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Russian air strikes kill at least 7 in Ukraine, as Poltava disaster scrutinized



Courtesy of Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadoviy via Telegram

Yaroslav Bazylevych and his family are pictured on the campus of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine.

RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service

A Russian drone and missile attack killed seven people in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, one day after a strike on a military facility killed more than 50 people in the eastern city of Poltava in one of the worst air strikes of the war, leaving residents in shock over the loss of life and scale of destruction.

The missile and drone attacks on Lviv, Kyiv and other cities began shortly after midnight and continued into the predawn hours on September 4. Among the seven dead were four members of one family in Lviv. A man identified by Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadoviy as Yaroslav Bazylevych was left as the only survivor in his family after his wife

and three daughters were killed.

A photo shared on social media showed all five posing together with one of the daughters holding a bouquet of sunflowers.

"His wife Yevhenia and their three daughters – Yaryna, 21, Daryna, 18, and Emilia, 7 – were killed in their own home," Mr. Sadoviy said. "I don't know what words to say to support Yaroslav – the father. Today we are all with you."

According to authorities and eyewitnesses, there were two heavy strikes that destroyed or damaged residential buildings, cultural monuments and educational institutions in Lviv.

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(Continued on page 9)

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(Continued on page 9)

Ukrainian civilian areas endure largest Russian barrage of aerial attacks since full-scale invasion

Kyiv forces maintain and expand presence in Russia's Kursk region as war dynamic changes



Courtesy of the 22nd Mechanized Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine

A drone operator of the 22nd Mechanized Brigade rejoices after conducting a successful strike on a Russian target in Ukraine.

by Mark Raczkiewycz

CHICAGO – Five Ukrainian regional capitals suffered a barrage of Russian attacks over the week from long-range Russian projectiles and Iranian-provided suicide drones that devastated population centers.

Hundreds were killed over the past seven days with the worst casualties being recorded in the central regional capital of Poltava where a military educational institute and nearby hospital were struck by two ballistic missiles.

More than 50 people were killed and over 200 injured in the aerial strike on September 3, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

First lady Olena Zelenska called the

attack a "stunning tragedy for all of Ukraine," she wrote on her Telegram channel.

"Today, Russia struck ... Poltava in their deadliest attack this year, killing at least 41 [people]. We must give Ukraine the equipment they need and permission to strike inside of Russia so that they can stop this horrific bloodshed," the U.S. Helsinki Commission said in a statement.

In the western part of the country, seven civilians were killed and 64 wounded in Lviv on September 4 during a barrage on the city center that is mostly considered a historical heritage site by the United Nations, regional authorities said.

Also suffering damage were Kyiv,

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National Bank proposes changing name of Ukraine's coins from kopiyyka to shah

by Roman Tymotsko

LVIV – The National Bank of Ukraine (NBU) announced a proposed change to the name of the country's coin to remove any connections it had with Soviet or Russian history and revive a name used more than a century ago.

Andriy Pyshniy, head of Ukraine's National Bank, said during a press briefing on September 2 that such a move would restore historical justice,

"Having studied the history of Ukraine's money circulation, we have come to the undeniable conclusion that the name 'kopiyyka' for a change coin is actually a symbol

of Moscow's occupation. Today, the Ukrainian people are reclaiming everything that was unjustly stolen from them and mutilated by Kremlin narratives. It's time to restore justice to the monetary system, to cleanse monetary sovereignty of the slightest affinity for anything related to Moscow. We have our own, specifically Ukrainian, word for small coins – the word 'shah,'" Mr. Pyshniy said.

The NBU initially plans to design and produce coins in denominations of 50 shahs. They will be introduced gradually, replacing old coins that are wearing out, Mr. Pyshniy said. "The kopiyyka and shah coins will be in circulation simultaneously,"

the NBU head said. "Citizens will not need to exchange kopiyykas for shahs."

Replacing kopiyykas with another coin requires changes to Article 32 of the Law on the National Bank of Ukraine. It now states that "the monetary unit of Ukraine is the hryvnia, which is equal to 100 kopiyykas."

According to the NBU, the revival of the name shah will bring Ukrainian coins their own identity. In addition to Ukraine, currently Russia, Belarus and Transdniestria use the kopiyyka.

The name shah is of ancient Ukrainian origin and has been used both on the territory of Ukraine and in Ukrainian monetary counting (from the 16th to the 17th centu-

ries). It is a unique name for a coin unknown in other linguistic cultures. It is widely used in classical Ukrainian literature and is often mentioned in the works of Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka and other Ukrainian writers. During the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-1921, banknotes named shah were introduced into actual money circulation and enshrined in law. The revival of this practice is justified by Ukraine's historical and linguistic tradition, Mr. Pyshniy said.

Ukraine's cash circulation will be cleansed of Russian influence, the National

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NEWS ANALYSIS

Moscow church, facing ban in Ukraine, on defensive across former Soviet space

by Paul Goble
Eurasia Daily Monitor

On August 20, the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, passed a law banning all religious organizations in Ukraine subordinate to religious structures headquartered in countries engaged in aggression against Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada, August 20). Many Ukrainians have demanded this measure be taken since the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) was granted autocephaly in 2019 and especially since Russian President Vladimir Putin began his expanded war against Ukraine in 2022 (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, December 8, 2022, February 13, April 10). The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) styled itself as part of the Moscow Patriarchate until recently. While it is not the only denomination that falls under this category, it is the primary target of Kyiv's actions by virtue of its size, its competition with the autocephalous OCU, and the support it continues to provide for Putin's war. Moscow has denounced this law as a threat to religious freedom in Ukraine, a position that has attracted some support from religious and human rights leaders in the West. The Kremlin has even begun to insist that Kyiv's recent actions are turning the war in Ukraine into a religious war (Window on Eurasia, August 24). Kyiv believes – and the evidence suggests – that what it is doing is an entirely reasonable defense of its national security. Ukraine is likely to press ahead, especially because other former Soviet republics have been moving in a similar direction and because of the follow-on impact of its actions in Russia itself.

The new law, in fact, does not impose an immediate ban but instead gives the Moscow church in Ukraine 10 months to demonstrate that it has completely separated itself from Moscow, not only in name but in fact. Kyiv will only ban the UOC and the other denominations, including the Old Believers, if they have not done so by spring 2025. This will trigger not only property disputes but a variety of reactions

from clergy and laity now part of the UOC. Ukrainian political and religious leaders clearly hope that most of the UOC's laity and at least some of its clergy will join the autocephalous OCU either on an individual or collective basis. Some, however, may go underground, join the Eastern Rite Catholic Churches (referred to occasionally as Uniates) who are Orthodox in practice but subordinate to Rome, or even seek continued recognition by and support from Orthodox churches beyond the borders of Ukraine, including Moscow (T.me/BuninCo, reposted at Echofm.online, August 20; MK.ru, August 29). Consequently, the new law should not be read as a final resolution of religious conflicts within Ukraine but rather as another move on the complicated chessboard of church life there.

