of the UNA, the statement highlighted the role the UNA has played in building churches, schools, organizing choirs and drama troupes, spearheading

(Continued on page 8)

Tasked with...

(Continued from page 1)

destruction to Ukraine" stand at \$400 billion.

Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers says the total cost to rebuild the nation over the next decade from Russia's full-fledged invasion that began on February 24, 2022, up to December 31 was \$11 billion higher.

"The UCCA [Ukrainian Congress Committee of America] continues to fight for and call on the U.S. administration to seize and confiscate assets owned by war criminals committing genocide against the Ukrainian nation," said Andriy Futey, president of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA). "[It's] time to act and hit those criminals where they will feel the pain. The U.S. administration has the resources. Stop the road shows and start acting."

Direct losses in the country "have now reached almost \$152 billion, with housing, transport, trade and industry, energy and agriculture identified as the most affected sectors," the Ukrainian government said on February 15, based on a joint report with the World Bank, the United Nations and the European Commission.

Ms. Pritzker only responded to two questions during the event, none of which related to how Ukraine's recovery will be advanced with frozen Russian assets.

Altogether, about \$323 billion of Moscow's central bank reserves are frozen in the European Union and the Group of Seven (G-7) industrialized nations that include the U.S., Reuter's news agency reported this week.

As a descendant of Ukrainian grandparents from Ukraine, Ms. Pritzker said that "Ukraine's economy has been resilient" during the all-out invasion and that its resistance is important "to our survival."

Addressing the audience, she said: "Let's work together; ... let's win the war and [achieve] peace together." She added that "we are committed to Ukraine's aspirations [to] join the E.U. and NATO [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization]."

Despite constant Russian bombardment of civilian infrastructure that are not considered to be valid targets per the U.N.'s Geneva Conventions, Ukraine saw economic growth of 5 percent in 2023, Ms. Pritzker said.

"Ukraine continues to beat the odds, ... exceeding expectation," she said while almost verbatim repeating a speech she gave at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in September when she was appointed as an envoy to Kyiv.

Noting Russia's military losses, she said that Russian forces are "untrained and ill-equipped; ... that's how little [Kremlin dictator Vladimir] Putin values human life."

Further emphasizing her point of the unjustified war already entering its 10th year, Ms. Pritzker said "Putin is making a bet against Ukraine, against the E.U.,

against the U.S. and against the rule of law and of sovereign integrity."

Regarding a pending \$95 billion aid package pending in the U.S. Congress, she pointed out that the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Mike Johnson (R-La.) is on the record previously highlighting the importance of ensuring that Russia faces consequences for invading Ukraine.

She quoted him from 2022 when Russia launched its full-scale war on Ukraine: "Russia's invasion of Ukraine's sovereign territory threatens the greatest destabilization of the world order since World War II and constitutes a national security threat to the entire West."

The House speaker is expected to block any further aid to Ukraine, citing the U.S. country's southern border security as a priority.

On February 14, Michael McFaul, the former U.S. ambassador to Russia said that "blocking aid to Ukraine is giving aid to Putin."

Ukraine's U.S. ambassador

Joining the event via video link, Kyiv's ambassador to the U.S., Oksana Markarova, said that for "721 days Ukraine has been fighting for its existence and democracy. The priority is to win the war and hope Congress will stay with us ... in this war that we must win. We also want to be in the EU and NATO."

During introductions, the vice president of the Illinois Division of the UCCA, Marta Farion, said that "a majority of Americans support the Founding Fathers [and their perspective] of freedom, fairness and justice," referring to the authors of the U.S. Constitution.

"The UCCA continues to fight for and call on the U.S. administration to seize and confiscate assets owned by war criminals committing genocide against the Ukrainian nation. Time to act and hit those criminals where they will feel the pain. The U.S. administration has the resources. Stop the road shows and start acting," she said.

There is a singular goal for Ukraine and that is "to regain Ukraine's sovereignty and for it to win, the country's economic recovery and victory [in the war] are inextricably linked," said Ivo Daalder, president of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Ms. Pritzker added that any Ukrainian recovery must include "a final turn away from post-Soviet corruption."

She said that the world needs to "increase awareness" about Ukraine's potential in "agriculture, mining, energy ... the transportation and logistics sector, defense production."

Citing U.S. statistics, she said that Ukraine's information technology industry "has grown 7 percent since 2022. And it 'will be the key to driving Ukraine's economic recovery,' Ms. Pritzker said without providing dollar amounts.



National Police of Ukraine

Russian aerial attacks in the town of Velykyi Burluky in the Kupiansk region of Kharkiv Oblast injured four civilians and destroyed eight of 16 apartments in the residential high-rise building pictured above.

'Kidnapped...'

(Continued from page 5)

"The kids are afraid when they return to Ukraine. They've been told by Russia that Nazis will kill them," Mr. Kuleba said. "It's crucial for us to provide the kids with love and support, to build an atmosphere of trust."

Save Ukraine has safely returned 231 kidnapped Ukrainian children to date, using what Mr. Kuleba described as "an underground railroad" of undisclosed routes for safety precautions.

Ukrainian filmmaker Tetiana Khodakhivska and Ukrainian conceptual artist Alevtina Kakhidze are using art as a means of helping returned Ukrainian children share their stories and process the trauma they've experienced.

"Our primary goal is to give these children their voices back, while also protecting them from further trauma," Ms. Khodakhivska said.

Due to the inherent difficulty in talking about such an emotional topic of being kidnapped, Ms. Khodakhivska collaborated with the children on ways they would like to share their stories. Some of the children chose to be filmed in interviews using animation to avoid showing their faces.

Ms. Khodakhivska said the idea for her film project "grew out of fear" after watching countless hours of Russian propaganda for an earlier film she was making on Russia's annexation of Crimea.

"I realized that to fight Russian propaganda, we have to do it with art," Ms.



Panelists at the event "Kidnapped Childhood: Russia's War on Ukraine's Children" were (from left to right) Tetiana Khodakhivska, Alevtina Kakhidze, Valentina Izmirlieva, Mykola Kuleba, and one of his team members from Save Ukraine, Olga (her surname was not included for security reasons).

Khodakhivska said. She and her team have also documented scenes of Ukrainian life from Kharkiv and Kherson for the film.

Ms. Kakhidze and a team of visual artists collaborated with the children by conducting "drawing interviews," which she believes produce "a greater degree of truth" than words alone.

"Drawing gives you power because you become someone who can control your narrative. For example, you can draw your suppressors as small," Ms. Kakhidze said, noting that many of the children they worked with are still sending them draw-

ings, using their art as a tool for therapy.

Many of the children used both text and images in the style of graphic novels to share their stories. Several of the children's drawings were shown on four large panel exhibits at the event.

Last March, the International Criminal Court in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia's commissioner for children's rights, charging them with the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, a war crime under international legislation.

