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Ukraine marks second anniversary of full-scale invasion and 10 years of war



Office of the President of Ukraine

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (center) is joined by (from left to right) Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Kroo in laying flowers at a memorial in Kyiv for soldiers who have died fighting against Russia's war on Ukraine.

by Roman Tymotsko

KYIV – Ukraine held several solemn commemorations this past week as the country marked the second anniversary of a full-scale war, as well as the 10th anniversary of war in the Donbas and the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia in what many here said is the culmi-

nation of a centuries-long struggle for independence against an imperialist aggressor.

Despite Russia's attempt to invade Kyiv in three days beginning early in the morning of February 24, 2022, the city remains vibrant, as capital residents displayed a cautious optimism for the future while

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U.S. Special Representative Pritzker says providing crucial aid to Ukraine also bolsters U.S. military capacity

by Andrew Nynka and Nicholas Gordon

NEW YORK and PARSIPPANY, N.J. – Penny Pritzker, the U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine's Economic Recovery, doesn't mince words about the need for immediate congressional action in providing military and economic aid to Ukraine, which in turn upgrades and strengthens U.S. defense capabilities both at home and abroad.

"Ukrainians were forced to withdraw from Avdiyivka because they had to ration munitions due to our congressional inaction," Ms. Pritzker said, referring to Ukraine's recent loss of the town of Avdiyivka, a strategic stronghold in the eastern Donbas region, to Russian forces. "Our congress needs to break the log jam on this issue, because it's existential for Ukraine."

In an exclusive interview with The

Ukrainian Weekly on the eve of the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Ms. Pritzker spoke about Ukraine's economic strengths and growth. Amid Kyiv's struggles, she also highlighted stories of resilience and bravery of the Ukrainian people with whom she has worked.

But she also cited the current "dire state of Ukrainian munitions stocks."

An undersupplied and outgunned Ukraine losing ground on the battlefield to Russia has broader geopolitical repercussions, she said.

"We know Putin is not going to stop with Ukraine," Ms. Pritzker said. "This is a war that is threatening our international order, and it's meant to undermine NATO [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and the E.U. [European Union]."

As the U.S. Special Representative to

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Russian strikes cause injuries among civilians in eastern Donetsk

As Ukrainian forces withdraw from two more villages in east



Serhii Nuzhnenko, RFE/RL

A Ukrainian soldier of the 10th Separate Mountain Assault Brigade "Edelweiss" fires a mortar in the Kupiansk axis after receiving coordinates about enemy positions from drone operators.

RFE/RL's Russian and Ukrainian Services

Russian troops shelled the Pokrovsky and Bakhmut districts of the Donetsk region causing multiple injuries among the civilian population, the Prosecutor-General's Office reported on the evening of February 28.

The shelling struck a village in the Pokrovsky district and the cities of Kurakhove and Chasiv Yar, the Prosecutor-General's Office said.

A 62-year-old woman who was walking on a street in the village was hospitalized with a head injury and a fracture, the office said. In Kurakhove, the victim was a 22-year-old saleswoman who was hit by rocket fire in a trade pavilion. She was hospitalized with brain injuries.

The attack on Chasiv Yar involved a drone that hit around 3 p.m., injuring a 40-year-old man. An hour later, Russian forces also struck the city of Siversk, inflict-

(Continued on page 12)

In address to Russians, Putin warns of 'tragic' consequences if West sends troops to Ukraine

As Macron notes 'broad consensus to do more and quicker' for Kyiv

RFE/RL's Russian and Ukrainian Services

President Vladimir Putin gave his state of the nation address to Russians on February 29, outlining his view on how the war against Ukraine is progressing and Russia's relations with the West, which he threatened with "tragic" consequences if it sent troops into Ukraine.

Speaking less than three weeks before a presidential election he is expected to easily win as he faces no opposition candidates, Putin didn't stray far from well-worn narratives and propaganda, saying the full-scale

invasion of Ukraine was needed to defend Russia's sovereignty and security.

"Despite all the trials and bitterness of losses, people are adamant in this choice," he said of the "special military operation," as the Kremlin calls the invasion it launched in February 2022. In Russia, it is illegal to call the conflict a war.

Putin's address in front of the audience of both chambers of parliament, the State Duma and the Federation Council, as well as other invitees, lasted just over two hours and touched on a broad array of issues.

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Russian society disfigured and degraded by 'long war'

by Pavel K. Baev
Eurasia Daily Monitor

Russians still do not call the full-scale invasion of Ukraine what it actually is – a war. Now in its third year, the war continues to be referred to in Russia by its awkward abbreviation SVO, short for Russian President Vladimir Putin's so-called "special military operation." Russian war propaganda pushing this narrative is everywhere. In February, participants in an annual Moscow ski race were arranged at the starting line in the shape of the letter Z – a pro-war symbol (Afisha Daily, February 11). Meanwhile, international skiing competitions, figure skating tournaments and soccer matches are no longer shown on television as Russian athletes have been banned from participating. These realities highlight that the Kremlin's ongoing war has increasingly disrupted the lives of everyday Russians and further isolated Russia in the international arena.

Moscow's dual narratives of trumpeting Russian heroics and denying the reality of war resembles the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which was officially labeled as a "performance of international duty." A darker resemblance comes with Joseph Stalin's repressions in the mid-1930s, a time when state oppression was camouflaged with comedy films and songs about a life full of joy. Today, Russia's list of censored authors, films and theater productions continuously grows. Nowhere was the

repressive regime more visible than in the murder of Alexei Navalny in a Gulag-like Arctic penal colony (Re: Russia, February 19).

Mr. Navalny's murder was timed to coincide with Russia's seizure of Avdiivka, a crucial city on the warfront whose defeat marked Russia's first significant success since May 2023 (Meduza.io, February 14). Putin praised this hard-won tactical gain, presenting it as a major strategic success (Izvestiya, February 20). Moscow's "patriotic" commentators have been eager to predict further offensive operations, but the heavy casualties suffered from the advance have left scant reserves for sustaining pressure (TopWar.ru, February 21; Meduza.io, February 24). Ukrainian long-distance strikes on Russian logistical hubs and Black Sea Fleet ships undercut Russian offensive capabilities even further, and the destruction of a second A-50U early warning and control aircraft delivered a heavy blow (The Insider, February 23).

Kremlin propaganda suppresses any news on casualties and tries to boost jingoist belligerence to rally the shrinking group of Russians who support the war (Republic.ru, February 24). Public opinion shows a clear preference for starting peace talks and views the costs of the SVO as too high (Levada.ru, February 6; Forbes.ru, February 24). Putin has attempted to address these feelings by declaring a readiness to negoti-

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Putin has yet to signal a real openness to peace negotiations

by Boris Bondarev
Eurasia Daily Monitor

On February 18, Russian President Vladimir Putin was interviewed on the Russian television program "Moscow. Kremlin. Putin." During the interview, Putin declared, "If not for the position of the West ... the war would have ended a year and a half ago. ... But those in Kyiv did not want that. I do not know if they will want that today. ... We are ready for dialogue" (TASS, February 18; Smotrim.ru, February 18). The Kremlin leader, however, did not elaborate on the concrete actions Russia would take to end the war. When considering whether the Kremlin's notions of ending the war and establishing peace are to be believed, the West must first consider the possible scenarios for how the war could end and their implications.

If Ukraine's defeat appears probable, then Putin would likely expect the losing side to initiate negotiations (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, May 10, 2023). Alternatively, suppose Putin realizes that his resources were insufficient to defeat Ukrainian forces, and a period of reprieve or ceasefire was initiated to recuperate his troops and resources. In that case, it is unlikely that he would use this opportunity to start peace talks (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, February 27, 2023).

If the situation on the front becomes a true stalemate, Moscow will likely be satisfied. The possibility of a "frozen conflict" scenario may increase with the upcoming U.S. presidential elections, which may cause further instability in the West (see Eurasia

Daily Monitor, January 16). Putin probably expects and hopes that former U.S. President Donald Trump will be reelected and that he will be able to turn the situation in Putin's favor (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 30, 2017).

If the war results in a Russian defeat, the collapse of the front and a retreat into Russian territory, then Putin is unlikely to prioritize peace talks and will be more likely to threaten the use of nuclear weapons. In this case, he may even go as far as to use them against Ukraine (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, June 28, 2023). Such a development cannot be discounted, and an appropriate response plan must be developed. Such a prospect, however, cannot and should not be perceived as inevitable at this time and should not cause panic and alarmist sentiments.

Signals from Moscow about a true desire to start a dialog to end military operations in Ukraine would be an attempt to reduce the West's attention to the war (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, February 6). This would presumably lead to reduced military support and arms supplies for Ukraine (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, November 20). That is, these signals would be a typical Putin ploy.

The question remains of how exactly Putin would try to start negotiations. If, for some reason, he decides to do so, then most likely, his calculations will be as follows. First, initial steps toward peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, or more likely, between Russia and the United States, would start with low-level, informal

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NEWSBRIEFS

Orlov's imprisonment is 'politically motivated'

The Norwegian Nobel Committee has called the imprisonment of Oleg Orlov, the co-chairman of the Russian rights group Memorial, which shared the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize, "politically motivated." A court in Moscow on February 27 sentenced the 70-year veteran rights defender to 2 1/2 years in prison on a charge of "repeatedly discrediting" the Russian military involved in Moscow's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. "The sentence against Mr. Orlov is politically motivated and provides another proof of the increasing disrespect for human rights and freedom of speech in today's Russia," Jorgen Watne Frydnes, chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, said in a statement on February 28. He added that Russian President Vladimir Putin's "regime has for many years tried to silence the leadership of Memorial and other important civil society organizations in Russia, and they are now using the war on Ukraine as a pretext to finish the job. It is important that they won't succeed." Memorial was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022 for its outstanding efforts in documenting war crimes, human rights abuses and the abuse of power in the former Soviet Union as well as in post-Soviet Russia. Mr. Orlov reiterated his innocence on February 27 in his final statement shortly before the verdict and sentence were announced, stressing that Russian authorities have banned "any independent opinion." The children and grandchildren of Russian officials "will be ashamed to talk about where their fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers served and what they did. And the same will happen to those who, by carrying out orders, are committing crimes in Ukraine. In my view, this is the worst punishment, and it is inevitable," Mr. Orlov said. Mr. Orlov was fined 150,000 rubles (\$1,630) in October on a charge that stemmed from several single-person pickets he held condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine and an article he wrote criticizing the Russian government for sending troops to Ukraine that was published in the French magazine Mediapart. In mid-December, the Moscow City Court canceled that ruling and sent Mr. Orlov's case back to prosecutors,

who appealed the sentence, saying it was too mild. Earlier this month, investigators updated the charge against the rights defender, saying that his alleged misdeeds were motivated by "ideological enmity against traditional Russian spiritual, moral and patriotic values." Memorial has noted the case was reinvestigated hastily, while Mr. Orlov said he thought investigators received an order to move quickly with the case to allow for the retrial. Mr. Orlov gained prominence as one of Russia's leading human rights activists after he co-founded the Memorial human rights center following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2004-2006, Mr. Orlov was a member of the Presidential Council for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights Institutions. For his contribution to human rights in Russia, Mr. Orlov was awarded the Sakharov Prize in 2009, an international award for individuals or groups who have dedicated their lives to the defense of human rights and freedom of thought. (RFE/RL)

Western Balkan reaffirms support for Ukraine

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on February 28 urged unity among the Western Balkan countries as he sought the continuation of military and financial aid to Kyiv at a summit of Western Balkans countries at which he also warned of the dangers they face if Russia is not stopped. Mr. Zelensky sought to build solidarity between the countries of the region and Ukraine, saying all of them deserve to be members of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). He also expressed interest in increasing cooperation with weapons suppliers in the Balkan countries as Ukrainian troops face a shortage of ammunition on the battlefield. "We are interested in co-production with you and all our partners," Mr. Zelensky said in his opening remarks to the summit in Tirana attended by delegations from Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Montenegro, Croatia, Moldova and Romania. "There are about 500 defense companies operating in Ukraine; each of them adds strength but it

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Russian economics professor wanted by Moscow speaks at Chicago's anti-war rally

by Mark Raczkiewycz

CHICAGO – Not all Russians support the invasion of Ukraine, says one professor of economics from Moscow, who attends every pro-Ukrainian rally he can while taking a break from his academic career at the prestigious University of Chicago.

"I support Ukraine defending itself and I'm totally against [Russian President Vladimir] Putin," said Konstantin Sonin, 52, at a pro-Ukrainian rally on February 24 that took place at Chicago's iconic Wrigley Building skyscraper. The demonstration was organized by the Illinois Division of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA).

He has opposed the war since 2014 when Russia initially invaded its neighboring country by illegally annexing the Crimean Peninsula, and "since then, I would do whatever I could to stop the war and from Ukrainians being killed and for Russia to withdraw its forces and pay compensation for damage" to Kyiv, Mr. Sonin said.

While the majority of Russians support the Kremlin's war on Ukraine, according to Moscow-based polling agencies Levada Center and Russian Field, the economist said a silent majority do not.

"Sure, there are millions of nationalists and imperialists, but they never have been close to any kind of majority – Putin never got a mandate to wage war and I'm sure a majority of Russians don't support the war. I mean, I've never seen any grass-roots pro-Russian rallies," Mr. Sonin said at the Chicago rally.

Regarding the so-called silent majority, he said most Russians want to keep their heads down and not bring attention to themselves. And yet, survey results from Russian Field found that a majority of Russian adults age 18 years and older prioritize "the end of the war."

Polling data in Russia is suspect because of the authoritarian nature of the government, said Peter Dickinson, an editor at the Washington-based Atlantic Council.

"You have to take with a grain of salt that people are not telling the truth out of fear and the methodology is usually done over the phone and not face-to-face," he said.

Still, Mr. Sonin said, he would never judge Ukrainians who say, "all Russians are bad. ... These are people who have to every day hide from bombs, take refuge abroad and it is to a large extent Putin's war."

After the initial invasion in 2014, the Muscovite attended anti-war rallies in Russia and called Putin's actions imperialistic.

"This is not the 16th century. There is no gain from tak-



Courtesy of Konstantin Sonin

Konstantin Sonin (center, red jacket), an economics professor from Moscow who lectures at the prestigious University of Chicago, attends a pro-Ukrainian rally in downtown Chicago in January 2023. He attended the most recent rally at the Wrigley Building skyscraper in Chicago to mark the second year of Russia's full onslaught on Ukraine on February 24.

ing over more territory. It's not the right course of action. ... The Kremlin is spending billions of dollars on the war instead [of] for the betterment of Russia," he said.

A wanted man in absentia in Russia on charges of disseminating "lies" about Russia's unjustified war, Mr. Sonin has lectured at the University of Chicago since 2015, but he found himself in Moscow during a year-and-a-half leave when Russia re-invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

When the repeat invasion started, he said, "I never felt safe" in Russia because of his political views.

Mr. Sonin appeared on the Ekho Moskvy radio station and wrote columns in newspapers and online media, including the English-language Moscow Times daily, in which he voiced criticism of the war.

"We wouldn't have left [if] it wasn't changing after the takeover of Crimea and the ensuing invasion. It became worse but somewhat tolerable," he said.

The first sign that he was in danger came when he was fired from his job as the vice president of a Moscow university.

"I have [also] lost childhood friends who think differently. ... I stopped talking to certain people, some in government who stayed there. I stopped talking to them too," he said.

For exercising his right of freedom of expression, Mr.

Sonin faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison in Russia for spreading "fake news" about the war – notably about the massacre in Bucha, Ukraine, near Kyiv and the siege of Mariupol in the Donetsk region, according to Russian court documents.

Moscow still maintains that all of the atrocities that took place regarding the killing of dozens of civilians in Bucha was staged by paid actors.

Some of Mr. Sonin's compatriots are also in self-exile, such as chess grandmaster and pro-democracy activist Garry Kasparov and prominent writer Boris Akunin, whose wife's assets have been frozen over his anti-war stance.

Mr. Akunin is designated a "foreign agent," according to Russian law, and he faces like Mr. Sonin, he criticized Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Mr. Kasparov, a vociferous supporter of Ukraine, also is designated a "foreign agent" by Moscow.

When the label was attached in 2022, the chess grandmaster told the Baltic Times that all sanctions against Russia should remain in place until it compensates Ukraine for war damage and those guilty of war crimes are brought to justice.

Kremlin dictator Putin and his commissioner for children's rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, are both wanted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

On second anniversary of full-scale war, Chicagoans rally to support Ukraine



Scores of pro-Ukrainian rallygoers march to a cathedral after their demonstration at the iconic Wrigley Building skyscraper on February 24 to draw attention to Russia's ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which is entering its third year.