The stakes resulting from this looming ban are enormous, not only in Ukraine but elsewhere in the former Soviet space – perhaps especially in the Russian Federation itself. In Ukraine, the Moscow church – although it has been declining in size over the last decade – is still the most numerous in terms of bishoprics and parishes, although not in terms of attendance. OCU churches, in most cases, now attract far more attendees than the Moscow church. The autocephalous OCU is almost certain to become the predominant national church in Ukraine if the Moscow UOC is marginalized by a ban (or even the threat of one), a development that will further strengthen Ukrainian national identity in the face of Russian aggression. The predictions of some Russian commentators that a ban will set off a religious war are thus almost certainly exaggerated, although Moscow propagandists can be counted on to predict this in hopes of mobilizing Western support against Kyiv on this issue (T.me/Agdchan; BusinessOnline, August 21).

The impact of Ukraine's new law does not stop at its borders. Ukraine's actions in the past and present are encouraging governments and religious leaders across the

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Putin puts forth resolute indifference to Kursk debacle

by Pavel K. Baev
Eurasia Daily Monitor

The impact of Ukraine's August 6 offensive operation into Kursk Oblast remains an open strategic question following four weeks of increasingly intense and fluid fighting (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, August 14, 15). Russian President Vladimir Putin's first reaction to this incursion was clearly misinformed by intelligence assessments portraying it as just another tactical raid. It was only on August 24 that he found time for an extensive briefing with the Chief of the General Staff Army Gen. Valery Gerasimov and his first deputy, Col. Gen. Sergey Rudskoy (RBC; Kremlin.ru, August 24). The top brass did not have any good news for the commander-in-chief, but he apparently did not demand a decisive counterattack aimed at the complete expulsion of enemy troops from Russian territory. While some "patriotic" Russian bloggers claim that the Kursk battle signifies the transformation of the "special military

operation" into a real war, Putin prefers to define Russian defensive battles as a counter-terrorist operation (TopWar.ru, August 29). Putin's lack of initiative in countering this incursion demonstrates how he is trying to avoid the perception within Russia that Ukraine is a formidable foe and that Moscow may not be able to win this war.

On the Kremlin's instruction, Russian mainstream media has downplayed the significance of the Ukrainian offensive and sought to present the continuing retreats of Russia's forces and citizens from Kursk villages as a "new normal" (Meduza, August 21). Russian society finds this reassurance comforting but far from convincing, and the hidden angst translates into diminishing support for Putin's war policy, which even the official polling agencies have not been able to quite camouflage (The Moscow Times, August 30). Economic consequences of the unfolding calamity are accumulating slowly, and many Russians are relieved that

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NEWSBRIEFS

Rada appoints new foreign affairs minister

Ukraine's parliament has approved the nomination of Andriy Sybiha as the country's new foreign affairs minister, replacing Dmytro Kuleba as part of a major government reshuffle. "First appointment: Andriy Sybiha as minister for foreign affairs of Ukraine," lawmaker Yaroslav Zheleznyak announced on September 5. He added that 258 of the more than 450 lawmakers in the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, voted in favor of Mr. Sybiha's appointment. Mr. Sybiha, a deputy foreign affairs minister, was nominated by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on September 5 to replace Mr. Kuleba as foreign affairs minister. Lawmakers also approved appointing Oleksiy Kuleba, who was serving as deputy head of presidential office, as deputy prime minister responsible for restoration and regional policies. Mr. Kuleba and several other cabinet members submitted their resignations this week after Mr. Zelenskyy indicated that a cabinet shake-up was imminent. The voting in parliament on the possible dismissals of cabinet members and other senior officials began on September 4. Commenting on the futures of Mr. Kuleba and the rest of the 22-member cabinet, Mr. Zelenskyy said on September 4 that "we need new energy, and these steps relate to strengthening our state in various areas." Mr. Kuleba has been one of the main faces of Kyiv's efforts to gird international support since Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022. He has been widely regarded as an effective messenger of Ukraine's warnings that stopping Russia's aggression is essential for the rest of Europe and the West along with pleas to continue massive military and other supplies by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members to a country defending itself against Russian attack. Parliament speaker Ruslan Stefanchuk informed the public of Mr. Kuleba's resignation on September 4, as well as those a day earlier of two deputy prime ministers and three cabinet ministers as part of what could be the biggest cabinet overhaul since Russia's full-scale invasion began 36 months ago. Mr. Zelenskyy has said more changes to the government are coming in

an effort to strengthen it and deliver the results that the country needs. "That is why there will be a number of personnel changes in the cabinet of ministers and the office of the president," he said on September 3, indicating that the changes would be coming in the fall. Mr. Zelenskyy also said Ukraine needed more interaction between the central government and communities, especially during preparation for the winter season. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, with reporting by Reuters, AFP and AP)

Russia incursion helps prisoner exchanges

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that the aim of a surprise incursion into Russia's southern Kursk region launched last month is to accrue territories and troops for exchange, but he added that, "We don't need their land." "We don't need Russian territory," Mr. Zelenskyy told NBC News through an interpreter in an interview excerpted on September 3. "Our operation is aimed at restoring our territorial integrity. We capture Russian troops to replace them with Ukrainian," he said. "We tell them, you know, we need our military soldiers in exchange for Russian ones. The same attitude is to the territories. We don't need their land." Since its incursion began in the Kursk region in early August, Kyiv claims to have gained control of more than 500 square miles of Russian territory. Early reports hinted that the operation was intended to better position Kyiv in the event of peace talks amid some calls for more intense efforts to end the 36-month-old full-scale war. Ukrainians and analysts have also suggested it is designed to drive the seriousness of the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine home to Russians. It marked the first foreign invasion of Russian territory since World War II. Kyiv and some of its allies have argued recently that Western providers of military aid, weapons and artillery should further lift restrictions on how Ukrainian defense forces can use such supplies, including by allowing strikes deeper inside Russia. Asked if Ukraine will seek to capture more Russian territory, Mr. Zelenskyy replied to

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As war continues, gaps in Ukrainian society widen

by Aleksander Palikot
RFE/RL

KYIV – Iryna was among dozens who gathered near a traffic junction to get a freshly cooked free meal on a recent afternoon. The 70-year-old used to work as a journalist but now, she says, with her modest pension and no help from her family, she comes here regularly.