Challenges with prosecuting them, how-

ever, remain, according to Dr. Volodymyr Venher, dean of the faculty of law at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and an associate professor in the school's department of jurisprudence and public law. Dr. Venher joined the panel virtually from Kyiv.

"First, there's the challenge of collecting data and evidence and documentation to provide to the courts," Dr. Venher said, noting that finding information on children abducted from occupied territories can be very difficult. "Second, international laws are based on mutual recognition between governments, but Russia won't abide by international law or acknowledge its war crimes."

Mr. Venher advocated for having a broader perspective on the legal term "forcible transfer" used to describe the kidnapping of Ukrainian children.

"Forcible transfer means not only trafficking and physically removing people from their homes; forcible transfer also means threats and fear of violence and psychological abuse," Mr. Venher said.

Ms. Izmirlieva echoed Mr. Venher's words in describing the Russian indoctrination of kidnapped Ukrainian children as "systemic Russification," which includes bribes and lies and threats and punishments.

But if the kidnapping of Ukrainian children by Russia is one of the war's most harrowing realities, the rescued children themselves have evinced profound fortitude throughout. As Ms. Kakhidze stated: "This is not only a sad story, it's also a story of resilience."

Russian economy...

(Continued from page 2)

culations are based on unrealistic expectations of high revenues and even more dubious provisions for reducing military expenditures in 2025-2026 (Tinkoff Journal, February 8).

Over-taxation causes underinvestment in the development of productive assets and the economization of industrial maintenance. This results in technical failures, such as the gas pipeline explosion in the Perm region on February 8 (Permnews.ru, February 9). Recognizing this vulnerability, Ukrainian Defense Intelligence has launched a series of long-distance drone strikes on Russian oil refineries, some of them hundreds of miles away from the border, as was the case in Volgograd or Yaroslavl (The Insider, February 7). Most of these attacks have low impact, but every disruption cuts the profit margin of petroleum exports (BFM.ru, February 6).

The primary source of budget revenue in the Russian Federation comes from the energy sector. The government seeks to increase this revenue by raising taxes, even on the coal industry, which is not very cost-effective even if exports hold steady (Kommersant, February 9). The loss of the profitable European market has severely affected the Russian gas industry. At the same time, plans for expanding liquid natural gas production have been delayed as the Novatek projects on Yamal and Gydan struggle to circumvent sanctions (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 9 [1], [2], January 24; Kommersant, February 8). The oil industry generates the bulk of economic revenue in the Russian Federation, and the volume has remained well below budget forecasts as both production and export prices remain stagnant (Neftegaz.ru, January 27).

The only hope of rescue for the Russian energy complex would be a new spike in oil prices. Still, the indifference in the world

market to the risks of maritime traffic in the Red Sea, much to Moscow's disappointment, illustrates the robustness of the declining trend in oil prices (Forbes.ru, February 7). Stagnation in China's economy is the primary driver of this trend. Russian proposals to build new gas pipelines jointly find the usual "maybe-later" response in Beijing (Moscow times, February 6). China is keen to increase exports to Russia but is wary of not breaching the sanctions regime. A recent shock for Moscow was the enforcement of a ban on all financial transactions with Russian clients by several Chinese banks (Vedomosti, February 7).

Several Turkish banks have also introduced similar restrictions. Desperate diplomatic persuasion from Russia has yielded only a partial softening of the ban, allowing payments for consumer goods exported from Turkey (IStories, February 5; RIA-Novosti, February 9). Russia is increasingly dependent upon Turkey to facilitate its energy exports. Moscow has sought to turn this weakness into strength by tempting Ankara with a proposal for a "gas hub" (Moscow times, February 1). Moscow has also refrained from venting its irritation with such Turkish actions as mine-clearing (jointly with Bulgaria and Romania) the maritime corridor from Odesa and building a plant near Kyiv for constructing Bayraktar drones (RBC.ru, February 6). Russian President Vladimir Putin hoped to smooth these disagreements with a visit to Ankara and to resume a dialogue with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Still, compromises have proven hard to reach, and the visit has been postponed (Kommersant, February 8).

Loopholes in the sanctions against Russia are progressively getting covered, creating more difficulties for the Russian economy. Each new Russian scheme for circumventing restrictions involves extra costs and relies on more middlemen of low repute. The economic model based on the high-value export of hydrocarbons and channeling revenues into the military-

industrial complex, which depends on the import of critical components and technologies, is resulting in diminishing returns and accelerating breakdowns.

Ukraine is struggling with a formidable and ruthless enemy. The approval of the military aid package by the U.S. Congress is crucial for keeping Kyiv in the fight for months to come. In the interim, however, Ukraine's victory will be determined by the economic ties and integration with Europe,

which possesses industrial, technological and scientific capabilities far superior to those that Russia can mobilize or purchase. Only a fraction of Europe's power needs to be deployed to decide the outcome of the confrontation unleashed by Putin.

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With battlefield...

(Continued from page 4)

that Gen. Syrskiy is trusted by fewer soldiers than Gen. Zaluzhnyi. The fact is that [Mr.] Zaluzhnyi's ouster was preceded by a campaign to discredit [him]."

"It is not clear what [Mr.] Zaluzhnyi did wrong, what was the point of throwing mud at him and the entire army, what can [Mr.] Syrskiy do in this situation," Iryna told Donbas.Realities, a unit of RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service.

"The current layer of generals of the Armed Forces is not modern military management. Unfortunately," said Andriy, a soldier in an airborne assault unit. "The new commander in chief - [Mr.] Syrskiy - is no exception. We are marching in place, all the while losing the best people in this country."

Oleksiy, a gunner in an artillery unit, blamed Mr. Zelenskyy for the current battlefield failures and accused him of trying to shift the blame to Mr. Zaluzhnyi.

"[Mr.] Zelenskyy wants to be number one in the world! He wants to be a hero!"

he said. "Although he has nothing to do with any military operation. I believe that this is [Mr.] Zelenskyy's most important mistake, which will cost him the trust of the people. And, unfortunately, it will also cost thousands of dead soldiers and the loss of new territory."

"Most of my friends are reacting with regret" to the decision to shuffle commanders, Ukrainian Jr. Sgt. Pavlo Kazarin, who is also a journalist, told Current Time. "But I repeat: the army is big, up to 1 million people serve in the Ukrainian defense forces, so it would be quite irresponsible on my part to judge the entire mood of the army."

(Mike Eckel reported from Prague; Todd Prince reported from Washington. With reporting by Serhiy Horbatenko and Darya Kurennaya of RFE/RL's Donbas Realities and Iryna Romaliyska, of Current Time.)

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Dennis Ougrin...

(Continued from page 1)

features treacherous terrain.

Recognized as the southernmost marathon on Earth, it offers runners from all corners of the globe an opportunity to test their limits in extreme conditions while marveling at the stunning frozen landscapes.

