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# THE UKRAINIAN WEEKLY

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## ***Ukraine's foreign affairs minister visits Beijing for first time since start of war***

by Reid Standish  
RFE/RL

Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Minister Dmytro Kuleba arrived in Beijing for the first time since Russia's full-scale invasion for talks geared toward finding a possible Chinese role in ending the war.

The three-day visit began on July 23, with Ukraine's top diplomat traveling at the invitation of Wang Yi, his Chinese counterpart.

Upon arriving in Beijing, Mr. Kuleba said in an Instagram post that he would use his trip to develop contacts between Chinese and Ukrainian leaders and that he would be having "extensive, detailed [and] substantive negotiations" with Mr. Wang over how to reach a peace settlement for the grinding war that is now in its third year.

"We must avoid competing peace plans. It is very important that Kyiv and Beijing conduct a direct dialogue and exchange positions," Mr. Kuleba said.

The trip is Mr. Kuleba's first visit to China since Russia's war in Ukraine began in February 2022 and is seen as unexpected by many observers given Beijing's close relationship with Moscow and diplomatic maneuvering that has often seen Chinese diplomats keep their distance from high-level Ukrainian officials.

Following his arrival in Beijing, Mr. Kuleba said Ukraine remains ready to hold talks with Russia provided Moscow proves it's ready to negotiate in "good faith." Kyiv has yet to see such inclination from the

Kremlin, Mr. Kuleba reiterated on July 24 during talks with Mr. Wang.

"I am convinced that a just peace in Ukraine is in China's strategic interests, and China's role as a global force for peace is important," Mr. Kuleba said, according to a Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Ministry statement, in opening remarks at the meeting with Mr. Wang in Guangzhou, a major commercial and manufacturing center in southern China.

Mr. Kuleba "presented the consistent position of Ukraine, that is its readiness to conduct negotiations with the Russian side at a certain stage, when Russia is ready to conduct negotiations in good faith, but emphasized that currently such readiness has not been observed on the Russian side," the statement added.

The meeting between the two foreign affairs ministers also comes as various peace initiatives have emerged in recent months against the backdrop of prolonged fighting and uncertainty ahead of the U.S. presidential election in November that could see the return of former President Donald Trump, who has threatened to limit aid flows to Ukraine and push for talks between Kyiv and Moscow that could quickly end the war.

In June, Kyiv held an international summit without Russian representation in Switzerland to promote its vision of peace. The gathering hosted delegations from 100 countries, and Ukraine has since said that it hopes to be ready to hold another one in

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## ***During address to nation, Biden vows to 'stop' Putin in last six months in Oval Office***

**Endorses Vice President Harris as democratic candidate in November election with Russo-Ukrainian war raging**



Official X page of Kamala Harris

**U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris (right) speaks at a peace summit in Switzerland in June dedicated to ending the Russo-Ukrainian war, as Ukrainian presidential chief of staff Andriy Yermak (center) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy listen (left).**

by Mark Raczkiewycz

CHICAGO – One of the tasks U.S. President Joe Biden put forward in his last six months in office is to rally a "coalition of proud nations to stop [Russian dictator Vladimir] Putin from taking over Ukraine and doing more damage," he said in a national address to the nation on July 24.

The live, 12-minute public address came three days after the 81-year-old president announced from the Oval Office that he

would not seek a second term. He instead endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris as the nominee to lead the party ticket at the Democratic National Convention on August 19-22 in Chicago.

"It's been the honor of my life to serve as your president," Mr. Biden said during possibly his last national address. "I draw strength and find joy in working for the people. But this sacred task of perfecting

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## ***Ukraine in shock as linguist and former member of parliament Iryna Farion murdered in Lviv***



Roman Baluk/Lviv City Council

Iryna Farion, who was murdered on July 19 in Lviv, Ukraine, was buried in the city's Lychakiv Cemetery on July 22.

by Roman Tymotsko

LVIV – Ukraine was in shock as a gunman on July 19 shot and killed former member of parliament, professor and linguist Iryna Farion.

Ms. Farion, 60, was shot in the head in Lviv in broad daylight near the house where she lived. Witnesses told police that the killer fired one shot and quickly fled the scene.

Ms. Farion was rushed to a local hospital where doctors tried to save her life for several hours, but she was pronounced dead at 11:20 p.m. local time.

The news was announced by Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyi and the head of the Lviv Regional State Administration Maksym Kozitskyi.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced on July 25 that a suspect in Ms. Farion's assassination had been

detained in Dnipro, Ukraine.

"The Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Ihor Klymenko, has just reported to me on the detention of a suspect in the murder of Iryna Farion in Dnipro. The detention operation was very difficult. During these days, hundreds of specialists from the National Police of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine [SBU], and other services worked to solve the murder," Mr. Zelenskyy wrote on social media.

"I am grateful to every person who added more facts to the picture of the crime every day and brought the full truth closer. An 18-year-old boy has been detained. Necessary investigative actions and examinations are underway. I have instructed the minister of internal affairs to provide all the details to the public," Mr. Zelenskyy said.

Mr. Klymenko said that the investigation

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## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Moscow seeks to drive 'peace' wedge into trans-Atlantic unity

by Pavel K. Baev  
Eurasia Daily Monitor

Russian President Vladimir Putin has not demonstrated any discernible change over the last few weeks in his maximalist stance on how to end his war in Ukraine. Nevertheless, many other governments and organizations continue to propose ideas and initiatives for how to end this devastating conflict, though not all of these are conducive to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's proposal for organizing the second peace summit this November (Kommersant, July 17). Some pleas for an immediate ceasefire, like the letter from a group of Nobel Prize laureates calling for peace in both Ukraine and Gaza, come from sincere humanitarian concerns (Novaya Gazeta, July 13). Other maneuvers are less magnanimous and more self-serving. Still, Moscow is keen to channel every proposition toward its obsessive goal of eroding Western unity and undermining the pro-Ukraine coalition.

Hungary's contrarian prime minister, Viktor Orban, has sought to capitalize on the search for peace and has made himself a key conduit for Russian intrigues. Abusing his new position of European Union Council President, he has made trips to Kyiv, Moscow and Beijing and then presented proposals for ending the war (Forbes.ru, July 15). In the newly-elected European Parliament, 495 of the 720 members recently condemned this "peace" mission as a breach of standard policy (Meduza, July 17). Mr. Orban insists that his initiative is on track and further confidential steps are being prepared (RBC, July 18). Putin, however, has not hinted at any possible decrease in Russian demands, but

commentators in Moscow still praised Mr. Orban's stance (Russia in Global Affairs, July 17).

Hungary's distinct position on the war in Ukraine may be convenient for Russia, but the consolidated position of the European Union in support of Ukraine is only getting stronger. The re-election of Ursula von der Leyen as the president of the European Commission signifies a broad commitment to increasing the E.U. security profile necessary for prevailing in a confrontation with Russia (Kommersant, July 18). Her intention to appoint a commissioner for defense cooperation is interpreted in Moscow as a step toward transforming the European Union into a military alliance (Izvestiya, July 18). The European Union's resolve to deter Russian aggression is also confirmed by the promotion of Kaja Kallas, the former prime minister of Estonia and fierce critic of Putin's regime, to the position of high representative for foreign affairs and security policy (Novaya Gazeta Europe, July 18).

Ms. Kallas' appointment shows that the firm stance of the "frontline states," such as Estonia and Poland, is shared and reinforced by Northern Europe, where pacifist opinions and movements used to be prevalent (The Moscow Times, July 17). Broad support for denying Russia any gains from its aggression was also demonstrated at the European Political Community Summit hosted in the United Kingdom last week (Kommersant, July 18). Mr. Zelenskyy used the opportunity to speak at Blenheim Palace – Winston Churchill's ancestral home – to invoke the former British prime minister's example of leadership in resist-

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# Russia's diamond industry under pressure of stricter sanctions

by Sergey Sukhankin  
Eurasia Daily Monitor

On June 24, the European Union adopted its 14th sanctions package against Russia. The package included new restrictions on Russian-mined diamonds, including on the import of Russian diamonds and an "indirect import ban on Russian diamonds processed in third countries other than Russia" (Eur-lex.europa.eu, June 24). The Group of Seven (G-7) countries and Switzerland had previously introduced similar sanctions. Russia's diamond-producing industry, however, has managed to survive the pressure, albeit while suffering some losses (Npral.ru, July 15).

Now, the new sanctions combined with growing competition look to have a more significant impact on Russia's diamond industry. Perhaps more importantly, the new measures may destabilize the Sakha Republic, one of Russia's top diamond-producing regions. Sakha is ethnically non-Russian and has traditionally been deprived by Moscow of its resource-generated income. Destabilization in regions like the Sakha Republic could lead to more protests against the war in Ukraine, which led to these sanctions in the first place, reluctance to continue working for the diamond industry and open a door for China to further its influence in the Russian Far East

(see Eurasia Daily Monitor, February 6, 2023).

Russia is one of the world's leading diamond producers. Moscow's flagship state-owned diamond mining company ALROSA supplies up to 35 percent of the world's diamonds and owns more than 40 percent of global diamond deposits (Forbes.ru, December 7, 2023). The export of diamonds provides the Russian budget with approximately \$4.7 billion annually (Vedomosti.ru, August 15, 2023). Despite sanctions and restrictions, Moscow managed to salvage its diamond-producing industry primarily due to three main reasons: a lack of detecting mechanisms to ascertain a diamond's origins; India, China, as well as some Middle Eastern and Northern African countries being unwilling to join Western sanctions; and key Western authorities in the diamond business, such as the Antwerp World Diamond Centre (AWDC), opposing sanctions (Brusselstimes.com, February 23, 2022).

Following two years of sanctions, Western countries and their partners are seemingly toughening their stance on this vital facet of the Russian economy. In early February, the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control, the European Union, and the G-7 introduced new and reportedly stricter

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## NEWSBRIEFS

**Zelenskyy respects Biden for difficult decision**

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that Ukraine respects U.S. President Joe Biden's "difficult but strong decision" to withdraw his candidacy for reelection. Mr. Biden, who is 81, on July 21 dropped his bid for reelection in November and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party's nominee amid an erosion of support over concerns about his fitness to run because of his age. "Ukraine is grateful to President Biden for his unwavering support for Ukraine's fight for freedom, which, along with strong bipartisan support in the United States, has been and continues to be critical," Mr. Zelenskyy wrote on X on July 22. Under Mr. Biden's leadership, the United States has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine in its war against Russia's unprovoked invasion and its main provider of military and financial aid. In what is likely to be one of his enduring legacies as president, Mr. Biden was able to quickly unite allies to support Ukraine with tens of billions of dollars in military and financial support after Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022. "Many strong decisions have been made in recent years and they will be remembered as bold steps taken by President Biden in response to challenging times. And we respect today's tough but strong decision," Mr. Zelenskyy wrote. "We will always be thankful for President Biden's leadership. He supported our country during the most dramatic moment in history, assisted us in preventing [Russian President Vladimir] Putin from occupying our country, and has continued to support us throughout this terrible war." Former President Donald Trump, who is vying for reelection as the Republican Party's candidate, has repeatedly said that, if he was elected president again, he would end the war Russia launched against Ukraine in a day. Mr. Trump repeated the pledge on July 19 in a phone call with Mr. Zelenskyy that both men described as good. Ms. Harris has strengthened her international profile during her three years in office and represented the United States at Ukraine's peace summit in Switzerland last month. In his statement, Mr. Zelenskyy voiced hope that Washington would remain at the helm of the Western

allies' support for Ukraine's response to Russia's aggression and would not abandon Ukraine. "The current situation in Ukraine and all of Europe is no less challenging, and we sincerely hope that America's continued strong leadership will prevent Russian evil from succeeding or making its aggression pay off," Mr. Zelenskyy said. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

**Kuleba: Moscow not ready for peace talks**

Ukraine remains ready to hold talks with Russia provided Moscow proves it's ready to negotiate in "good faith," but Kyiv has yet to see such inclination from the Kremlin, Foreign Affairs Minister Dmytro Kuleba reiterated on July 24 during talks with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi. At the invitation of Mr. Wang, Mr. Kuleba is on a three-day visit to China, his first since Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion, for talks to explore a possible Chinese role in ending the war. "I am convinced that a just peace in Ukraine is in China's strategic interests, and China's role as a global force for peace is important," Mr. Kuleba said, according to a Ukrainian Foreign Affairs Ministry statement, in opening remarks at the meeting with Mr. Wang in Guangzhou, a major commercial and manufacturing center in southern China. Mr. Kuleba "presented the consistent position of Ukraine, that is its readiness to conduct negotiations with the Russian side at a certain stage, when Russia is ready to conduct negotiations in good faith, but emphasized that currently such readiness has not been observed on the Russian side," the statement added. Mr. Kuleba's trip came as a surprise to some observers, given Beijing's close relationship with Moscow and diplomatic maneuvering that has often seen Chinese diplomats keep their distance from high-level Ukrainian officials. Ukraine last month held an international summit without Russian representation in Switzerland to promote its vision of peace. The gathering hosted delegations from 100 countries and Washington was represented by Vice President Kamala Harris, the front-runner to obtain the Democratic Party's nomination for the November presidential poll following

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# Long lines, worries as Ukraine pushes to bolster ranks for fight against Russia

by Aleksander Palikot and  
RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service

KYIV – Before dawn on July 16, Vladyslav woke up in his car. At 4:37 a.m., he was fourth in a line at a draft office in Ukraine's capital.

It was the last day for men eligible for military service to register or update their personal details with the military.

"I was here several times before and lost many hours," Vladyslav, who did not want his last name published, told RFE/RL. "In the end, I had to sleep in the car, parked nearby, to make it on time."