Most of those lining up for a helping of buckwheat with meat sauce, bread and apples were either elderly, displaced or disabled, Zhanna Tsvir, a volunteer of Sant'Egidio, the religious charity that brought in the food, told RFE/RL.

"These are the unlucky ones," she said.

An estimated 7.3 million Ukrainians face moderate or severe food insecurity, including 1.2 million children and 2 million elderly, according to an analysis by the United Nations. There is a high concentration of food-insecure people in the capital, but most of the affected are near the front lines, where approximately one-quarter of the population faces severe or extreme food deficits, the organization says.

These numbers stand in contrast with Kyiv's bustling city center, with its packed restaurants, posh cars and edgy street fashions. The Ukrainian economy has shown signs of recovery since the deep recession that followed the full-scale invasion in February 2022. After dropping by 30 percent in 2022, real GDP increased by 5.7 percent in 2023 and is expected to reach 3.5 percent this year. After spiking to over 26 percent in 2023, inflation decreased to 4-5 percent annually. Food price inflation dropped from over 37 percent in late 2022 to some 5 percent today.

The impact of war on different sectors of the economy and social groups is uneven, but the wartime impoverishment of large swathes of Ukrainian society is highlighted by data coming from a number of sources, Tymofiy Brik, a sociologist and rector of the

Kyiv School of Economics, told RFE/RL.

"Soon, socioeconomic conflicts may become a political factor for the first time in independent Ukraine," he said.

The number of Ukrainians living in poverty has grown by 1.8 million since 2020, bringing the total to about 9 million, or 29 percent of the population living in the Kyiv-controlled territory, the World Bank said in a report published in May. The increase in poverty was driven mostly by job loss, with more than one-fifth of adults who were employed before the war having lost their jobs, a problem that is especially acute among the internally displaced (IDPs).

"The idea that we are all in the same boat is an illusion propagated by the wartime messaging of unity," sociologist Volodymyr Ishchenko told RFE/RL.

In reality, he says, the war has had drastically differing impacts on various population groups, with its burden falling most heavily on Ukrainians from the south and east of the country.

'Left with nothing'

Lyudmyla Mozhova left her native Lysychansk in the eastern Luhansk region shortly before the city fell to Russian forces in July 2022. The 48-year-old, a former accountant and a mother of four, is now an unpaid volunteer for Sant'Egidio. She lost her house and possessions, and both her parents who remained under occupation died of stress-related health reasons, she told RFE/RL.

"I was uprooted from a life that was good, and I am left with nothing," she said as she registered IDPs seeking food and other products at the charity's Kyiv office on a recent morning.

"After the full-scale invasion, we saw a surge of volunteers to take up charity roles and fill the needs created by the war," Lyudmyla Kharchenko, the Kyiv office head at Sant'Egidio, told RFE/RL. "Even if the war ends tomorrow, the social crisis will



People line up for a free meal from a charity in Kyiv on September 3.

Pavlo Kholodov, RFE/RL



People receive free food at an outdoor "soup kitchen."

Pavlo Kholodov, RFE/RL



A resident carries a food package from the World Food Program in Pokrovsk, Ukraine.

Serhiy Nuzhnenko, RFE/RL



A homeless man sleeps on the street in Kyiv on September 3.

continue for years."

There are 4.6 million people with the status of IDP in Ukraine, and 1.5 million are receiving social payments, according to Iryna Vereshchuk, deputy prime minister and minister for the reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories.

In March, the government scrapped the monthly payments – \$77 for those with children or disabilities and \$51 for others – for some 2.5 million IDPs deemed capable of working. But activists say a lack of support pushes some IDPs to return to their homes, even if they are still near the front lines or going to territories occupied by Russian forces.

Widening gaps

The eastern and southern parts of Ukraine have been the epicenter of the humanitarian crisis, but the war affects all of Ukrainian society, Mr. Brik told RFE/RL.

"Perhaps the biggest gap is the one between different experiences of war," he said. "Some are hunting for a place in a kindergarten in Berlin, while others need a pickup truck for their military unit."

Historical examples show that there are important variations in how different social classes experience war, says Olena Simonchuk, a sociologist with the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

Ms. Simonchuk's research monitoring social trends shows that the working class has been affected by job loss particularly badly due to the destruction of industrial facilities. Although no official data is available, members of this class are also more likely to be called to the army.

The middle class has suffered due to the emigration of highly skilled women – some 6 million Ukrainian refugees have been recorded in Europe, 90 percent of them women and children – but overall has managed to preserve its status, often by resorting to working remotely, she says.

Business owners suffered significant losses, but over time many of them adapted

to the new conditions and Ukraine's economy proved resilient. While in May 2022 only 28 percent of companies were fully operational, by August 2023 about 88 percent were back to work.

At the same time, Ukraine may be witnessing the decline of the oligarchic class, while the role of the state in the economy increases, Ms. Simonchuk adds.

Fractured unity

"The dynamics of wartime societal transformation are complex and difficult to predict, but we are observing some positive trends," she said, citing historically high levels of unity on previously contentious issues such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union accession and Ukrainian identity. Public confidence in state institutions, most notably the army, is also relatively high compared to pre-invasion times.

But as the war drags on, opinions on how it should end are diverging, according to a survey by the Kyiv-based Razumkov Center in July. Almost 44 percent of Ukrainians believe it is time for official peace negotiations with Russia. Thirty-five percent oppose such talks, and 21 percent said they had no opinion.

At the same time, more than 80 percent opposed the cease-fire conditions laid out by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has demanded Ukraine hand over the five regions Moscow has claimed in their entirety and abandon efforts to join NATO.

"Between the ebbs and flows of enthusiasm, we see that unity starts to fragment on topics such as mobilization, negotiations with Russia or even just tax policy," Mr. Ishchenko said.

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With Kursk incursion, Kyiv seeks to show 'red lines don't exist,' Khodorkovsky says

by Ksenia Sokolyanskaya
RFE/RL

PRAGUE – About three weeks after Ukraine's military launched a surprise incursion into Russia's western Kursk region, the operation remains "an important element of the war," said leading Russian opposition figure Mikhail Khodorkovsky in an interview with RFE/RL's Current Time.

The operation on Russian territory, after years of fighting almost exclusively in Ukraine, has proven to be a morale boost for Ukraine and has struck a blow at Russian President Vladimir Putin's domestic support, Mr. Khodorkovsky said on the sidelines of the Globsec international security conference in Prague on September 1.