"I used to climb mountains for many years, and then in 2019 I had an accident at Mount Everest. And after that, I couldn't climb the high mountains anymore. However, I still required a sufficient amount of dopamine release every year to keep me going, and I was looking for new challenges. I think overcoming difficulties probably gives you more dopamine than anything else," Mr. Ougrin told a correspondent for The Ukrainian Weekly.

Mr. Ougrin chose running as his new challenge.

"However, simple marathons produced a rather limited and modest amount of dopamine in my brain. So, I had to find a marathon that would challenge me significantly. That sort of marathon was in Antarctica, and I decided to run that marathon to compensate for the lack of high mountains in my life," he said.

He says that he always looks for things that would be memorable.

"I think my wife and I were the first Ukrainians to climb Mount Denali in Alaska. And I certainly was the first Ukrainian to attempt the marathon in Antarctica. Being the first in something adds another small amount of dopamine in my brain. So that's a bonus," he said.

"Marathons are a rather poor substitute for high mountains, and I think I could very easily change all seven marathons on all seven continents for one Everest because there is something extraordinary behind mountains, which is very difficult to articulate, but it gives me a lot of pleasure that marathons don't. If you ask me whether an Antarctic marathon is a small dream, then I would say it's a very, very small one," he said.

Mr. Ougrin mentioned that he was aware he would be one of six British participants that year, and he also knew there would be at least one Russian competitor, which presented an extra challenge for him.

Speaking of his dual nation representation, Mr. Ougrin said, "Firstly, I'm Ukrainian. I always support England in football except when it plays Ukraine, so my loyalty is clear."

With over 800 official marathons held worldwide each year, the Antarctic Ice Marathon is considered by many athletes to be the most challenging. The harsh



Courtesy of Antarctic Ice Marathon

Dennis Ougrin became the first Ukrainian to complete the Antarctic Ice Marathon, which took place on Union Glacier in the Antarctic in December.



Courtesy of Antarctic Ice Marathon

Dennis Ougrin (left) is seen running the Antarctic Ice Marathon on Union Glacier in the Antarctic in December.

Antarctic weather, including freezing temperatures and severe winds, presents significant hurdles for participants. Achieving success in this unique setting demands exceptional physical fitness and resilience.

"I would recommend that in those kinds of marathons, you have a good wife and good friends. My wife is an experienced mountain climber as well. She spends many hours researching gear. She used her experience and knowledge of climbing gear to secure me the best gear for running. Furthermore, she did that with a friend, a fellow mountain climber from Minneapolis named Petro. He's also a member of the Plast kurin [fraternity] Burlaky," said Mr. Ougrin, who has been a Plast member since the 1990s.

Mr. Ougrin shared that his wife, Petro and other friends came together to provide him with the best possible gear for the marathon. His wife was crucial in selecting the right shoes and, importantly, a mask for him. He believed he was either the only one or among the few runners wearing a mask during the race.

Mr. Ougrin and his friend Andriy Havryliv traveled to Norway for training a few weeks before the marathon. They ran in low temperatures, where the mask proved to be beneficial. It helped maintain enough warm air to breathe comfortably in the extreme cold. Mr. Ougrin noted that, while running with the mask, the wind's direction significantly impacted his experience. The mask was beneficial when facing headwinds.

Typically, Antarctica is an extremely cold place, where temperatures could go as low as -89 degrees Celsius (-128.2 degrees Fahrenheit). However, the marathon took place during the summer and was unusually warm.

"It was tropical. On the actual marathon day, the temperature was -3 degrees Celsius [26.6 degrees Fahrenheit]. The wind was powerful, and the chill was -25 [-13 degrees Fahrenheit]. So, the day before, and the day after, it was -15 [5 degrees Fahrenheit], which still is quite warm. But on the actual day, it was extraordinarily warm," Mr. Ougrin said.

One of the critical differences between Mr. Ougrin and most marathon runners, which allowed him to take second place in his age group and 11th overall, was that he's trained and used to cold weather and ice and wind. He said that most participants were very young and super athletic. In the 45 and over age group, there were around 20 people, according to Mr. Ougrin. He was pleased to realize that his experience with high mountains, ice and wind could significantly contribute to his performance in the marathon.

"So, people who are significantly more qualified than I was, with significantly more

experience and an aptitude for these things, were doing significantly worse because they were not used to the cold and wind and running on ice and snow. I'm also not the slimmest, so being slightly fat is an advantage when running a marathon in Antarctica. So, I recommend shynka [ham] and varenyky as opposed to quinoa and water," Mr. Ougrin joked.

In addition to the marathon, Antarctica is an extraordinary experience on its own. Mr. Ougrin shared his most emotional impressions of the ice continent.

"There's no night in Antarctica, so at one o'clock in the morning, you still have the sun, and that's an unusual experience – it's never dark. So, you sleep in broad daylight. Secondly, Antarctica is the largest desert in the world, and it has nothing there besides ice. And the ice is exceptionally deep, so the average amount of ice under your feet is about 2 kilometers, an unreal amount of ice," he said.

"And then what you have is also this weird experience where you know that that huge landmass doesn't belong to anybody. Even though many countries claim it, that particular aspect of Antarctica called the Union Glacier, is claimed by three countries – Chile, Argentina, and, weirdly, the U.K. But it also creates interesting challenges," he said.

"So, for instance, I have a funny picture that shows a speed limit of 15 miles per hour, but it's unclear which country is supposed to enforce this speed limit. It is also unclear to me if there is a crime, who is supposed to investigate. Let's say, God forbid, that one marathon runner becomes irritated with another and kills him. Then, it's unclear which jurisdiction should cover that crime," Mr. Ougrin said.

He said that most military bases are on the coast, but the marathon is in the middle of the continent, and it's very beautiful – there are mountains, but there are no penguins and no people aside from those who

come for the marathon.

Mr. Ougrin says there is an international terminal on the ice where planes from Chile land. From there, passengers are taken to an exceptionally well-run base camp with excellent food, showers and amenities that one might not expect in such a remote location.

The camp serves as a hub for various activities. People from the camp can choose to climb the highest mountain in the area, Mount Vincent, participate in a marathon, or journey to the South Pole.

A small plane is needed to reach the South Pole or the mountain. There is also a domestic terminal near the camp where these small planes take off and land, with flights lasting about 40 minutes. This setup includes international and domestic terminals, but everything is on ice, with no permanent structures, animals or plants. The landscape is characterized by thick ice, stunning mountains and continuous daylight during the polar day.

The base camp has tents where people sleep and is very comfortable, Mr. Ougrin said. There's a big communal tent where people can read books, play games and watch movies, but they are temporary, and at the end of the season, they're all folded up.

Mr. Ougrin spent several nights at the camp.

"As a psychiatrist, I was trying to calm people down. That was one of the key things because people are very worried about things. And then they ask many questions even though I've never been there before," he said.