As Russia's full-scale invasion grinds on in its third year, with Moscow's forces exerting enormous pressure on often exhausted soldiers on multiple sections of the 620-mile front line in the east and south, Ukraine is struggling to increase the number of troops available for its defense.

A controversial mobilization law, adopted in April after heated debate, took effect in May.

July 16 marked the end of a 60-day grace period during which time all citizens eligible for mobilization were required to update their personal data at military-run territorial recruitment centers or civilian administrative centers – or via a newly rolled out government app, Reserve+.

Vladyslav was one of some 4 million citizens who renewed their data by the deadline, according to the Defense Ministry, including 2.7 million who did so through the app.

For weeks, draft offices were struggling with crowds of conscripts trying to fulfill their duty, lining up for hours in the sweltering summer heat. Blackouts – a result of Russia's relentless attacks on Ukraine's power infrastructure – added to the troubles.

Some of those who complied with the law will now receive a summons and head to military medical commissions for examinations to determine their fitness for service. Others will get exemptions on various grounds.

## Trying to hide

Those who did not comply face fines and other civil restrictions such as the potential revocation of driver's licenses or, in the case of military-age men abroad, the right to consular services.

"From now on, they can also receive a summons by post, which will be treated as



Ukrainian Border Service courtesy image

**At least 30 bodies have been recovered as men drowned attempting to swim across a river into Romania.**

delivered even without their confirmation of receipt," Deputy Defense Minister Kateryna Chernohorenko told RFE/RL.

If they ignore this, they can be declared wanted within a criminal proceeding.

"Some people are trying to hide their data, but it is a matter of time – all citizens [subject to mobilization] will be in the military register," Serhiy Starenkiy, deputy chairman of the Human Rights Protection Committee of the Ukrainian National Bar Association, told RFE/RL.

Ukraine introduced these procedures to make identifying men eligible for conscription easier and mobilizing them more efficient.

Prior to the new legislation, the bulk of summonses had been handed out to men by military patrols on the streets of cities, towns and villages. That practice has provoked controversy, and there have been numerous reports of violence used by or against draft officers across Ukraine.

In one such case, 32-year-old Serhiy Kovalchuk died in the hospital after a visit to a draft office in the Zhytomyr region. Recruiters attributed his death to an epileptic seizure and alcohol, but the death certificate indicated that the cause was multiple cranial-cerebral injuries with displaced skull bones.

Mr. Kovalchuk's family alleges that he was assaulted at the draft office, and over 100 people staged a protest outside the building over the incident.

Thousands of men have fled or left the

country – which is illegal for men of fighting age under martial law, in effect since shortly after Russia launched the full-scale invasion in February 2022 – and others have gone into hiding or used legal loopholes to try to avoid the draft.

Some Ukrainians soured on recruitment efforts due to widespread reports of corruption in draft offices. Last August, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy dismissed the senior military recruiter in each of Ukraine's regions as reports of corruption proliferated.

The push to bolster the military ranks comes as the enthusiasm to serve that marked the early months of the full-scale Russian invasion has faded.

In a late June poll conducted by the Kyiv-based Razumkov Center, about 46 percent of respondents said there is no shame in being a draft dodger, while 29 percent held the opposite opinion, and 25 percent found it difficult to answer.

Still, the government asserts that the stepped-up mobilization campaign is going well.

"The military says that everything is going according to their plan," Mr. Zelenskyy said at a press conference on July 15, adding that there are not enough training grounds and that the state is working to expand them.

## Prisoners and more

Shortly before the mobilization law was adopted, Mr. Zelenskyy signed a bill lower-

ing the lower end of the age range in which men can be drafted from 27 to 25, leaving the upper limit at 60, and ordered those who previously held "partially eligible" status to go through mandatory medical checks.

Some men aged 18-24 can also be called up, and women can volunteer to serve.

In another bid to recruit more troops, Kyiv has also allowed some categories of prisoners to serve in the military.

Meanwhile, some of the most popular units – such as the Third Separate Assault Brigade, the 93rd Mechanized Brigade and the Khartia Brigade – opened their recruitment centers and are running marketing campaigns, leaving Ukrainian cities plastered with billboards with calls to join the army.

Military and civilian critics of the mobilization law note that it fails to address questions of rotation – giving units a chance to rest, away from frontline fighting – and demobilization, when an active-duty soldier can legally leave service.

"If this [current] trend continues into the fall, it may then be possible to submit a bill on demobilization to the Verkhovna Rada," Roman Kostenko, head of the parliament's National Security Committee, said in June.

Separately, in an interview with a German newspaper, Mr. Kostenko said that the Ukrainian military could enlist 200,000 additional troops by the end of the year.

Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, Ukraine's former top general, made a reported request for 500,000 new recruits that was believed to be one of the reasons Mr. Zelenskyy dismissed him in February.

There are 4.35 million Ukrainian men who are eligible for service and are not yet in the military, according to Dmytro Natalukha, chairman of the Economy Committee in parliament. Some estimates put the number higher.

Ukrainian officials have said on different occasions that their armed forces number from 800,000 to 1 million. In February, Mr. Zelenskyy said that 31,000 soldiers had been killed since February 2022, a figure seen as a major undercount.

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## Moscow seeks...

(Continued from page 2)

ing and defeating arrogant tyranny and to request more help for Ukraine's defiant fight (Lenta, July 18). Russian commentators have given no convincing response to this show of solidarity, instead resorting to looking for evidence of Germany's inability to take a lead in forging European unity (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, July 15).

What confuses pundits in Moscow is that European security dynamics are not compelled by U.S. pressure but rather stem from motivations internal to their own organizations and governments (Rossiiskaya Gazeta, July 16). U.S. leadership in the path to peace remains crucial, as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit demonstrated yet again. However, Russian propaganda's standard rhetoric about U.S. dominance does not apply in the case of E.U. decision making (Re: Russia, July 12; see Eurasia Daily Monitor, July 15, 17, 18). Whatever twists and turns U.S. domestic politics makes in the months leading up to the November presidential

election, Putin will not get his wish for Ukraine's capitulation (Svoboda.org, July 18).

Another certainty is that the next U.S. administration will prioritize managing strategic competition with China. Beijing responded angrily to the assertion in the declaration of the Washington Summit that China was the primary "enabler" of Russian aggression and has expressed disapproval of the expansion of NATO activities in the Indo-Pacific (Vedomosti, July 12; TopWar.ru, July 19). Besides the predictable denials and condemnations, Beijing finds it essential to confirm its commitment to ending the war in Ukraine, which does not rule out its participation in the second peace summit (RBC, July 16). Instead of elaborating on its old "peace plan," China has suggested signing an agreement committing the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council not to threaten or plan a first nuclear strike, implicitly undercutting Putin's pattern of brinkmanship (Kommersant, July 18). At the same time, however, it should be noted that China has also pulled out of nuclear arms control talks with the United States in

recent weeks (TASS, July 17). Chinese President Xi Jinping granted Mr. Orban an audience but did not encourage his mediation for peace, perhaps preferring to communicate with the E.U. leadership on this issue without this dubious interlocutor (Izvestiya, July 8).

Moscow still hopes that an escalation of tensions between China and the West could make its key strategic partner more supportive of its war (RIA Novosti, July 20). What makes Beijing's diplomatic maneuvering hard to comprehend for the Kremlin is the scope of China's economic problems due to pressure from Western countries, which determines the political priorities of its leadership (RIAC, July 19). Russia relies on China for the livelihood of its military-industrial complex, as China is one of the few states that will trade essential parts with Russia due to Western sanctions, meaning Russia has tied its economy closer to China's (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 22, April 29, May 6, 14).

For many key external stakeholders, it is relatively clear that the current deadlock in trench warfare is not conducive to promoting a constructive peace process. Russia is

prepared to keep wasting a thousand soldiers a day for the control of a notional "strategic initiative," and Ukraine hopes that its resilience will grant it a stronger negotiation position, perhaps by as soon as the end of the year (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, July 16). In the abstract, the proposition of bringing the war to an end through peace talks is nevertheless increasing in popularity on both sides, which have been traumatized by this protracted disaster. This preference has not yet translated into a readiness to compromise, which opens space for self-serving politicians to declare "peace" slogans without putting any substance into them (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, July 2). Willingly or not, they play into Putin's hands, which are locked on the levers of his war machine. He is firmly set on dividing the West and ruling Ukraine, and the hard road to peace proceeds from denying this ambition to its ultimate defeat.

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# Under relentless Russian attacks, Ukrainian power plant workers race to get lights back on

by Kollen Post  
RFE/RL

The first time he felt a Russian strike on the power plant was the scariest, Ihor said: It shattered his sense of safety at the place where he's worked for over two decades.

"It didn't bring that much destruction, relatively. But when the front is far away from you, you somehow live at peace," said Ihor, a senior machinist at one of the 17 thermoelectric power plants scattered throughout Ukraine (The last names of plant employees are being withheld for security reasons). Seven are under Russian occupation; two others have been fully destroyed.

That first attack on Ihor's plant took place in October 2022, eight months into the full-scale invasion, when Russia made its first real bid to shut out the lights with winter approaching.

The strikes keep coming. An intense wave of Russian attacks on energy infrastructure in recent months has caused massive damage to the power grid and deepened the suffering Moscow is inflicting upon Ukraine.

There were four people in Ihor's section of the plant that first night, still out on the floor. "We were at our workstations. We had armored vests, we had helmets, but we weren't safe."

When the first explosion hit, the machinery around him rocked and groaned "a meter away on the blast wave," he said. "And then you think, 'If it can do that to that huge piece of machinery, what's going to happen to me?'"

Ihor grew up in the surrounding town

and exhibits a measure of hometown pride in the plant, the only one of its kind and scale in the region. The 24 years he has worked there – half of his life so far – have been full of safety training and protocols that now seem quaint.

"The scariest thing that can happen in peacetime is some kind of explosion. We practice all of these fire-prevention trainings: who has to take what position where, what tasks fall to whom," he said. "But here, there was a situation that was impossible to take into account."

Since then, Russian strikes and the repairs that follow have become the defining feature of the job. This year, an attack in May peeled the roof off like the lid of a tin can. One of the three rockets blew up the back wall – for the second time. The thermoelectric plant is producing no electricity.

The experience has rendered Ihor somewhat fatalistic in his attitude to a job that was never supposed to be this dangerous.

"When such a big giant attacks you, and you are much smaller than he is, you understand that it doesn't depend on you," he said. "What depends on you is which valve you are supposed to close, which valve you're not supposed to open."

## Let there be light

Russia's relentless attacks on Ukraine's energy generation capacity have crippled the grid. Within a few weeks of the start of the full-scale invasion, over half of Ukraine's generation capacity was in Russian-occupied territory, with half of what remained taken out by air strikes. That includes 90 percent of generation at coal-fired power plants like Ihor's.



Kollen Post, RFE/RL

Workers clear rubble from the upper floors of a Ukrainian power plant damaged in a Russian attack on June 20.

In summer, fears of freezing to death in the dark are allayed. But rolling blackouts have seized the country from end to end in recent weeks, compounding the effects of an exhausting heat wave.

On July 6, Ukrenergo, the state energy authority, reported a strike on a power plant in the Sumy region, which borders Russia in the northeast. It also flagged a new crop of fake pages for the agency appearing across social media, taking advantage of fears of further blackouts.

"Their lack of success on the front is what's causing the 'Rashists' to strike civilian targets," Ihor said, referring to a common Ukrainian wartime portmanteau of the words "Russian" and "fascist." "The fact that they're bombing power plants is, in fact, a big failure on their part."

Since that first attack, Ihor and his coworkers have gotten used to filing into one of three bomb shelters on the premises. The largest fits 600 people. Several jugs of water stand at the ready for a long haul underground. Old, reclaimed church pew seating faces a small bookshelf full of Orthodox Christian icons next to a cross hanging on the wall. The ventilation pipes above have been painted the yellow and blue of the Ukrainian flag.

For security reasons, the company operating the plant, DTEK, has asked that the specific plant not be identified. It is one of many that are, once again, under repair.

## Closed loop

A big part of the process consists of industrial-level cleanup. In the upper level of the plant, there are still bits of shrapnel and engines from Russian rockets lying amid fiberglass insulation that's been caved

in. A demolition chute of orange buckets coughs out plumes of black smoke as rubble slides through to massive piles below the outside of the shattered wall.

DTEK facilities have been struck over 160 times since the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, according to the company. The director of the plant where Ihor works, Oleh, said they had lost count of how many hit this location.

Employees fear they have been locked in a "closed loop" of repairs and new strikes, said Olha Tarasyuk, a DTEK representative.

The thermoelectric facilities are all built using Soviet parts that the attacks have exhausted from throughout the allied parts of the former Eastern bloc. "What there was to get from Poland, we already got," plant director Oleh said.

As Ukraine's energy infrastructure groans, the country has stepped up imports from its Western neighbors massively, reaching almost 25,000 megawatt hours on July 22.

As Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has done in talks with Western leaders, DTEK is lobbying heavily for greater air defense systems.

In the meantime, the workers are pulling "round-the-clock shifts. There's always someone here. For me, each strike, either I was here or had to come here," Ihor said. "Imagine, when others are running away from the situation, you run toward it."

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Kollen Post, RFE/RL

One of the generators that power this plant, which Ihor recalls shifting by a meter the first time it fell under Russian shelling.

# 'Creating havoc and panic': Kremlin-friendly fake news takes aim at Paris Olympics

by Tony Wesolowsky  
RFE/RL

It sounds like Tom Cruise. But narrating a film smearing the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would seem an odd career choice for the Hollywood actor, who normally headlines action-packed, global blockbusters.