"The assistance that the [Russian] state is providing to people who have been caught up in it is clearly inadequate," Mr. Khodorkovsky said, saying most of Russian society doesn't view the incursion as a military action but rather as a sort of "natural disaster."

"Putin's 10,000 rubles [\$110] is just spitting in people's faces. And that is how the public perceives it," Mr. Khodorkovsky said.

This reaction makes it even more politically risky than before for the Russian government to institute a new mobilization of troops for the war against Ukraine, Mr. Khodorkovsky argued.

"Deciding to turn the war into a national



Courtesy image via RFE/RL

Mikhail Khodorkovsky (right) listens to a speaker at the 2024 Globsec international security forum in Prague on August 31.

effort," he said, "is a decision [Putin] is afraid to make."

Putin's government has used the media to prevent the onset of "war fatigue" by convincing the broad public that "there is no war."

"As soon as he creates the feeling that there is a war, the clock will start ticking," Mr. Khodorkovsky added. "How much time is left on the clock, given that the special military operation has already been going on for a while, we just don't know."

For Ukraine, the incursion is part of

Kyiv's effort to convince its Western partners that there is no sense in establishing "red lines" regarding offensive operations against Russia.

"It is clear that the bureaucracies in all countries – particularly the United States – are very cowardly," Mr. Khodorkovsky argued. "They need to prove that red lines don't exist or at least that they are not located here. This step has made [Western] bureaucracies very angry, although they haven't shown it yet. But, like it or not, they have been shown that any red lines are not

where these bureaucracies imagine them to be. That makes [the incursion] very important."

Mr. Khodorkovsky, 61, was once Russia's richest man. He was arrested in 2003, ostensibly on fraud charges that supporters say were trumped up to punish him for his political activity and to facilitate the takeover of his business assets by figures close to Putin. In 2005, he was sentenced to nine years in prison. However, Putin pardoned him in December 2013 and expelled him from the country.

Since then, based in London, Mr. Khodorkovsky has funded a number of Russian opposition initiatives. In May 2022, the Russian government designated him a "foreign agent."

In April 2023, Mr. Khodorkovsky was one of a large group of prominent exiled Russian oppositionists who signed a Declaration of Russia's Democratic Forces that proclaimed the Putin government "illegitimate and criminal" and demanded that Russian troops withdraw "from all occupied territories" in Ukraine.

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Putin claims Ukraine's incursion into Russia did not affect war aims

RFE/RL

Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed on September 5 that the Ukrainian military's incursion into Russian territory has not affected Moscow's so-called "special military operation," the phrase the Kremlin uses to describe its war against Ukraine.

Speaking at the Eastern Eurasian Forum in Russia's Far Eastern city of Vladivostok, Putin claimed that, by sending troops into Russia's Kursk region, Ukraine weakened its forces in its eastern Donbas region, where Russian forces have made visible advances in recent days.

"The enemy's goal was to make us get nervous, mess around, move our troops from one site to another, and stop our offensive in key directions, first of all in the Donbas," Putin said. "Did the enemy manage to do so? No, it managed nothing."

Putin claimed that Russia's forces "stabilized the situation and started gradually pushing the enemy from the territories along the border" where Ukrainian forces pushed into Russian territory in early August. The move left Ukraine without the means to "contain our offensive" in eastern Ukraine, Putin said.

"To the contrary, by sending its sufficiently big and well-trained units to the border districts, the enemy weakened itself on key fronts, while our troops have expedited their offensive operations," Putin said.

Kyiv claims to have seized control of more than 500 square miles of Russian territory as a result of its surprise incursion, the first foreign invasion of Russian territory since World War II. Russian forces have meanwhile made significant gains in their effort to capture the strategically significant city of Pokrovsk in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in an interview with NBC television published this week that the aim of the surprise incursion into the Kursk region was to accrue Russian territory and troops

Ukraine's Incursion Into Russia

Ukraine launched an incursion into Russia's Kursk region on August 6. Its forces now control some 900 square kilometers of territory inside Russia. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has said one of the operation's goals is to capture Russian soldiers for exchange and that the "same attitude" applies to territory.



for future exchanges, emphasizing that Ukraine does not need Russian territory.

"Our operation is aimed at restoring our territorial integrity. We capture Russian troops to replace them with Ukrainian [ones]," he said. "We tell them, you know, we need our military soldiers in exchange for Russian ones. The same attitude is to the territories. We don't need their land."

Putin has previously called the Ukrainian incursion "a provocation" and publicly said it left Russia with no reason to negotiate with Kyiv.

"What is there to negotiate with them, now?" he said.

On September 5, Putin backtracked from that position, saying that "we never refused to hold negotiations." However, he said in Vladivostok that any peace talks must take

into account Moscow's long-standing conditions – that parts of Ukraine occupied by Russian troops must remain under Moscow's control.

Russia occupies parts of the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia and Kherson, and in September 2022 illegally annexed them in their entirety as part of Russia. The United Nations continues to recognize all four regions as Ukrainian territory.

Ukraine has repeatedly called for the return of all of its territories occupied by Russia, including the Crimean Peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014.

Putin also hinted in Vladivostok that, when talking about possible talks, Kyiv must take into consideration the future losses it faces.

"It sometimes seems to me that those

who now lead Ukraine are aliens or some sort of foreigners. As a matter of fact, they simply do not think, and I am serious about this, you know, [they have] such colossal losses. What can they do further, I do not understand," Putin said.

Putin's statement came as Russia targeted the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, with more overnight drone strikes. The Ukrainian military said that several other regions, including the northern Chernihiv and northeastern Sumy regions, were being targeted by Russian drones.

Kyiv residents were ordered by city authorities not to leave shelters as Russia targeted the city.

"There are still several drones in the air-space over the capital. Don't leave shelters!" the city's mayor, Vitaliy Klitschko, warned in a Telegram post.

"The air alert continues! Air defense works in the capital. Stay in shelters until the air-raid alarm goes off!" the Kyiv city military administration chief, Serhiy Popko, advised residents.

A Ukrainian military analyst, Col. Vladyslav Seleznev, told Current Time on September 4 that, when attacking Ukrainian cities, Russia targets not only key energy, electricity and railway infrastructure, but also residential and civil buildings "to create the atmosphere of panic and chaos in Ukrainian society as we approach the autumn-winter season."

Mr. Seleznev added that more supplies of anti-missile systems, weapons and military equipment from the West would help Ukraine defend itself against Russia's ongoing aggression.