A prayer requiem was held at the downtown Catholic Holy Name Cathedral in downtown Chicago to bring attention to Russia's ongoing war against war, which is entering its 11th year.

by Mark Raczkiewycz

CHICAGO – Scores of pro-Ukrainian protesters assembled at a heavy pedestrian traffic area near the Wrigley Building in the thick of the U.S.'s third most populous city's skyline to draw attention to Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine as Moscow's all-out invasion enters its third year.

A key message was to call on further U.S. security assistance for Ukraine as it faces relentless meat-grinder onslaughts of Russian infantry west of Avdiivka, a Donetsk regional town that it lost last week.

U.S. ammunition "will give [us] what we need to push Russia back ... and create more jobs in the U.S.," said Zoryana Smozhanyk of the Ukrainian Daughters Foundation, who immigrated from Ukraine when she was 10 years old and served in the military.

"American companies are still doing business with Russia. We need to stop funding it [Russian state coffers]," she said referring to Subway and Pepsi and other corporate conglomerates that have continued to do business in Russia.

Ukrainian officials have recently reported losing the town of Lastochkyne just west of Avdiivka and later of pulling back from the towns of Sieverne and Stepove as well, the Tavria military sector spokesperson Capt. Dmytro Lykhovii said on national television.

"Both towns had about 100 residents before the war," he said as Kyiv's forces have been reduced to using mostly small arms and drones to withstand Russia's attacks without ample artillery.

The rally was part of a broader effort by the Ukrainian World Congress, an umbrella group representing

(Continued on page 12)

U.S. Rep. Sherrill holds community briefing to advocate for additional U.S. aid to Ukraine

by Roma Hadzewycz

WHIPPANY, N.J. – U.S. Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-N.J.) addressed a community meeting and press briefing here at the Ukrainian American Cultural Center of New Jersey (UACCNJ) on February 27 to underscore the importance of allocating funds to aid Ukraine in its existential struggle against Russia.

"We are at an inflection point right now – a really critical inflection point – where we can either choose to stand with our allies or we can surrender to a brutal dictator whose vision for conquest goes beyond Ukraine's borders," said Rep. Sherrill, who represents New Jersey's 11th Congressional District. She was referring to the fact that, while the Senate passed a \$95 billion foreign aid bill on February 13, the funding has been stalled in the House of Representatives as Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) has said he does not plan to bring the bill up for a vote.

The congresswoman spoke on the same day that the leadership of the Senate and House of Representatives was meeting with President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris at the White House to discuss a national security package that includes funds for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, as well as funding to avert a U.S. government shutdown.



U.S. Rep. Mikie Sherrill addresses the community meeting and press briefing held at the Ukrainian American Cultural Center of New Jersey on February 27.

"The meeting on Ukraine was one of the most intense meetings I've ever encountered in many meetings in the Oval Office," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) later told reporters.

At the UACCNJ, Rep. Sherrill was introduced by Roman Hirniak, a former mayor of nearby Randolph, N.J., and a member of



www.facebook.com/RepMikieSherrill

At the Ukrainian American Cultural Center of New Jersey (from left to right) are Dr. Marta Lopatynsky, Ukrainian serviceman Serhiy, Rep. Mikie Sherrill, Dr. Roksolana Vaskul, Roman Hirniak and Andrew Olesnycky.

the local Ukrainian community, who cited the congresswoman's credentials, including service in the U.S. Navy as a helicopter pilot and Russian policy officer, her work as a former prosecutor with the U.S. attorney's office, and her membership on the House Armed Services Committee and the Congressional Ukraine Caucus.

"A true friend of the Ukrainian American community," she has "led efforts on Capitol Hill to remind her colleagues and, by extension, the world, that Ukraine cannot win the war alone," said Mr. Hirniak, who is also the president and chief executive officer of the Ukrainian National Association.

Rep. Sherrill began her remarks by noting that "It's been a grueling two years [of full-scale war], but support from this community has never wavered." She cited the presence at the briefing of Ukrainian community members from Morris, Passaic and Bergen counties, as well as the participation of local elected officials from Morris County and a representative from Sen. Cory Booker's (D-N.J.) office.

The congresswoman said the Ukrainians are "fighting so incredibly bravely" and are "defying the odds." They are keeping the port of Odesa open and supplying grain to the world, and their GDP went up 5 percent last year, even during wartime.

"So, when people ask me: Why are we funding this war? Can the Ukrainians win? I say: The Ukrainians have already won. We just need to continue to support them as they seek further victory," she said.

Speaking of her attendance the previous week at the Munich Security Conference as part of a bipartisan delegation, Rep. Sherrill said she spoke directly with President [Volodymyr] Zelensky.

"I met with a president who is committed, who is resolute, who is determined, who is going to continue to fight along with the people of Ukraine no matter what," she said.

She added that, "as Americans who love democracy, who know how horrible [Vladimir] Putin is and the Russian ideology is, [and] the least we can do is support President Zelensky and the Ukrainian people."

Several members of the UACCNJ board were then invited by Rep. Sherrill to present distinct aspects of Russia's ongoing war on Ukraine.

Dr. Marta Lopatynsky, a physician, spoke of Ukraine's present-day heroes – including doctors, nurses and medics – and the destruction by the invading Russians of over 1,000 medical facilities. She pointed out that the miles of landmines laid by the Russians have severely injured tens of thousands of people and up to 20,000 are now in need of prosthetic devices.

"Hearing loss, sleep deprivation, mental stress will leave long-term issues for this generation of Ukrainians. Medications, equipment, supplies are unavailable in

FOR THE RECORD

U.S. State Department issues statement on war anniversary and death of Navalny

The following statement was released by the U.S. State Department on February 23. It was attributed to U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken.

Tomorrow [February 24] marks two years since Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine. After 10 years of conflict, sovereign, democratic Ukraine remains courageous in the face of formidable odds. The United States will continue to stand resolutely with the Ukrainian people in their defense of their homeland. Putin's war threatens not only Ukraine, but also the security of the United States, our NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] allies, and the free and open international order we depend on. It is imperative that we defend the basic rules that have undergirded peace, security and prosperity since the end of World War II, including sovereignty, terri-

torial integrity and the right of states to choose their own future.

The United States has built a coalition of 50 countries, including all NATO members and the G-7 [Group of Seven] in defense of the freedom of a sovereign democratic nation. Together, we will continue to impose costs on Putin's Russia for its actions and ensure accountability for its crimes.

Today, the United States' departments of State, Treasury and Commerce, in coordination with our allies and partners, are taking additional new measures to respond to Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, its global malign influence and the death of Alexei Navalny and its intensifying repression at home by sanctioning and imposing export control restrictions on more than 500 individuals and entities, our largest number of designations in a single Russia-related action. There is a

clear link between Russia's authoritarianism, its crackdown on domestic dissent and its aggression abroad. We are imposing additional costs for Russia's internal repression, the death of Alexei Navalny and the war against Ukraine.

Specifically, the Department of State is imposing sanctions on more than 250 entities and individuals to help deprive the Russian regime of the revenue and technology it needs to prosecute its war effort and engage in destabilizing activity around the world. Our targets include those involved in the evasion of our economic restrictions against Russia and those responsible for bolstering Russia's future energy, metals and mining production among others. The department is also taking action to promote accountability for Russian human rights abusers by pur-

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U.S. State Department announces project to protect Ukrainian state archives

The following statement was released by the U.S. State Department on February 22. It was attributed to the Office of the Spokesperson.

With Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine placing Ukrainian cultural identity and heritage under continuous threat, the U.S. Department of State announced today a project to protect and digitize collections of the State Archival Services of Ukraine (SAS), thereby ensuring that Ukrainian history, through its archives, will be safe-guarded for generations to come.

Implemented in cooperation with the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH), the \$645,000 project is the latest activity supported by ECA's [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the State Depart-

ment] Ukraine Cultural Heritage Response Initiative. The project includes training for SAS staff in the management and digitization of archival records at risk of damage or destruction. SAS materials that will be preserved include archival records in the Ukrainian language that are central to Ukraine's unique identity and to understanding the country's history.

The Ukraine Cultural Heritage Response Initiative, with overall funding of \$10.5 million, supports Ukraine's efforts to protect and repair damage to Ukrainian cultural heritage sites and collections, as well as expand and strengthen public-private partnerships with civil society in Ukraine. The Initiative prioritizes cultural heritage sites and collections directly impacted by Russia's brutal war in Ukraine and is part of the United States' broader global efforts

to preserve and protect cultural heritage. The initiative complements broader efforts coordinated by the department's Cultural Heritage Center to support emergency preparedness and response, monitor Russia's destruction of cultural heritage in Ukraine and foster public-private partnerships to preserve and protect cultural heritage.

These efforts build on more than 20 years of U.S. engagement on cultural heritage protection and preservation work with the government of Ukraine through the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). To learn more about U.S. efforts to preserve and protect Ukraine's cultural heritage, click here [<https://eca.state.gov/cultural-heritage-center>].

For further information, please contact ECA-Press@state.gov.

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Two years into full-scale Russian invasion, Ukrainian soldiers reflect on state of war

by Aleksander Palikot
RFE/RL

Two years after Russia's full-scale invasion began, many Ukrainians sense that their country could soon find itself under unbearable pressure.

Speaking at the annual Munich Security Conference in late February, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy repeated a message he had delivered at the same forum days before the invasion: If Ukraine is left to go it alone, Russia will destroy it, and Russian aggression can only be stopped by force.

As Western leaders debated in Bavaria, Russian forces seized Avdiyivka, a city in the Donbas that has been at the heart of the war in Ukraine since 2014. With U.S. aid in doubt and Russia pushing for further gains, the coming year is crucial to the country's fate.

Two years after missiles rained down across the country and Russian forces attacked from the north, east and south, RFE/RL spoke to soldiers it had encountered in earlier reporting on the war.

Here is what they said.

'Painful mathematics'

Volodymyr, 54, left his job as a doctor in Kyiv at the beginning of the all-out war and has treated hundreds of soldiers wounded in the long, bloody battle for Avdiyivka.

Speaking to RFE/RL near the front in December, he said that on some days his team's triage unit treated several dozen badly wounded soldiers.

"The Russian Army is ready to lay down any number of [its soldiers'] lives to reach its goal," Volodymyr said at the time. "The killing will go on until one side is exhausted."

Recently rotated out of the proximity of the now Russian-controlled city, he told RFE/RL that in retrospect, the withdrawal from Avdiyivka was "inevitable" in the face of the Russian advantage in personnel and shells.

"War is painful mathematics," Volodymyr said. "Without weapons, we are forced to die or lose territory."

In mid-August, U.S. officials spoke unofficially of 70,000 Ukrainian soldiers killed and 120,000 wounded — figures that do not include civilians. The corresponding numbers for the Russian side were 120,000 killed and 170,000-180,000 wounded.

Roughly one-fifth of Ukraine's territory — parts of the Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Kherson and Kharkiv regions, as well as the entire Crimean Peninsula — is under Russian occupation. According to the Kyiv-based Zmina human rights center, at least 5 million Ukrainians remain in Russian-held areas.

After almost two years spent near Avdiyivka, Volodymyr will continue his service elsewhere. He does not expect the war to end this year and believes a diplomatic settlement of the conflict is not likely anytime soon.

"We will not give up, because we did in the past and it resulted in subjugation and Holodomor," he said, referring to the demise of the short-lived Ukrainian People's Republic in 1921 and the man-made famine that killed millions of Ukrainians under Soviet dictator Josef Stalin in 1932-1933.

The war in Ukraine started in 2014, when Russia occupied Crimea and fomented armed separatism in the Donbas, and escalated dramatically when Russian President Vladimir Putin launched the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022. But many Ukrainians, like Volodymyr, see it as a continuation of Russian centuries-old imperial policy against their nation.

Futile hopes

When Grizzly, 34, a deputy commander of a battalion that has fought in over 20 locations in the north, east and south of Ukraine, spoke to RFE/RL last August, he said his view of the fighting was becoming "less bright every month."

Speaking at the high point of Ukraine's counteroffensive aimed at driving a wedge into the Russian-occupied territory in the south, he said he hoped that Gen. Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, then the commander in chief of the armed forces, had "a joker in his hand" — a wild card that could tip the balance in Kyiv's favor.

But that hope proved futile, Grizzly — his military call sign — told RFE/RL recently. He said his unit has lost a significant number of soldiers and that recruits, who come in small numbers, are usually poorly motivated. The unit has been recently transferred to the area around Kupyansk, in the Kharkiv region, where heavy fighting has been ongoing for months.

Optimists stress that, over the past year, Ukraine has regained control of the western part of the Black Sea, allowing the export of grain to the wider world, has destroyed part of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and has had some success striking deep into Russian territory.

But as the Ukrainian steppe turned into an enormous minefield shadowed by tens of thousands of drones and guarded by hundreds of thousands of soldiers, hopes of a military breakthrough have given way, for many in Ukraine, to fears that forces low on ammunition and personnel may fail to hold the line.

"In fact, we are in a worse negotiating



Courtesy of Ivan Mishchenko via Twitter

For Ukrainian Supreme Court Judge Ivan Mishchenko, the choice to fight on the front line was not a hard one. "If Russia wins, courts and judges will not be necessary in Ukraine," he said.

position now than we had been a year ago," Grizzly said.

The front in southern Ukraine has shifted only marginally despite the deliveries of Western-made weapons and training for Ukrainian soldiers in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states. Russia, meanwhile, succeeded in militarizing its industry and kept the informal mobilization of soldiers going, he said.

Military analysts say substantial Russian gains could at some point push Ukraine into peace talks on Moscow's terms.

Grizzly, an entrepreneur in civilian life who first fought for Ukraine in the Donbas in 2015, said he believes that without "deep reforms" Ukraine's war effort "will be at best stuck."

"But attempts to reform are halted by the government's lack of trust in its people," he said. "Our old problems did not vanish with the new war."

'Left to face Russia alone'

In March 2023, Ivan Mishchenko, 45, a Supreme Court judge turned volunteer soldier, told RFE/RL that while Ukrainians are fighting against a stronger adversary, the greatest danger lies in corruption and weak state institutions. "If we lose the support of the whole civilized world, we will be left to face Russia alone," he said at the time.

Mr. Mishchenko, who volunteered to fight at the beginning of the invasion and spent several months at the front, later left

the army to work with a European Union-backed commission responsible for appointing new judges and is now back at work at Ukraine's top court.

"Of course, the war does have a negative impact on processes concerning human rights protection and democracy," he recently told RFE/RL. "We are not doing badly, but we need to continue the reforms."

Two years into the all-out war, Ukraine is still struggling to root out corruption in state institutions. Due to martial law and the constant threat of bomb attacks, elections cannot take place. Worries about the independent media are also on the rise.

With problems mounting on the front line, Mr. Zelenskyy — still supported by most citizens but with trust ratings slipping as the war grinds on — dismissed Mr. Zaluzhnyi in February and shook up much of the military leadership.

The authorities are also expected to soon introduce a new law on military conscription. With fewer and fewer people willing to join the army, reforming a recruitment system that critics say is plagued by corruption and strengthens social inequality has become a highly controversial issue.

'Global security threat'

Mr. Mishchenko said that despite the setbacks and problems, Ukrainians' aims have

(Continued on page 19)

FOR THE RECORD

U.S. Holodomor committee announces student competition for 2024

by Oksana Kulynych

YONKERS, N.Y. — Last year, the U.S. Committee for Ukrainian Holodomor Genocide Awareness sponsored a Holodomor competition for students in grades 9-12. The organization received many excellent submissions with teachers and students indicating that they would like to participate this year.

Organizers said they were excited to offer the opportunity again for high school students in the U.S. to participate in the 2024 Ukrainian Holodomor Genocide Student Competition.

The objective of the competition is to increase students' understanding of what transpired during Stalin's regime in what was then Soviet Ukraine and how it relates to Russia's ongoing geno-

cidal war against Ukraine.

Students will have the opportunity to choose among a variety of projects to showcase their knowledge of the Holodomor and share it with others.

The announcement about the 2024 Ukrainian Holodomor Genocide Competition, with a flyer, and a link to the official description are available on the Holodomor Resource Library website under the news and events page: <https://holodomorct.org/news-events/>.

Educators are encouraged to widely disseminate information about the competition. For submissions, questions or additional information, readers can email ukrainecompetition@gmail.com.

The competition is open to all high school students in grades 9-12 in the U.S. The deadline for submission is March 15.



Andre Luis Alves, via RFE/RL

At a triage site near Avdiyivka in early December, the wounded came in waves — sometimes dozens of soldiers in a single day.

THE UKRAINIAN WEEKLY

Putin's veil of duplicity

Once again, Russian President Vladimir Putin has taken to the podium to deliver his annual state-of-the-nation address, a theatrical display of power and rhetoric that has become emblematic of his enduring rule. However, beneath the veneer of grandiosity and patriotic fervor lies a tapestry of deception and manipulation.

Six years have passed since Putin first unveiled Russia's supposed arsenal of powerful new weapons, a blatant warning to the West. Yet, in his latest address on February 29, the echoes of past speeches reverberated as Putin chose to dwell not on international tensions or the conflict in Ukraine, but on the minutiae of domestic policy.