It's not Mr. Cruise, of course. However, when it appeared in the summer of 2023, Olympics Has Fallen and its AI-generated Cruise narration became among the first, and perhaps slickest, salvos in a yearslong, pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign targeting the IOC and France ahead of the Paris Summer Olympics that open on July 26.

Since then, fake-news monitors have detected a stream of such videos, text reports and other misinformation material, much of it allegedly crafted by what the Microsoft Threat Analysis Center (MTAC) has called "prolific Russian influence

actors." Nearly all of the content ends up seeding social media and popping up on bogus websites made to look like legitimate news outlets.

In a recent report, the MTAC said two Russian influence teams that it dubbed Storm-1679 and Storm-1099 were behind a disinformation campaign not only to tar the IOC but to stoke security fears ahead of the Olympics.

Russia and its embassy in France deny any such campaign, but Moscow has long been credibly linked to fake-news efforts, especially since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, in an attempt to blur the lines of its unprovoked aggression.

Russian Olympic meddling is also not something new. Russian hackers posed as North Korean hackers to disrupt drone and telecast operations during the opening ceremony of the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea. A Russian

cyberespionage group called the Tsar Team, also known as APT28 or Fancy Bear, allegedly hacked the World Anti-Doping Agency, stole athletes' confidential medical data and leaked some of it after the 2016 Games in Rio de Janeiro.

This time, however, alleged Russian Olympic efforts appear to be more malicious, explains Clint Watts, author of the June 2 MTAC report.

"In the past, it was really about undermining the integrity of the IOC. Now, I think it's about undermining the integrity and the conduct of the Games to really create havoc or panic potentially in Paris," Mr. Watts, who is also the author of "Messing With the Enemy: Surviving in a Social Media World of Hackers, Terrorists, Russians and Fake News," told RFE/RL this week.

Others have raised similar alarms. A report also issued in June by Mandiant, a cybersecurity firm owned by Google, predicted with "high confidence" that cyber-

pionage, hacktivism and disinformation campaigns, likely linked to Russia, would target France and the Paris Olympics.

And there are even more worrying signs. A Russian national and alleged Federal Security Service (FSB) agent working as a chef and living in France for 14 years was arrested on suspicion of planning with an unspecified foreign power to carry out "large-scale" acts of "destabilization" during the Paris Olympics, *Le Monde* reported on July 24.

Russian athletes will largely be absent as a result of past state-sponsored cheating. Only those with no ties to the Russian military or intelligence (a vetting process that is already proving controversial) will be allowed to compete, and even then, only as neutral athletes; meaning minus national symbols, colors or anthems (This also applies to athletes from Russia's close ally, Belarus, whose authoritarian leader

(Continued on page 7)

# Coming of age at a 'patriotic' summer camp in Ukraine's heartland

by Aleksander Palikot  
RFE/RL

KHOLODNIY YAR, Ukraine – With big round glasses magnifying his eyes, "Rocket" stood ramrod-straight along with about 40 other children aged 10 to 13, all dressed in black clothes and identical black baseball caps.

After an instructor inspected the tidiness of their attire, the children put their hands on their hearts and recited what's known as the Prayer of a Ukrainian Nationalist.

"Burn all the weakness in my heart with the life-giving fire. May I know no fear or

hesitation," they intoned – part of an oath written in 1936 by nationalist leader Osyp Mashchak that is now popular among some of the Ukrainian military units fighting against the Russian invasion.

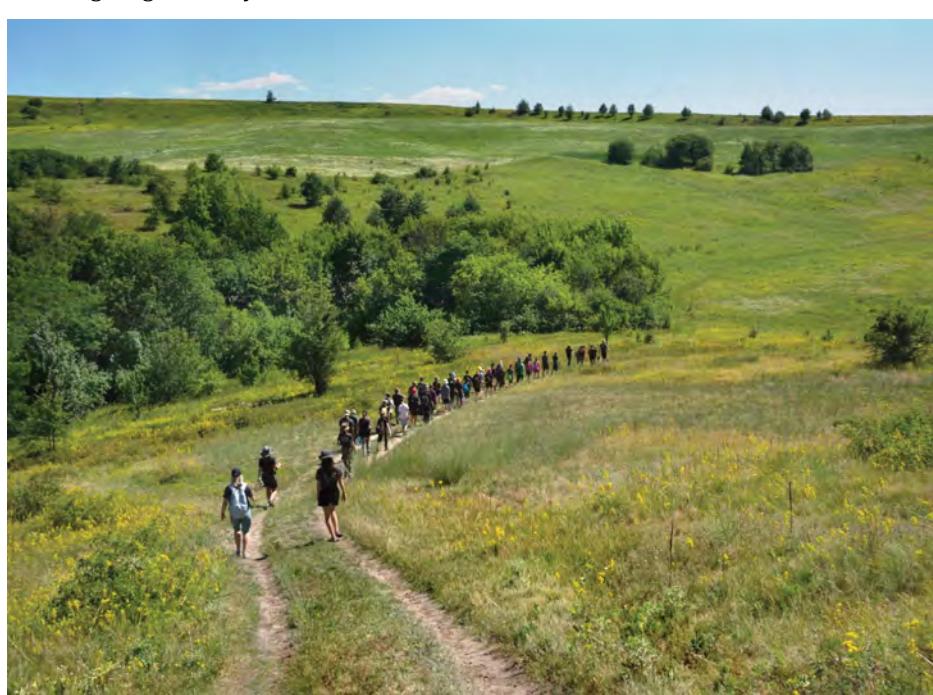
These assemblies, morning and evening, set the tone for a 10-day "patriotic-nationalistic" youth camp in Kholodniy Yar, an ancient forest fabled among nationalists in Ukraine: Partisans supporting the short-lived Ukrainian National Republic held out here against both Bolsheviks and Whites in the Ukrainian War of Independence just over a century ago.

The Russian invasion has bolstered



Dzvinka Pinchuk, RFE/RL

"Rocket" (right) and a friend attend a workshop on mine and grenade safety.



Children take a 19-mile hike in Kholodniy Yar, Ukraine, a picturesque region where pro-independence Ukrainian partisans held out over a century ago.

Ukrainian unity and strengthened the sense of national identity. Amid the onslaught, various forms of military training are becoming part of everyday life for millions of people – children not excluded.

As many as 73 percent of Ukrainians believe that "military-patriotic education" is advisable in schools, with 16 percent opposed, according to a study on the militarization of society conducted by the Kyiv-based Razumkov Center in May 2024 and supported by USAID.

This shift in popular opinion was expressed by Ukraine's first lady, Olena Zelenska, who said in Davos in January

2023: "What [the Russians] have achieved is that all our children will be nationalists."

## 'Responsible citizens'

The program of the Call of the Ravine camp – "yar" means ravine – includes sports, lectures on Ukrainian history and nationalist ideology, and activities such as assembling AK-47 rifles, first aid training and a mine safety workshop.

"We don't want our kids to fight. We'd like them not to have to," Illya Maryan, the head of the camp, told RFE/RL. "But we

(Continued on page 9)

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## THE UKRAINIAN WEEKLY

# Russia's grim assault on religious freedom

In the turbulent landscape of occupied Ukraine, a dark shadow looms over religious freedom. Churches, once vibrant with life and faith, now stand silent, or worse, repurposed for propaganda. Ukrainian military chaplain Mark Serhiyev's testimony at a congressional hearing on July 24 brought this grim reality to light, accusing Russia of waging a "Christian jihad" in the region (for more on Mr. Serhiyev's story, see page 7).

Mr. Serhiyev, an evangelical pastor from Melitopol, shared harrowing accounts of life as a non-Orthodox Christian under Russian occupation. Speaking to the Helsinki Commission, he highlighted the dire state of religious freedom in Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine, noting that evangelical churches have all but vanished from those regions. Before the war, Ukraine was home to 2,000 Baptist churches and 2,500 Pentecostal churches; now, many Christians worship underground, fearful of persecution.

The pastor's personal experiences are a stark testament to Russia's brutal tactics. Early in the invasion, Mr. Serhiyev watched Russian tanks roll into Melitopol from his church's windows. His father, also a pastor, faced brutal intimidation, threatened with mutilation if he refused to declare Putin's control over the area. Despite the threats, he stood firm, and the church's 40-foot cross was desecrated and replaced with a Russian flag.

Russia's assault on religious freedom is not just a war tactic; it's a deliberate strategy to control and manipulate. Mr. Serhiyev described how his church is now used to host pro-Russia concerts, funded by the Kremlin. "Russians are trying to make a weapon of religion," he said, highlighting Moscow's cynical use of faith as a tool of oppression.

The Russian Orthodox Church, under Patriarch Kirill, plays a central role in this oppressive regime. Kirill, known for his close ties to Putin, has declared a "Christian jihad," promising Russian soldiers who die in battle in Ukraine a direct path to heaven. This perverse manipulation of faith for political ends is not new; it echoes the dark days of the Soviet Union. Mr. Serhiyev drew chilling parallels to his great-grandfather's experience, a pastor jailed and later killed by the KGB. "Nothing has changed," he lamented, noting the same oppressive tactics are now being used against him and his congregation.

The testimonies of other witnesses reinforced the stark reality of religious persecution in occupied Ukraine. Pennsylvania State Prof. Catherine Wanner told the commission that in the "Russian world" there is no place for Protestants, who are considered "apostates," "traitors" and "spies." This echoes the broader Russian strategy of religious and cultural homogenization, a strategy that has devastating consequences for religious minorities.

The plight of non-Orthodox Christians in occupied Ukraine is a grave affront to the principle of religious freedom. It is a reminder of the fundamental right enshrined in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution: the right to practice one's faith free from government interference. As Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever."

The systematic destruction of churches, the intimidation and persecution of religious leaders and the cynical manipulation of faith for political ends are not just violations of human rights; they are crimes against humanity.

As we witness these atrocities, we must remember the words of James Madison, the architect of the Bill of Rights: "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries." The strife that Madison spoke of is now a grim reality in Ukraine, a reality that demands our attention and action.

In these dark times, the stories of Ukrainian believers must be heard. Their courage and resilience in the face of persecution are a testament to the enduring power of faith. The international community, and especially the United States, must stand in solidarity with them, condemning Russia's jihad on Christianity and advocating for true religious freedom for all.

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## Turning the pages back...

Fourteen years ago, on August 1, 2010, The Ukrainian Weekly's editorial marked the 35th anniversary of the Helsinki Accords, which were signed on August 1, 1975, and officially known as the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Participating states included 33 European countries, the Soviet Union, Canada and the United States. This year marks the 49th anniversary of the signing of the accords.

The Helsinki Accords comprised three "baskets" of provisions – security in Europe; cooperation in the fields of economics, science and technology, and the environment; and cooperation in humanitarian and other fields. The signatories also agreed on the decalogue of fundamental principles, such as the inviolability of borders, territorial integrity of states, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-intervention in internal affairs, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Principle VII of the Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States of the Helsinki Accords states the following: "The participating states recognize the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor for the peace, justice and well-being necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations and cooperation among themselves as among all states."

The Soviets hailed the Helsinki Accords as they recognized the USSR's territorial conquests in Central and Eastern Europe and the principles of non-interference in a state's

(Continued on page 7)

## Russia's diamond...

(Continued from page 2)

measures against Russia's diamond-producing industry, including tightening control mechanisms over the origins of diamonds to prevent their presence in Western markets (Vedomosti.ru, February 9; Interfax.ru, June 24).

Moscow's official reaction to these restrictions was nonchalant. Russia's massive diamond deposits, its central position in the global diamond supply chain, and mounting concerns among both Western and non-Western actors on the state of the global diamond economy have created a veneer of invincibility as Moscow faces new sanctions (Eurointegration.com.ua, May 17). The Kremlin is counting on the potential of a deep structural crisis in the global diamond and high-end jewelry industry if stricter sanctions are introduced.

The first signs of a looming crisis are already appearing. The Gem & Jewelry Export Promotion Council, the World Federation of Diamond Bourses and the International Diamond Masters Association, along with 146 companies, have drafted an open letter to AWDC officials complaining about the potential impact of sanctions (Kommersant.ru, April 18). Russian sources also highlight the reported "chaos" in India's diamond-processing industry. Following the imposition of the first sanctions in 2022, India emerged as the top importer of unprocessed Russian diamonds that, having been processed in India, ended up in the West as "Indian" diamonds. This process is said to have already harmed the supply chain mechanism – causing payment delays and supply disruptions – and has resulted in growing discontent among Indian businesses that blame the G-7 and the West for these issues (Frankmedia.ru, April 4).

Russian experts express unyielding confidence in Moscow's ability to overcome the new restrictions. They claim that the West – specifically, European and North American companies and end-users – would have to pay more to receive essentially the same diamonds through India, the United Arab Emirates or other parties. These commentators do not believe that the West will be able to establish an effective and comprehensive certification and controlling mechanism to "catch" Russia-produced diamonds (Izvestiya, March 25). In anticipation of new sanctions, Russian Deputy Finance Minister Alexey Moiseev initially dismissed rumors about the government's preparations to render financial assistance to ALROSA. He claimed that "the company is ready for sanctions" and that its books are in excellent shape (Interfax.ru, January 9).

The situation, however, seems more complex than Russian officials and Kremlin-backed experts have presented. Regarding economic sustainability, ALROSA appears to be searching for help. According to official Russian sources, in 2023, the head of ALROSA, in a meeting with Aysen Nikolaev, the head of the Sakha Republic, said that the company has decreased diamond production by 2.8 percent, with net profits shrinking by 35 percent (in the first half of 2023 compared to 2022) (Vedomosti.ru, February 9). Furthermore, Russia was not prepared for sanctions. In early March, ALROSA signed an agreement with the Ministry of Finance

stipulating that the latter purchase (with public funds) a large part of the diamonds produced by the company but not exported due to external pressure. Russian officials claim this measure is "temporary," though the negative trends at ALROSA say otherwise (The Moscow Times, March 28, 2024).