(With reporting by Current Time and RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service)

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Pro-war policies put Russia's Orthodox Church under increasing pressure outside Russia

by Vidka Atanasova, Rostyslav Khotin, Volodymyr Ivakhnenko and Mike Eckel
RFE/RL

Earlier this month, on the same day that Ukrainian lawmakers effectively moved to ban an entire branch of the Russian Orthodox Church, the leader of Bulgaria's Orthodox Church publicly weighed in with a critical opinion on the historic, and controversial, step.

The Ukrainian law, Patriarch Daniil said, subjects the Russian church to "serious factual and legal restrictions," amounting to a "discriminatory policy."

Daniil's public positions backing the Russian church had already raised eyebrows in Bulgaria. And Daniil is not the only one.

Last year, Bulgaria expelled three priests – two Belarusians and one Russian – employed by the Russian Orthodox Church, citing national security grounds.

In Ukraine, where Russia's all-out war stands at 30 months and counting, Kyiv's move against a branch of the Orthodox Church seen as loyal to Moscow was yet another watershed moment in a decades-long struggle to define Ukraine's Orthodox identity. Some saw it, or outright misconstrued it, as an attack on religious freedom.

But in a growing number of other countries, the Russian church is finding it difficult to continue its operations as more authorities turn a critical eye toward its presence – under the argument that, rather than being an exclusively religious, spiritual organization, it is instead an active tool of Russian government soft power.

"It has never been a secret that Russia uses the church and Orthodox values as a

significant part of its foreign policy," said Vladimir Liparteliani, a scholar at Durham University in Britain who has researched the Russian Orthodox Church, sometimes referred to by the abbreviation ROC.

"When a state bans and restricts the influence of the ROC, it is essentially trying to reduce the impact of Russian soft power," he said. "Moreover, for many European states, it is critically important to address this issue because Russian religious and conservative narratives are highly anti-Western and anti-liberal, and their danger should not be underestimated."

The Kremlin's calculation'

The ROC, the largest and wealthiest single unit among all Eastern Orthodox churches, has for centuries claimed the mantle of the true home of Orthodox Christianity.

Its current chief, Patriarch Kirill, is a vocal and visible supporter of President Vladimir Putin and the war against Ukraine. In September 2022, seven months after the start of Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine, Kirill told Russian soldiers that "sacrifice in the course of carrying out your military duty washes away all sins." Earlier this year, Kirill declared the Ukraine invasion to be a "holy war."

"The more militant the patriarch's rhetoric and the more visible he becomes in Russian propaganda, the more bigoted he looks from the outside and the stronger the centrifugal forces within the church," Ksenia Luchenko, a visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, wrote in a commentary last year. "By using force to try to keep the splintering parts of the once unified ROC together, the patriarch is only driving them away."

Inside Ukraine, the Russian church has long held sway over one of the largest branches of the fractured Orthodox faith, known until recently as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate, or simply UOC-MP.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, a church called the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate emerged, competing for primacy among Ukrainian believers. It also competed with the Moscow Patriarchate church for prime real estate.

As tensions built following Russia's seizure of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, the Ukrainian churches edged further away from Moscow.

In late 2018, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate merged with another, smaller denomination called the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, which had been around since the Bolshevik Revolution a century earlier.

The newly merged church was called the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, or OCU. In January 2019, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the spiritual head of all Orthodox Christians, for the first time in history recognized the OCU's independence from Moscow.

Under pressure from Kyiv, the UOC formally renounced its ties to Moscow in the wake of Russia's war on Ukraine.

But Ukrainian lawmakers were unconvinced, and on August 20, passed legislation banning religious organizations linked to the ROC from operating in Ukraine.

"Protecting our people from Russian aggression, we must do it together not only on the battlefield, informational, diplomatic, economic and other spheres but accordingly in the spiritual sphere as well," the head of the Ukrainian church, Metropolitan

Epiphany, said in a television interview following the vote. "Because without spiritual independence from the Kremlin, from the Russian 'evil empire,' we cannot talk about our true independence."

Ukraine's move was met with predictable anger in Moscow.

In other places, it was framed as an attack on religious liberty. Even the head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis, criticized the legislation, saying, "I fear for the liberty of those who pray."

For some in Ukraine, however, the move was a welcome effort to counter the Moscow-linked church's efforts to sway sympathies of Ukrainians, either overtly or subtly.

Tetyana Derkach, a Ukrainian analyst and religious scholar, charged that the Russian church played a role in undermining Ukrainian national sentiments in the wake of the 2014 Euro-Maidan public protests, which led to the ouster of the country's pro-Russian president. The Kremlin has repeatedly tried to depict those events not as a public display of anti-government sentiment but rather a coup d'état.

"The Kremlin's calculation that [the UOC] would be able to 'educate' believers into people loyal to Russia was largely justified," Ms. Derkach said. "In essence, the UOC was preparing a springboard for people to accept the idea of unifying Ukraine with Russia and restoring the union state."

Bulgaria looks east

In Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has been under scrutiny for its positions siding with the Russian church, particularly regarding the war on Ukraine. The church leadership has refused to recognize

(Continued on page 12)



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THE UKRAINIAN WEEKLY

Putin believes humanity must be conquered

Vladimir Putin's worldview, shaped by decades of Soviet influence and authoritarian governance, reflects a fundamentally different understanding of human nature than the one found in liberal democratic societies. He believes that human nature, and therefore the relationship between human beings, can only be tamed through power, control and dominance. By contrast, liberal democracies are based on the ideals of human cooperation, individual rights and shared governance, reflecting a much more optimistic view of human nature. The stark contrast between these two views constitutes the fundamental distinction between Russia under Putin and the democratic West.

At the heart of Putin's view of human nature lies a deep cynicism. His authoritarian rule rests on the assumption that people are inherently self-interested, power-hungry and prone to conflict. In this view, individuals and nations are motivated primarily by the desire for security, status and dominance. Trust, cooperation and compromise are seen as weaknesses that invite exploitation. For Putin, the world is a zero-sum game where one nation's gain is another's loss, and, in such a game, only the strong survive.

This worldview can be traced back to Putin's early years in the Soviet Union, where he was shaped by the KGB, the secret police and a society governed by fear and repression. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left a lasting impression on Putin. He famously described it as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century." For Putin, the disintegration of the USSR was not just a national tragedy, but a personal betrayal that confirmed his belief in the fragility of order and the need for a strong, centralized power. The chaos of post-Soviet Russia, where oligarchs plundered the economy and corruption thrived, further entrenched his view that unchecked freedom leads to disorder and decay.