Putin's address, strategically timed just weeks before an election that he is all but guaranteed to win, followed a familiar script. Despite the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands and displaced countless more, Putin's rhetoric painted a picture of Russian national unity and resilience. He lauded the efforts of workers, entrepreneurs and volunteers, conveniently glossing over the mass exodus of dissidents and the suppression of independent media that has characterized his regime.

Central to Putin's narrative was the saber-rattling bravado that has become synonymous with his leadership. Once again, he boasted of Russia's formidable arsenal, brandishing the threat of nuclear conflict as a deterrent to Western intervention. His thinly veiled warnings to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United States served as a stark reminder of the precarious geopolitical landscape that his regime has cultivated.

Yet, amidst the bombast and bravado, Putin's address betrayed a sense of nostalgia for a bygone era. As he delved into the intricacies of domestic policy, harkening back to the national projects of the early 2000s, he laughably sought to present himself as a steward of Russian progress and prosperity, though he has done nothing but push the nation and his people back decades. His proposals for economic development and social reform were carefully calibrated to appeal to the concerns of ordinary Russians, masking the authoritarian underpinnings of his regime.

Perhaps most egregious was Putin's blatant disregard for the democratic process. In a country where elections have long been a charade, his address offered no semblance of genuine political discourse. Instead, it served as a platform for the propagation of Kremlin propaganda and the consolidation of his grip on power.

As the March election looms on the horizon, Putin's speech serves as a stark reminder of the facade of democracy that has come to define Russian politics. Despite the veneer of legitimacy that he seeks to project, his regime remains mired in corruption, censorship and repression.

In the face of Putin's duplicitous rhetoric, the international community must remain vigilant. The specter of Russian aggression looms large, threatening to upset the fragile equilibrium of global stability. Now more than ever, it is imperative that the United States, as a leader of the world's democratic nations, stand against the forces of tyranny and oppression. It can begin by passing the \$60 billion aid bill currently languishing in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Putin's state-of-the-nation address may be a spectacle of grandiosity, but beneath the pomp and pageantry lies a stark reality. As the world watches, we must not be deceived by the rhetoric of autocrats, but instead remain steadfast in our commitment to democracy, freedom and human rights. Only then can we hope to confront the challenges that lie ahead and build a future defined by peace, justice and prosperity for all.

**March
1
1993**

Turning the pages back...

Thirty-one years ago, on March 1, 1993, Ukraine's Foreign Affairs Ministry issued a sharp reaction to an appeal by Russian President Boris Yeltsin for a United Nations mandate for Russia to act as a "guarantor of peace" on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

"No one in Ukraine gave authority to the Russian president to appeal to the United Nations with such a request," Ukraine's Foreign Affairs Ministry stated. "The realization of this idea would be nothing short of a gross violation of existing international legal norms, including principles of the United Nations Charter and principle documents of the CSCE [Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission]."

Ukraine also accused Russia of threatening its sovereignty and territorial integrity. "The Russian desire to unilaterally take on itself the role of guarantor of peace and security in the region of the former Soviet Union carries the unconcealed threat of creating a situation whereby one of the CIS countries has a bigger role than all others. And all this poses a threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Ukraine will never agree to such claims."

Russia's statement drew criticism from United Nations officials, including Stephen Browne, representative of the United Nations in Ukraine, who called Russia's actions a "departure from normal U.N. practice to recognize a country as a custodian for the security of a region. ... It would be a precedent if authority was to be vested in a single country on behalf of a region," he added.

Mykola Mykhachenko, chief political advisor to President Leonid Kravchuk, told Reuters that Ukraine would never recognize Russia's claims of a sphere of influence on

(Continued on page 19)

In address...

(Continued from page 1)

In the first part of the speech, he accused the West of "trying to drag us into an arms race" by "trying to wear us down," before moving on to his global outlook and then domestic issues such as economic development.

"The West is not just trying to hold back our development; instead of Russia, they need a dying space," he said, adding that at the same time the West "miscalculated."

Earlier in the week, French President Emmanuel Macron, speaking after a summit of continental leaders in Paris, said that despite a current lack of consensus, "nothing," including sending Western forces to fight on the Ukrainians' side, should be ruled out to prevent a Russian victory in Ukraine.

Putin said such a move would result in "consequences for the interventionists" that will be "much more tragic."

He also said that such involvement by the West would heighten the possibility of a global nuclear war.

"Russia has weapons which can hit targets on their territory and what they are now suggesting and scaring the world with, all that raises the real threat of a nuclear conflict that will mean the destruction of our civilization," Putin said.

"Don't they understand it? ... Those people haven't been through any tough challenges and they have forgotten what war means," he added.

While rejecting Western reports that Moscow was considering the deployment of space-based nuclear weapons, Putin did say that Russia's nuclear forces are at "full readiness" and that his military has deployed new weaponry on the Ukrainian battlefield.

He also said that the new Sarmat heavy intercontinental ballistic missile has entered service with Russian nuclear forces, while the country is completing testing of the Burevestnik atomic-powered cruise missile and the Poseidon atomic-powered, nuclear-armed drone.

The speech comes before the March 15-17 balloting, which the Kremlin hopes to use as a show of national unity in support of Putin and the invasion of Ukraine.

Russian elections are tightly controlled by the Kremlin and are neither free nor fair but are viewed by the government as necessary to convey a sense of legitimacy.

The Kremlin's tight grip on politics, media, law enforcement and other levers means Putin, who has ruled Russia as president or prime minister since 1999, is certain to win, barring a very big, unexpected development.

An hour into his speech, Putin had not mentioned Alexei Navalny, the popular opposition politician who died two weeks ago in an Arctic prison under suspicious circumstances.

Boris Nadezhin, who spoke out against the war in Ukraine, appeared to be headed toward securing status as a candidate until the Central Election Commission (TsIK) barred him, saying too many of the support signatures he submitted were not verified.

Mr. Navalny attempted to run against Putin in 2018 only to be barred by the TsIK over a conviction in a fraud case in what is widely seen as a politically motivated move.

The TsIK routinely refuses to register would-be opposition candidates on the pretext that they submitted an insufficient number of valid signatures.

The Kremlin warned Kyiv's European allies that sending troops to fight in Ukraine would lead to the "inevitability" of war between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Mr. Macron told a news conference that "no consensus" existed on the sending of European ground troops to Ukraine, but added, "nothing should be excluded to achieve our objective. Russia cannot win that war."

Asked about Mr. Macron's remark, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on

February 27 that "the very fact of discussing the possibility of sending certain contingents to Ukraine from NATO countries is a very important new element."

"We would need to talk not about the probability, but about the inevitability [of a direct conflict between Russia and NATO]," Mr. Peskov said.

The United States said it had no plans to send ground troops to Ukraine, while Germany, Britain, Spain, Poland and the Czech Republic distanced themselves from any suggestion they might commit ground troops to the fight.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who attended the Paris gathering, told journalists that what has been agreed among the allies is "that there will be no soldiers on Ukrainian soil sent there by European states or NATO states."

In Prague, Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala and his visiting Polish counterpart, Donald Tusk, said their governments were not contemplating such a move.

"I am convinced that we should develop the paths of support that we embarked on after Russia's aggression," Mr. Fiala told a news conference alongside Mr. Tusk.

"I believe we don't need to open some other methods or ways," he added.

"Poland does not plan to send its troops to the territory of Ukraine," Mr. Tusk said.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg told the AP on February 27 that "NATO allies are providing unprecedented support to Ukraine, but there are "no plans for NATO combat troops on the ground in Ukraine."

Seeking to clarify Mr. Macron's remarks, French Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Sejourne said the president had in mind sending troops for specific tasks such as helping with mine clearance, production of weapons on site and cyber defense.

This could require a military presence "without crossing the threshold of fighting," Mr. Sejourne told French lawmakers.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who addressed the Paris meeting virtually, called on European leaders to ensure that Putin "cannot destroy our achievements and cannot expand his aggression to other nations."

Ukraine relies heavily on advanced weaponry and ammunition supplies from its Western allies, mainly from the United States, to resist increasingly intense assaults by Russian forces who have superiority in manpower and a large supply of ammunition.

Outgunned and outmanned Ukrainian troops have been recently forced to withdraw from some of their defensive positions in the east as a critical U.S. military aid package worth \$61 billion remains blocked in the Republican-led House of Representatives.

U.S. President Joe Biden called a meeting of top congressional leaders at the White House, warning of the dire cost of failing to give Ukraine military aid.

The meeting escalated his efforts to unlock the stalled assistance as well as to avert a looming government shutdown as a March 1 deadline on an appropriations bill approached.

"On Ukraine, I think the need is urgent," said Mr. Biden, who was joined at the meeting by Vice President Kamala Harris. The "consequence of inaction every day in Ukraine is dire," he added.

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.), an ally of former President Donald Trump who leads a razor-thin Republican majority in the House, has refused to allow a vote on the bill that includes the new aid to Ukraine.

(With reporting by AP, AFP, Reuters and dpa)

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Threats for the West. Money for mothers: What Putin did and didn't say in his state-of-the-nation speech.

by Mike Eckel and Robert Coalson
RFE/RL

Six years ago, Russian President Vladimir Putin stood before a joint gathering of Russia's two chambers of parliament, along with dozens of cabinet and other government officials, and boasted that the country was developing a slew of powerful new weapons, a pointed warning to the West.

On February 29, he did the same thing again.

But as he did back in 2018, Putin proceeded to spend the vast majority of his more-than-two-hour speech diving deep into the minutiae of Russia's domestic problems, discussing things like the minimum wage and tax rates and financial support for mothers and installing new heating-gas pipelines.

The state-of-the-nation speech comes just two weeks before an election that Putin is certain to win, securing a fifth term in office and prolonging his tenure as what is already Russia's longest-serving leader since the tsarist era.

There wasn't a lot of electioneering in the speech. Nor was it dominated by the Kremlin's all-out invasion of Ukraine, which is now in its third year with no end in sight. Since it began, some 330,000 Russian troops have been wounded or killed, according to Western estimates, and hundreds of thousands of Russians have fled the country, fearing being called up to fight in Ukraine.

Here are some takeaways from the February 29 address:

'It's not my war, it's our war'

Putin spoke about the war against Ukraine in broad strokes. But he took pains to portray it as a national effort – a common cause that has united the country.

"The decisive role in this just struggle belongs to our citizens, our unity and dedication to our native country, and our responsibility for its fate," he said. And while evidence indicates that many senior Russian officials did not learn of the invasion until it was underway, and millions of Russians were stunned by the decision, Putin asserted that widespread support "clearly and unambiguously appeared from the beginning of the special military operation."

He lauded workers for "working triple shifts," as well as entrepreneurs, engineers, laborers, volunteers, charities, political parties and others for "their responsible, tireless work to support Russia's interests."

In his bid to spread responsibility to the entire population, Putin ignored the tens of thousands of people who uprooted their lives and fled the country in the weeks following the February 2022 invasion and the second massive wave of emigration that came when Putin announced a military mobilization that September.

Non-government media, both national and local, were also largely driven from the country or forced to shut down, including high-profile outlets such as *Ekho Moskvy*, *Dozhd TV*, and *Novaya Gazeta*.

Putin's narrative of broad support also did not account for the fact that the government has mandated this apparent unity with draconian laws against dissent that have resulted in thousands of prosecutions and an ever-growing number of long prison terms for "discrediting" the armed forces and the like.

Saber-rattling. Again.

As was the case in 2018, and the following year as well, Putin used his speech to boast about Russia's new weaponry, sending threatening signals to the North

Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the West.

He bragged about hypersonic weapons that have been under development for years: the Kinzhal air-launched ballistic missile and the Tsirkon (Zircon) hypersonic, naval-launched cruise missile. The Kinzhal has been confirmed in the Ukraine conflict; the Tsirkon has not.

Putin said both had already been used in Ukraine.

He also boasted about other previously revealed weapon systems – the Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile, the Peresvet laser weapon, and two others he said were near completion: the Poseidon nuclear-capable underwater drone and the nuclear-powered cruise missile known as the Burevestnik.

What was more notable was how Putin framed the new weapons. He nodded to comments days earlier when French President Emmanuel Macron suggested the theoretical possibility of troops from NATO members being openly deployed to Ukraine to help in its defense against the Russian invasion.

"We also have weapons that can strike targets on their territory," Putin said. "Do they not understand this?"

The West "must, in the end, understand that all this truly threatens a conflict with the use of nuclear weapons, and therefore the destruction of civilization," he said.

"We remember the fate of those who once sent their contingents to the territory of our country," Putin said in what appeared to be a reference to past invasions by Napoleon in the 18th century and Hitler in the 20th century.

"But now the consequences for potential interventionists will be much more tragic," he said.

Does this mean Russia is about to attack Europe or NATO – something that several NATO members have said is a growing possibility in the coming years?

For the moment, the answer is no. But Putin's threat may have been intended to spook NATO members, choking off any potential discussion about deploying NATO forces.

Putin also aimed what he and the more hawkish elements of the Russian security and intelligence community consider to be the country's greatest adversary and rival: the United States.

Decades of arms-control treaties between the two countries have frayed to the point of total collapse. Efforts to keep the last major treaty – New START – from expiring with no replacement in 2026 have faltered, as Russia seeks to broaden negotiations to include other issues, such as Ukraine, while the United States calls for focusing solely on arms control.

"There have been more and more unsubstantiated accusations against Russia, for example that we are allegedly going to deploy nuclear weapons in space," Putin said. "Such innuendo, which is nothing but innuendo, is a ploy to draw us into negotiations on their terms, which are favorable only to the United States."

"The words of today's American authorities about their alleged interest in negotiations with us on strategic-stability issues are demagoguery ... they simply want to show their citizens and everyone else that they still rule the world."

The old is new again

Although Putin devoted space in the speech to the war against Ukraine and to Russia's confrontation with the West, he didn't dwell on them at length as he has in many appearances since the invasion was launched.

By far the bulk of the speech was given over to programmatic issues, such as how many square meters of new housing should be constructed annually and what average life expectancy should be by 2030.

There were long sections with proposals relating to demographic decline, the gasification of urban areas, developing industry and agriculture, and improving the healthcare and education sectors. He called for the reduction of inspections of businesses and for an amnesty to companies that renounce tax evasion.

That large section of the speech closely resembled the content and style of his early state-of-the-nation addresses, stretching back to the 2000s.

In 2005, early in his second term, Putin laid out the so-called national projects, aimed at bringing about dramatic improvements in the realm of housing, medical care, education and agriculture. Almost two decades later, he was describing those challenges and the means of addressing them in very similar terms.

All politics is local

Over nearly 24 years as Russia's preeminent political figure, Putin has refined the art of mastering small details – painstaking or mind-numbing or both. It's one of the skills that has helped cement his enduring popularity among much of the Russian electorate.

This year's speech was no exception, with the majority of it dedicated to domestic policy proposals that he said would combat poverty, boost the country's flagging birthrate, provide support for veterans and improve educational access.

Sketching out a six-year plan for spending and investments, Putin drilled down deep into the nuances of laying new natural gas lines in far-flung corners of the country. He discussed changing the format of the Unified State Exam, a nationally administered exam taken by millions of high school students before entering universities.

He talked about boosting industrial production, calling for manufacturers to increase production of high-tech goods by 150 percent, and prioritized the development of domestically produced medicines and automobiles.

He called for writing off municipal debts for some regions, and for offering up to 250 billion rubles (\$2.75 billion) in infrastructure loans to spur investment in creaky municipal facilities. And he suggested rejigging the country's Tax Code to hike rates on high earners.

Election, what election?

With the March 15-17 election fast approaching, one might expect a speech of

this sort – it was nationally televised by the main state channels and lavishly covered by Kremlin-allied media – would be full of election slogans and bumper-sticker proposals, to help gin up support from undecided voters.

In Putin's Russia, there's less need for that. The election campaign has been devoid of the usual activities: campaign rallies, debates, ribbon-cuttings, barnstorming trips to regions where support is seen as flagging.

Ahead of the address, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov himself said it could be viewed "to a large degree as his election program."

But Putin's speech bore few hallmarks of that type: there were no calls to come to the polls, no praise for election workers, no paeans to the democratic process.

That said, the Kremlin and its powerful presidential administration – which is intimately involved in engineering the entire election process – appears eager to make sure there is a plausibly high turnout among Russian voters, and that the percentage of the vote in Putin's favor is also plausibly high.

The newspaper *Kommersant* reported last year that Kremlin policy advisers were aiming for 70 percent turnout, with the victor receiving at least 75 percent of the vote, and Putin's spokesman said last year that he would receive more than 90 percent.

To that end, Putin did announce several clearly populist measures: foremost was the pledge to double the monthly minimum wage by 2030, up to 35,000 rubles (\$385). With inflation running at around 7.5 percent for 2023, that will be perceived as a clear boon for many middle-wage earners, even though the increase is being phased in over six years.