ALROSA is one of the key pillars of the Sakha Republic's economy. The government holds a 33-percent share in the company. ALROSA is one of the main financers of the local economy, comprising around one-third of the regional budget (Zapiska.substack.com, May 23). In this regard, the Sakha Republic, an ethnically non-Russian region colonized by Moscow, is rich in diamonds, gold and other commodities but remains one of the poorest regions in Russia (TASS, March 14). As a result, problems for ALROSA would translate into significant issues for the local population. That, in turn, could pose a risk of further inequality, unemployment, alcoholism, criminality and social tensions that could have visible "ethnic" aspects (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, December 9, 2021, July 20, 2022, June 8, 2023).

Under these circumstances, the new sanctions could pose a broader geopolitical challenge for Moscow. Angola, where ALROSA has operated since 1992, is trying to dissolve an agreement with the company and expel it from the country. Local diamond producers have said that it is becoming "increasingly toxic to work with Russian partners." Thus, Angola is urging ALROSA to leave the country "immediately ... and without any compensation." The Angolan government has reportedly promised ALROSA that the company would be welcomed back once the sanctions regime is lifted (or at least eased). Some in the Kremlin are skeptical of these prospects, however, based on the conviction that political-economic ties between Angola and the United States have and will continue to be strengthened (The Moscow Times, January 27). Despite African diamond-producing countries feeling frustrated over Western sanctions, enthusiasm is growing among many African players – especially Botswana, South Africa and Angola – over emerging opportunities given Russia's weakening position. Many African countries are frustrated with a lack of communication and transparency with the West's sanctions regime. To avoid inflaming these frustrations further, Western countries will need to communicate early and often with Africa's diamond-producing states when considering restrictions (DW, June 21).

New sanctions are unlikely to result in the collapse of Russia's diamond industry. Nevertheless, they will likely exacerbate existing weaknesses within the Russian economy. More crucially, growing issues in the diamond-producing industry could contribute to anti-Moscow sentiments in the Sakha Republic and other resource-endowed regions, as these predominantly non-Russian subjects are intentionally deprived of revenue by Moscow. The further degradation of Russia's economy and rising unease among its population – especially among ethnically non-Russian populations – may very well lead to wider unrest across the country.

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

## OUR NEXT ISSUE

This week's issue of The Ukrainian Weekly is a double issue dated July 28-August 4, 2024. Our next issue will have a publication date of August 11, 2024.

## 'Creating...'

(Continued from page 4)

allowed Russia to stage part of its Ukraine invasion from Belarusian territory.

That is nothing new for Russia, which has faced similar restrictions at previous Olympic Games over doping that gave its athletes a competitive advantage.

Beyond its Olympic snub, analysts say Russia may have extra motivation to target France, one of Ukraine's more vocal allies. French officials have complained of being in the crosshairs of a stepped-up Russian disinformation campaign since last year.

"We've been under, I would say under attack," Christophe Lemoine, acting French Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman, said of Russian disinformation campaigns. "There has been an increase since last year, and we know that, with the Olympics approaching, it's something that is going to be speeding up," Mr. Lemoine told Politico in June.

Viginum, the French government cyber-security watchdog, has published multiple reports singling out Russian efforts to sow divisions in France and elsewhere since late 2023.

### The 'Matrioshka' strategy

"This modus operandi, known in open sources as 'Matrioshka' [Russian for nesting dolls], has been active since at least September 2023. It relies on the publication of false content [reports, graffiti, memes, etc.], which is then subject to coordinated dissemination in the response space of publications of X accounts of media, personalities and fact-checking cells from more than 60 countries," Viginum said in one of its reports.

The faux-Cruise film *Olympics Has Fallen* was made to look like a Netflix production, including corporate branding and logo. It was promoted by multiple video clips on social-media platforms, including Telegram accounts that normally promote pro-Kremlin narratives, the MTAC said in its June report.

"Users were encouraged to scan a QR code that directed them to a Telegram channel of the same name" to watch *Olympics Has Fallen*, a play on the title of the U.S. action thriller *Olympus Has Fallen*, released more than a decade ago.

For all its sophistication, the disinformation flick was a flop, Mr. Watts says.

"As much as they tried to get different individuals, mostly through Telegram channels, to watch it, it never took off for a couple of reasons. One of the ways they tried to host it was as a Netflix documentary, and the Netflix logo resulted in it being easily taken down if it was posted onto YouTube or any of the social-media channels because it vio-

lates trademark. So, from that perspective, they made some mistakes," Mr. Watts said.

"But in terms of employing generative AI, it was really the first time we'd seen an actor try and do that full-scale, you know, across an entire piece of content," he said.

Other fake-news efforts targeted not the IOC but France, with fear as the goal, Mr. Watts' latest report says.

A short video, packaged to look like Brussels-based Euro News, falsely claimed that Parisians, spooked by the threat of terrorism linked to the Games, were scrambling to buy property insurance, Mr. Watts' report notes.

Another bogus clip, this one falsely attributed to French broadcaster France24, claimed that nearly one-quarter of all purchased Olympic tickets had been returned due to fears of terrorism.

A blunter attempt to scare spectators away contained a false CIA warning to Americans about traveling to Paris, citing a fake warning about the "high risk" of an attack, CBS News reported on June 19. CBS said it had originated on "Russian channels before making its way to X and Facebook."

The video is "a fabrication, has no connection to CIA, and does not represent CIA's view," a CIA spokesperson told CBS News.

### Countdown to Games signals switch to bots

With the countdown to the Paris Olympics well underway, the MTAC predicted "a tactical shift toward online bots and automated social media accounts as Kremlin-affiliated actors seek to disseminate their messaging more effectively."

Intelligence officials from three countries recently flagged a Russian influence campaign that used artificial intelligence to create nearly 1,000 fake – or bot – accounts on social-media platform X.

The U.S. Justice Department said on July 9 that Russia's state-run RT News network developed the bot farm, which the FSB operated to "sow discord" in the United States and elsewhere.

While such efforts may slow the spread of fake news, ending it is unlikely. Public awareness, however, can blunt it, Mr. Watts says.

"That's why we issued the public report last month," he said. "It was just to make people aware that, if you are seeing and hearing things related to these Russian actors, be aware that it could be disinformation just designed to scare you."

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by signatories to confirm adherence to the Helsinki Accords and to make further commitments to the principles embodied in them.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which was born of the Helsinki Accords, has 56 participating states, including Ukraine (since 1992). The U.S. Commission on Security in Europe (the Helsinki Commission) was created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance with the Helsinki Accords and subsequent OSCE commitments, advocating human rights, democracy and international cooperation in the economic, environmental and security spheres.

The editorial underscored: "... The obligations freely undertaken in Helsinki 35 years ago truly transformed our world by promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law by shining an international spotlight on them via what became known as 'the Helsinki process.'"

*Source: "Helsinki Accords' legacy," The Ukrainian Weekly, July 28, 2010.*

Regular review conferences were held

## Russia is waging a 'Christian jihad' in occupied Ukraine, military chaplain says



Erin Osborne, RFE/RL

**Ukrainian Military Chaplain Mark Serhiyev is seen on July 24 after testifying before the U.S. Helsinki Commission.**

by Erin Osborne  
RFE/RL

WASHINGTON – Churches in occupied Ukraine are "loyal to Moscow rather than God," Ukrainian military chaplain Mark Serhiyev said at a July 24 congressional hearing, adding that Russia is waging a "Christian jihad" in the region.

Mr. Serhiyev, an evangelical pastor in Melitopol, a city in southern Ukraine, was invited to speak to the Helsinki Commission about life as a non-Orthodox Christian in occupied Ukraine. Mr. Serhiyev said he came to the United States to meet with over 25 pastors and American Christians to "spread the stories" of Ukrainian believers.

Members of Congress in recent months have met with representatives from various Ukrainian Protestant churches to better understand the impact of the war on religious freedom. Evangelical leaders, in turn, have said that minority faith groups are under threat in Russian-occupied territory in Ukraine as they appeal to American evangelicals, a key constituency in the presidential election this November.

Mr. Serhiyev told the commission that he watched "from the windows of my church" as Russian tanks "rolled into my city" in the early days of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

There are no evangelical churches left in Russia-occupied parts of Ukraine, Mr. Serhiyev told Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.), chairman of the Helsinki Commission, which is a committee that focuses on security, cooperation and human rights in Europe.

Mr. Serhiyev noted that before the war there were 2,000 Baptist churches and 2,500 Pentecostal churches in Ukraine. He didn't specify how many remain but said many Christians are now worshiping underground.

Mr. Serhiyev said his father, also an evangelical pastor, was given 72 hours early in the invasion to record a video in front of his Melitopol church stating that Russian President Vladimir Putin controlled the area. His father refused to make the video, even under threat of having his fingers cut off, and the church's 40-foot cross was "cut up" and "replaced with the Russian flag."

"Russians are trying to make a weapon of religion," Mr. Serhiyev said, adding that his church is now being used to host pro-Russia concerts funded by the Kremlin.

Moscow values religion for controlling the public, Mr. Serhiyev said, noting that Russia in June exchanged a single Orthodox

priest for Ukrainian soldiers in a prisoner swap.

While Mr. Serhiyev told the commission that Ukraine has "100 percent religious freedom," in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine members of all non-Orthodox denominations and religions are targeted.

Under Russian occupation, Mr. Serhiyev said 80 percent of congregants from his 1,500-person church fled. Those who remain meet and pray in small groups of less than five people in what Mr. Serhiyev described as a "new level of faith." One small group leader, Lena, is being held prisoner by Russia for leading a small evangelical group, Mr. Serhiyev recounted.

Pennsylvania State Prof. Catherine Wanner told the commission there is "no place for Protestants in the Russian world." According to Ms. Wanner, who previously worked for the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University, evangelicals in Russia are considered "apostates," "traitors" and "spies."

For Mr. Serhiyev, Russia's behavior parallels his great-grandfather's experience as a jailed pastor in the Soviet Union. He was later killed.

"Nothing has changed," Mr. Serhiyev told RFE/RL. "The questions by the communist KGB were the same when Russians came into my house."

Mr. Serhiyev said that when the Russian forces found out he was a pastor, he was forced to go outside in the middle of the night. Russian soldiers, he said, pointed an assault rifle in his face while his 9-year-old son, Christopher, watched.

Mr. Serhiyev also condemned Patriarch Kirill, who is the head of the Russian Orthodox Church and known for his ties to Putin.

The hearing addressed Kirill, who announced a "Christian jihad," and proclaimed that every Russian soldier who fights against Ukraine would "go directly to heaven because he's fighting for the country" if he died in battle, Mr. Serhiyev told RFE/RL.

From the Russian perspective, Mr. Serhiyev said Kirill wants a "fight for the Slavic Orthodox world," which "is crazy because they are killing kids and destroying our city."

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## Turning...

(Continued from page 6)

internal affairs, while the humanitarian and human rights aspects of the accords were viewed as requiring further negotiations. The West, meanwhile, lauded provisions for freedom of movement, the free flow of ideas, as well as human rights and self-determination.

On the ground, the Helsinki Accords spawned the creation of human rights monitoring groups, including the Moscow Helsinki Monitoring Group and the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, with similar groups formed in Lithuania, Georgia and Armenia.

The Ukrainian Helsinki Group declared that, "The struggle for human rights will not cease until these rights become the everyday standard in society." The Soviets responded to these groups with repression, harassment, intimidation, violence, imprisonment and "internal" exile.

Regular review conferences were held

## Ukraine in shock...

(Continued from page 1)

our union is not about me. It's about you. Your families. Your futures. It's about 'We the People.'

A former prosecutor and attorney general and senator from California, Ms. Harris has voiced support for Ukraine and attended a peace summit that Kyiv held in Switzerland in June to end the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. She was also seen exchanging U.S. and Ukrainian flags with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy when he addressed Congress on Capitol Hill in December 2022.

She announced \$1.5 billion in aid to Kyiv at the event "that includes \$500 million in new funding for energy assistance and redirecting \$324 million in previously announced funds towards emergency needs in Ukraine," a White House statement said.

Ms. Harris "spoke forcefully in support of Ukraine's independence and democracy" at the Swiss peace summit, said former ambassador to Russia and current Stanford University professor Michael McFaul.

He quoted her by saying, "We support Ukraine not out of charity but because the people of Ukraine and their future is in our strategic interests."

A majority among almost 4,700 delegates are expected to nominate Ms. Harris for the Democratic nomination, an Associated Press poll says.

The outgoing president's announcement to end his bid for a second term after 50 combined years in public service came three days after the Republican National Convention concluded in Milwaukee.

Messrs. Zelensky and Trump held a phone conversation on July 19, a day after Mr. Trump accepted the Republican Party's



Courtesy of the 28th Mechanized Brigade

**Soldiers from Ukraine's 28th Mechanized Brigade who are garrisoned in the Odesa region are seen on July 24 in the war zone of eastern Ukraine.**

nomination at his party's convention, which centered on finding peace in a war Russia started without justifiable cause 10 years ago.

"President Zelenskyy of Ukraine and I had a very good phone call earlier today. He congratulated me on a very successful Republican National Convention and becoming the Republican nominee for president of the United States," Mr. Trump said on Truth Social.

It was their first conversation since July 2019. That call prompted Mr. Trump's first impeachment in the House, but he was acquitted in the Republican-controlled Senate.