"At the base, you eat, drink and then just hope for good weather to play volleyball on ice. If you like it, you can also take an ice bicycle, which is quite an experience. It feels like the base camp of Everest or any other mountain where people come temporarily. They are very particular kinds of people; some are very unpleasant, and some are very likable," he said.

Turning...

(Continued from page 6)

literary projects, including publishing books in Ukrainian and English.

The UNA newspapers were on the front lines domestically in the post-World War II era during the years of the Red Scare, the statement explained, when Ukrainians were being slandered as Nazi sympathizers during the ongoing waves of Ukrainian displaced persons who were arriving in North America. The UNA was a major advocate for the U.S. to open its doors to these displaced persons and continued to advocate for the release of Ukrainian political prisoners and those who had been victims of

psychological abuse by the Soviets.

Another major milestone for the Ukrainian American community came in 1964 with the unveiling of the Taras Shevchenko monument in Washington.

Mr. Kaczaraj also reminded readers in his statement of the role Ukrainian women have played in the organization. "The history of the UNA," he said, "is replete with the names of prominent women who worked, and continue to work, for the good of our community and our nation within the UNA's ranks and beyond."

Source: "The Ukrainian National Association is 125 years old," by Stefan Kaczaraj, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, February 24, 2019.



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NEWSBRIEFS

(Continued from page 2)

any way." (By RFE/RL's Mark Krutov, Sergei Dobrynin and Yauhen Lehalau)

Large Russian landing ship destroyed

The Ukrainian military said it destroyed a large Russian landing ship in the Black Sea off the coast of occupied Crimea in a combined operation of the armed forces and military intelligence. "The armed forces of Ukraine together with the military intelligence [HUR] have destroyed the Tsezar Kunikov, a large landing ship belonging to the occupiers," the General Staff of Ukraine's military said on February 14. It said the vessel was struck by naval drones off the coast near the settlement of Alupka. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment on the Ukrainian claim, which could not be independently confirmed immediately. But the pro-war Rybar Telegram channel, which is close to the Russian Defense Ministry, confirmed the attack, although without providing details. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy commented on the operation in his nightly video address. "Today, more security in the Black Sea and more motivation for our people were added. This is important. And step by step, we will clear the Black Sea of Russian terrorist objects," Mr. Zelenskyy said. North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO) Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg was asked earlier on February 14 about the strike on the Tsezar Kunikov at a news conference in Brussels. Mr. Stoltenberg did not confirm the strike on the landing ship but hailed the progress made by Ukraine in pushing away Russia's fleet from the western part of the Black Sea. "This is a great achievement and a great victory for Ukrainians," Mr. Stoltenberg said. "Few believed that this was possible just a few months ago. But now, actually, the export of grain from Ukraine takes place even without an agreement with Russia, so this shows the skills and competence of the Ukrainian armed forces," he added. The HUR said the operation was carried out by a special-forces unit called Group 13, which used Magura V5 naval attack drones. "The Tsezar Kunikov received critical holes on its left side ... and began to sink," the HUR said in its statement. "It is symbolic that the Russian officer after whom the ship was named was killed exactly 81 years ago," the HUR said, referring to an officer of the Soviet Naval Infantry who was killed on February 14, 1943, during a landing operation on the Black Sea coast. The HUR said that a Russian operation to save the survivors was "unsuccessful," although the anonymous Russian Telegram channel Two Majors, which publishes information from sources close to the security establishment, said that the crew was alive. The Tsezar Kunikov, one of the largest Russian landing

ships, was built in 1986 at a shipyard in the Polish port of Gdansk. It can transport equipment and more than 300 troops. The regular crew is 87. The ship took part in Russia's military operation in Georgia in 2008, supplied the Russian military group involved in the conflict in Syria and participated in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It was damaged in 2022 by a Ukrainian missile attack in the Ukrainian port of Berdyansk. Ukrainian forces last week said they sank the Russian missile-armed corvette Ivanovets in the Black Sea in an operation carried out by the same elite Group 13 unit with Magura V drones. In December, Ukraine said its missiles struck another Russian landing ship in Crimea. The Magura V5 drone, the acronym for Maritime Autonomous Guard Unmanned Robotic Apparatus V Type, was unveiled last year. The drone, which has the appearance of a sleek speedboat, has a top speed of 80 kilometers per hour, according to reports, and can carry a payload of 320 kilograms. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian and Russian services, with reporting by AP and Reuters)

Russian shelling kills at least 3 civilians

Russian shelling killed at least three people, including a child, and wounded 12 others early on February 14 in the city of Selydove in the eastern Donetsk region, the local council reported, adding that four of the wounded were also children. Local authorities said nine apartment blocks and the city hospital were also damaged during the shelling. Russia in recent weeks has stepped up its shelling and drone attacks on Ukrainian civilian settlements and infrastructure, causing numerous victims and damage. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

Bulgarian farmers protest Ukrainian imports

Farmers from across Bulgaria blocked two main thoroughfares in the capital, Sofia, on February 13, pouring milk onto the streets as they demanded the resignation of Agriculture Minister Kiril Vatev, increased subsidies and changes to a deal on compensation for the impact of Ukrainian imports flooding the market. Demonstrators also demanded a meeting with Prime Minister Nikolai Denkov, but said they were turned down. Some clashes between farmers and police were reported when they tried to enter the government building. (RFE/RL's Bulgarian Service)

Russian oligarch's assets nationalizes

The Ukrainian Prosecutor-General's Office said on February 13 that the Anti-Corruption High Court has nationalized assets in Ukraine belonging to Russian oligarch and former lawmaker Ivan Savvidi. The nationalized assets include all the shares of the PentoPak packaging company and its subsidiaries, commercial buildings, vehicles and over \$1 million cash in bank accounts in the name of the companies in question. The Ukrainian State Bureau of Investigation said that Mr. Savvidi is suspected of money laundering and financing activities aimed at seizing power in Ukraine. Mr. Savvidi holds dual Russian and Greek citizenship. He owns the Greek professional soccer club PAOK as well as several lucrative businesses in Russia. (RFE/RL's Current Time)

IIHF keeps ban on Russia, Belarus

The International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) has decided Russia and Belarus remain barred from participating in its competitions, meaning neither will be represented at events in the 2024-2025 championship season. "Based on a thorough analysis, the IIHF Council concluded that it is not yet safe to reincorporate the Russian and Belarusian teams back into IIHF competitions," the sport's governing body said in a statement on February 12. The countries were banned from competitions after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of

Ukraine in February 2022. Belarus was included as it has provided logistical support for its ally. (RFE/RL)