Thus, Putin's political strategy has been to consolidate power over Russia's society, media and economy. His foreign policy mirrors this: the annexation of Crimea, the war in Georgia and the ongoing war on Ukraine reflect a desire to assert dominance and restore Russia's influence by any means necessary. Putin views international relations as governed by force and manipulation, with little room for mutual respect or cooperation unless it serves Russia's interests. Diplomacy, for Putin, is often a façade for underlying power struggles.

In stark contrast, liberal democracies operate under a more optimistic view of human nature. The foundation of democratic societies rests on the belief that individuals, given freedom and equality, will pursue their own interests and the common good. Democratic liberalism assumes that humans are capable of reason, empathy and cooperation. In this view, societies thrive when individuals have the right to express themselves freely, participate in governance and pursue their aspirations within a framework of law and mutual respect.

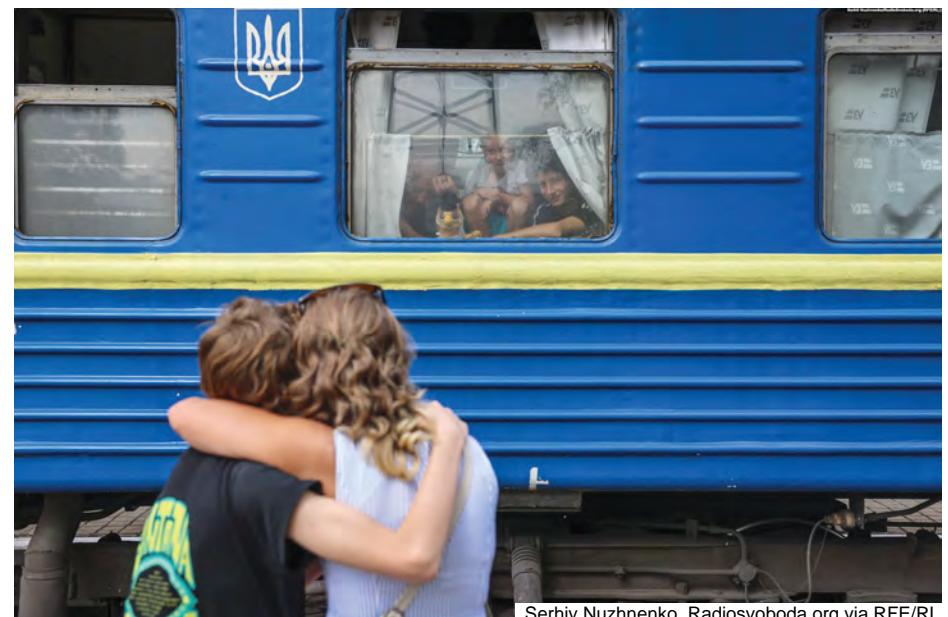
This vision is deeply rooted in Enlightenment thinking, where philosophers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Emmanuel Kant posited that humans are not inherently corrupt but capable of self-governance, moral growth and reasoned public discourse. Democracies aim to create institutions that reflect these principles by ensuring checks on power, protecting individual rights and fostering an environment where pluralism and dissent are valued. Trust in the rule of law, transparency and accountability are central to democratic governance, as they are designed to prevent abuses of power and ensure that societies remain fair and just.

The tension between these two worldviews is evident in the global arena. Putin's Russia sees democracy as a threat precisely because it undermines his model of authoritarian control. In Putin's view, liberal democracy's emphasis on individual rights and open governance leads to chaos, weakness and instability, as demonstrated in his portrayal of the West as decadent and morally decayed. The rise of populist movements in democratic nations, alongside economic inequalities and political polarization, has provided fodder for Putin's argument that democracy is a fragile, flawed system.

However, liberal democracies argue that the very flaws Putin points to are a reflection of the strength of such systems. Unlike authoritarian regimes, democracies are built to self-correct through open debate, elections, reforms and compromise. Their willingness to admit mistakes, confront corruption and change leadership through peaceful transitions of power stand in stark contrast to the rigid, unaccountable structures of authoritarian governments.

Putin's cynical view of human nature shapes a governance model based on fear, control and suspicion. He and his propagandists around the globe see Ukraine and Ukrainians through a worldview that denigrates individual reason and self-governance. For Putin, the only good citizen is a controlled citizen. But liberal democracies such as Ukraine, while imperfect, operate on a fundamentally different belief: that human beings, when given freedom, can contribute positively to society, and that collaboration, transparency, respect for human rights and compromise ultimately make countries stronger than authoritarian societies run by tyrants, no matter how strong they believe themselves to be.

'New energy' or routine rotation? The lowdown on Ukraine's biggest wartime government shake-up



Serhiy Nuzhnenko, Radiosvoboda.org via RFE/RL

People are seen saying goodbye to individuals evacuating from Pokrovsk, Ukraine, via train on August 30.

by Roksolana Bychay
RFE/RL

KYIV – With Russia's full-scale invasion at 30 months and counting, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is trying to shake things up – on the battlefield and in the halls of power in Kyiv.

In early August, Ukraine launched a surprise incursion into Russian territory, sending troops across the border and opening a new front in the Kursk region.

This week, Mr. Zelenskyy launched the biggest government shake-up since the all-out war began, replacing Kyiv's foreign affairs minister – a prominent face of Ukraine abroad since 2020 – and engineering several other changes in the cabinet of ministers and his influential administration, widely known as the presidential office.

Here's a look at the motives, the timing and the potential effects of a move that the wartime leader says will give Ukraine "new energy" at a crucial juncture but that critics say will actually change little.

Why now?

Mr. Zelenskyy replaced his defense minister a year ago and the commander in chief of the armed forces in February, and there had long been rumblings of a more sweeping change in government.

Ruslan Stefanchuk, speaker of Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, announced in June that there would be changes in the cabinet, noting that several ministries, including those in charge of culture, agricultural policy and infrastructure, had been without confirmed ministers for some time.

Nothing happened at that time, though, and subsequent rumors that Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal might be on the way out proved inaccurate. He is still in place.

Prominent political scientist Volodymyr Fesenko told RFE/RL that he believes Mr. Zelenskyy and his chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, had long wanted to make changes but only recently "had time" to get to the nitty-gritty and make decisions about who should go where.

"As soon as they took the corresponding political decisions ... that's when it happened," Mr. Fesenko said.

In any case, the shake-up comes at an intense time in the war, with Ukraine holding territory in Russia's Kursk region and Moscow's forces pressing forward in the Donbas – the eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, which Russian President Vladimir Putin appears determined to seize in their entirety.