The Republican nominee has repeatedly said he could find a peaceful solution to the war "in 24 hours," though he has not said

how that would be accomplished.

Mr. Zelenskyy's latest response to that boisterous disclosure came on the eve of his phone conversation with Mr. Trump during an interview with BBC.

"If one person in the world, and this person is Donald Trump, can stop the war in 24 hours, the question is at what price, and who will pay?" Mr. Zelenskyy said. A simple way to achieve peace would be to force Ukraine to make territorial concessions and drop its sanctions on Russia, but "no one in the world" could force Ukraine to do this, he added.

"We agreed with [former] President Trump to discuss at a personal meeting what steps can make peace fair and truly lasting," the Ukrainian president wrote on X.

Ms. Harris, the hopeful Democratic nominee, has condemned Russia's illegal war against Ukraine since the start of her political career.

"Russia's illegal occupation of [the peninsula of] Crimea is a flagrant violation of international norms, as [are] its support of military operations in eastern Ukraine and cyberattacks," she said during her own 2020 presidential election campaign.

She also has criticized the delay, mostly by the U.S. bicameral legislature, of delivering badly needed aid to Ukraine, and she has repeatedly voiced the need for unwavering support for Kyiv. She has yet to announce a running mate for the vice presidential spot.

The political developments in the U.S. come as Russia has suffered the most military personnel losses since the full-scale invasion was launched in February 2022.

"Russian military casualties in May and June this year averaged more than 1,000 a day. Higher than at any other point in the war so far," British Defense Intelligence said. "Poorly trained Russian soldiers are being used as cannon fodder in an attempt to overwhelm strong Ukrainian defenses."

Nearly 600,000 Russian military personnel have been either killed or wounded since February 2022, according to Ukraine's Defense Ministry. Military commander-in-chief Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi told the London-based The Guardian in an interview published on July 24 that Moscow is losing a significant number of troops.

"Russia's successes" come "at a staggering human cost. The Kremlin's casualties were 'three times' higher than Ukraine's, and 'even more' in certain directions," Mr. Syrskyi said. "Their number of killed is much bigger."

Both warring sides do not disclose official battlefield losses.

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## Coming of age...

(Continued from page 5)

want to raise responsible citizens capable of organizing and defending themselves."

Most of the children at the camp cannot remember a Ukraine fully at peace. They were toddlers when Russia seized Crimea and fomented war in the Donbas region in 2014, and they were around 10 years old when Russia launched its full-scale invasion in 2022.

"Rocket," 13, whose real name is Heorhiy, was attending the camp for the third time. He said he received his nickname - all campers use them, like Kholodniy Yar partisans had in the past - when friends threw him into a lake in 2021 and he "flew high in the air like a rocket."

That summer, he met Pavlo Nakonechniy, an activist and historian who initiated the camp in 2020 and died fighting against the Russian invasion in June 2022 at the age of 25. He left the organization in the hands of close friends, young people mostly from nearby Cherkasy, a sleepy and until recently largely Russian-speaking city on the Dnipro River in central Ukraine.

"I found my place here," Heorhiy said during a daylong hike in the forest and surrounding hills. His parents recently divorced, and he and his mother moved to a village in another region to live with his stepfather.

He considers himself a nationalist: "It means being faithful to the nation and following its ideas," he said.

Maryan, who at 23 was the oldest person at the camp, said that while the word "nationalism" might have carried negative connotations for some in Ukraine in the past, it now poses no barrier for parents sending their children there, even if they themselves steer clear of politics and ideology.

Ukraine's nationalist tradition has been a divisive issue inside and outside the country, with some voicing criticism of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its military arm, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which fought alongside and against Nazi Germany at different times during World War II and is accused of carrying out murderous campaigns against Poles and Jews.

As the campers climbed a hill where legend has it that 17th-century Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytskiy is buried, Maryan said that his group acknowledges "dark episodes" in the history of Ukrainian nationalism but focuses on its "positive aspects," "modernizes it," and "does not preach aggression but readies for self-defense."

"Above all, we are teaching the children the value of discipline, brotherhood and patriotism," he said.

### Separated by war

For "Oak," an 11-year-old whose real name is also Heorhiy, the 19-mile hike ended with a bloody nose. He carried a military backpack with first-aid and survival kits, a gift from an older friend who is a soldier, like Heorhiy's father and grandfather.

"The nosebleed is not a big deal," he said, as instructors helped him.

Roughly half of the campers have close relatives in the military, and almost all of them have soldiers among broader family or social circles.

"Rocky," 13, whose real name is Solomia, speaks to her father on the front line every four days and texts him daily. She said she was proud of him and came to the camp following his advice.

She enjoyed patriotic rituals, songs and poems that are ever-present at the camp, she said, because to her they are "an act of respect toward our heroes."



After a session of kayaking, campers and instructors jump up and down chanting "Together to the end" during a summer rain.

Nazar, or "Keba," 12, hasn't seen his father, who joined the army shortly after Russia launched the full-scale invasion in February 2022, in over six months. They talk every week, but Nazar, who wore military pants and a piece of paper rolled up like a cigarette in his mouth, said he misses his father a lot.

Unlike most of the children, Nazar did not always follow orders from the camp organizers, who leave little room for disobedience or unpunctuality. When he insisted on filling his water bottle despite a request to hurry up, the whole group had to crouch in a plank position while waiting for him. Organizers call it "collective responsibility."

Separation from parents and fear for their lives can paralyze a child's development, Volodymyr Voloshyn, the head of the Institute of Psychology of Health, which holds rehabilitation sessions for children of military personnel, told RFE/RL.

"They desperately need social interaction and acceptance, but each individual case requires an individual approach," Mr. Voloshyn said.

The organizers of the camp, most of them high school and university students who themselves participated in Call of the Ravine camp in their teens, spent an hour every night discussing problems faced by participants and generally addressing their concerns.

According to Kateryna Doroshenko, one of the instructors, for children used to anxious air raids and solitary online schooling, the camp is "a safe haven."

Maksym, 12, saw the explosion when a Russian missile struck the center of his native city of Vinnytsia in July 2022, killing 20 people. He said his aunt was buried in a mass grave in Mariupol, the Azov Sea port city that Russia occupied after a deadly siege in the spring of 2022.

He said he collected money to pay his way to the camp, calling Kholodniy Yar a place where "I do what I want."

Many Ukrainian children experience loss, dislocation or violence, which results in feelings of isolation, misunderstanding and powerlessness, Inna Knyazyeva, a psychotherapist at the charitable foundation Voices of Children, told RFE/RL.

Ms. Knyazyeva, who also co-organizes therapeutic camps for children, said that anxious parents often become overprotective in wartime, so children may enjoy clear rules and powerful authority as well as physical activities and adventures.

### 'In the trenches'

Children at the camp get all of this in abundance. They wake up around 6 a.m., do morning exercises, and stand in long lines for simple country meals. They are allowed to use their mobile phones for one hour in the evening - something that

said in the wake of the Russian missile strike on Kyiv's Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital. He said that many of his former charges have been killed fighting the invasion.

This summer, some 150 children, aged 10-17, will attend several sessions in Kholodniy Yar, Roman Nadtochiy, 35, the organization's co-founder who is now serving in the army, told RFE/RL. The organizers dream of transforming the place into an all-year educational center.

Several times during the 10-day camp, a so-called "alarm" was conducted at night. On the third night, after campers chose their nicknames, they were woken up at 2 a.m. to swear an oath vowing to always act in a brave and dignified way, just as organizers said Kholodniy Yar's partisans did.

As the children knelt, surrounded by torches and mystical music coming from loudspeakers, Maryan, an actor by training, put a replica of a Cossack sword on their shoulders.

Artem, or "Dragon," 11, said that for him it was "the best part of the camp." He said he wanted to be a soldier like his grandfather Serhiy, who joined the army at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, at the age of 58 and used "Dragon" as his call sign. Serhiy, who was sent home after suffering two heart attacks, supports Artem and his single mother with the money he receives as a disabled person.

"I think he had to go through something similar in the trenches," Artem said of his grandfather.

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## NEWSBRIEFS

(Continued from page 2)

President Joe Biden's announcement that he will not run for reelection. China, which did not attend the Swiss summit, published a separate six-point peace plan with Brazil in the weeks leading up to the gathering that called for a separate international peace conference to be held that would have representation from both Kyiv and Moscow. Mr. Kuleba, who reportedly said Ukraine had "carefully studied" the Chinese plan, also informed Mr. Wang "about the results of the peace summit in Switzerland and explained the logic of further steps in the implementation of the peace formula as a way to a fair end to Russian aggression," the statement said. In an Instagram post ahead of the visit, Mr. Kuleba said: "We must avoid competing peace plans. It is very important that Kyiv and Beijing conduct a direct dialogue and exchange positions." Mr. Wang in turn told Mr. Kuleba that Beijing believes that all conflicts should be resolved "at the negotiating table," the Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry said in a statement. He added that recently both Ukraine and Russia had sent signals that they are willing to negotiate "to varying degrees." "Although the conditions and timing are not yet ripe, we support all efforts conducive to peace and are willing to continue to play a constructive role in cease-

fire and the resumption of peace talks," the statement quoted Mr. Wang as saying. China's invitation to Mr. Kuleba came after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy voiced rare criticism directed at Beijing, saying that China's efforts were undermining the Swiss peace talks by pushing some countries to not attend and others to not sign the final communique. Kyiv has been hesitant to criticize China, with Mr. Zelenskyy often encouraging Beijing to play a role in reaching a peace settlement. China says its ties with Russia are built on the basis of non alliance and do not target any third parties. Despite expressing neutrality toward the war in Ukraine, China has emerged as the Kremlin's leading international supporter by supplying Russia with key components that Moscow needs for its production of weapons and as a vital consumer of oil and gas that has helped boost the Russian economy. Western governments have also accused China of providing crucial support to Russia during the war, with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg saying Beijing's assistance to Moscow has made it a "decisive enabler" of the war. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

### Martial law extension approved

Ukrainian lawmakers on July 23 approved bills to support decrees issued by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to extend martial law and a general military mobiliza-

tion for 90 days starting on August 12. Lawmakers Yaroslav Zheleznyak and Oleksiy Honcharenko said on Telegram that 339 lawmakers voted to extend martial law, while 338 supported the extension of mobilization. Mr. Zelenskyy is expected now to endorse the bills into law. Martial law and the general mobilization were last extended in May, the 11th extension since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

### In snub to Hungary, EU to hold meeting in Brussels

European Union foreign affairs policy chief Josep Borrell says the bloc will hold a strategic meeting next month in Brussels instead of Budapest, the capital of the current holder of the E.U.'s rotating presidency, Hungary. The bloc's move came in response to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's trips to Russia and China this month, which he said were part of a "peace mission" aimed at ending the war in Ukraine. Mr. Orbán's move caused outrage among Ukraine's allies, who saw it as undermining their support for Kyiv. "E.U. member states overwhelmingly criticized Hungary's lack of sincere and loyal cooperation," Mr. Borrell wrote on X. (RFE/RL's Russian Service)

### Appointment of Bulgarian envoy to Kyiv blocked

Bulgarian President Rumen Radev has acknowledged blocking the appointment of a pro-Western former defense minister as Sofia's ambassador to Kyiv, underscoring a long-running division between the head of state and successive governments over support for Ukraine in its battle against invading Russian forces. Mr. Radev's July 23 statement followed reports that the caretaker government of Prime Minister Dimitar Glavchev used a workaround that doesn't require the president's signature to plug a diplomatic gap that had existed since the early months of the 29-month-old full-scale war in Ukraine. Mr. Radev, a 61-year-old retired general and two-term president whose critics accuse him of holding pro-Kremlin positions, alleged that the government circumvented the constitution to appoint Nikolay Nenchev as the envoy to Kyiv. Mr. Glavchev, who was appointed prime minister on a caretaker basis by Mr. Radev in April and also serves as foreign affairs minister, responded that Mr. Nenchev's appointment as temporary ambassador was conducted in accordance with Bulgarian law. Mr. Radev said the previous prime minister, Nikolay Denkov, had been "insistent" on Mr. Nenchev's appointment to the Kyiv post in their final regular cabinet meeting in April. "I firmly refused because the candidate does not have the required professional qualities or expertise for this important post," Mr. Radev said. Mr. Radev has clashed with multiple Bulgarian governments amid two years of inconclusive elections in the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member state over Sofia's provision of military aid to Kyiv. He has referred to supporters of such aid as "warmongers." Mr. Nenchev, who was defense minister in 2014-2017, is a generally pro-Western figure who has publicly argued in favor of military aid for Ukraine. RFE/RL's Bulgarian Service requested comment from the Foreign Affairs Ministry and from the cabinet, but those requests went unmet. Mr. Nenchev did not return RFE/RL's phone calls. Sofia temporarily closed its embassy in Kyiv as a precaution after Russian troops invaded in February 2022, and former Bulgarian Ambassador Kostadin Kodzhabashev's mandate expired before the mission was reopened in September 2022. The Bulgarian ambassadorial post has remained vacant ever since. A former Bulgarian foreign affairs minister who heads a think tank in Sofia that advocates for transatlantic defense and security ties, Solomon Passy,

sparked the public spat when he disclosed the Nenchev appointment on July 22. Vice President Iliana Iotova, a Radev ally, said Mr. Passy's revelation had "presented us all with a fait accompli, because I understand that this appointment must become a reality within days." She said it risked "lowering" Sofia's representation in Kyiv. Tensions between Messrs. Radev and Nenchev reportedly date back to Mr. Radev's days as the commander of the air force, with Mr. Nenchev serving as defense minister. Mr. Radev boycotted this month's NATO summit in Washington, reportedly over his exclusion from talks on a final communique laying out alliance members' positions on the war in Ukraine. (RFE/RL's Nikolay Lavchiev)