Baltic officials on Russian wanted list

Moscow has placed Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas on Russia's wanted list, the first time a foreign leader has been put on the Interior Ministry's list, for "destroying monuments to Soviet soldiers" as relations between the Kremlin and the West continue to show signs of deteriorating. The Foreign Affairs Ministry in Moscow confirmed the move on February 13, though it did not say when Ms. Kallas, Estonian Secretary of State Taimar Peterkop, Lithuanian Culture Minister Simonas Kairys, and about 60 of the 100 members of the previous Latvian parliament were placed on the list. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Ms. Kallas was put on the wanted list for the "desecration of historical memory." "The Kremlin now hopes this move will help to silence me and others - but it won't," Ms. Kallas said in a post on X, formerly Twitter. "I will continue my strong support to Ukraine. I will continue to stand for increasing Europe's defense," she said, adding that Russia's move was "nothing surprising." Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine nearly two years ago, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and many other former Soviet republics and ex-Warsaw pact members have demolished Soviet-era monuments. The three Baltic states were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 and occupied by Nazi Germany before falling back under Moscow's rule until regaining independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. All three are now members of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and strongly support Ukraine in its battle to repel invading Russian forces. Ms. Kallas became Estonia's prime minister in 2021 and soon afterward pledged to dismantle as many as 400 monuments seen as an unwanted legacy from the Soviet era. News of Moscow's move to put Ms. Kallas and other officials from European Union countries on its wanted list comes almost a year after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's commissioner for children's rights, alleging responsibility for the war crime of unlawfully deporting and transferring children from Ukraine during the war. The Russian Interior Ministry's list also includes ICC President Piotr Hofmanski. (RFE/RL's Current Time, with reporting by AP and Reuters)

Security conference opens with Europe on edge

The Munich Security Conference kicked off on February 16 at a critical time, as the U.S. presidential election campaign heats up with a rematch between former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden looking likely and with a major U.S. military aid package bogged down in Congress. U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris was scheduled to address the conference on its opening day to be followed on February 17 by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who will make his first in-person appearance at the conference since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. He addressed the 2023 conference virtually. An estimated 50 world leaders are expected to attend the annual event that bills itself as the world's leading forum for debating international security policy. The governments of Russia and Iran have not been invited. It will be an encore for Ms. Harris, who spoke at the conference in 2022 and 2023, but the stakes are different this year. She faces the task of reassuring allies that Washington remains committed

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Ukrainian American community in Florida hosts academics from Ukraine



Daria Tomashosky

Ukrainian academics met with members of Ukrainian American organizations during a luncheon at St. Andrews Ukrainian Cultural Center in North Port, Fla., on February 2.

by Patricia Zalisko

NORTH PORT, Fla. – Sarasota community-based Ukrainian American organizations hosted a luncheon and meeting with visiting academics from Ukraine on February 2. The luncheon was held at the St. Andrews Ukrainian Cultural Center in North Port, Fla.

The Ukrainian visitors' trip to the United States was sponsored by the Rotary Club of Punta Gorda, Fla., and members from the club accompanied the Ukrainian delegation to North Port, Fla.

The group of academics traveled to the United States to learn more about a range of topics, including aerodynamics, engineering-related issues, the use of prosthet-



Bohdana Puzyk

A delegation of academics from Ukraine met with Rev. Dmytro in St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church in North Port, Fla., on February 2.



Bohdana Puzyk

Academics from Ukraine met municipal officials of North Port, Fla., in North Port City Hall on February 2.

ics, and veterans' affairs.

The academics were particularly interested in learning how the United States treats its veterans after they have served in combat.

Branch 56 of the Ukrainian National Women's League of America (UNWLA), the Ukrainian American Veterans, and the Ukrainian American Club arranged the meeting and luncheon.

Bohdana Puzyk, representing the Ukrainian National Association, and Vira Bodnaruk were on hand to greet the Ukrainian guests.

The Ukrainian academics also met municipal officials in North Port City Hall and visited St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church where its pastor, Rev. Dmytro, greeted them.

The guests from Ukraine included the following individuals: Oksana Shabas, head

of the Peace Corps of Ukraine; Kseniia Semenova, acting vice-rector for scientific work and innovative development at the National Aviation University of Ukraine; Inna Steparets, vice-rector for scientific and pedagogical work (Humanitarian Issues) at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; Anatoli Melnychenko, vice-rector for education at the National Technical University of Ukraine (Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute); Roman Tomashevskyi, director of the Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute; and Anna Pavelieva, associate professor in the Germanic philology and translation department and an international relations coordinator at the national university Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic.

Patricia Zalisko is the press secretary of Branch 56 of the UNWLA in North Port, Fla.

NEWSBRIEFS

(Continued from page 10)

to defending their security after Mr. Trump, the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination, questioned defending North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies who failed to spend enough on defense from a potential Russia invasion. Ms. Harris plans to pledge that the United States will never retreat from its NATO obligations, and contrast Mr. Biden's commitment to global engagement with Mr. Trump's isolationist views, a White House official was quoted by Reuters as saying. "The vice president will recommit to defeat the failed ideologies of isolationism, authoritarianism and unilateralism ... [and] denounce these approaches to foreign policy as short-sighted, dangerous and destabilizing," the official said. Ms. Harris is expected to meet with Mr. Zelenskyy during the conference, according to the White House. She will be joined by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who just completed a visit to Albania, where he reinforced what he called an "extraordinary partnership" between Washington and Tirana. The U.S. vice president will also express confidence that the American people will continue to support the Biden administration's

approach to Ukraine. Ukraine, which is heavily dependent on economic and military aid from its Western allies, has been facing a shortage of ammunition and military equipment on the battlefield and is now facing intense fighting for the eastern city of Avdiivka. Kyiv also is desperate for a replenishment of supplies of air-defense systems to protect its civilians and infrastructure, which are hit almost daily by Russian shelling and drone attacks. Ms. Harris is certain to be asked about a \$95.34 billion military-aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan that the Senate, led by Democrats, approved on February 13 but that may never be put up for a vote in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives because of Trump's opposition to it. Meanwhile, Ukraine's European allies have begun increasing their support for Ukraine. Ahead of his arrival in Munich, Mr. Zelenskyy was scheduled to travel on February 16 first to Berlin for talks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and then to Paris to sign a security pact with French President Emmanuel Macron, his office in Kyiv and the Elysee Palace in Paris said. Berlin did not release any details about Mr. Zelenskyy's meeting with Mr. Scholz, but Germany is also negotiating a security agreement with Kyiv. (RFE/RL, with reporting by Reuters, AFP and dpa)

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Ukraine wins 25 medals at Para Nordic Cup

by Ihor N. Stelmach

Ukrainian athletes won a pair of medals in Para Nordic skiing on the first day of the Para Nordic Cup in Martell, Italy, on January 31 through February 4. Pavlo Bal won gold in men's classic sitting and Liudmyla Liashenko took silver in women's sprint classic standing.

The inaugural event of the 2024 Para biathlon season got going on February 1 in Martell with some 70 male and female athletes showcasing their skills across a

7.5-kilometer course. The competition on this day and the next two days featured three distinct categories: sitting, standing and vision-impaired, highlighting the varying talents within the Para-athlete community. Ukraine's Para team emerged triumphant, securing 23 total medals in the biathlon competition, setting an impressive tone for the upcoming season.