It also comes ahead of a tough winter, as

Ukraine struggles to keep the power on while Russian forces pummel the country's energy infrastructure in addition to the homes of civilians. Furthermore, it comes as Mr. Zelenskyy, who is beseeching the West to let Ukraine strike military targets deeper in Russia with long-range weapons – prepares to potentially hand U.S. President Joe Biden a "victory plan" later this month.

What's the goal?

On September 4, Mr. Zelenskyy said that Ukraine needs "new energy" and described the government shake-up that was unfolding as aimed at "strengthening our state in various areas." The president, who was elected in April 2019, said that some officials have been in their posts for 4 1/2 to five years.

He called for quick results in an address the following evening, urging his new team to work "more actively than before" and achieve advancements in arms industry investments, financial stability, "support for the front line," and Ukraine's European Union membership bid.

Some opponents suspect the reshuffle is aimed at further consolidating power in the hands of Mr. Zelenskyy and his administration, pointing to the fact that several of the moves involve cabinet members shifting to the presidential office or vice-versa.

Andriy Sybiha, the former first deputy foreign affairs minister who is replacing Dmytro Kuleba as the top Ukrainian diplomat, earlier worked in the presidential office. The new minister of development of communities, territories and infrastructure, Oleksiy Kuleba, is a former deputy of Mr. Yermak. And Iryna Vereshchuk, the former minister for reintegration of temporarily occupied territories, is moving to the presidential office to work on social policy.

Oleh Rybachuk, a deputy prime minister under former President Viktor Yushchenko and now head of the Kyiv-based non-governmental organization Center UA, said that "it's impossible to talk about new faces [in the cabinet] because they are chosen based on many criteria and by various influence groups. They have to go through this 'casting' process by influential figures in [Mr. Zelenskyy's] office – mainly [Mr.] Yermak."

Mr. Yermak has not commented on his role in the shake-up. Earlier, in an interview with a Ukrainian media outlet, he responded to claims that he interferes in the work of the Foreign Affairs Ministry by saying, "My authority ends where the mandate of

Sept.
7
2019

Turning the pages back...

Five years ago, on September 7, 2019, Ukraine welcomed home 35 political prisoners and hostages released from Russian custody. Among those who were released were Oleh Sentsov, a Ukrainian filmmaker from Crimea. His release generated much joy and hope, but also some controversy. The Ukrainians were released as part of a prisoner exchange with Russia.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, along with the families of the detained, welcomed

(Continued on page 11)

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Explainer: Putin's Mongolia visit shows limits of International Criminal Court

by Dragan Stavljanin
RFE/RL

Mongolian officials rolled out the red carpet on September 2 for a visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin. While visiting the vast East Asian country, which borders Russia to the north and China to the south, east and west, Putin reportedly inked agreements on the supply of aviation fuel to Mongolia's capital, Ulan Bator, and presented proposals to improve rail connections between the two countries.

But Putin's visit made the headlines for different reasons: It was the Russian president's first visit to a member state of the International Criminal Court (ICC) since it issued an arrest warrant for him in March 2023.

The warrant is related to the illegal repatriation and relocation of children from areas of Ukraine seized by Russia following Moscow's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Member countries of the ICC are treaty-bound to detain suspects if an arrest warrant has been issued, but Putin left the country on September 3 a free man.

What is the ICC and why does it matter?

The Rome Statute – which was signed in 1998 and went into force in 2002 – established the International Criminal Court. The permanent international court is responsible for prosecuting individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression.

Campaigners for global justice see it as a significant milestone, as it set up a legal mechanism to hold individuals to account for crimes that transcend national borders.

The ICC is seen as a court of last resort. That means that, under "the principle of complementarity," the ICC may exercise its jurisdiction only if a national court is either unwilling or unable to prosecute grave crimes.

Since 2002, the ICC has indicted more than 50 individuals, mostly from African countries. Twenty-one people have been detained in The Hague, where the court is based; 10 have been convicted and four have been acquitted.

Who are its members?

There are some notable absences among the court's 124 signatories, including the United States, China, Russia, India and Israel. Those countries have cited vari-



Russian President Vladimir Putin inspects a guard of honor while visiting Mongolia on September 3.

Kremlin.ru via RFE/RL

ous concerns about the court, including national sovereignty, politicization and the targeting of their militaries.

In 2016, Russia pulled its signature from the Rome Statute after the court branded its 2014 annexation of Crimea an occupation.

Why didn't the Mongolian authorities arrest Putin?

Mongolia became a member of the ICC in 2003, and, in 2023, a Mongolian judge, Erdenebalsuren Damdin, joined the ICC's panel of sitting judges.

In an August 30 statement, ICC spokesperson Fadi El Abdallah underscored that Mongolia, as "a state party to the ICC Rome Statute," must cooperate with the court, including with regard to arrest warrants.

Following calls from, among others, Ukraine, the European Union and the ICC to either deny entry to Putin or arrest him, a Mongolian government spokesperson told Politico that the country was dependent on Russian energy and thus wasn't prepared to arrest the Russian president.

"Mongolia imports 95 percent of its petroleum products and over 20 percent of electricity from our immediate neighborhood. ... This supply is critical to ensure our existence and that of our people," the spokesperson said.

The ICC does not possess an enforcement mechanism.

What consequences could Mongolia face?

Several international human rights watchdogs warned Mongolia about the

consequences of failing to arrest Putin.

"If Mongolia provides even a temporary safe haven for President Putin," said Altantuya Batdorj, executive director of Amnesty International Mongolia, "it will effectively become an accomplice in ensuring impunity for some of the most serious crimes under international law."

For Marian Elena Vignoli, senior international justice counsel at the New York-based Human Rights Watch, "welcoming Putin, an ICC fugitive, would not only be an affront to the many victims of Russian forces' crimes, but would also undermine the crucial principle that no one, no matter how powerful, is above the law."

"In case of noncooperation, ICC judges may make a finding to that effect and inform the Assembly of States Parties [governing body]," El Abdallah said in the ICC statement before Putin's visit. "It is then for the assembly to take any measure it deems appropriate."

It isn't clear, however, how exactly Mongolia might be sanctioned for failing to arrest the Russian president.

One possibility would be removing both of Mongolia's judge from the ICC and removing the country from the list of signatories and ratifiers of the Rome Statute.

What was Russia hoping to get out of Putin's visit?

According to Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, "all aspects of the president's visit have been carefully prepared." And Bloomberg reported before Putin's visit that Russia had secured guarantees that he wouldn't be arrested during the visit.