### 1 dead after ferry attacked in Russian port

A drone attack on a ferry in southern Russia has killed at least one person and injured several others, a regional official reported, while traffic on a bridge over the Kerch Strait has been temporarily halted and the Crimean port of Sevastopol was also targeted, according to reports by local officials. The governor of Russia's southern Krasnodar region, Veniamin Kondratyev, said on Telegram that Ukrainian drones early on July 23 attacked a passenger ferry and set it on fire in the port of Kavkaz, close to the Kerch Strait that connects the Black Sea with the Sea of Azov and separates Ukraine's Moscow-occupied Crimea region from Russia. "Unfortunately, one person was killed and there are casualties among the crew members and port employees," Mr. Kondratyev wrote. Ukraine, whose energy and civilian infrastructure has been devastated by continuous Russian drone and missile strikes that have caused numerous victims and serious damage, has in recent months started to increasingly target Russian industrial objectives and transport infrastructure. In Crimea, Mikhail Razvozhayev, the Kremlin-installed governor of Sevastopol, separately said the city was attacked by 15 drones and traffic was halted on the Kerch bridge built by Moscow after it occupied the Ukrainian region. Ukraine has not commented and the Russian claims could not be independently confirmed immediately. In Moscow, Russia's Defense Ministry said its air-defense systems shot down 25 Ukrainian drones over several of its regions early on July 23. It said two drones were downed over the Bryansk region and two over the Belgorod region, while 21 drones were destroyed over Crimea and off the Black Sea coast. Meanwhile, Ukraine said Russia overnight struck a critical infrastructure facility in the northeastern Sumy region, without giving details. No casualties were reported. Ukraine's Air Force said in a message on Facebook that its air-defense systems shot down seven out of eight Russian drones that attacked Sumy and also neutralized a Kh-69 guided cruise missile. "As a result of active countermeasures, the enemy's Kh-69 guided air missile did not reach its target," Air Force commander Mykola Oleschuk said. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service and RFE/RL's Russian Service)

### Rosneft refinery damaged in drone attack

A large Russian oil refinery in southern Russia sustained damage after it was set on fire early on July 22, regional officials said, as the Defense Ministry in Moscow said that it repelled a large Ukrainian drone attack targeting several regions. Sergei Boyko, the governor of Russia's southern Krasnodar region, said on Telegram that debris from a drone that had been shot down sparked a fire at the oil refinery in Tuapse, Russia's only oil-processing installation on the shore of the Black Sea, which belongs to the Russian state-owned oil

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(Continued on page 12)

## Ukraine in shock...

(Continued from page 1)

had uncovered enough evidence to charge the young man detained in Dnipro with murdering Ms. Farion.

"There is enough evidence to claim that it was the detainee who shot at the linguist. One hundred and thirty-nine hours of continuous work by a huge team of operatives, investigators, criminal analysts, experts, other police services and employees of the Security Service of Ukraine. Eventually, the suspect was tracked down. We identified him. Having his photo, it was a matter of time: smart video surveillance cameras caught him everywhere," Mr. Klymenko said.

The 18-year-old detainee is a resident of Dnipro, Ukraine. He rented at least three apartments in Lviv to prepare for the attack, according to Mr. Klymenko, who added that investigators believe him to be the only person involved in carrying out the assassination. Mr. Klymenko promised to provide more information later.

As of the first night after the assassination, the police were considering several motives for Ms. Farion's murder, including her public and political activities, as well as personal animosity toward her, Mr. Klymenko said during a briefing with the press.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has engaged the entire police force of Lviv and parts of the Lviv region to continue an investigation. Operatives and investigators of the National Police and the Security Service of Ukraine from Kyiv were also dispatched to Lviv.

The My-Ukraine television channel quoted a resident of the apartment building where Ms. Farion lived on Masaryk Street in Lviv as saying that about two weeks before the attack a stranger began appearing at the entrance to the building. In the morning, that individual sat on a bench in front of the entrance to the building and would leave only in the evening, the resident said.

Mr. Klymenko confirmed that the stranger whose photo was distributed by the press was the main suspect.

Investigators have struggled to view video footage from cameras around the building as Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure have caused disruptions in the power supply to the city.

"The power is cut off on a scheduled basis, so there were problems with determining who was at the entrance, including the operation of the video cameras at the entrance - to confirm or deny this version 100 percent. That is why we are checking all the information, working with witnesses and contacting anyone who can provide additional information to the investigation," Mr. Klymenko said.

Mr. Zelenskyy said that on the morning of July 20 he received new reports about the attack, and noted that all possibilities are being investigated, including one pointing to Russian involvement in the crime.

Investigators said they believe the attacker had been preparing for at least a month and that the perpetrator may have had accomplices who helped plan the attack.

Currently, law enforcement officers are examining video recordings and studying the clothing and behavior of the murder suspect. Investigators said they believe the murder was a contract killing and that the man may have had accomplices. It is not yet known how those possible accomplices may have been involved in the murder.

According to law enforcement, the man who is now a suspect was recorded by cameras on July 11. He came to the neighborhood every day, except Saturday and Sunday, wearing the same clothes.

The suspect also had a small handbag, which, according to law enforcement, could have contained a weapon. However, sometimes, he came to the yard empty-handed. The gun is currently being examined, as a shell casing was found at the scene of the murder.

On the day of the murder, the man was waiting for Ms. Farion at 5:03 p.m. outside of her home. When she came out, he fired one shot at the woman.

Law enforcement sources noted that the man acted professionally and was prepared for different scenarios, though they didn't elaborate on what they might have been. During the assassination attempt, cameras were not working in the area where the linguist lived due to a power outage.

Russian Telegram channels have published a video of the alleged murder of Ms. Farion, as well as a "manifesto of a Ukrainian autonomous revolutionary racist" claiming responsibility for the murder. Ukrainian law enforcement is investigating that video.

The video appeared on Russian social media late on July 24. Ukrainian law enforcement officials said the recording of the alleged moment of the murder is "sewn in" at the end of the long video.

That video, which is less than 10 seconds long, is not clear, as the camera is covered by something most of the time. A shot and a scream, however, are heard on the recording, and the location is visible for a second. Investigative journalists compared the video and the crime scene photo, and determined that two are similar.

The entire video has a watermark with the letters NS/WP on it. Those letters stand for the group National-Socialism/White Power, which is known in Russia as a "neo-Nazi" organization. Since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the organization has claimed responsibility for arson attacks on military enlistment offices in Russia. In May 2021, the Russian Supreme Court recognized it as a "terrorist organization."

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported that among the Russian far right many have expressed confidence that NS/WP is a project of the Russian special services, which aims to involve young people in illegal activities to arrest and neutralize them or control them.

In 2022 and 2023, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) reported on the alleged detention of "dozens of members" of a "neo-Nazi group" allegedly linked to NS/WP, who, according to the intelligence service, planned assassination attempts on Russian propagandists Vladimir Solovyov, Margarita Simonyan and Ksenia Sobchak.

Ms. Farion, who was born on April 29, 1964, in Lviv, was a Ukrainian linguist, educator, scientist, doctor of philology, professor, politician, member of Ukraine's parliament - the Verkhovna Rada - from 2012-2014, former chairman of the Subcommittee on Higher Education of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Science and Education, as well as a political and public figure, publicist and blogger.

Since 2005, she had been a member of the conservative nationalist Svoboda party. In 2006, Ms. Farion was elected to the Lviv Regional Council and in 2012 she was elected to parliament. In both cases, she ran as a member of Svoboda.

While working in the Verkhovna Rada when Viktor Yanukovych and the Party of Regions were in power, she opposed all initiatives restricting the Ukrainian language.

In the 2014 snap elections, Svoboda failed to gain seats in the Verkhovna Rada, so Ms. Farion returned to Lviv and continued her teaching career.

During 2013-2019, Ms. Farion hosted the television project "The Greatness of the Personality" on the Rada parliamentary channel. Its goal was to popularize knowledge about significant figures in Ukrainian history, culture and politics. A total of 160 programs were broadcast.

Ms. Farion was also the founder and

author of the television project "Gene of Ukrainians" (2019-2023) on the Lviv television channel NTA. In addition, she ran two YouTube channels, Iryna Farion and Studio Farion, where she hosted the projects Anti-Anglicism, Political Review and Ukrainian Language Culture Courses.

She gained notoriety for her frequent campaigns promoting the Ukrainian language and discrediting public officials who spoke Russian. Her views were considered radical by some critics, and several of her statements sparked controversy.

In 2018, amid Ukraine's conflict with Russia-backed separatists in the east, she called for a campaign to "punch every Russian-speaking person in the jaw."

In 2023, she was dismissed as a professor at the Department of Ukrainian Language at the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences at Lviv Polytechnic University due to her controversial statements. However, at the end of May, the Lviv Court of Appeal issued a ruling reinstating her to the position.

Ms. Farion was buried in Lviv's Lychakiv Cemetery on July 22. Thousands of people came to pay their last respects, among them relatives, colleagues, friends, fellow party members and supporters from different cities of Ukraine.



With deep sorrow we announce that

### Jaroslava "Slava" Daria Mulyk



79, of Morristown NJ, passed away on June 29th, 2024, at home with her family by her side after a vigilant battle of cancer.

Our beloved Slava Mulyk, the daughter of Wasyl and Anna Natyna, was born on December 27th, 1944, in Vienna, Austria. Her family immigrated from Germany to Caracas, Venezuela, as many Ukrainian families did after the war, before finally making their way to the United States in March of 1958. She graduated from Hunter College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education, major in Spanish and Minor in French. She married Jaroslaw Mulyk in 1966 on a snowy January 30th at Saint George Church in the lower East side. They lived in Astoria for a short period, before settling in New Jersey, first in Whipppany and later in Morristown, NJ, for 50 years, where they raised their 3 children, Ihor, Marta and Oksana "Ciania".

Slava is survived by:

husband - Jaroslaw;  
 son - Ihor with children Jonathon and wife Kristina, Alexander and fiancé Lexi Scala and Gracie;  
 daughter - Marta Mulyk Baxter and her late husband Christopher Baxter;  
 daughter - Oksana (Ciania) with husband Jim Hurley and children Monia and Mark.  
 sister - Luba and husband Walter Kasian with children Stefan and Larissa;  
 brother - Wolodymyr Natyna  
 sister-in-law - Stefanie Gisonna with children Andrew Gisonna and family, Christopher Gisonna and Tania Gisonna.  
 niece - Adrianna Muys and family  
 extended family and friends in USA and Ukraine.

She was predeceased by brother Ihor and sister Bohdanna Natyna

In lieu of flowers donations may be made to: Saint John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church, 60 N. Jefferson Rd., Whippanny, NJ 07981 Memo: Slava Mulyk, OR UNWLA: Ukrainian National Women's League, 203 Second Ave., 5th Fl, New York, NY 10003 Memo: Slava Mulyk- Ukrainian humanitarian aide.

40th Day Liturgy will be held on Wednesday, August 7th, 2024, at 7 PM at St. John's the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church, 60 North Jefferson Road, Whippanny, NJ.

May she rest in peace. Вічна й пам'ять!

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## Ukraine's foreign...

(Continued from page 1)

November that would feature envoys from Moscow.

China, which did not attend the Swiss summit, published a separate six-point peace plan with Brazil in the weeks leading up to the gathering where they called for a separate international peace conference to be held that would have both representation from Kyiv and Moscow.

Mr. Kuleba, who reportedly said Ukraine had "carefully studied" the Chinese plan, also informed Mr. Wang "about the results of the peace summit in Switzerland and explained the logic of further steps in the implementation of the peace formula as a way to a fair end to Russian aggression," the statement said.

In an Instagram post ahead of the visit, Mr. Kuleba said: "We must avoid competing peace plans. It is very important that Kyiv and Beijing conduct a direct dialogue and exchange positions."

Mr. Wang in turn told Mr. Kuleba that Beijing believes that all conflicts should be resolved "at the negotiating table," the Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry said in a statement.

He added that recently both Ukraine and Russia had sent signals that they are willing to negotiate "to varying degrees."

"Although the conditions and timing are not yet ripe, we support all efforts conducive to peace and are willing to continue to play a constructive role in cease-fire and the resumption of peace talks," the statement quoted Mr. Wang as saying.

China's alternative diplomatic track led to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy offering his most vocal criticism yet of Beijing since the war began, where he said that China's efforts were undermining



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine  
Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Dmytro Kuleba is seen in an official portrait taken in 2021.

the Swiss peace talks by pushing some countries to not attend and others to not sign the final communique.

"China, unfortunately ... is working hard today for countries not to come to the peace summit," Mr. Zelenskyy said in Singapore on June 2.

Despite expressing neutrality toward the war in Ukraine, China has emerged as the Kremlin's leading international supporter by supplying Russia with key components that Moscow needs for its production of weapons and as a vital consumer of oil and gas that has helped boost the Russian economy.

Western governments have also accused China of providing crucial support to Russia during the war, with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg saying Beijing's assistance to Moscow has made it a "decisive enabler" of the war.

"Allies have stated clearly that China cannot enable the largest conflict in Europe in recent history without this negatively impacting their interests and reputation," Mr. Stoltenberg said on July 11 at the NATO summit in Washington.

China, meanwhile, says its ties with Russia are built on the basis of non-alliance and do not target any third party.

Mr. Kuleba's trip is also on Moscow's radar, with Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov acknowledging the news on July 22.