Ukrainian men dominated the sitting category in the 7.5-kilometer sprint with Taras Rad finishing first and Bal taking second. The Ukrainian women duplicated the



International Biathlon Union

Ukraine's men's 7.5-kilometer sprint pursuit (vision impaired) champions (standing, from left to right) Iaroslav Rashetynskyi, Oleksandr Kazik and Dmytro Suiarko are seen pictured with guides (seated) at the Para Nordic Cup in Martell, Italy, on January 31 through February 4.

men's success in the standing category with Oleksandra Kononova capitalizing on teammate Liashenko's one misfire at the shooting range to claim gold. In the men's 7.5-kilometer sprint pursuit (vision impaired), Ukrainians Oleksandr Kazik, Iaroslav Rashetynskyi and Dmytro Suiarko swept the podium, winning gold, silver and bronze, respectively. Ukraine captured seven medals on the day.

The revised two-stage format in sprint pursuit was introduced on the second day of the biathlon competition. Rad and Vasyl Kravchuk finished first and second, respectively, in the sitting category as Ukrainians continued their dominance. Ukrainian women did the men one better by sweeping the podium in the standing event, this time Liashenko bested Kononova, while Bohdana Konashuk took bronze. Not to be outdone, Ukrainian men swept the podium in the vision-impaired category with the threesome of Kazik, Rashetynskyi and Dmytro Suiarko taking gold, silver and bronze, respectively. Ukraine won nine medals on the second day of the competition.

The third and final day featured the biathlon 10-kilometer competition and Ukraine maintained its dominance in the competition. Ukrainian men again swept the podium in the men's sitting 10-kilometer with Kravchuk, Rad and Oleksandr Aleksyk winning gold, silver and bronze, respectively. Oleksandr Kazik completed a hat-trick in winning his third gold medal in the men's vision-impaired middle 10-kilometer, and Ukraine's Para athletes totaled an additional seven medals on this day.

In total, Ukraine captured 25 medals, two in Para ski-racing and 23 in Para biathlon. Overall, the breakdown of medals Ukraine won were nine gold, 10 silver and six bronze medals.

Another first-day highlight was the triumphant comeback of Team U.S.A.'s Oksana Masters (who is of Ukrainian descent) who underwent treatment for injuries following her biathlon appearance at the 2022 Paralympic Games in Beijing. She returned grandly, first winning the women's classic sprint sitting in Nordic skiing then completed the 7.5-kilometer biathlon sprint with the fastest time while also flawlessly hitting all 10 targets, taking the gold medal. She went on to place third, winning bronze in the women's sitting sprint pursuit and finished second in the sitting middle 10-kilometer for a total haul of four medals.

Ukraine places second at 2024 ITTF Egypt Para Open

Ukrainian Lev Kats joined France's Florian Merrien as men of the moment in Giza, Egypt, on January 24-27 at the 2024 ITTF Egypt Para Open. Kats won three titles

(Continued on page 15)



International Biathlon Union

Oksana Masters, a multi-sport Para athlete originally from Ukraine who competes for Team U.S.A., won gold in the women's 7.5-kilometer sprint (seated), silver in the women's 10-kilometer (seated) and bronze in the women's 7.5-kilometer sprint pursuit (seated) at the Para Nordic Cup in Martell, Italy, on January 31 through February 4.



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Ukrainian pro sports update

by Ihor N. Stelmach

Ukraine's deputy sports minister wants more scrutiny of 'neutral Russian athletes'

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) banned Russian and Belarusian athletes from international competitions. A subsequent ruling that allowed so-called individual neutral athletes (INA's) to participate in the 2024 Summer Olympics was a softening of the IOC's stance from its original position.

In addition, many of the athletes already qualified to compete in Paris this summer are described as active supporters of Russia's invasion. Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports Andriy Chesnokov said that one cannot be a neutral athlete and be chosen for the Olympics.

In its amended policy, the IOC stated that Russian or Belarusian athletes who actively support the war or have ties to the military or security services will not be welcome in Paris. However, there exist no specific compliance criteria that fully define what neutrality in this context means. This leaves the question of inclusion open to interpretation by international sports federations who are left making the final decision of which athletes are neutral and which are not.

There exists a stronger pro-Russian bias in certain sports, predominantly combat sports such as wrestling, taekwondo and judo. These international federations have, according to Chesnokov, chosen to ignore active members of Russia's military who are participating in competitions.

In response, the Ukrainian government has compiled a database of Russian and Belarusian athletes in more than 50 sports who, it claims, have expressed support for Russia. The database cites evidence that ranges from pro-war social media posts to active service in the Russian armed forces. Not every name in the database is an athlete who hopes to compete at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games.

Although respectful of the international federations' independence, Chesnokov says their autonomy should not be abused. He suggests an independent organization with zero ties to sports federations should determine an athlete's neutrality. He also proposes considering a legally binding convention in the future.

Since the odds are good that the Ukraine-Russia war will still be in progress when the Paris Olympics hold its opening ceremonies, Chesnokov sees the presence of pro-Russian athletes and their supporters as a serious concern. He advocates that perhaps safety concerns should take precedence over principles of inclusion.

Ukrainian couple marathon training in Kenya

Husband and wife Mykola Mevsha and Maryna Nemchenko are excited to be in Iten, Kenya, known as the home of running champions, hoping that the altitude there and the competition at the famous Lobo Village will help them develop the mileage needed in road running. The duo plans to make use of the pleasant weather for their two-month training period in Kenya. Nemchenko has run half marathons and marathons and hopes to improve her performance.



Ukrainian Greco-Roman wrestler Oleksandr Bilokon, 32, who competed as a powerlifter, was killed in action defending Ukraine in 2024. The news was announced on February 3 by Vadim Kisil, president of Ukraine's Greco-Roman Wrestling Federation.

The two runners have been training in Poland for the last two years after they escaped from their homeland when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Nemchenko has not seen her parents for two years. She has said that she misses them, and is working very hard to make them proud of her achievements in competitive running. She noted the favorable weather in Kenya compared to the snow she left behind in Poland.

Mevsha acknowledges the tough conditions in Lobo will be an excellent preparation for major road races. He will be competing in the afternoon, which will be different coming from a low altitude and cold temperatures. He will spend time with elite runners, such as Daniel Simiu and Sabastian Sawe, hoping to enjoy a good race in a beautiful country. He's also eager to return home to Ukraine with his wife once the war with Russia ends.

Pritulyak boycotts Abu Dhabi Baja Challenge

When Ukrainian Vadim Pritulyak found out Russian Sergei Kariakin would be in the field at the January 27 Abu Dhabi Baja Challenge, Pritulyak decided not to race in protest even though he was to compete in the T4 category while Kariakin would race in the SxS Pro class where he finished second. Kariakin was granted special approval to race under the colors of the Russian Federation instead of a neutral FIA (Federation International Automobile) banner.