The wage, which is used to calculate all sorts of public subsidies and tariffs, already increased by 18.5 percent since the beginning of 2023.

Putin also made the argument in defense of Russia's political system, despite the fact that the country's elections ceased years ago to be free, fair, competitive or even transparent, according to both Russian and Western election observers.

"Russia's political system is one of the foundations of the country's sovereignty," Putin said. "We will not let anyone interfere in our domestic affairs."

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U.S. State...

(Continued from page 4)

suing visa restrictions on five Kremlin-backed individuals in Ukraine for their connection to the deportation and confinement of Ukraine's children.

The United States will use all available tools to hinder Russia's ability to access the global financial system, disrupt Russia's military-industrial-procurement, stand in solidarity with Russians striving for a more democratic future and ensure Putin's invasion remains a strategic failure for Russia.

The Department of State and the Department of the Treasury sanctions actions were taken pursuant to Executive Order 14024 "Blocking Property With Respect To Specified Harmful Foreign Activities of the

Government of the Russian Federation," as amended by E.O. 14114; and E.O. 13224, "Blocking Property and Prohibiting Transactions With Persons Who Commit, Threaten To Commit, or Support Terrorism." Additional actions are pursuant to a visa restriction policy under Section 212(a)(3) (C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which authorizes the secretary of state to restrict visa issuance to Russian Federation military officials and Russia-backed or Russia-installed purported authorities who are believed to have been involved in human rights abuses, violations of international humanitarian law or public corruption in Ukraine. For more information on today's actions, please see the Department of State's fact sheet, the Department of the Treasury's press release and the Department of Commerce's press release.

Rallygoers in Edmonton mark full-scale war's deconds anniversary

by Lidia M. Wasyllyn

EDMONTON – Joining communities around the globe, Edmonton's Ukrainian community and its supporters marked the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24.

Approximately 2,000 people, gathered on the grounds of the Alberta legislature to commemorate the solemn anniversary.

The event was organized by the Edmonton Branch of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) in cooperation with

the Edmonton Branch of the Ukrainian National Federation and the Alberta Provincial Council of the UCC.

Edmonton UCC President Yaroslav Broda thanked everyone for standing with Ukraine, including various elected officials. The Nove Zhyttia Choir, under the direction of Oleksandra Hryniuk who performed the Canadian and Ukrainian national anthems, opened the program. A moving prayer for Ukraine was delivered by Archpriest Cornell Zubritsky, dean of St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral in



Lidia M. Wasyllyn

Rallygoers held portraits of fallen war heroes during a commemoration of the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine in Edmonton organized by the Ukrainian National Federation.



Pictured during a rally to support Ukraine are (from left to right) Edmonton City Councillor Tim Cartmell, Sr. Lt. Konstantyn Bilous of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, President of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress-Alberta Provincial Council Oryisia Boychuk, Consul General of Ukraine in Edmonton Aleksandr Danylyko, Member of the Canadian Parliament Randy Boissonnault, Member of the Canadian Parliament Ziad Aboultaif and an assistant, and President of the Edmonton branch of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Yaroslav Broda.

Edmonton.

"Russia has been at war with Ukraine for 3,656 days. Just over 10 years have passed since unmarked Russian soldiers – little green men – appeared in Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk, sparking a slow-motion, simmering conflict until Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, when it boiled over 730 days ago," Mr. Broda said. "It became a full-scale genocide. For 730 days, Russian soldiers have been committing unspeakable atrocities against Ukrainians, including executions, torture, rape, mass murder. This scale of war has not been seen since World War II."

Mr. Broda reminded the crowd of the

need for unity as Ukraine continues to fight back against Russia's attempt to conquer its neighbor.

"Let's be clear, this is not [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's war, this is Russia's war. In February, while 5,000 people rallied against the war, 200,000 sang and danced in a soccer stadium in Moscow in support of the war. Putin did not slaughter civilians in Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol. Russian soldiers did. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers from every corner of the Russian Federation [are part of the war]," Mr. Broda said.

(Continued on page 9)

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Ukrainians mark full-scale war's anniversary with more than 1,000 events worldwide

by Roman Tymotsko

LVIV – On February 24, the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale war, Ukrainians and their diaspora organizations hosted 1,023 events around the world to show support for Ukraine.

The events occurred in 746 cities across 69 countries on every continent, including Antarctica, according to the Ukrainian World Congress (UWC) and Ukrayinska Pravda, which jointly created an interactive map that tracked events commemorating the solemn occasion.

The greatest number of events on that day occurred in Germany, the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Canada.

In Prague, Czech President Petr Pavel opened a large Ukrainian rally, while European Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders participated in a massive demonstration in Brussels.

The 28th Ukrainian Antarctic expedition sent a video message from Antarctica.

A correspondent for The Ukrainian Weekly spoke with participants of rallies in the U.S., the U.K., Spain and Japan.

Austin, Texas

"The atmosphere was amicable, with many Ukrainian flags, vyshyvankas [traditional Ukrainian embroidered shirts], and many families with kids. The organizers wanted to ensure everyone felt comfortable – they brought water bottles, and kids had a place where their faces were painted. They could read books together," Sophia Salo said about the event in Austin, Texas.

Ms. Salo said that more people than the

previous year attended the rally. She saw familiar faces, as Austin has developed an active Ukrainian community. Ms. Salo said she has participated in diaspora activities since moving to the city a year ago. She recently joined the Women in Tech hub in Austin.

"The rally started with the [Ukrainian national] anthem and a minute of silence to commemorate everyone who was killed since the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The organizers did some collective reflections on the main events of the past two years. They also emphasized that the war had lasted for 10 years, so we looked back at some key events. Everything was in English so that Americans could understand. The main messages were about Ukraine fighting for the democracy of the entire world, about arming Ukraine, and about Russia being a terrorist state. The organizers also emphasized the need to vote in the upcoming elections and choose the best candidate to protect America and democracy," said Ms. Salo, who works in the IT sector.

"It's a hard day for each Ukrainian, no matter where they are. I felt emotionally drained after the rally and had to nap to disconnect from everything and recharge. All the reflections – both personal and public that people share all over social media – are extremely important yet overwhelming and hard to process at once," Ms. Salo said.

She said she usually doesn't enjoy mass gatherings, especially the ones tied to sad events such as this anniversary.

"I knew I would feel uncomfortable, stressed, overwhelmed and want to go



Embassy of Ukraine in Japan

Ukrainians and their supporters rally in Tokyo on February 24 to mark the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale war.

home. But I knew I'd feel guilty if I didn't go. Attending major rallies and donating is the least I can do, being far away from Ukraine," she said.

Tokyo

Daryna Kukhar, a student at the Keio University in Tokyo, is an active Ukrainian community member who took part in an anniversary commemoration in central Tokyo.

"The atmosphere was not bad; there was no total unity, but it was nice that peo-

ple came and devoted their time to the demonstration. We have a kind of 'diaspora chat' where we publish news. The organizers encouraged us to come and advised us on what to bring. I thought there were quite a few of us because I was standing in front. But, judging by the video, maybe 100 of us, including Japanese individuals who decided to support us, and that's great. There were Japanese journalists in front of us, a whole camp of them, so they were

(Continued on page 11)

Rallygoers...

(Continued from page 8)

He also thanked Canadian officials for continuing to support Kyiv.

"Just today, the Canadian government committed \$3 billion in military and financial aid to Ukraine. For this we are thankful. Canada must continue to be a leader among allies in supporting Ukraine. Ukraine's fight is all of our fight. Ukraine must be victorious today to prevent a future conflict in Europe. If Russia is not defeated today, [then] it will guarantee a wider war in Europe in the future. Ukraine must be given the tools it needs to achieve complete victory to achieve a just peace. The cost of inaction will be immeasurably greater," Mr. Broda said.

"The UCC calls on the government of Canada and our allies to supply Ukraine with air defense, long-range artillery, ammunition, planes and tanks. Furthermore, we call on the government of Canada to designate the Russian Federation a state supporter of terrorism and to expel all Russian diplomats from Canada. Finally, we call on the government of Canada to seize all sanctioned Russian assets and provide them to Ukraine, so we can continue to fight," Mr. Broda said.

Orysia Boychuk, president of the Alberta Provincial Council of the UCC (UCC-APC), said in her remarks that "the world is facing the biggest threat of global peace and security since World War II. It is imperative that we keep the message alive as Russia continues to wage this brutal war on Ukraine."

"Twenty-thousand children have been documented to have been stolen from Ukraine, taken to Russia to be re-educated in camps to remove and annihilate their Ukrainian identity," Ms. Boychuk said.

She thanked the Alberta government for signing a memorandum of understanding with the Ukrainian Ministry of Energy and also for a grant of \$80,000 to support

English classes for newcomers.

Ms. Boychuk acknowledged and thanked Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland for their visit to Kyiv that very day, where they signed a defense cooperation agreement with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in which Canada committed to providing \$3 billion of financial and military aid to Ukraine.

Other flags were scattered amongst the blue and yellow, including the flags of Belarus, Iran and the Crimean Tatars.

Mr. Broda noted that Edmonton's iconic High-Level Bridge over the North Saskatchewan River along with other buildings in the city's downtown neighborhood, would be illuminated in Ukraine's blue and yellow colors in honor of the sacrifices made in the war in Ukraine.

Consul General of Ukraine Oleksandr Danylyko spoke about the tragedies visited upon the Ukrainian nation in the last 10 years of war.

"Despite centuries of oppression, terror and countless acts of genocide, Ukrainians still stand; we are still alive and still fighting, we are strong," Mr. Danylyko said. "We are fighting for our land, we are fighting for our survival. But actually, we are fighting for freedom in the whole world because, if we fail, if we fall under this Putin invasion, he will go further. There will be no safe place in the world because all dictatorships, all the countries who have power can decide to take anything at will, to invade neighbors and destroy another country. So we are fighting now not only for Ukraine, we are fighting for the whole world."

Mr. Danylyko asked the crowd to remind Ukraine's supporters that the war continues and to not forget Ukraine. He said the 50,000 newcomers to Alberta cannot become complacent and indifferent to Ukraine just because they are now far away in Canada and preoccupied with their new lives. And he expressed deep gratitude for

the assistance provided thus far by all levels of the government and all Canadians.

Edmonton Centre Member of Parliament Randy Boissonnault spoke on behalf of the prime minister and strongly expressed Canada's support for Ukraine. He acknowledged the horrors the Ukrainian nation is being subjected to by Russia's unprovoked invasion. He repeated that the government of Canada's support for Ukraine is unequivocal and that Canada will stand with Ukraine until the country is victorious.

Representing the official opposition Conservatives in Canada's parliament were Zaid Aboulaif and Dane Lloyd.

"We can only remember the sacrifices every Ukrainian is putting out there in the battlefield to defeat Vladimir Putin and his illegal invasion of Ukraine," Mr. Aboulaif said. "So we stand with Ukraine, yesterday, today and in the future and as long as it takes to ensure the victory against Putin and his illegal attack on Ukraine's sovereignty and people."

Mr. Lloyd underscored that "Canada's goal is unequivocal – the complete and utter victory of the Ukrainian people against the barbarian Russian hordes."

Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, a member of the legislative assembly of Alberta, spoke on behalf of the government of Alberta. She acknowledged the anguish of the Ukrainian nation and recognized that nearly 50,000 Ukrainian refugees have settled in 205 communities across Alberta and are contributing to the tapestry of their society.

The city of Edmonton was represented by three city councilors, including Andrew Knack, Tim Cartmell and Karen Principe, who offered words of support for Ukraine and welcome to the thousands of displaced Ukrainians who have made Edmonton home.

A noteworthy speaker was Konstantyn Bilous, former Senior Lt. of the 59th Motorized Infantry Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine who fought in Kherson

Oblast in the spring of 2022.

He expressed gratitude "to all Ukrainians, all Canadians who have gathered to remind the world what occurred two years ago. Ukrainians did not anticipate a war, because they lived peacefully and felt life was happy. But the enemy came upon us treacherously and now we recall how our trains overflowed with refugees, we recall Bucha and Mariupol and the pain in our hearts has been transformed into rage against the enemy."

"Two years ago, long lineups appeared in Ukraine, lineups for signing up to defend Ukraine. We repelled the enemy from Kyiv, Odesa, Mykolaiv and other cities. But now is a difficult time as some are now fatigued and discouraged. But we believe and know that Ukraine will overcome because Ukrainians are strong and brave. We are very thankful to the world, which at first did not have faith in Ukrainians. But when they saw that we persevered, all together they began to help us. In the first place were the Canadians, the government of Canada, and especially Canadians of Ukrainian ancestry and we can really feel this assistance," Mr. Bilous said, adding that now is not the time to slow down assistance to Ukraine. He urged people to do what they can for the liberation and victory of Ukraine.

Members of the Ukrainian National Youth Federation created a large outline of a map of Ukraine with candles in front of the crowd. They delivered a poignant, personal reminiscence of February 24, 2022.

Portraits of many fallen heroes were displayed on a visual backdrop showing the devastation of the war, followed by the playing of the heartrending folksong Plyve Kacha that has come to symbolize the pain of loss of innocent lives in war.

Over \$5,500 was raised through donations at the commemoration with funds forwarded to the Ukrainian World Congress for the Army of Drones Campaign.

U.S. Rep. Sherrill...

(Continued from page 4)

parts of Ukraine. Vaccinations for children are delayed," Dr. Lopatynsky continued. She sounded a hopeful note by underscoring that she believes Ukraine's circle of friends, including the United States, will continue to help Ukraine at this most difficult time.

The topic addressed by Jerry Kuzemczak, an attorney, was the war crimes being perpetrated in Ukraine by Russia – an exhaustive topic that he said could take days to cover.

"Innocent lives are being shattered, families are being torn apart and communities are being ravaged by the relentless onslaught of violence," he said. "The situation in Ukraine is not merely a conflict between nations. It's a humanitarian crisis of staggering proportions. It is a battle between good and evil."

Mr. Kuzemczak reported that "Russia is committing acts of torture, summary executions, acts of sexual violence, looting of cultural properties, abuse of POWs. And it has even established filtration camps, just like North Korea has." These acts, he said, are committed "to destroy the Ukrainian nation." In addition, the Russians are kidnapping Ukrainian children and deporting them to Russia – yet another war crime. He concluded by stating: "The world must stand united in condemning these egregious acts, every day and holding them accountable. ... Silence in the face of injustice only serves to embolden the oppressor."

Attorney Andrew Olesnycky underlined the importance of continued U.S. support in response to Russian aggression.



www.facebook.com/RepMikieSherrill

Community members with Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill (from left to right) are Andrew Olesnycky, Dr. Roksolana Vaskul, Rep. Sherrill, Jerry Kuzemczak, Dr. Marta Lopatynsky, Father Stepan Bilyk and Marie Duplak.

"Today we face a prospect that two years ago was unthinkable: that continued U.S. financial and military support for Ukraine is in jeopardy. It's being held hostage by a minority of people in Congress, a significantly growing minority, of politicians who are ignoring the obvious."

At the beginning of Russia's assault on Ukraine, there was broad consensus among both parties that helping Ukraine was "not only in America's interest but an American imperative." Now, Mr. Olesnycky pointed out, there are those, "empowered by Russian propaganda," who believe we should cede victory to Russia in a war that is not just directed against Ukraine but is

really directed against the United States. It is a war against the very fabric of the rules-based international order."

Mr. Olesnycky exhorted American voters to understand that "Russia is not an ally, nor is it a neutral actor within its own sphere of influence. It is a historical and a present enemy of the United States." He added that Americans are a target of Russian propaganda, but they also become tools of that propaganda when they succumb to its disinformation.

Dr. Roksolana Vaskul, a physician who is president of the UACCNJ board of directors, expressed sincere thanks to the people of Morris County, New Jersey and the United

States for supporting Ukraine and the Ukrainian American community's efforts to assist their ancestral homeland. She had special words of gratitude to Rep. Sherrill for her constant support.

She spoke emotionally about the suffering of the people of Ukraine as a result of the Russian invasion and occupation. If we become indifferent to this suffering, she said, we must ask ourselves: "Who are we as a nation; what have we become? On which side of history are we?"

Dr. Vaskul emphasized that, "This war is not only about Ukraine; this war is about security and democracy in the whole world."

Rep. Sherrill then welcomed a hero to the podium: a Ukrainian soldier named Serhiy (identified only by his first name) who was severely injured in Mariinka and is currently in the U.S. for medical treatment. Serhiy thanked the American people for aiding Ukraine.

"The world saw that we are a strong nation. Then we received weapons from the West and were able to fight," he said.

Right now, however, "weapons are running out and we cannot protect our civilians. We are losing troops that would not have been lost had we received the necessary weapons when we needed them," Serhiy said. "I hope the world sees this and will come to our aid."