"For us, our relations with China are the main thing," he said in comments to reporters. "We intend to continue following the path of developing Russian-Chinese relations in all areas."

In February 2023, Beijing released a 12-point paper calling for a "political settlement" to the war.

The document was dismissed at the time by Western countries and Kyiv, which warned that the Chinese proposal would enable Russia to retain much of the territory.

it had seized in Ukraine.

In the years leading up to Moscow's full-scale invasion, Kyiv tried to build strong economic ties with Beijing as it reoriented its economy away from Russia, and found itself frustrated with some Western policy moves.

Despite Beijing's deepening ties with Moscow since the outbreak of the war, Kyiv has been hesitant to criticize China, with Mr. Zelenskyy often encouraging the country to play a role in reaching a peace settlement.

(With additional reporting by RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service.)

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## NEWSBRIEFS

(Continued from page 10)

giant Rosneft. Mr. Boyko said the fire was eventually contained and that there were no casualties. The extent of the damage was not immediately clear. Ukraine, whose energy infrastructure has been decimated by relentless Russian missile and drone strikes, has increasingly targeted in recent months oil facilities inside Russia that work for the military. Tuapse, one of Russia's oldest refineries, has been targeted by Ukrainian drones in the past, the most recent attack reportedly occurring in May. The refinery has a daily processing capacity of 240,000 barrels and produces fuel oil, vacuum gas oil, and high sulphur diesel. It exports a large part of its production to countries such as Turkey and China. Ukraine has not officially commented on the strike, but a source in the Ukrainian defense sector told AFP that drones linked to the Defense Ministry's Main Intelligence Directorate (HUR) were behind the refinery attack. Meanwhile, the governor of Russia's southern Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said a tractor driver was killed and his wife was wounded in a Ukrainian drone attack. The claim could not be independently verified immediately. Russia's Defense Ministry said earlier that its air defenses on July 22 shot down 47 Ukrainian drones over five regions and off the Black Sea and Sea of Azov coasts. The ministry said most of the drones were downed over the Rostov, Belgorod, Voronezh, Smolensk and Krasnodar regions, while 17 were destroyed over the sea. Separately, Ukraine's air force said that its air defenses shot down 16 Russian drones in the south and east of the country. Regional officials also reported that 10 people were wounded by Russian shelling in Ukraine's southern region of Kherson and two women sustained injuries as a result of Russian bombardment in the northeastern region of Kharkiv. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service and Current Time)

been banned from participating in the Summer Olympics as punishment for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which Belarus has supported. (RFE/RL)

### Prison for supporting Ukrainian regiment

Prosecutors in the western Belarusian region of Brest said on July 22 that a local woman had been sentenced to six years in prison for sending 4,400 rubles (\$1,344) to a regiment of Belarusian soldiers fighting on the side of Ukraine. The Vyasnaya human rights center identified the woman as Natallya Levaya, a 38-year-old resident of Brest. The Brest regional court on July 17 convicted Ms. Levaya of financing extremist activities for sending the funds to the Kastus Kalinouski Regiment and attempting to join an armed group in a foreign country. Ms. Levaya was also ordered to pay a \$40,000 ruble (\$12,218) fine. (RFE/RL's Current Time)

### Terrorist acts prevented in Ukraine, EU countries

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said on July 25 that its officers, along with the National Police, had prevented a series of terrorist attacks in the country and in European Union member states Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. According to an SBU statement, the suspected organizer of the planned arson attacks on civic buildings and an associate were detained in the western Prykarpattia region. The two suspects allegedly coordinated, under the supervision of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), the activities of 19 members of a terrorist group in several Ukrainian regions. The two men were informed that they are suspected of high treason and forgery. Russia has not commented on the report. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

### Another \$2B in accounting errors for Ukraine aid

The Pentagon has identified an additional \$2 billion in errors in its calculations for missiles, ammunition and other equipment sent to Ukraine, according to a U.S. government report released on July 25. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) report highlighted that the U.S. Department of Defense has encountered difficulties in accurately valuing defense articles sent to Ukraine due to ambiguous accounting definitions. In 2023, the Pentagon disclosed that it had mistakenly used "replacement value" instead of "depreciated value" to calculate the billions of dollars in equipment sent to Ukraine. The correction initially revealed a \$6.2 billion error, and the Pentagon has now found a further \$2 billion in overstatements. Consequently, an additional \$2 billion worth of arms can be sent to Ukraine to align with the aid approved by the Biden administration. (RFE/RL via Reuters)

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## Ukraine at the 2024 Summer Olympics: Preview

by Ihor Stelmach

### Three Ukrainian Olympians go for gold

The effects of the ongoing war in Ukraine are endless and felt everywhere in the country. However, Ukraine's elite athletes are relentless about competing in this summer's Paris Games. This will be the nation's first Olympics since Russia's invasion in February 2022. Below is a look at three Ukrainian Olympians and how, amid much distress and uncertainty, they maintained their training and determination to compete in the Olympics.

#### Oleg Verniaiev, gymnast

Oleg Verniaiev was sleeping in his apartment at the Olympic training center in early February when explosions roused him out of bed at 5 a.m. Two Russian rockets had eluded interception by Kyiv's air-defense system and a high-rise building was hit, killing four civilians. If this had been the spring of 2022, Verniaiev probably would not have trained on such a day. More than two years later, he has gotten used to living in a war zone and training for the Olympics under threatening conditions. To maintain elite level athletic status, workouts are mandatory. Two hours after the attack, Verniaiev was at the Olympic gymnasium, starting his first daily training session.

Striving for a gold medal requires twice-daily training for 3-4 hours, six days a week, along with the rest of the Ukrainian national artistic gymnastics team. The 30-year-old smoothly glides through the air and his toughened hands grasp the horizontal bar tightly as he flips his short, thin body through the air five times before landing on his feet in the pit below.

His sport is a discipline where athletes perform brief routines on specific appara-

tuses. On the men's side, these include the floor exercise, pommel horse, vault, rings, parallel bars and horizontal bar. Verniaiev's specialty is the parallel bars, and, as one of Ukraine's top artistic gymnasts, expectations for him are high. His workouts consist of strength training, cardio and gymnastic technique.

The Paris Games will be his third Olympics, having represented Ukraine in London (2012) and in Rio de Janeiro (2016), where he won a gold medal in the parallel bars and a silver medal in the individual all-around event. In 2020, he was given a four-year ban when a doping test revealed meldonium, a heart medication sometimes used by athletes to improve their performance or recovery rate (Verniaiev said that the meldonium was placed in his food without his knowledge and he did not purposely consume the drug).

During his ban, Russia invaded Ukraine and Verniaiev dedicated his time to helping his homeland. He delivered aid to the city of Kharkiv where he has many friends, including one of his best friends. He did some fundraising and collected supplies for Ukrainian soldiers on the frontlines in the Donbas region, which has been under siege by Russian forces for 10 years. He even did some volunteer work in his hometown of Donetsk, which has been occupied by Russia for the last decade.

Verniaiev ultimately had his ban cut in half by the Court of Arbitration for Sport following an appeal in March 2023. Eligible to compete in the 2024 Summer Games, he stopped most of his volunteer work to represent Ukraine on the international sporting stage. When he returned to training, his



Ihor Trunov and Oleh Kukharyk won gold in the men's K-2 200-meter canoe sprint race at the 2023 European Games in Krakow-Malopolska, Poland, held on June 21-22 on the Kryspinow Waterway.

weight was up and his coordination was off, which could have led to injury. He lost 33 pounds to regain his form and competed in his first post-ban event in Turkey last September. Four silver medals in Challenge and World Cup competitions plus another silver at the European Championships since then have shown that Verniaiev is ready for Paris. His medals were won in parallel bars, pommel horse and all-around. He captured a gold medal in the parallel bars at the Mersin Challenge Cup in Turkey upon his reinstatement.

These days, Verniaiev wants to remind the world of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has dropped out of news headlines. He believes competing internationally allows him to publicize his homeland's plight in hopes of not only garnering attention, but also some support and assistance for Ukraine. Competing at events reminds

people that Ukraine and its people still exist and are bravely fighting for their survival.

#### Zhan Beleniuk, Greco-Roman wrestler

Zhan Beleniuk spends some of his time serving in Ukraine's legislature as the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Youth and Sports, where he has helped enact legislation to increase sports participation among Ukraine's youth since 2019. The rest of his days are spent training to represent his country at the Olympics as a Greco-Roman wrestler.

Beleniuk has competed in two Olympic Games – Rio in 2016 where he won a silver medal in the 85-kilogram category, and in Tokyo 2021, where he won gold in the 87-kilogram category. A fellow Olympian in

(Continued on page 14)

### 140 Ukrainian athletes to compete in Paris Olympics

Ukraine's 140 athletes will compete at the 2024 Summer Olympic Games in Paris from July 26 to August 11. Ukraine is sending 68 women and 72 men in its eighth consecutive appearance at the Summer Olympics in the post-Soviet era and first since the Russian invasion in February 2022. In 2021 at the Tokyo Games, Ukraine was represented by 155 athletes where they placed 44th overall, winning a total of 19 medals (one gold, six silver and 12 bronze medals). In 2016 at the Rio de Janeiro Games, Ukraine sent 203 athletes and captured 11 medals (two gold, five silver and four bronze), good for 31st place. Ukraine's Olympians will compete in 22 out of 32 sports in Paris. Ukraine will not com-

pete in basketball, equestrian, field hockey, golf, rugby 7s, sailing, skateboarding, surfing, taekwondo and triathlon.

Ukraine will field a presence in athletics (25 athletes), football (18, plus reserves), gymnastics (12), canoeing, diving and wrestling (9 each), rowing, fencing and shooting (six each), and swimming and judo (five each). Historically, Ukrainian Olympians have shown strong results in gymnastics, boxing, wrestling, canoeing and athletics.

Ukraine has many returning medalists who are prospective repeat medalists in Paris. Zhan Beleniuk (Greco-Roman wrestling), Olha Kharlan (fencing), Mykhailo Romanchuk (swimming), Liudmyla Luzan

(canoeing), Daria Bilodid (judo), Oleg Verniaiev (gymnastics), Elina Svitolina (tennis) and Yaroslava Mahuchikh (high jump) are eight Ukrainian Olympians who have experienced sport's biggest stage and climbed the medal podium after placing in the top three of their specialized sporting event. All eight can easily repeat as medal winners in 2024.

With the country at war for well over two years, Ukraine's participation in these Olympics takes on particular significance. Some 479 Ukrainian athletes have been killed while serving in the military or civilian life, while about 3,000 athletes have served in the country's armed forces. Training has been a monumental challenge with sports infrastructure being damaged or destroyed and many athletes forced to find safe training facilities abroad. There is, of course, the added constant fear for one's home, family and friends with daily bombardments of Ukrainian cities and towns by the Russians. Many Ukrainian athletes have put their sporting careers on hold to serve in the army. For those competing, the war is both a stressor and additional motivation. For them, simply being in Paris is an achievement and a victory.

Fewer Olympic athletes, fewer Olympic-level training facilities and less-than-ideal life circumstances translate into the potential of fewer Olympic medals for Ukraine at the 2024 Summer Games. However, there is more inspiration, fortitude and a brighter global spotlight may mean several gold medals and a total medal haul approaching Tokyo's 19 as a resilient Team Ukraine

shines in France's capital city where they hope to make their soldiers battling on the frontlines and Ukrainians everywhere beam with pride.

#### Mahuchikh wants to share her message with the world

Ukrainian high-jumper Yaroslava Mahuchikh spent the initial stages of the Russian invasion in her hometown of Dnipro, Ukraine, delivering humanitarian aid. Later she decided she could better help her country in the sporting arena. Since then, she has enjoyed many victories in high jumping, including gold medal wins at the World and European championships. Whenever the 22-year-old competes, her message remains the same: her success in athletics is also a bigger victory for Ukraine. "We all are fighting for our people, for our soldiers," she says. "We want to show every person in the world that we will continue fighting, that the war is not finished."

Mahuchikh copes with the extra pressure and expectation by subscribing to her coach Tetyana Stepanova's psychology of always competing in the moment. The coach constantly reminds her that it is just her and the bar. She admits that listening to music, reading books and braiding her hair before competitions helps her stay focused.

The first six months of 2024 was a long road leading to Paris where Mahuchikh is determined to upgrade from the bronze medal she won in Tokyo. She believes that, since the Olympics is the ultimate sporting



Facebook.com/OlympicUA

Ukraine's wrestling team and coaching staff prepare to depart Kyiv for the Paris Olympic Games that begin on July 26.

(Continued on page 14)

# Rally in Paris honors fallen Ukrainian athletes

by Ihor N. Stelmach

A rally was held in Paris on July 13 to honor Ukrainian athletes killed by Russian forces during the war in Ukraine. Several hundred people marched from the Pantheon to the Fontaine Saint-Michel, many of them wearing t-shirts with the names of Ukrainian athletes who lost their lives in the war. Participants included Ukrainians, French citizens and people from various backgrounds, united in grief and determined to honor the athletes' memories.

Olympic weightlifter Oleksandr Pielieshenko, who competed at Rio 2016 and 2018, and Youth Olympics silver medalist boxer Maksym Halinichev were two of those honored. Over 479 Ukrainian athletes have been killed as a result of the conflict since February 2022. Some of them would have been representing Ukraine at the Olympics.

The rally was organized by the Union of Ukrainians in France with support from the Ukrainian World Congress, and its goal was to honor these fallen sports heroes while underlining the ongoing impact of the war on Ukraine's athletic community.

Paris is hosting the Summer Olympic Games from July 26 to August 11.