Pritulyak refused to compete with anyone supporting Vladimir Putin's "special military operation," having had two close friends killed in the first months of the war.

Kariakin is an ardent Putin supporter and ran for a seat in the Legislative Assembly of Russia's Sverdlovsk Oblast in 2021 as a member of the United Russia party. He also led Putin's birthday parade in Yekaterinburg last year. He regards FIA's measures forbidding drivers from Russia and Belarus from racing unless they condemn the war and do not display their country's flag and insignia as discriminatory. Kariakin has been unable to race outside of Russia for the last two years before finally receiving a green light from the Emirates Motorsports Organization for Abu Dhabi.

Pritulyak is the ambassador for SKARLAT, an Emirati-headquartered Ukrainian manufacturer that builds side-by-side vehicles to transport resources and evacuate wounded troops from the front lines. He has been very vocal about the importance of using motorsports to help Ukrainian veterans transition back to civilian life.

Carlisle United sign 19-year-old Ukrainian striker

On January 26, Carlisle United announced the signing of 19-year-old Ukrainian forward Anton Dudik to a contract that will run until the end of the current season. The move comes after an extended trial period. Dudik has previously played for Volyn Lutsk, Shakhtar Donetsk and Polish club Slask Wroclaw before moving to England. Dudik was recommended to Carlisle by a player agent and he spent several weeks training with their youth team. The youngster showed enough promise and potential that manager Paul Simpson deemed him worthy of keeping and developing. The plan was to play him as an over-aged player in youth games and in Cumberland Cup matches with the senior team.

Dudik and his mother fled Ukraine amid Russia's invasion of their homeland and they moved to England. Since arriving there, he also played with Rotherham United UFLCA NWC in the National Football Youth League.

Carlisle United Football Club is a professional association football club based in Carlisle, Cumbria, England. The team competes in EFL League One, the third level of English football.

Rusyn hitting form in Sunderland

It took a bit of time, but Ukrainian Nazariy Rusyn is beginning to look like the player Sunderland thought they were getting when they acquired him on transfer from Zorya Luhansk for a little over \$3.1 million last September. After struggling at times with his English Football League Championship club, the arrival of his family from war-torn Ukraine has played a major factor in his recent improvement. The language barrier (he does not know much English) certainly did not help the situation.

Proof of Rusyn's improvement was seen on the pitch when he scored a goal in a 1-1 draw with Middlesbrough on February 4. It was his second tally of the season. While his English improves daily and that has helped him connect



Nazariy Rusyn, 24, who signed with English club Sunderland of the English Football League in September 2023, scored his second goal of the season against Middlesbrough on February 4.

with teammates, having his wife and son Oleh with him in England eliminates a heavy burden. Rusyn now has peace of mind to go along with his non-stop energy, superior skillset and work ethic.

Usyk-Fury fight postponed and rescheduled

The undisputed heavyweight world title fight between Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury has been postponed. Fury pulled out of the February 17 scheduled bout after sustaining a severe cut over his right eye during a sparring session on February 2. On February 4 the fight was officially rescheduled for May 18 and it will take place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. If either fighter withdraws from this date, they will forfeit \$10 million of their fight purse.

Usyk's promoter, Alex Krassiyuk, could not resist teasing Fury, wishing him a speedy recovery on social media and hinting that the Briton should accept the freak injury as an omen and seriously consider retirement from boxing.

Reports have surfaced that the reigning World Boxing Association (WBA), World Boxing Organization (WBO), International Boxing Federation (IBF) and The Ring Ukrainian heavyweight champion could face Filip Hrgovic (17-0, 14 KO) of Croatia on February 17 in Riyadh instead.

USA sweeps Ukraine in Davis Cup play

The clinching match was the doubles American pair of Rajeev Ram and Austin Krajicek defeating Ukraine's Illya Beloborodko and Oleksii Krutych 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 on February 2. It gave the United States a spot in the Davis Cup Finals group. The doubles win gave the U.S. an insurmountable 3-0 lead in the best-of-five qualifying series played in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The victory followed a successful opening day of singles play for Americans Sebastian Korda and Chris Eubanks, who defeated Krutych 6-3, 6-7(3), 6-4 and Viacheslav Bielinskyi 6-3, 6-2, respectively.

The matches were supposed to be hosted by Ukraine, but were moved to indoor hard courts at SEB Arena in Lithuania due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

In a post-match interview with the Associated Press, Ram praised the Ukrainian players for competing hard, stating that "says a lot about who they are."

Abramovich and British government share blame for frozen Chelsea sale funds

Funds from the sale of the Chelsea Football Club remain frozen instead of going to support Ukrainian war victims as promised some two years ago by the club's former owner, Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich. The billionaire was forced to sell the club after being sanctioned by the British government for what it said was his enabling of Russia's "brutal and barbaric invasion" of Ukraine.

Abramovich pledged to donate \$3.17 billion from the sale to war victims. Twenty months later and the funds continue to sit in a bank account because of a difference of opinion with the government on how the money is to be

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OUT & ABOUT

Through March 3 Chicago	Exhibit, "Immense Journeys: Art, Nature, Science and Beyond," featuring works by Melissa Jay Craig, Lisa A. Frank and Anne Hughes, Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, www.uima-chicago.org	February 23 Stanford, CA	Presentation by Megan Buskey, "Ukraine is Not Dead Yet: A Family Story of Exile and Return," Stanford University, https://creees.stanford.edu
Through April 28 New York	Exhibit featuring works by Evgeny Kotlyar, "The Light of the Revival: Stained Glass Design for the Restituted Synagogues of Ukraine," Ukrainian Institute of America, www.ukrainianinstitute.org	February 23 New York	Presentation by Oleksandr Matviichuk, Volodymyr Yermolenko and Kristina Hook, "Resilience, Resistance, Renewal: Two Years of the Full-Scale war in Ukraine," Shevchenko Scientific Society, Cooper Union, https://shevchenko.org or 212-254-5130
February 20 New York	Film screening, "Freedom on Fire" by Evgeny Afineevsky, Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Nations Headquarters, Trusteeship Council, www.ukrainianinstitute.org	February 23-29 New York	Film screening, "Veselka: The Rainbow at the Center of the World," Village East Cinema, www.angelikafilmcenter.com
February 20-23 Washington	Ukrainian Days advocacy events, Ukrainian National Information Service, U.S. Congressional Offices, Capitol Hill, UkrainianDaysDC2024@gmail.com	February 23-29 North Hollywood, CA	Film screening, "Veselka: The Rainbow at the Center of the World," Laemmle NoHo 7, www.laemmle.com
February 21 Cambridge, MA	Conversation with journalists Terrell Jermaine Starr with Emily Channell-Justice, "Covering Ukraine and the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election," Harvard University, https://huri.harvard.edu	February 23-29 Bernardsville, NJ	Film screening, "Veselka: The Rainbow at the Center of the World," Bernardsville Cinema 3, www.bernardsvillecinema.com
February 21 Stanford, CA	Presentation by Halyna Babak, "'National Modernism' in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s," Stanford University, https://creees.stanford.edu	February 24 New York	Open House, Ukrainian Institute of America, www.ukrainianinstitute.org or 212-288-8660
February 22 Jenkintown, PA	Award banquet, "Lumen Christi," Sisters of the Order of Saint Basil the Great, Ukrainian Educational and Cultural Center, www.stbasils.com or 215-379-3998 ext. 17	February 24 Washington	Rally, "Two Years Since Russia's Full-Scale War Against Ukraine," Embassy of Ukraine, Lincoln Memorial, www.ucca.org
February 22 Online	Webinar with Yaroslav Trofimov, "Year Three: Ukrainian Resistance and the New Phase of the War," Harvard University, https://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu	February 24 Ottawa	Stand with Ukraine Victory Rally, Ukrainian Canadian Congress (Ottawa Branch), Parliament Hill, www.ottawaucc.ca
February 23 Online	Online presentation by Fr. Bohdan Hladio, "Ukrainian Winter Festivals: Faith, Music, Traditions," Ukrainian History and Education Center, www.ukrhec.org	February 24 North Port, FL	Moleben service, "Pray for Ukraine," Ukrainian National Women's League of America (Branch 56), St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church, www.uccnp.org or 941-426-7931