Rep. Sherrill thanked Serhiy for his words in support of his brothers in arms and civilians in Ukraine. She later commented on social media: "It was incredibly moving to hear from Serhiy, an injured Ukrainian soldier, about what U.S. support means for the frontlines. Ukraine can win this war – U.S. support cannot falter now."

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EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

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U.S. rodeo capital holds rally to draw attention to Russian aggression

Wyoming war rallygoer says 'better to laugh than cry'

by Mark Raczkiewycz

CHICAGO – The so-called rodeo capital of the world in Cody, Wyo., placed itself on the map of more than 700 population centers worldwide that held rallies on February 24 to draw attention to the second year of Russia's full-fledged invasion of Ukraine.

More than a dozen people rallied in the rural settlement of about 10,000 people situated along the Shoshone River in the Bighorn Basin of the least populous state despite being the 10th largest by area of the U.S.

"The sun was shining bright outside with a blue sky and we said a prayer for all those who've lost their homes and lives to Russian aggression," said the event's organizer, Yulia Matviyenko-Piazza a native of Kyiv, referring to the Ukrainian national flag's colors of blue and yellow.

Ms. Matviyenko-Piazza is the client relationship manager of her American husband's investment bank and administers the local Sleeping Giant ski area that he owns.



Courtesy of Yulia Matviyenko-Piazza

Yulia Matviyenko-Piazza (holding 'We Stand with Ukraine' sign) is joined by a cohort of protesters who were part of a rally in Cody, Wyo., on February 24 to draw attention to the war that Russia is waging against Ukraine, already entering its 11th year.

"We brought our giant Ukrainian flag and held up our 'Stand with Ukraine' placards ... and a priest came who is from Ternopil [Ukraine] to say an outdoor prayer," she said.

The purpose of their assembly, she said, "was to show people we support Ukraine

and to remind them that the [Russia-Ukrainian] war is still ongoing ... 10 years on and that this is the second invasion of the country [by Russia]."

Videos were shown to The Ukrainian Weekly of passenger vehicles driving by with people waving their hands and honk-

Ukrainians mark...

(Continued from page 9)

filming everything," Ms. Kukhar said.

"There are not so many Ukrainians in Tokyo; they are scattered all over Japan, so it's hard to gather everyone. I have a lot of acquaintances, friends from university, and organizers of demonstrations. They still do them every Sunday at Shinjuku subway station," Ms. Kukhar told The Ukrainian Weekly.

Participants held posters and waved flags. They said Russia should pay for its crimes, and that the export of Russian goods to Japan should stop, and they sought to remind Japanese citizens that the war in Ukraine continues Japan should help Kyiv.

"Reflecting on this day, I remembered the beginning of the full-scale invasion, how my friends and family and I experienced the first days, and how much time has passed since then. I thought about how the attitude of the Japanese has changed in the almost two years we have been here. We are converting a few Japanese at a time to the correct perception of Ukraine and Ukrainians, but this is not enough, so we keep working," Ms. Kukhar said.

"The Japanese help us a lot, but ordinary people do not quite understand the context, and the topic of war is still taboo. They also perceive Russian culture and people as separate entities, not as part of one problem, so don't think everything is so rosy and cool here," Ms. Kukhar said.

London

"On the day of the second anniversary of the full-scale invasion, a huge pro-Ukrainian march filled the central streets of London. The column formed near Hyde Park and headed to Trafalgar Square. I was traveling to the gathering point by bus, and, closer to the center, I realized how large the event was for the city – the main streets were blocked, traffic jams were near the event's start, and buses were announcing route changes because of the Ukrainian procession. I joined the march when the column had already started, almost at the tail, and I could not see the beginning of the column," said Khrystyna Oryshchak, an interior designer and entrepreneur.



Rallygoers hold a large receipt noting the costs of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine during a rally in Tokyo on February 24.

"The participants did not chant but carried Ukrainian flags and slogans written on cardboard, such as 'Poland is the sister of Ukraine.' I could hear different languages, so the participants were of different nationalities. People were walking calmly, sadly but confidently, with pride. We were greeted by passersby and passing cars, and the occasional rickshaw played Ukrainian music, which cut through the silence. I liked seeing the long row of Ukrainian flags against the backdrop of streets and houses with completely different colors. The feeling of support and unity was with me the whole time," Ms. Oryshchak said.

At Trafalgar Square, the column began to dissolve into the crowd of people who had already gathered there. Under the monument was a small stage made using a metal shipping container. It seemed too small compared to the number of people, Ms. Oryshchak thought.

"I was close to the stage, and people seemed densely packed into the square. Ukrainian flags, but also flags of different countries, those who support Ukraine or decided to use the occasion to remind the

world about themselves. There were people of different nationalities and languages around. I recognized people in the crowd who often attend Ukrainian rallies in London, and those who often speak publicly in support of us took the stage," Ms. Oryshchak said.

"There was a prayer from Father Hlib Lonchyna, who heads the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the U.K., followed by a hymn called 'God is Great and Only,' which was difficult to sing because tears were pouring [from my face]," Ms. Oryshchak said.

"It is difficult to talk about my reflections on these two years. The wave of recollections on social media of how it was at the beginning also brought back memories. My phone showed photos from those days. I wanted to be silent and grateful. To cry but to be proud," Ms. Oryshchak said.

Barcelona

Marta Sanduliak, an economics student, attended the rally in Barcelona.

"The weather was very gloomy, and the first thing I saw was a girl's poster saying, 'My father is defending Ukraine now; I

ing their car horns in support.

Eight non-Ukrainians joined the rally and a native of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, drove more than two hours from Billings, Mont., to participate.

Asked whether Ms. Matviyenko-Piazza is optimistic about Ukraine's future, she said: "After two years, it's better to laugh than cry [Краще сміятися ніж плакати] as the Ukrainian saying goes. ... I'm more angry than optimistic because I don't know if Ukraine will get enough support."

Part of her outreach efforts include producing a documentary film about the siege of Kyiv during the early days of the February 24, 2022, invasion that was shown to high school pupils and also later screened by members of Congress, as well as at a national student film festival and award presentation in New York.

The Piazza family has sponsored more than 40 Ukrainian families through the federal government's United for Ukraine program for war-ravaged refugees and has also donated an estimated \$200,000 to support the war effort and has harnessed about \$12,000 from their local community for the same cause, said her husband, Nick Piazza.

"This program [United for Ukraine] has been a big success with those families living and paying taxes in the U.S.A. Many are located in Cody," he said.

don't want to see him killed.' I immediately thought about how everything that is happening to us is unfair and that this rally is a great reminder to the Spaniards and a sign of gratefulness toward them, but still – how insignificant it is compared to the scale of the war," Ms. Sanduliak said.

"I believe in small gatherings, support and donations, but the thought of what a big evil we are fighting makes me feel that the whole world is making such slow decisions, and it's unacceptable. More than a year ago, military expert Taras Chmut said that, if we get F16s in six months, it will be swift, and I thought six months is so long when people understand the urgency of this step. More than a year later, I laugh at my naivety," she said.

"I didn't feel any excitement during the rally; it was nice to hear Ukrainian, see flags, and meet foreigners who support us. But I felt more the atmosphere of 'we have had to remind everyone about the war for two years now; the world is moving on with its life and Ukraine is still in hell.' It felt like we were doing the right thing because people stopped, read the posters, took pictures, and some even joined the march," Ms. Sanduliak said.

She said that there seemed to be few people at first, but when the march began, she realized how far ahead she could see the Ukrainian flag and how many other people were behind her.

"I realized that there were a lot of people. Some joined us at the end of the march at Plaça Catalunya. So, it felt like several thousand people were right next to you," she said.

Ms. Sanduliak, who lives in Paris and came to Barcelona to visit her friend with whom she went to the rally, also accidentally bumped into an acquaintance she hadn't met for five years.

"During the rally, I realized how much I wanted to return to Ukraine. Not only on such significant dates but regularly. Last year, on this day, I was in Ukraine and felt very good in my place and where I should be. I understand the importance of Ukrainians abroad and the constant reminders of what is happening in Ukraine, but I consider myself more useful at home. The rally made me even more determined to finish my studies and return to Ukraine," she said.

U.S. Special...

(Continued from page 1)

Ukraine, Ms. Pritzker works with the Ukrainian government, the Group of Seven (G-7) intergovernmental political and economic forum, the E.U., international financial institutions and partners, and the American private sector "to help forge Ukraine's future as a prosperous, secure, European democracy," as stated on the U.S. Department of State's website.

At the recent Munich Security Conference, Ms. Pritzker received pleas in every meeting she attended for more 155 mm artillery shells, the NATO-standard used in field guns and howitzers.

"In Ukraine, there's a sense of desperation right now that's amplified by the House's foot-dragging on economic and military aid," Ms. Pritzker told The Ukrainian Weekly, referring to the U.S. House of Representatives, and noting that the Senate, for its part, passed the \$95 billion aid package with a vote of 70 to 29.

"That's a reflection of where the American people are at on this issue, and the House has similar bipartisan support for Ukraine," Ms. Pritzker said. "There's just no reason that this shouldn't be brought to the floor and voted on."

The Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Mike Johnson (R-La.), who heads a razor-thin Republican majority in the House, has refused to allow a vote on the bill.

Ms. Pritzker stressed that the advantag-

es of passing the funding bill extend well beyond Ukraine and would have significant benefits for the U.S. military.

"Let's keep in mind that two-thirds of the defense and military authorization that go to Ukraine ultimately turn around and go to American defense modernization," Ms. Pritzker said. "In over 31 states and 117 different production lines, new equipment is made to replace the old equipment that we send to Ukraine."

Ms. Pritzker said that aid goes specifically into the production of Howitzers made in Minnesota, Bradley Fighting Vehicles made in Alabama, and HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems) made in New Jersey. The bill would allow the U.S. to upgrade its military stocks with the latest munitions and armaments.

While the amount of economic aid slated for Ukraine – accounted for and overseen by embassy workers in the country – is significantly smaller than the amount of military aid, its role is just as crucial in fortifying Ukraine and thereby protecting NATO, Ms. Pritzker said.

"The economic aid is being spent on very specific projects that help with infrastructure, exports and job creation, all to keep the economy growing and functioning," Ms. Pritzker said. "A core element of Ukraine's ability to prosecute the war is the ability of their first responders and medical workers and teachers to keep the country running."

The impact of the U.S. economic aid has produced tangible results, with Ukraine's GDP growing at 5 percent, investment up

17 percent and tax revenue up 25 percent, and inflation down 7 percent, Ms. Pritzker said.

Ukraine is also exporting through the Black Sea four times as much as they were last year, when Russia backed out of the Black Sea grain initiative and brought exports to a standstill, she added.

"The Ukrainian economy is alive and active and resilient," Ms. Pritzker said. "Their tech sector is growing and there's a huge opportunity in defense production that will not only help Ukraine in their own defense, but will ultimately allow them to export into Europe, which is buying more military equipment and ammunition to arm itself."

Another powerful asset of the Ukrainian economy is the reported 6.5 million refugees who fled the country after the full-scale Russian invasion.

"Getting Ukrainian refugees back into the country is a huge priority for Ukraine," Ms. Pritzker said. "They need the workforce and the skilled labor of their citizens."

To prepare for such an eventuality, Ukraine has been rebuilding housing and schools, taking advantage of the fact that 60 percent of the country has not been directly touched by drones and projectiles that have devastated other parts of the war-torn country.

Ms. Pritzker said there is "united effort among Ukraine, the U.S. and our allies" to help refugees get back into Ukraine when there's greater security, as well as plans to help reintegrate veterans into their com-

munities and the Ukrainian economy.

What should not get overlooked in all the talk of aid are "the stories of real people," Ms. Pritzker said, heroic and humble, giving up their lives for the greater good of fighting this Russian war.

Ms. Pritzker shared two indelible stories that inform and inspire her bedrock resolve to help Ukraine fight the war, maintain its sovereignty and build its economy.

The first concerned the largest Coca-Cola bottling plant in Europe, which has some 1,600 workers and is located in Ukraine. Though the plant was captured in the spring of 2022, the workers and the military fought hard to regain control of it within months. Soon thereafter, they had production back up and operating, and over the past year, the plant produced 690 million bottles of Coke, without a single person being laid off during that time, Ms. Pritzker said.

She also described being brought to tears when she met with a Ukrainian family – the mother, wife and sister of a 42-year man with dual citizenship who served in the U.S. army. He was killed in battle after returning to Ukraine when the war started to fight for his homeland's independence.

"This man saw that our democracy and our freedom were on the line, and he came back to Ukraine to fight for that. We have brave men like this who are willing to give up their lives for this cause," Ms. Pritzker said. "So, what we have to do is give financial and military support, and act now to defend ourselves and our values."

Russian strikes...

(Continued from page 1)

ing life-threatening injuries on a 69-year-old woman who was near her home at the time of the attack.

Unconfirmed reports circulated on February 28 saying that the Ukrainian Armed Forces launched a strike with a high-mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS) at a concentration of Russian military personnel in the village of Yelenovka in the Donetsk region.

Several Telegram channels – both Ukrainian and Russian – reported the incident. Various sources mentioned dozens of dead and injured Russian military personnel.

The shelling was also reported by former Verkhovna Rada deputy Oleg Tsarev, who has supported separatists in the Donbas region since 2014.

He declined to provide details "so as not to please the enemy," he said.

If the reports are confirmed, it would be the third time within a week that a Ukrainian military strike reportedly hit a concentration of Russian troops.

Neither the Ukrainian command nor the Russian Defense Ministry commented on any of the strikes.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's military said its forces had withdrawn from two more villages near the eastern city of Avdiyivka, which was captured earlier in February by Russian forces, marking further losses for Ukraine as its troops continue to struggle with shortages of equipment, especially ammunition.

Ukrainian troops withdrew from Stepove and Syeverne, which lie west of Avdiyivka, Ukrainian military spokesman Dmytro Lykhoviy said on February 27.

"Our forces withdrew from the small villages of Syeverne and Stepove. ... Heavy battles for Syeverne went on yesterday in the evening and night," Mr. Lykhoviy said, adding that Russia had taken significant losses in the fight.

Ukrainian forces have consolidated new defensive positions west of Avdiyivka, he said.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it had

captured Syeverne, and that its troops had "occupied more advantageous lines and positions" and struck Ukrainian troops and equipment near Syeverne and Stepove, and another settlement, Lastochkyne, which Kyiv announced on February 26 it had abandoned.

Oleksandr Tarnavskiy, the commander of Ukraine's southeastern sector, said on Telegram that in the Avdiyivka "sector," the line of defense has been "stabilized" in the areas of Tonenke, Orlivka and Berdychi.

Russian forces had failed in their attempts to advance in two areas further south, including the Ukrainian-held village of Robotyne, Mr. Tarnavskiy added.

It was not possible to verify the claims.

The U.S. State Department said on February 27 that the situation on the battlefield in Ukraine was "extremely serious" because the Ukrainian military does not have enough ammunition to repel Russian aggression.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Ukrainian troops "continue to fight bravely" with the weapons and ammunition that they have, but "they have to [conserve] it because the U.S. Congress has failed to act."

Mr. Miller again called on Congress to pass a bill that would provide \$61 billion in military aid to the Ukrainian Army.

"Fundamentally, we think that the path to victory for Ukraine right now is in the United States House of Representatives," Mr. Miller said.

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.), an ally of former President Donald Trump and head of a razor-thin Republican majority in the House, has refused to allow a vote on the bill.

U.S. President Joe Biden and top Democrats met with Mr. Johnson and other senior Republican members of Congress on February 27 at the White House to press again for its passage.

A White House statement issued after a meeting said that Mr. Biden "discussed how Ukraine has lost ground on the battlefield in recent weeks and is being forced to ration ammunition and supplies due to congressional inaction."

Mr. Biden again warned of the terrible

cost of delaying the aid, which was approved overwhelmingly by the Senate nearly two weeks ago. Mr. Johnson said after the meeting that the Senate's package "does nothing" to secure the U.S.-Mexico border, which is what Republicans have demanded in return for passing aid to Ukraine.

"The first priority of the country is our border, and making it secure," Mr. Johnson said.

The House earlier adjourned until February 28 and will work on reaching an agreement on government funding as agreements to continue spending at previ-

ous levels begin to expire.

The House is not expected to return to the national security package until after the first week of March.

(With reporting by Reuters and AP)

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On second...

(Continued from page 3)

Ukrainians around the world, to map all of the rallies held around the world to mark the war's second anniversary. The interactive map, posted online under the slogan "Stand with Ukraine," showed the location of rallies held in more than 746 cities worldwide. The largest events were held in Germany, the U.S. France, Britain and Canada.

Chicagoans have been vocal in their support of Ukraine with many non-profit groups sending security and humanitarian aid to their brethren.

A Congressional bill worth \$60 billion that the Pentagon says is needed to provide additional aid to Kyiv is still stalled in the House of Representatives after the Senate approved a package, said House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) on February 28 after a meeting in the White House.