## Some Russian athletes in Paris not truly 'neutral'

Thirty-three out of 59 Russian and Belarusian athletes cleared to compete at the 2024 Paris Olympics were in violation of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) guidelines on participation at the Games. A 223-page report from The Hague-based Global Rights Compliance determined that more than half of these "neutral"



Hundreds of participants honor fallen Ukrainian athletes during a rally in Paris hosted by the Association of Ukrainians in France on July 13.

athletes had links to military or national security agencies or have demonstrated support for Russia's war on Ukraine.

The human rights group's president and lawyer, Wayne Jordash, who is also a member of an advisory panel set up to assist Ukrainian law enforcement bodies investigate war crimes, said the IOC acknowledged his letter expressing concerns in June, but chose not to discuss the matter in detail and has ignored two follow-up letters.

Jordash said the IOC "is effectively sportswashing its position" by not fully adhering to its rules that govern which Russian and Belarusian athletes can compete in Paris. Jordash called the IOC's position egregious because the non-governmental sports organization issued and promoted its own set of guidelines.

The report listed 12 competitors who

have ties to military and security forces through bodies like the Central Sports Club of the Army (CSKA), an institution affiliated with the Russian Defense Ministry. Another 13 athletes were identified as having "liked" or retweeted pro-war or anti-Ukrainian posts on social media.

The IOC originally listed 59 Russian and Belarusian athletes invited to compete in Paris as neutrals with 28 declining invitations. Of the 31 who are scheduled to compete, 10 out of 15 Russians and seven out of 16 Belarusians have allegedly indicated support for the war in Ukraine in violation of the IOC's neutrality rules. The IOC said its review panel made its decision with the help of new information that included official lists of athletes affiliated with sports clubs of military and security forces published on official websites in Russia and Belarus.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the IOC condemned the aggression and banned Russia and Belarus from hosting international sporting events or participating in them. The IOC also barred their national flags, anthems and national colors from events and refused to accredit government officials.

The IOC later backtracked, setting specific conditions for Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete as "neutrals" provided they were not involved in "actively supporting the war in Ukraine." Any athletes contracted to Russian or Belarusian military or national security agencies were deemed ineligible.

Global Rights Compliance sent its report to all 15 major sponsors of the Olympics, asking them to pressure the IOC or reconsider their sponsorship of the Games. Jordash claimed that sponsors are linked to IOC activities and international law and the United Nations' guiding principles on human rights and business says leverage must be exerted to improve the situation.

## Ukraine releases Olympic stamp

Ukraine launched a new postage stamp to support its Olympic athletes as it sent its smallest-ever national team to the Paris Games. A set of six postage stamps featuring sports in which Ukraine has previously won medals and awards includes fencing, judo, tennis, canoeing, weightlifting and shooting.

(Based on reporting by ESPN, CP 24, Inside the Games, The Japan Times, Daily Mail.com, The Kyiv Independent and The Straits Times.)

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## Three Ukrainian...

(Continued from page 13)

Rio, weightlifter Oleksandr Pielieshenko lost his life defending Ukraine in May. Beleniuk has lost several friends in the war with Russia, and he has not yet gotten used to the shock of it all. He thought of enlisting in the Ukrainian military at the outset of the war like many other Ukrainian athletes, but, as a member of parliament and an Olympian, he prioritized his work and decided to compete one last time in hopes of winning a second gold medal for his nation.

Beleniuk trains in two hour sessions, twice daily, six days per week at the Ukrainian Olympic base in Kyiv. His warmup consists of sprints, bear crawls, crab walks and bridges. He has the short, muscular build of a typical Greco-Roman wrestler, yet he stands out because he is black (Beleniuk's deceased father was from Rwanda, while his mother is a Ukrainian from Kyiv). Following warmups he engages in technical training with partner Ruslan Abdiiev, restrained at first, but he picks up the pace later.

During one such training session in June, air-raid sirens suddenly began to blare, but the wrestlers continued their training. Normally the team stays put, not retreating to a basement during an alarm, although they usually lose some focus. Thoughts move from wrestling moves to worrying about the safety of their families, a notable shift in priorities.

Following some training on the mat, there is a lengthy break before moving on to the next part of the session. Wrestlers train for strength and mobility - Beleniuk bench-presses 265 pounds and squats 287 pounds. He then does biceps curls and bent-over rows with a 44-pound bar. Then it's five sets of 20 swings with a 53-pound kettle ball.

Getting ready for this summer's Olympics, Beleniuk was learning English so

he can better communicate with the international community as an athlete and politician. He is working at countering Vladimir Putin's claim that Ukraine is a racist country run by Nazis. He presents Ukraine as a tolerant nation absent any Nazism or racism, dismissing Russia's propaganda and disinformation about Ukraine.

Proud to be a member of Ukraine's Parliament, Beleniuk put his legislative duties on hold to fully concentrate on his athletic career. He understands that the Olympics are the biggest competition in the world for sports and Olympic athletes feel pressure before competing. For Beleniuk, the Games are special because he is not only an athlete, but also a politician. It is important for him to win a medal, preferably a gold, for his devastated, war-ravaged nation.

### Oleh Kukharyk, sprint canoe

It is a 25-minute drive from Ukraine's Olympic center in Kyiv to the Stuhna River where Ukrainian canoeers train. They used to train in Dnipro in eastern Ukraine on the Dnipro River, but war with Russia has made that impossible. The Stuhna River is in a much safer area, although still susceptible to missile and drone attacks. Oleh Kukharyk and teammate Igor Trunov are in their two-person sprint canoe ready for some practice, hoping the Russian missiles are shot down.

Kukharyk has been preparing himself for the Olympics since he was 12 years old and this summer he will finally compete in the Games. His slender, toned arms are covered with tattoos along with another collection of ink on his left leg.

Hearing their coach's whistle, Kukharyk and his three teammates begin paddling energetically, floating in unison in a sprint across the river. He is paired with Trunov, his partner in the two-man event in Paris, in one canoe, while Dmytro Danylenko and Ivan Semykin are racing individually. After some 30 seconds, they have gone about

547 yards, the distance they will cover in the Olympics. At this distance, they hit a speed of 14 miles per hour.

Before heading to the river, the sprint canoe team had a training session in a small gym near the Stuhna River. The four-some's warmup drill included a rowing machine, bench presses and seal rows. They have 10 such sessions a week, two to three hours long, with sets of weighted pull-ups, bench presses and deadlifts. The most important part of the strength training targets the back, helping them build muscular endurance to row in the water. They jog 2.5 miles around the Olympic base each morning to keep up their cardio.

Ukraine has several teams in its Canoe Federation, but Kukharyk and his mates are the only four-person men's team in the Olympics. They named themselves the "Energy Circle," treat each other as brothers and emotionally support each other during the war. The hope is to win a medal for

Ukraine, ensuring the world does not forget about their country's fight for freedom (Ukraine's sprint canoe team's last medal was a bronze in men's C-2 1,000-meters in Rio 2016). For Kukharyk, the war hits closer to home as his father is a soldier on the Donetsk frontlines. Son tries to speak with father daily, sometimes getting a quick message that dad is still alive. Oleh's primary worry is that his father doesn't have the body armor he needs at the front.

Kukharyk has raised funds for his father's unit to purchase necessary supplies through Instagram and anticipates raising awareness about the ongoing war and gathering support for Ukraine in Paris. He believes that winning a medal at the 2024 Summer Olympics would vividly demonstrate Ukraine's resilience.

(Based on reporting by Men's Health.)

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## 140 Ukrainian...

(Continued from page 13)

competition, a gold medal will show the world Ukraine continues to fight and will never give up.

In Paris she will earn favorite status based on her setting a new world record on July 7 at the Diamond League meet in Paris where she cleared 2.10 meters, and her career achievements are more impressive considering that she began high jumping later in life at age 13. She started out using a scissor kick, and after lots of failed attempts she was taught the Fosbury Flop (jumping backward and arching the body over the bar).

Outside of sports, Mahuchikh has posed for Elle and Vogue Ukraine and appeared on the runway at New York fashion week.

She sees nothing wrong with combining her sports career with occasional forays into fashion and modeling.

Mahuchikh is active on social media, posting photos of herself training, doing Tik Tok videos or a feed of her cat, Lara, which she rescued from a shelter four years ago. Since she left Ukraine for Germany and later Portugal for training, she has not seen Lara for quite some time.

However, her social media activity includes showing the grim reality of life in today's Ukraine including the fallout from one rocket attack that destroyed the sports college in Dnipro where she began her career and used to train.

"My message is that we are fighting for peace in the world. We need your help, because if we lose, the whole world loses, not only Ukraine," Mahuchikh said.

(Based on reporting by the Guardian.)

# OUT & ABOUT

July 29-31 Jewett, NY	Gerdany (bead-stringing) workshop, with instruction by Oriana Makar, Grazhda Music and Art Center of Greene County, <a href="https://grazhdamusicandart.org">https://grazhdamusicandart.org</a>	August 5-8 Jewett, NY	Embroidery workshop, with instruction by Lubow Wolynetz, Grazhda Music and Art Center of Greene County, <a href="https://grazhdamusicandart.org">https://grazhdamusicandart.org</a>
July 29-August 9 Jewett, NY	Children's singing course of Ukrainian folk songs, with instruction by Anna Bachynsky and Melanie Serbay, Grazhda Music and Art Center of Greene County, <a href="https://grazhdamusicandart.org">https://grazhdamusicandart.org</a>	August 7 Cambridge, MA	Presentation by Serhii Plokhi, "Twilight of an Empire: The Russo-Ukrainian War in the Eyes of a Historian," Harvard University, <a href="http://www.huri.harvard.edu">www.huri.harvard.edu</a>
July 31 Cambridge, MA	Presentation by George Grabowicz and Bohdan Tokarskyi, Harvard University, <a href="http://huri.harvard.edu">https://huri.harvard.edu</a>	August 10 Jewett, NY	Children's recital, students of a two-week Ukrainian folk singing course, Grazhda Music and Art Center of Greene County, <a href="https://grazhdamusicandart.org">https://grazhdamusicandart.org</a>
August 1 Philadelphia	Fundraiser, Iskra Surgeries for Children in Ukraine, featuring live music, silent auction, Iskra Global, Ukrainian American Citizens' Association, <a href="https://iskraglobal.org">https://iskraglobal.org</a>	August 12 Bolton Landing, NY	Film screening, "Veselka: The Rainbow on the Corner at the Center of the World," The Sembrich, <a href="http://www.thesembrich.org/festival/2024/vreselka">www.thesembrich.org/festival/2024/vreselka</a>
August 1 Chicago	Ukrainian flag-raising ceremony, Ukrainian Congress Committee of America - Illinois Division, Richard J. Daley Center, <a href="http://www.uccaillinois.org">www.uccaillinois.org</a>	August 12-16 Somerset, NJ	Passport Through Ukraine, summer camp, Ukrainian History and Education Center, <a href="https://ukrhec.org">https://ukrhec.org</a>
August 1-2 Jewett, NY	Pysanka workshop, with instruction by Sofika Zielyk, Grazhda Music and Art Center of Greene County, <a href="https://grazhdamusicandart.org">https://grazhdamusicandart.org</a>	August 15-18 Rochester, NY	St. Josaphat Ukrainian Festival, St. Josaphat Ukrainian Catholic Church, <a href="https://rochesterukrainianfestival.com">https://rochesterukrainianfestival.com</a>
August 2-4 McAdoo, PA	Parish picnic, St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church, 570-929-7058 or <a href="mailto:stmarysmcadoo@gmail.com">stmarysmcadoo@gmail.com</a>	August 17 Jewett, NY	Concert with violinist Filip Podady and pianist Pavlo Gintov, Grazhda Music and Art Center of Greene County, <a href="https://grazhdamusicandart.org">https://grazhdamusicandart.org</a>
August 3 Jewett, NY	Piano recital with Serhiy Salov, featuring works by Bach, Mozart, Chopin and Kapustin, Grazhda Music and Art Center of Greene County, <a href="https://grazhdamusicandart.org">https://grazhdamusicandart.org</a>	August 17-18 Lehighton, PA	Ukrainian Festival, Ukrainian Homestead, <a href="http://www.ukrhomestead.com">www.ukrhomestead.com</a> or 610-377-4621
August 3-4 Williamsburg, NY	Film screening, "Veselka: The Rainbow on the Corner at the Center of the World," Nitehawk Cinema (Williamsburg Brooklyn theater), <a href="https://nitehawkcinema.com/williamsburg">https://nitehawkcinema.com/williamsburg</a>	August 23 Binghamton, NY	Ukrainian Independence Day celebration and flag-raising ceremony, Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (Binghamton, N.Y., Branch), Binghamton City Hall, <a href="mailto:LMZobniw@aol.com">LMZobniw@aol.com</a> or 607-772-7001
August 3-4 Glen Spey, NY	Ukrainian Festival, St. Volodymyr Ukrainian Catholic Church, 917-664-0755 or <a href="mailto:karnapol@live.com">karnapol@live.com</a>	August 24 Toronto	Ukrainian Independence Day Celebration, Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Centennial Park, <a href="http://www.ucctoronto.ca">www.ucctoronto.ca</a>
August 5 Cambridge, MA	Presentation by George Grabowicz and Bohdan Tokarskyi, "Keeping the Fires Burning: Studying Ukrainian Literature Through Censorship, Independence and War," Harvard University, <a href="http://huri.harvard.edu">www.huri.harvard.edu</a>	Entries in "Out and About" are listed free of charge. Priority is given to events advertised in The Ukrainian Weekly. However, we also welcome submissions from all our readers. Items will be published at the discretion of the editors and as space allows. Please send e-mail to <a href="mailto:mdubas@ukrweekly.com">mdubas@ukrweekly.com</a> .	



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