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 mdubas@ukrweekly.com.

Ukrainian pro...

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spent. The impasse spotlights the difficulty for Western governments to use frozen Russian assets for Ukraine, including those promised by their owner.

British members of parliament have expressed their frustration with the lost time and have said they don't understand why there wasn't more clarity in the original agreement regarding who in Ukraine is eligible to receive the funds. A committee report blamed both Abramovich and the government.

The funds still belong to Abramovich, who must apply for a license that the government states is contingent on the money being exclusively used for humanitarian purposes in Ukraine. When the sale was transacted, Abramovich said the money would be transferred to a foundation – not yet created – which would benefit "all victims of the war in Ukraine" and those suffering from "the consequences of the Ukraine war."

In theory, that could include Ukrainians outside of Ukraine, with some suggesting that Abramovich envisioned some of the money being used in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine, an action that would be nixed by the British government. Use of the money in Russia-controlled areas of Ukraine would not be allowed because it would not comply with existing sanctions.

In December, Abramovich lost his appeal challenging the European Union's travel ban and a freeze of his assets. Since the war began, he has attempted to position himself as a middleman between Russia and the West.

It has been suggested that Abramovich is fearful of a deal in which all of the Chelsea funds are spent on Ukrainian humanitarian projects because it would place him in conflict with the Kremlin.

The prevailing conclusion is that the funds are currently stuck in a "bureaucratic hole" since Britain had agreed with the European Union that the funds can only be used for projects within Ukraine. Western nations have wrestled with how to use billions of dollars of sanctioned Russian state or private assets to help Ukraine.

The Chelsea funds are being looked upon as an important case study on how to properly utilize frozen assets to benefit Ukraine.

Shevchenko defines plan for Ukraine's lost generation

Newly elected president of Ukraine's Football Association Andriy Shevchenko has outlined a tentative plan to not have a "lost generation" of football players amid fear that the war with Russia is being forgotten. He is on a mission to locate many of the young players who left Ukraine since the Russian invasion.

Shevchenko admits that the world's attention to Ukraine's plight has fallen, but underlines that sport is a "good message" and, if Ukrainian athletes perform well, the national team qualifies for the 2024 European Championship and Ukraine's Olympians do well in Paris, then attention will return to Ukraine.

Nonetheless, his top priority is to find the many talented boys and girls who have been displaced by war. It will be a long-term project. According to various press reports, some 6 million Ukrainians have left the country since 2022, while another eight million have been internally displaced within the country. Many youngsters will end up in academies across Europe and the U.K., and Shevchenko wants them to grow up connected to their homeland.

He has already initiated the creation of an online database of players as the current system is in dire need of updating. Shevchenko wants to find these players and

create a relationship with them in hopes of having a future with them and not lose their talents.

To achieve his goal, he will need assistance from other football federations. He understands that the rest of the world will need to help him if Ukraine's efforts are to be sustainable. He describes today's state of domestic football in Ukraine as "OK" with major financial issues to overcome.

He continues to believe sport can help people overcome personal trauma and points to Ukraine's Premier League continuing its seasons as a testament to that commitment.

Ukrainian powerlifter killed in action

On February 3, Ukraine's Greco-Roman Wrestling Federation President Vadym Kisil reported that Ukrainian powerlifter-turned-soldier Oleksandr Bilokon was

killed in action. The 32-year-old was the World and European powerlifting champion before enlisting in the Ukrainian Armed Forces in March 2023. Bilokon held Ukraine's record for truck pulling and in 2020 was named Ukraine's strongest man (95-kilogram division). There were no details regarding where or when Bilokon was killed in action.

More than 400 Ukrainian athletes have been killed since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

(Based on reporting by Nation, Play the Game, The Checkered Flag, Carlisle United Football Club, The Cumberland News & Star, Sunderland Nation, Manchester Evening News, Suspilne.Sports via Ukrinform, NBC Sports, The Morning Star, The Mirror and The Kyiv Independent.)

Ihor Stelmach may be reached at iman@sfgsports.com

Ukraine wins...

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in men's table tennis singles (class 6), men's doubles (class 18) (he partnered with Ivan Mai, and mixed doubles (class 20) alongside Iryna Shynkarova. Colleague Oleksandr Yezyk captured two titles, winning men's singles (class 2) and men's doubles (class 4) with his Slovak partner Peter Lovas.

Natalya Kosmina and Valerii Vlasenko each won gold in mixed doubles with their Japanese partners, Maki Ito and Hajime Hara, respectively. Maryna Lytovchenko won silver medals (singles class 6, mixed doubles class XD17) with Kats and women's doubles class WD20 with Shynkarova.

Lytovchenko, holder of the "big three" titles (Paralympic Games, World Para Championships and European Championships), was upset in her singles matchup by

Iraq's Najlah Al-Davyeni after building a 2-0 lead in games. The two now head for a potential clash in the forthcoming Paris 2024 Paralympic Games.

The victories of Yezyk and Kats were seen as significant upsets with the top seeds suffering prior elimination from the competition, setting the stage for the two Ukrainians to step up and take full advantage of their opportunities.

Ukrainian Para athletes totaled 10.5 medals including 5.5 golds, three silver and two bronze medals, finishing second overall in total medals behind France (A Ukrainian partnered with a non-Ukrainian earns 0.5 of a medal).

(Based on reporting by the International Table Tennis Federation and the International Biathlon Union.)

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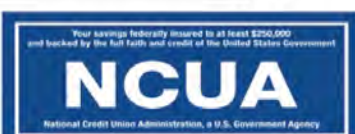
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