The U.S. Congress, which holds the "power of the purse," has not approved additional funding for Ukraine in more than 400 days.

"Don't ask how long this war will last. Ask how to help Ukraine win faster," said Serhiy Koledov, the Ukrainian consulate general in Chicago. "The sooner and the more security assistance Ukraine gets now, the sooner the war will end with a comprehensive, just and lasting peace."

The urgency of Ukraine's situation was not lost on the local head of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA), Dr. Mariya Dmytriv-Kapenak, who said that every day Ukraine experiences a shortage of weapons, the military and civilian populations suffer.

"While launching daily attacks on Ukrainian cities, the Russian regime also uses sophisticated tactics to provoke unrest in other parts of the world. One of these tactics targets a sacred aspect for every American: the U.S. democratic election process," she warned of the upcoming U.S. presidential election this November.

"We fight for freedom," the protesters said in unison at the Holy Name Trinity cathedral one mile away on Chicago Avenue and State Street.

"U.S.A. support Ukraine," a priest said through a megaphone.

Despite losing about 20 square miles of ground over the week, Ukraine's air force reported clipping the wings of 13 Russian military aircraft from February 17 through February 29, including three Sukhoi-35 Flanker-E jets and one A-50 spy plane worth about \$330 million.

"A world in which terror wins would please no one, which is exactly why Putin must lose. Our people in Ukraine are capable of ensuring this – with sufficient support," said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his nightly address to the nation on February 29.

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is not enough to win," he said, proposing the establishment of a Ukrainian-Balkans defense forum in Kyiv or in a Balkan capital to nurture arms cooperation. There are significant arms industries in parts of the Balkans, especially Serbia and Croatia, a legacy of former federal Yugoslavia. Ukraine made similar arrangements last year with British and U.S. weapons companies, which are the main suppliers of weapons and ammunition to Ukraine. But in recent weeks its troops have been forced to withdraw from some of their defensive positions in the east as a critical bill containing \$61 billion in U.S. military aid remains blocked in the House of Representatives. Mr. Zelenskyy said at a joint news conference with Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama that unity among the Western Balkan nations is important because Russia will do everything to destabilize the situation. "Russia will not stop. Russia draws conclusions from the mistakes it has made on the territory of Ukraine and will destabilize even further if it's provided with opportunities to survive in this aggression against us - to politically survive - and then it will use other tactics," he added. "It will try to exert influence on the countries where it can immediately get

success - the Baltics, Moldova and the Balkan states - everywhere where [the] Soviet Union was present." Mr. Zelenskyy also demanded quicker delivery of weapons, saying that the more Russian President Vladimir Putin sees Ukraine's shortcomings, "the more he can think he can challenge Europe and the West." Mr. Rama admitted that there is a clear danger for the Balkans, adding that what is happening in Ukraine "can be repeated in different ways." Mr. Rama called on the Western Balkan states to continue aid to Ukraine, and warned against it being delayed by internal politics. "Ukraine deserves to be supported and helped with all the necessary means to resist and ensure that any peace that comes out of this war will be a just peace based, first of all, on [Mr.] Zelenskyy's 10-point plan, which we support and want all states to discuss," said Mr. Rama. Mr. Rama also said that Mr. Zelenskyy's presence in Tirana was an indication that Putin, despite the military power of his country, has failed to "suppress the will of Ukrainians to live in a free, independent and democratic state [and] has failed to keep the truth quiet." The summit participants later on February 28 adopted a 12-point statement in which they said that Russian military aggression against Ukraine remains the biggest threat to European security, is in flagrant violation of international law, including the United Nations Charter, and is a crime against the

Ukrainian people. Participating states pledged to continue supporting Ukraine and condemned Russia's efforts to hold Russian presidential elections in the parts of Ukraine it has occupied. The leaders also reaffirmed efforts to further advance the integration of the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia into the European Union, and they said they "fully support Ukraine's right to choose its own security arrangements" and backed its desire to join NATO. But the statement did not mention sanctions against Russia. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said this was at the request of Serbia, a traditional ally of Russia that has not joined the E.U.'s sanctions regime against Moscow. "There is no talk of sanctions. There is no mention of malicious Russian influence," Mr. Vucic told reporters. (RFE/RL's Balkan and Ukrainian Services, with reporting by AFP and Reuters)

Ukraine shoots down Russian jet

The Ukrainian military has shot down another Russian Su-34 fighter-bomber jet, the commander of Ukraine's Air Force said on Telegram on February 27. "Minus one Su-34 in the eastern direction," Gen. Mykola Oleshchuk said, without giving details. Russia has not commented on Ukraine's claim, which could not be independently verified immediately. Mr. Oleshchuk previously reported the downing of a Su-34 fighter bomber on February 21. That claim could also not be independently confirmed. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

Air defenses down 11 Russian drones

Ukrainian air defenses shot down 11 of 13 drones launched by Russia at targets inside Ukraine early on February 27, the country's air force said. It added that two cruise missiles out of a total of six had also been destroyed. "Fighter aircraft, anti-aircraft missile units, mobile groups and electronic warfare equipment were involved in repelling the attack," the Ukrainian military said, adding that the drones and missiles were shot down over the Kharkiv, Sumy, Dniproptrovsk, Khmelnytskyi and Kirovohrad regions. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

Former Russian actor gets life sentence

A military court in Moscow on February 26 sentenced to life in prison on a charge of high-treason former actor Kirill Kanakhin, who joined the so-called Russian Volunteer Corps (RDK) fighting alongside Ukrainian forces against Russian troops. The court issued the sentence in absentia four months after an arrest warrant was issued for Mr. Kanakhin. He was previously added to Russia's list of extremists and terrorists. Also in November, a Moscow court sentenced in absentia Denis Kapustin (aka Nikitin), a commander of the RDK, to life in prison in absentia on the same charge. (RFE/RL's Current Time)

Activists mark second anniversary of war

Kazakh activists marked the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine with a rally over the

weekend in the Central Asian nation's largest city, Almaty, to show support for Kyiv. Around 100 activists gathered near a monument to prominent Ukrainian writer, poet and thinker Taras Shevchenko carrying flowers, balloons and posters in Ukrainian saying "Glory to Ukraine!" and "Peace to Ukraine, freedom to the world!" The activists also sang Ukrainian songs, held Ukrainian national flags and lit candles. When some of those in attendance unfolded more national flags from Ukraine and Kazakhstan, police officers approached and warned that the gathering was not officially permitted by the city. However, they did not halt the event and no clashes were reported. The Kazakh government under President Qasym-Zhomart Toqaev has been trying to maintain cooperation with Ukraine, its Western allies and Russia since Moscow launched its ongoing invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. While not openly condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Mr. Toqaev has publicly stated that his country would not recognize parts of Ukraine's eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions occupied by Moscow's forces as Russian territory. Thousands of Russians have moved to Kazakhstan to avoid a so-called "partial mobilization," which Russian President Vladimir Putin announced in September 2022. Meanwhile, Kazakh businesses last year set up so-called "invincibility" yurts (traditional nomadic felt tents) in Kyiv and several other Ukrainian cities to provide local residents with food, tea, warmth and the possibility of charging electronic devices. Kazakhstan has preserved its economic ties with Russia, while the Kazakh-Russian border is over 7,000 kilometers long - the world's second largest after the U.S.-Canadian border. While many in Kazakhstan have openly supported Kyiv, the attitude among Kazakh citizens to the ongoing war in Ukraine varies. Around 3.5 million of some 20 million Kazakh citizens are ethnic Russians and about 250,000 are ethnic Ukrainians. Meanwhile, more than 1 million Russian citizens residing mostly in Russian regions adjacent to Kazakhstan are ethnic Kazakhs, some of whom were mobilized to the war in Ukraine and died there. (RFE/RL's Kazakh Service)

Kremlin dismisses peace talks without Russia

Russia has rejected an idea advanced by Switzerland about possible talks in Geneva on a peace plan for Ukraine without Moscow's participation as "ridiculous." The news came as outgunned and outmanned Ukrainian forces withdrew from a second location in the east of the country. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy voiced hopes on February 25 that a summit of world leaders will be held in Switzerland in the coming months to discuss his vision for peace after Swiss President Viola Amherd had said the previous day her neutral country was ready to host a senior-level peace conference. "I hope it [a summit] will take place this spring. We must not lose this diplomatic initiative," Mr. Zelenskyy

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NEWSBRIEFS

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said, adding that he expected the resulting peace initiative to be presented to Moscow. But Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on February 26 called the idea "bizarre." "As far as we understand, the issue on the agenda is some bizarre so-called Geneva platform – a conference to discuss Mr. Zelenskyy's peace plan. "We have repeatedly said that at least this is a strange arrangement, because some peace plans are being discussed without Russia's participation, which in itself is not serious and even ridiculous," Mr. Peskov said at his weekly news conference. Meanwhile, some 20 Western leaders and senior officials are gathering in Paris on February 26 to reinforce Europe's determination to back Ukraine as the war entered its third year.

"We want to send [Russian President Vladimir] Putin a very clear message, that he won't win in Ukraine," an adviser to French President Emmanuel Macron told reporters about the hastily arranged meeting. "Our goal is to crush this idea he wants us to believe that he would be somehow winning," the adviser said. Ukrainian forces, meanwhile, confirmed that they had retreated from Lastochkyne, a village some 5 kilometers northwest of Avidiyivka, which fell to Russian troops last week after a fierce monthslong battle. "This is an orderly and competent retreat," military spokesman Serhiy Tsekhotskiy told RFE/RL. "No need to panic. The most important thing is to save the lives of Ukrainian personnel." Exhausted Ukrainian forces have been suffering from mounting shortages of heavy weapons and ammunition as desperately needed U.S. military help remains stuck in the Republican-controlled House of

Putin has...

(Continued from page 2)

contacts. These contacts would be designed to explore the possibility of formal talks without committing to specific outcomes. These preliminary discussions could take place on neutral soil and involve a variety of channels, including intelligence contacts and diplomatic backchannels.

Second, intelligence agencies may engage in preliminary, confidential communications to assess the intentions and flexibility of each side. These contacts would be crucial for establishing the trust and understanding necessary for more formal negotiations.

Third, diplomats, possibly those with prior experience in sensitive negotiations or those who have maintained personal relationships across divides, could use informal backchannels to communicate. These discussions would identify mutual interests and potential areas for compromise, away from the public eye and pressure of official positions.

Fourth, initial contacts may include media influencers known to have positive attitudes toward Putin. Moscow may try to use these "useful idiots" to carry its messages, though that increases the risks of a premature disclosure of the Kremlin's plans. This method may already be in use, as seen in Putin's recent interview with U.S. television personality Tucker Carlson (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, February 8, 2022; YouTube.com, February 9; Novaya Gazeta, February 10). Initial contact with these "useful idiots" would likely occur in a country or location perceived as neutral and conducive to discreet, low-pressure discussions. This could be a country without direct involvement in the conflict and good standing with Russia, Ukraine and Western governments. United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, India and some African countries are possible locations.

Such contacts are likely to be kept as secret as possible and are unlikely to occur on the margins of multilateral meetings. The involvement of mediators in this initial contact is also unlikely. The fact that Putin initiated such negotiations when the prospects of victory were unclear may signal to the elites that the leader was uncertain about the successful outcome of the war (Ukrainska Pravda, November 24). Therefore, the intelligence services that Putin is most accustomed to trusting will likely be the ones to conduct initial probing about potential peace negotiations.

Putin and the Kremlin could initiate numerous direct declarations and first steps that would unequivocally signify Russia's determination for peace. Should Moscow receive a positive response, the

following actions would back up such claims. Otherwise, these actions would be misleading.

An explicit, unequivocal public declaration of intent to cease hostilities and engage in negotiations for peace would be the first step. This declaration would include a willingness to discuss critical issues such as sovereignty, territorial integrity and security guarantees. Such a move would be broadcast through various channels to ensure wide dissemination and signal seriousness to domestic and international audiences.

An immediate and unilateral ceasefire across all conflict zones would be the next step. This action would need to include a clear timeline for the cessation of hostilities and be verifiable by international observers. Additionally, releasing detained military personnel and civilians as a gesture of goodwill would help build trust and create a more conducive negotiation environment.

Even if Moscow takes such steps, they still may not signify a genuine wish to end the war, especially on terms acceptable to Kyiv. Even these steps could be a deceptive ploy to convince Western governments of Russia's peaceful intentions (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, February 6). Moscow would then use the time to replenish troops and resources before another "decisive" offensive (Euronews, February 26).

Inside Russia, Kremlin propaganda will portray the initiative to negotiate as a desire for peace and as evidence that Ukraine and the West have finally realized the legitimacy of Putin's war. This is evident in Putin's interview with "Moscow. Kremlin. Putin" (TASS, February 18; Smotrim.ru, February 18). With this, the Kremlin leader hopes to convince the population that the war is not lost. According to sociological surveys, however, the majority of the population is generally indifferent to the war and its outcome (Telegram.me/holodmedia, February 25). The Russian people are concerned only about the possible spilling over of hostilities to their territory. Putin also hopes to reassure the elites that the situation is not so bad, that war is under control, and that Russia is winning.

If Putin were serious about peace between Russia and Ukraine, these actions would be the first indications of his genuine intent. Even if these steps begin to be taken, the West should retain a healthy dose of skepticism that any negotiations with the Kremlin would bring results acceptable to Kyiv and other Western capitals.

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

Representatives, which refuses to pass a bill that includes \$61 billion in aid to Ukraine. Separately, at least two people were killed in a Russian air strike in northeastern Sumy region on February 26 as Russia unleashed a fresh wave of drone and missile strikes on Ukraine, regional officials and the military said. "A private residential building was destroyed, five others were damaged" in the strike on the village of Yunakyiv. "A couple was killed in the strike," Sumy regional authorities said in a message on Telegram. Ukrainian air defenses shot down nine out of the 14 drones launched by Russia early on February 26, the military said. Three Russian cruise missiles were also destroyed, it added. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, with reporting by Reuters and AFP)

G-7 leaders hold summit on war anniversary

Leaders of the Group of Seven (G-7) vowed on February 24 to support Ukraine for as long as needed in its war against Russia and said they would look for ways to make Moscow pay for the damage inflicted by its invasion. The G-7 leaders held a videoconference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to mark the second anniversary of the Russian invasion. "As Ukraine enters the third year of this relentless war, its government and its people can count on the G-7's support for as long as it takes," the G-7 leaders' statement said. Mr. Zelenskyy told the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States that they "know very well" what Ukraine needs to protect its skies and strengthen its army on the ground. "You know everything we need to support and continue our success at sea. And you well understand that we need all this in time. We are counting on you," Mr. Zelenskyy said, calling on the leaders to

remember "that imperial ambitions and revanchism disappear only with the defeat of those who are infected by them." This is historically what clears the way for real security and the development of democracy, he added. "We hear at this time 'History is watching' and this is absolutely true," he said, referring to the words of U.S. President Joe Biden in recent speeches imploring the House of Representatives to pass a bill that includes \$61 billion in aid to Ukraine. The first G-7 summit in 2024 took place exactly two years after Russia launched its full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022. "I thank you for these two years together. That terrible day of February 24 and all the horror brought by Russia still did not deprive Ukraine of a normal future," Mr. Zelenskyy told the G-7 leaders. Mr. Zelenskyy signed security agreements earlier on February 24 with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who were in Kyiv along with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo to mark the war's second anniversary. "The message I want to send today to ... all the Ukrainian people is that they are not alone," Ms. Meloni said as she signed a 10-year defense pact with Mr. Zelenskyy. Mr. Trudeau signed a similar accord and pledged some \$2.25 billion in financial and military support this year. "Every day since Russia's invasion began, the G-7 has stood with Ukraine. And today, together, we reaffirmed that support. We are united. We are unwavering. And we are not going to let Putin win," Mr. Trudeau said. Mr. Zelenskyy also met with Swedish Defense Minister Pal Jonson to discuss the potential for joint arms production and future negotiations on signing a bilateral security agreement. (RFE/RL, with reporting by Reuters)



With deep sorrow we share that

MICHAEL ROMAN PASLAWSKYJ

beloved husband, father, grandfather,
brother, uncle and cousin,

passed away on January 28, 2024, in Cumming, Georgia.

Michael was born on April 15, 1954, in New York City to the late Lidia and Bohdan Paslawskyj. Younger years resided in Towaco, New Jersey. Michael graduated from Rutgers College in New Brunswick N.J. with a Bachelor's degree, and Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison, N.J. with a Master's degree in economics. He spent his career as Chief Economist with The CIT Group in Livingston, N.J. and then Chief Regional Economist with FDIC in Atlanta, GA, from where he retired. Michael was often quoted and interviewed in various business articles and business media during his career. He also served on various financial committees for non-profits.



He enjoyed spending time with his family and friends, cheering on the NY Yankees, traveling, reading and building his model railroad.

Memorial Mass was held on Monday, February 5, 2024, at 1 pm at St. Brendan the Navigator R.C. Church in Cumming, GA, where he resided for 16 years. Additional Service to be held at St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church in Whippany, N.J. on April 6, 2024 at 10:30 am.

Michael is survived by:

- his loving wife of 44 years Iliana
- son Bohdan with wife Daria
- granddaughters Zoriana and Kaya
- sister Maria Hillyer with husband Michael
- sister Olha Paluch with husband Ihor
- niece Anya Paluch
- niece Oksana DiMaris with husband Dakota and children Charlie Mae and Kenny
- as well as extended family in the USA and Ukraine

Вічна пам'ять!

"Тухо сну без тривог, Мухасю."

In lieu of flowers, please make a donation to Plast Camp «Vovcha Tropa» with «In memory of Michael Paslawskyj» in the memo. Please send to Plast Camp Vovcha Tropa, c/o Pavlo Liteplo, 960 Heritage Hills, Unit C, Somers, NY 10589.

Ukraine marks...

(Continued from page 1)

mourning those who have sacrificed their lives fighting against Russian President Vladimir Putin's attempts to subjugate and destroy their homeland.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy noted in a press conference on February 25 that some 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers have died over the past two years fighting to defend the country's freedom.

On the anniversary of the full-scale invasion, many Kyiv residents went to the Wall of Remembrance near St. Michael's Golden-Domed Cathedral. In solemn silence, they passed by the wall, looking at the portraits of soldiers who lost their lives for their country, laying flowers along the wall.

Mr. Zelenskyy and visiting world leaders also paid homage to those who fought for Ukraine's freedom at the Wall of Remembrance. A delegation of government officials representing Canada, Italy and Belgium joined the Ukrainian president in honoring Ukraine's fallen heroes.

The commemoration of the anniversary of the full-scale invasion on February 24 began with Mr. Zelenskyy's address from Hostomel, a strategic location near the Ukrainian capital from which the Russians planned to capture Kyiv in three days.

"Any normal person wants the war to end. But none of us will allow our country to end. That is why we always add to the words about the war's end: 'on our terms.' That is why the word justice always follows the word peace. That is why in the future history, the word independent will always stand next to the word Ukraine," Mr. Zelenskyy said.

On the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Oleksandr Syrskyi said that now, more than ever, Ukraine needs unity.

"I am convinced that our victory is in unity. And it will be. Because light always conquers darkness," Gen. Syrskyi said.

He emphasized that the last two years have turned the 10-year war into the largest in Europe since World War II. According to the commander-in-chief, when thousands of columns of Russian invaders moved from all directions into Ukraine, when thousands of missiles and bombs fell on Ukrainian soil, no one in the world believed that Ukraine would survive – no one except members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

"No one, except hundreds of thousands of volunteers who stood in line at military registration and enlistment offices in the first hours of the full-scale aggression, except for the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians who enlisted in the Territorial Defense Forces in the very first days, in addition to the millions of Ukrainians who volunteered to support their Army unprecedentedly in history. No one believed, but Ukraine did. It believed, accepted the battle and survived," Mr. Syrskyi.

The prime ministers of Italy, Canada, and Belgium, as well as the president of the European Commission, arrived in Kyiv on February 24 to show their solidarity with Ukraine on the second anniversary of the Russian invasion.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Kroo and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen arrived in the Ukrainian capital by train from neighboring Poland.

Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson also arrived in Ukraine.

"On this grim second anniversary of Putin's invasion, I am honored to be here in Ukraine. Given their indomitable courage, I

do not doubt that Ukrainians will prevail and drive out Putin's forces – provided we give them the military, political and economic assistance they need," Mr. Johnson wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

Former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt also arrived in Ukraine to mark the occasion.

"Early morning arrival in Kyiv. On this day two years ago, Putin launched an all-out war to conquer the country, but Ukraine is still standing and defending itself bravely," Mr. Bildt wrote on X.

Vladyslav Urubkov, a young veteran who served in Ukraine's Armed Forces in 2022-2023, shared his reflections on the anniversary.

"February 24 reminds me of the pain, fear and chaos of that first day of the full-scale invasion. I see those pictures of friends' faces when we read the news and heard the explosions; I remember the scenes on our way out of Kyiv to a safer place. At the same time, I had a high-level certainty that our capital would stand, and now I spread this certainty for Ukraine. We have already done a lot, and we have already ensured the survival of our state," Mr. Urubkov said.

"All my thoughts are about the situation on the frontline. Unfortunately, Russians proved again their complete madness in the war. They are motivated enough to die for some fields and small villages far away from their homes and do it non-stop. They are no doubt holding an initiative now, and they can use our lack of ammo so they push forward simultaneously in different sectors. Furthermore, they literally don't care about either people or vehicle losses. It is a great pity they still can produce high-tech weapons despite the sanctions, and our allies do not stop them properly," he said.

"Moreover, we do not get even minimal support to continue fighting. It is normal to feel desperate, emotionally and physically exhausted, especially for those in the trenches every day. We lost many of our best people, but we have so many left who will not let Ukraine down," Mr. Urubkov said.

"Everybody has changed a lot. The majority of families in Ukraine felt this war directly; many of them lost relatives, friends and homes, and many of them were forced to live under occupation. It is impossible to live further as if nothing has changed. Although the brain always tries to do that, it highlights something good even in complete darkness. Unfortunately, when we need to be more unified than ever, many new points divide us. After these two years, we are still learning how to deal with it. Personally, I became more cynical, more realistic, less trusting of people; I try not to procrastinate any minute, especially after returning home after service, because I don't know how much time I have," Mr. Urubkov said.

"There was plenty of optimism over the last two years. I had hope, but never real optimism. We have a chance to win the war; it is tinier than in 2022, but still. We need effective permanent support from the West because we stand against the biggest state in the world [Russia], which created different systems: social, military and economic, and all of them aim to destroy us first and the Western world order then. We can cope with our enemy only if our allies engage fully," Mr. Urubkov said.

"It is important to me to help my mates even after returning home. That is what I'm doing now. I want people to understand why this duty exists and why it is essential to join the Army. I believe the allies will finally help us, but there is a significant part we should do ourselves. Mobilization should be about justice and respect for those who want to be home, at least for a while. I see how it is hard for a democratic

society to beat the society that used to have a tsar, how our human-centric approach and values of personal freedoms are not adapted for the war; and theirs are a perfect match. But we did not choose this war; therefore, we have no other way apart from fighting for as long as we can. Russia will finally collapse from the inside; we should be in form for this day," Mr. Urubkov said.

Anastasiia Shepeleva, a Kyiv-based journalist, said that she didn't have any particular thoughts on the full-scale war anniversary because "the war is ongoing, and there is no end in sight."

"Therefore, for selfish reasons, I decided to postpone it until the end of the war so as not to torture myself once again. It's not about escaping from reality, because every day I remember the price Ukrainians pay for a secure future, not only for their country but for the whole of Europe, but it's about taking basic care of ourselves and our mental health. Because, unfortunately, a lot of pain is still ahead," Ms. Shepeleva said.

"Although I did not intentionally plan to reflect, I do not live in a vacuum, so I had different thoughts seeing multiple reflections on the anniversary on social media. I was pleased to see how many people pointed out that the war has lasted for 10 years, not two. After leaving my hometown, Luhansk, in 2014 because of the war, I often had to deal with those who did not

understand this, and these were not always pleasant discussions. I also remembered February 24, 2022, and how scared I was of the unknown. And I realized that although the uncertainty of the future remains now, there is much less fear and anxiety because of it," Ms. Shepeleva said.

"Probably, my growing up was finally complete with the full-scale war. When I evacuated to Germany with my job, taking my underage sister and my elderly, then cancer-stricken grandmother with me, I was fully responsible for them in a country that was utterly alien to them. And the decision to leave was made primarily because of a sense of responsibility for them and their safety. As for the rest of us, I think the situation is somewhat similar. Ukrainians as a nation, I want to believe, finally matured when an existential threat to our existence arose. The country has united, and it is vital to nurture and preserve this sense of unity because the enemy is working against us with weapons and words, i.e., disinformation," Ms. Shepeleva said.

"I am realistic because I see no point in proceeding only from a position of optimism and naively believing that a miracle will happen and the war is about to end. ... The war is a new reality in which we have to do something every day to bring the moment of peace closer," Ms. Shepeleva said.

Russian society...

(Continued from page 2)

ate the terms of Ukraine's surrender and to counter such sentiments by suppressing the anti-war opposition. Mr. Navalny's murder was supposed to deliver a crushing blow to the opposition by driving a wedge between the remnants of Mr. Navalny's team and the other groups that gathered for the 12th Free Russia Forum in Vilnius (Svoboda.org, February 21; Delfi.lt, February 24). The Kremlin's plan backfired when Yulia Navalnaya stepped forward to take up her late husband's brave cause (Moscow times, February 19).

The Kremlin also timed Mr. Navalny's murder with the Munich Security Conference, which turned out to be a terrible miscalculation. The conference provided Ms. Navalnaya with a perfect podium to make her case (Novaya Gazeta Europe, February 22). Putin had reasons to expect that a combination of the victory at Avdiyivka and the decimation of the anti-war opposition would undermine European resolve to support Ukraine (Rossiiskaya Gazeta, February 15). In fact, the opposite has happened as European leaders have felt compelled to join efforts to support Ukraine and expand investments in their respective defense industries (Kommersant, February 18). European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and three prime ministers – Giorgia Meloni of Italy, Alexander de Croo of Belgium and Justin Trudeau of Canada – visited Kyiv on February 24 to confirm their commitment to Ukraine's victory (MK.ru, February 24).

U.S. Congressional approval of an aid package for Ukraine remains pending. U.S. President Joe Biden announced a new set of sanctions following Mr. Navalny's murder that target many vulnerabilities in the Russian military-industrial complex. The military-industrial complex in Russia remains highly dependent on the import of high-tech components, which these sanctions will further target (RBC.ru, February 24). Russia's economy has been seriously distorted to support the demands of war, and each Ukrainian long-distance strike, such as the attack on the Lipetsk steel plant

on the third anniversary of the invasion, further disrupts supply chains (Republic.ru, February 21; Forbes.ru, February 24). Russia's successes only come by overexploiting its resources and economy. The sustained news stream of technical failures, like the explosion at the Votkinsk missile plant, indicates that soon Russia will no longer be able to keep up with its demand for artillery production (TopWar.ru, February 9).

Russia has sought to distract from its illicit economic activities by taking a more "self-righteous" approach to its posturing in international forums, including the Group of 20 (G-20) (Rossiiskaya Gazeta, February 22). Russia's vicious anti-Western rhetoric aimed at drumming up support in the Global South rings hollow, not only because Russia fails to offer any tangible stimuli, but also because this diplomacy is a clear attempt to cover up the country's cruel domestic repressions (Carnegie Politika, February 19). Broad international support for bringing the war to an end has progressively translated into elaborations on the basic Ukrainian peace plan. Switzerland has become the main hub for merging initiatives between influential "neutral" countries, such as Brazil or South Africa (RBC.ru, February 24).

Moscow's war has horribly damaged Ukraine, but Kyiv's resolve to emerge as a proud European state remains unshakable. Russia, on the other hand, is sinking deeper into a hopeless acceptance of war as a way of life. The Kremlin's determination to pursue confrontation with the "hostile" West condemns the unsettled domestic population to further degradation. As Europe embraces Ukraine, Russia finds it harder to deny that every effort to keep the war going makes its future more forlorn and grim. The war's course will be determined not only by the balance of military capabilities but also by the clash of hopes for a better future. Every bit of Western solidarity adds to Ukraine's edge, and every twist of Putin's repressions diminishes Russia's stamina.

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Ukrainian pro sports update

by Ihor N. Stelmach

Wounded Ukrainian veterans form amputee soccer club

The Ukrainian city of Lviv has become a rehabilitation center for soldiers injured in the war with Russia, including many who have lost an arm or leg. As some complete their rehabilitation, they have the desire to get back into sports. Some have succeeded, playing for Pokrova, Ukraine's first amputee soccer club.

Before Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago, Serhiy Ivanov loved playing soccer in his spare time. When he lost his right arm defending the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, he suffered through months of intense rehabilitation, wondering if he would ever play soccer again.

About 80 percent of Pokrova's roster is comprised of military veterans who lost an arm or a leg on the battlefield fighting for their homeland.

On the practice pitch, the team's vigor is quite noticeable. Those with one arm get to play as goalkeepers while those with one leg play as defenders or attackers. The players dribble all around the field, passing, shooting and navigating their way around the pitch with the use of crutches.

The club was formed in September of last year and all team members take their training seriously. In March they are off to Poland to compete in their first tournament. The practice schedule is twice a week with each session lasting about two hours. All of the players have been fitted with prosthetic limbs, which they remove when they play. There are occasional collisions where players hit the turf, only to jump right up and run back into the play.

Sports in general and soccer specifically offer strong powers of healing. The amputee players claim that when they play soccer, they forget about life – their pain, personal problems and the problems their country has faced over the last 10 years.

Some of the players face more challenges than others, usually from a mental standpoint of adjusting to playing with crutches. One player who lost his left leg, naturally tries to strike the ball with his left foot, but to no avail.

However, the drive to keep improving is very much present, a quality most attribute



Instagram: @pokrova_lviv_amp_football/

Pokrova Lviv Amputee Football Club celebrates its first tournament appearance, at a pre-season tournament in 2024 in Zheshuv, Poland, where the team won second place.

to their military background, especially those who led commands and had to lead by example. These leaders train hard, demonstrating to others that playing soccer can be done, life goes on and one can still play sports.

Sunak urged to release Chelsea sale funds

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of the United Kingdom has received a written request from a coalition of Ukrainian human rights groups to end an impasse over using funds from Roman Abramovich's sale of the Chelsea football club to assist victims of Ukraine's war with Russia.

It has been nearly two years since the U.K. imposed sanctions on Abramovich, freezing the \$3.165 billion generated from Chelsea's sale despite a commitment to utilize the proceeds for humanitarian purposes in Ukraine.

Fifty-eight organizations, including the Ukrainian human rights coalition Ukraine 5am, signed a letter on February 28 from the nongovernmental organization Redress asking Sunak to take action. The letter argued that the frozen funds be directed to the urgent needs of victims and survivors

of the war.

The British government has admitted that there is a disagreement with Abramovich over the fund's use. The government insists the money be spent only within Ukraine's borders while Abramovich denies that claim, insisting that the money is to be spent on humanitarian purposes supporting all victims of the conflict and its consequences.

The letter asks Sunak to find other ways of unlocking the frozen funds, including a split of the sale of the proceeds to be used for humanitarian purposes, reconstruction and reparations for victims of human rights abuses. The letter also suggests establishing a working group between the government, society and survivors to make sure the funds are distributed effectively and promptly. It further suggests using existing mechanisms instead of a yet-to-be-established charitable foundation.

The Ukraine 5am coalition is a group of organizations chronicling war crimes committed by Russians since the invasion of 2022. Other signers of the letter include the Global Survivors Fund, the Coalition for Genocide Response, the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute and

renowned human rights attorney Helena Kennedy.

Ukrainian heavyweight Rogava wins main event

Tsotne Badrievich Rogava is a Ukrainian heavyweight Muay Thai kickboxer born in Zugdidi, Georgia. The 30-year-old is the current ACB Kickboxing Heavyweight champion and represented Ukraine in the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. Rogava (5-0, 5 KO) headlined for the first time on February 15 on the "Punches and Punchlines" card at Soboba Casino Resort in San Jacinto, Calif.

Rogava steamrolled to another first-round knockout in a night to remember at the casino's pro boxing night. The towering Ukrainian Olympian unleashed a devastating assault on the body of opponent John Shipman (5-6, 2 KO) of the U.S.A., leaving him struggling to maintain any space. The referee wasted little time in saving Shipman from additional punishment, courtesy of Rogava's overwhelming power.

Born in the Republic of Georgia, Rogava lived in Ukraine for several years until moving to Marina del Rey, Calif., in 2023. The 6-foot-5, 270-pound Rogava successfully transitioned to boxing from his world class Muay Thai and kickboxing career, highlighted by his three-time IFMA world title-winning performances in Muay Thai as an amateur, along with an ACB kickboxing crown.

With his perfect 5-0 record, all via knockout, and his having spent only seven rounds in the ring through his five fights, Rogava is close to becoming the heavyweight division's next big thing. He is trained by Hall of Famer Joe Goossen, who compares his client to Tyson Fury, style-wise, due to the athletic movement of his feet. The Ukrainian was fresh off a January 4 opening-round knockout of undefeated Dante Williams (4-1, 4 KO) of the U.S.A.

Marseille defeats Shakhtar Donetsk 3-1

Marseille secured a spot in the next round of UEFA's Europa League, while Shakhtar Donetsk's European Cup season

(Continued on page 18)

Bukhov grabs gold at World Aquatics Championships

by Ihor N. Stelmach

Surprises are the rule in swimming's 50-meter sprint events with little to no margin for error over the course of one lap. The final of the 50-meter men's freestyle at the 2024 World Championships in Doha, Qatar, on February 17 produced a shocker. Ukrainian Vladyslav Bukhov claimed the gold medal with a time of 21.44, barely 0.01 seconds ahead of the favored Cam McEvoy of Australia.

McEvoy hit marks of 21.13 (preliminary) and 21.23 (semifinal), easily standing as the gold medal favorite. The Australian was a bit off his earlier showings allowing Bukhov to take advantage. He, too, was not at his best in the final since his winning time was off the Ukrainian record of 21.38 seconds he set in the semifinal. Fortunately for the 21-year-old Donetsk native, he got his hand on the wall in a most narrow fashion.

Bukhov has been on everyone's radar

for several years. In 2019, he captured the gold medal in the 50-meter freestyle at the World Junior Championships. The same year he won bronze in the 50-meter freestyle at the European Juniors.

McEvoy will seek his revenge in the sprint race at the upcoming Summer Olympics in Paris where Bukhov's presence will only strengthen the field.

Bukhov used his platform following his win in Doha to push for a ban of Russian athletes in Paris. He said they should "absolutely not" compete at the Olympics, even as neutral athletes. In an interview with *Swim Swam* at the World Championships, he spoke of Russian rockets flying around the swimming pool in Kyiv where Ukrainian Olympic swimmers train, not knowing if death lurks around the corner.

Four Belarusians competed as neutral athletes in Doha, but no Russians.

Ukraine ended the event with a total of four medals including a silver and two bronze medals to go with Bukhov's gold,



Wikipedia

Weightlifter Kamila Konotop (59 kilograms), seen at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, earned a spot at the 2024 Paris Olympics with her total lift of 230 kilograms at the European Weightlifting Championships on February 12-20 in Sofia, Bulgaria.

finishing tied for 17th place out of 34 countries earning medals.

Konotop lifts Ukraine into Olympic berth

Kharkiv, Ukraine, native Kamila Konotop was Ukraine's top performer at the 2024 European Weightlifting Championships, a Paris 2024 qualifying event, held in Sofia, Bulgaria, on February 12-20 by lifting 105 kilograms in the snatch and 125 kilograms in the clean and jerk. Her total weight of 230 kilograms crowned her as the absolute champion in the 59-kilogram women's category and earned her a license to compete at the 2024 Summer Olympics.

This was Konotop's third career gold medal in the European Championships, having triumphed in 2021 and 2023. In 2022, she settled for a silver medal. The 23-year-old represented Ukraine at the 2020 Summer Games in Tokyo where she

(Continued on page 19)

Ukrainian pro...

(Continued from page 17)

ended as a result of the French club's 3-1 win on February 22. Marseille had to come from behind to earn the victory on home turf in what was Jean-Louis Gasset's first game as interim manager.

Shakhtar struck first when Jonathan Clauss committed a clumsy foul inside the box and Heorhiy Sudakov capitalized by drilling home a penalty kick early in the match. Marseille answered back quickly when Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang slotted home calmly with his seventh goal in Europa League play a mere 11 minutes later.

Playing to a first-half draw, the French side took their time to grab the lead, but when they did, it was a pair of goals within 7 minutes of each other, the first by substitute Ismaila Sarr, the second and final tally of the game by Geoffrey Kondogbia in the 81st minute. The latter goal was a consequence of an unfortunate mix-up between Shakhtar captain Taras Stepanenko and goalkeeper Dmytro Riznyk, a goal that put the game to bed.

Ukraine seeks investigation of 19 neutral athletes

In a letter to International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach sent the week of February 5, the Ukrainian National Olympic Committee is asking for an investigation of 19 Russian and Belarusian athletes who reportedly do not meet the conditions imposed by the IOC to compete as "neutral" athletes at the 2024 Summer Olympics. Ukraine is claiming these athletes, some of whom have already qualified for the Games while others will compete in the upcoming months, have supported Russia's war on Ukraine.

Specific attention in the letter addressed

wrestling athletes who were allowed to compete in the 2023 World Wrestling Championships despite Ukraine's claims that they did not fully meet IOC requirements for 'neutral' status. With the second round of Olympic qualifying approaching, the letter is asking the IOC to pay close attention to this issue and to consider evidence presented by the Ukrainian Olympic Committee.

Nineteen Belarusian and Russian athletes were listed as questionable to compete under a neutral flag as individual neutral athletes.

Ukraine's national hockey team on path for Olympic qualification

Ukraine earned a spot in the final round of the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) Men's Olympic Ice Hockey Qualification for the first time in 11 years after defeating Estonia, 5-3, in the third round, Group J in Sosnowiec, Poland, on February 11. The third-ranked Ukrainians grabbed the top spot in the group going through the tournament undefeated after victories over Poland (a 3-2 shootout) and Korea (4-0). This is Ukraine's first time in the final round since 2013.

The final qualification is scheduled to be played between August 29 and September 1. Twelve teams will compete for three slots at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milano Cortina, Italy.

The Ukrainian national hockey team's only participation in the Olympics came in 2002 where it placed 10th. One of the players on that team was Ukraine's current national team coach, Dmytro Khristich.

Three unanswered first period goals by Vadym Mazur, Pylyp Pangelov-Yuldashev and Vitali Lialka led Ukraine's drive to keep their Olympic dream alive. Estonia tried to make a game of it, closing to 4-3, but with 2:20 left in the final period, Lialka fed Oleksandr Peresunko to close it out at 5-3.



Michael Chwieduk/IIHF

Ukraine's national ice hockey team celebrates its 5-3 win against Estonia at the International Ice Hockey Federation Men's Olympic Ice Hockey Qualification in the third round of Group J on February 11 in Sosnowiec, Poland.

Denys Borodai and Yevheni Ratushny tallied for Ukraine in regulation time against Poland, before Illia Korenchuk and Olexi Vorona scored shootout goals against Polish goalkeeper Maciej Miarka for the 3-2 win. Ukrainian goalie Bogdan Dyachenko saved four of five shootout attempts.

In the 4-0 shutout of Korea, Ukrainian goal scorers were Mazur, Vorona, Andri Denyskin and Danil Trakht. Eduard Zakharchenko earned the shootout victory by stopping all 31 shots he faced.

In the final round of Olympic qualification, Ukraine is in a group with Latvia, France and Slovenia in Group E.

Vladyslav Gela, a champion inside and outside the boxing ring

On January 20, Ukraine's largest sports arena, Kyiv's Palace of Sports, hosted a bout between Andriy Tsiura and Vladyslav Gela for the vacant World Boxing Council (WBC) Ukraine title in the super welterweight division. The large-scale charity boxing event was organized by the promotional firm SportaBox with support from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's UNITED 24.

The strenuous 10-round fight went the distance with the judges unanimously awarding the victory and championship to Gela. The trained firefighter and rescuer, chief of guard at the 14th State Fire and Rescue Unit in Kremenchuk, Ukraine, Gela has been actively fighting the consequences of non-stop Russian missile and drone attacks. His unit was one of the first group of responders on the scene when the Russians attacked Kremenchuk in the summer of 2022.

Gela has been a member of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine's hand-to-hand combat team since 2016. He competed in Ukraine's Presidential Cup and boxed his way through his school and university years.

By winning the WBC Ukraine Championship belt, Gela gained entry into the WBC rankings and can compete for international titles.

Ukrainian club wins Charity Soccer Cup

The Charity Soccer Cup was played at Compass Arena in Willowbrook, Ill., on February 17-18. The event was a soccer fundraiser to provide drones for the Ukrainian military in their ongoing war against Russia and to raise funds for the construction of a soccer field at the 4.50. Prykarpattia Sports Rehabilitation Center in Kalush, Ukraine. The competition was organized by the Ukrainian Diaspora Sport Association and Help Heroes of Ukraine Charity group.

Chicago's Ukrainian FC Connection UA adult team won the tournament, which had a field of 16 teams divided into four groups of four. Eight teams qualified for the quar-

terfinal where the Ukrainian squad defeated AK United 3-0. In the semifinal against Relys LLS Patriot, FC Connection UA survived elimination on penalty kicks, leading to a final matchup with Miami's Express Svb, in which the Ukrainian club prevailed 2-0.

Second Ukrainian dies from stabbing attack in Germany

Eighteen-year-old Ukrainian basketball player Artem Kozachenko died from stab wounds suffered in a brutal attack in Germany on February 20. According to a report from the ART Giants basketball club where Kozachenko and his 17-year-old teammate Volodymyr Yermakov played, Kozachenko was placed in intensive care after the attack while Yermakov died in the hospital as a result of his injuries. The second victim of the alleged street stabbing in Oberhausen on February 10 experienced a significant deterioration in his condition resulting in his death.

The incident occurred after a confrontation between two groups of young adults at a bus station on Willy-Brand-Platz as reported by German media outlet Focus. Four people, including both Ukrainians, suffered knife wounds. Four suspects were detained by German police.

The Kyiv Basketball Federation has said the basketball players' attackers may have been motivated by hatred against Ukraine, although German police do not believe the attack was politically motivated.

Polish company 4F to outfit Ukraine's Olympians

Ukraine's National Olympic Committee (NOC) President Vadym Gutzeit announced that the Polish company 4F has been selected to provide official uniforms for Ukrainian athletes at the upcoming Summer Olympic Games in Paris under a sponsorship agreement.

"The National Olympic Committee has signed a new contract in a new form with the Poles. Poles-4F (a Polish sportswear company) will dress us for the Olympic Games. A new, beautiful uniform," Gutzeit said on the air of a national telethon on February 21.

Gutzeit said the contract with the Polish firm is in the form of a sponsorship, meaning the uniforms will be provided at no cost to Ukraine. The NOC leader said there were additional offers from several Chinese companies, but their offers were not accepted.

(Based on reporting by The World from PRX, The Guardian via Yahoo Sports, Boxing Talk.com, Boxing News, One Football, UAF, Inside the Games, OBOZ.UA, IIHF, WBC, The Kyiv Independent and Interfax-Ukraine.)

Ihor Stelmach may be reached at iman@sfsgsports.com.

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OUT & ABOUT

Through March 24 Chicago	Art exhibit, "Tree of Life" with works by Marta Sofia Fraser and Kateryna Tkachenko, Ukrainian National Museum, www.ukrainiannationalmuseum.org	March 9 Lehighton, PA	Pysanka workshop, Ukrainian Homestead of CEC ODWU, www.ukrhomestead.com or oseliaodwu@gmail.com
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	March 9 Syracuse, NY	Pysanka workshop, Syracuse Ukrainian National Home, https://syrucc.org/unh
Through March 7 New York	Film screening, "Veselka: The Rainbow on the Corner at the Center of the World," https://www.angelikafilmcenter.com/villageeast/film/veselka-the-rainbow-on-the-corner-at-the-center-of-the-world	March 9 through April 27 Chicago	Pysanka workshops, Ukrainian National Museum, www.ukrainiannationalmuseum.org or 312-421-8020
Through March 7 Bernardsville, NJ	Film screening, "Veselka: The Rainbow on the Corner at the Center of the World," https://www.bernardsvillecinema.com/movie/veselka-the-rainbow-on-the-corner	March 10 Melrose Park, PA	Pysanka workshop, led by Georgine Borchik, Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church, 856-829-3597 or mk.hill@hillspace.org
Through March 7 North Hollywood, CA	Film screening, "Veselka: The Rainbow on the Corner at the Center of the World," https://www.laemmle.com/film/veselka-rainbow-corner-center-world#get-tickets	March 10 Chicago	Concert, "The Village Strings," Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, St. Nicholas Cathedral, www.uima-chicago.org
March 5 Philadelphia	Ballet, "Giselle," Grand Kyiv Ballet, Philadelphia Klein Center, www.grandkyivballet.com.ua	March 15 Chicago	Fashion Show, featuring designs by Lyuba Chernikova, fundraiser for the 52nd Battalion of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Lone Tree Manor Banquet Hall, showimpulse.com
March 5 Philadelphia	Concert, "Ukraine in the Eyes of Others," Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, American Philosophical Society, 215-569-8080 or pcmsconcerts.org/Ukraine	March 19 New York	Poetry reading, "Iryna Tsilyk: Literary Readings and a Conversation about Life and Art in Today's Ukraine," Columbia University, https://harrimann.columbia.edu
March 7 New York	Poetry reading, "Songs of Rage and Hope: A Poetry Reading and Conversation with Alex Averbuch," Columbia University, https://harrimann.columbia.edu	March 23 Jenkintown, PA	Easter Bazaar and Food Fest, Ukrainian Educational and Cultural Center, www.ueccphila.org
March 8 Chicago	Concert, "Harmony in Motion: An Evening of Flute and Piano," with Anastasia Squires and Giacomo Franci, Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, www.uima-chicago.org	March 24 Cheektowaga, NY	Aid for Ukraine event, Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church, www.UkrainiansofBuffalo.com
March 8 through April 14 Jenkintown, PA	Exhibit, "Affirmation of Life: Art from Today's Ukraine," benefiting Ukraine Global Scholars, Abington Art Center, https://ukrainian-cultural-initiative.com/ or https://abingtonartcenter.org	March 24 Lehighton, PA	Easter Bazaar, Ukrainian Homestead of CEC ODWU, www.ukrhomestead.com or oseliaodwu@gmail.com
		March 26 New York	Book talk with Olesya Yaremchuk, "Our Others. Stories of Ukrainian Diversity," Columbia University, https://harrimann.columbia.edu

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.

Turning...

(Continued from page 6)

Ukrainian territory. "We will never agree to Russia once again becoming an elder brother or any kind of brother. We want relations of equality," Mr. Mykhalchenko explained.

Observers viewed Russia's move as an attempt to hold on to the past and an effort to try to win international endorsement for

dominance of territory once part of the former Soviet Union.

U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Roman Popadiuk commented that Russia's actions "will only exacerbate relations and confirm security concerns for the former Soviet republics."

Source: "Ukraine protests Yeltsin's vision of regional mandate for Russia," by Marta Koliadets, *The Ukrainian Weekly*, March 7, 1993.

Bukhov grabs...

(Continued from page 17)

finished in fifth place in the women's 55-kilogram event with a total of 206 kilograms. She will have an opportunity to better that mark in Paris this summer.

Ukraine won a total of 13 medals including five gold medals, six silver and two bronze to place fifth among all countries. In addition to Konotop's three golds, Svitlana Samuliak won gold in women's 64-kg snatch and Hanna Davydova won overall gold (total weight) in the same weight category.

Ukraine won two gold medals in the "big" classification, which is defined as total result (snatch plus clean & jerk total), ranking them in third place. Ukrainian women finished first overall in the rankings with 654 points, ahead of Turkey's 525 points.

Ukrainian women win wrestling team title

After losing three final matches on the first day of women's gold medal bouts at the 2024 European Wrestling Champion-

ships, the Ukrainian women had one last finalist on the second day and Iryna Koliadets did not disappoint. Koliadets defeated Romania's Kateryna Zelenykh 6-0 in the 65-kilogram final to earn Team Ukraine its first gold medal. Her gold medal earned Ukraine the team title in women's freestyle with 147 points, ahead of Turkey and Romania.

The Championships were held in Bucharest, Romania, from February 12-18 with 519 wrestlers competing from 36 countries. Ukraine finished fourth in the medal rankings and fifth in total medals with 10, including four silvers and five bronze medals to go with Koliadets's gold. Ukraine won four medals in Greco-Roman and six medals in women's freestyle.

The 25-year-old Koliadets, a native of Irpin, Ukraine, won a bronze medal in the women's freestyle 62-kilogram event at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo and is a three-time gold medalist at the European Wrestling Championships.

(Based on reporting by Swimming World, Swim Swam, OBOZ.UA and Inside the Games.)

Two years into...

(Continued from page 5)

not changed. "We want control over our internationally recognized territory, responsibility borne by those who started the war, and reparations."

According to polling, most Ukrainians believe the restoration of control over the entire country is the most likely end of the war. In a survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on February 5-10, about 65 percent of respondents said they believe in such an outcome, down from 71 percent in May 2022.

But amid geopolitical uncertainty, with Donald Trump saying he would encourage Russia to "do whatever the hell they want"

to any NATO country that doesn't meet military spending targets, Ukrainians are realizing that support for their cause is limited and uncertain.

"Some partners are helping more, others less. Many still don't understand that it is not a regional conflict but a global security threat and a war between two mutually exclusive worldviews," Mr. Mishchenko said. "It's increasingly resembling the situation ahead of the last World War."

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Andre Luis Alves, via RFE/RL

Grizzly, 34, is a deputy commander of a battalion that has fought in over 20 locations in the north, east and south of Ukraine.

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The annual percentage rate (APR) is the cost of credit over the term of the loan expressed as an annual rate. The APR shown here is based on the interest rates and points only and does not take into account other loan specific finance charges you may be required to pay.