Russia was using the trip to "mock the ICC," wrote Elena Davlikanova, a fellow with the Washington-based Center for European Policy Analysis.

For Russia, the trip provided not only a distraction from Ukraine's recent incursion into the Russian border region of Kursk but was also a way to "help maintain Putin's image as a strong leader at home and abroad," Ms. Davlikanova wrote.

She also said that Putin's trip helped to undermine the ICC and any prospect of future prosecution of suspected war crimes. There is an ongoing discussion among various countries and international bodies about establishing a special tribunal to prosecute so-called crimes of aggression committed by Russian forces against Ukraine.

However, Kenneth Roth, the former director of Human Rights Watch, said that Putin's trip to Mongolia was "a sign of weakness." In a post on X, formerly Twitter, Mr. Roth said that was because Putin "could manage a trip only to a country with a tiny population of 3.4 million that lives in Russia's shadow."

Has something like this happened before?

In 2023, Putin had to skip a BRICS summit (comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates) in South Africa, following pressure on South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's government to detain the Russian leader if he arrived in the country.

South Africa had been criticized before, after it failed in 2015 to arrest then-Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, an ICC indictee, during a visit to the country.

And Mongolia itself was among 94 countries that signed a joint statement in June expressing "unwavering support" for the ICC following criticism of the court's chief prosecutor, Karim Khan. The prosecutor had tried to obtain arrest warrants for two Israeli officials, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and three leaders of the U.S.- and European Union-designated terrorist organization Hamas.

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New energy...

(Continued from page 6)

the president ends," adding that he sees himself as a national-security adviser.

Mr. Fesenko had a different take than Mr. Rybachuk on the back-and-forth movement between the cabinet and the presidential office. The "personnel reserve ... is limited," he said, so the new appointments were made by "choosing from among those who have proven themselves on Volodymyr Zelenskyy's team."

"They want to keep people on the president's team so that they don't just go nowhere, so [Ms.] Vereshchuk will work for a while in the presidential office, and then maybe some other positions will emerge," Mr. Fesenko said.

Will the shake-up succeed?

Opposition figures voiced doubt that the government shake-up will bring positive change.

"No fresh blood will emerge, let's put it

bluntly," Yulia Klymenko, a lawmaker from the opposition party Holos, said on an RFE/RL Ukrainian Service program on September 5. "It's the same people. They are just changing places, moving from one ministry to another. We don't see or hear any new ideas or fresh or new people."

Laying out what he suggested was a barrier to effective change, Mr. Rybachuk asserted that ministers have little power, while "the real decisions" are made by people close to Mr. Zelenskyy in his office, who he said "do not bear the necessary level of responsibility for their decisions."

"The president says he wants to see people with new energy, active professionals, but at the same time his entourage says that he is setting the condition that these new people must understand faster ... and immediately fulfill all the whims, essentially, of the president and his office," Mr. Rybachuk said on the same program. "That is certainly not a model that will bring us significant results."

Supporters of Mr. Zelenskyy argue that he is open to bringing new people into gov-

ernment, pointing among other things to his appointment of Rustam Umerov, of the Holos party, as defense minister last year.

Mr. Fesenko said he believes that by "new energy" Mr. Zelenskyy meant changes within existing teams and not exclusively "new faces."

"At one time, the president 'fell ill' with this 'disease of the new face' when he thought that, if he appointed enough new, young people, there would be an update" or change, he said. "And it turned out that, unfortunately, it does not work."

Ukrainians are likely to judge the shake-up by how things go in the coming weeks and months.

A woman in Sumy, a northeastern border region that comes under frequent attack from Russia, suggested that she welcomed a shake-up "because there is no satisfaction ... with the people who have been sitting in posts for too long."

"There are no changes," she told RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service.

A man in the northern city of Chernihiv, which avoided Russian capture early in the

full-scale invasion and also comes under attack as the war drags on, said he believes the shake-up "is about all those ministers who have compiled certain negative [images]. As a response, the government is trying to get rid of those negatives along with the people."

But he suggested he would not hold his breath, saying that what's important is "not the people but the system we have."

A woman in the same city said her biggest hope is "for the war to end soon."

"My two sons are fighting, and my grandson is in the military," she said, repeating that she hopes "the war will end as soon as possible."

(Adapted from the original Ukrainian by Steve Guterman.)

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Ukrainian Independence Day celebrated at City Hall in Binghamton, N.Y.

by Lubomyr Zobniw

BINGHAMTON, N.Y. – A flag-raising ceremony at Binghamton City Hall on August 23 attracted the local Ukrainian American community to celebrate the 33rd anniversary of Ukraine's renewed independence and commemorate the fallen heroes defending Ukraine against Russia's war of aggression.

The local branch of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America (UCCA) in Binghamton, N.Y., has organized an annual celebration of Ukrainian Independence Day since the 1950s, which was held this year at City Hall and included a flag-raising program.

Victor Czumak emceed the celebration and commemoration, with opening remarks expressing pride in Ukraine's resolve for its courageous defense.

Members of the Ukrainian American community expressed their gratitude to the United States and European countries for supplying weapons to Ukraine. Community members said they were grateful to all organizations for providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

Near the podium where various individuals spoke during the event was a painting by Nickolas Timko illustrating the horrific destruction inflicted by Russia on Ukraine.

Large banners, some with the phrase "Stand With Ukraine," were held by participants to raise support and awareness.

Mr. Czumak introduced local clergy members who serve the Ukrainian American community in the area, among them were Rev. Teodor Czabala, pastor of Sacred Heart Ukrainian Catholic Church; Rev. Ivan Synevsky of St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Church; and Pastor Yaroslav Karnauch of First Ukrainian Pentecostal Church.

The pastors reminded those in attendance about the power of prayer, the slogan "God and Ukraine," and the need to provide support for the wounded and the families of Ukrainians who have died defending Ukraine. The pastors expressed gratitude for the medical packages that parishes have shipped to Ukraine.



Serhiy Petechny

Children join Mayor Jared Kraham of Binghamton, N.Y., at City Hall on August 23 during the celebration of Ukraine's 33rd anniversary of its renewed independence.

Binghamton, N.Y., Mayor Jared Kraham gave the signed "Ukrainian Independence Day" proclamation with his support for a free, sovereign Ukraine, to Lubomyr Zobniw, chairman of the Binghamton, N.Y., chapter of the UCCA, who thanked Mr. Kraham for welcoming the community to the event. Mr. Kraham has been connected with the event

for years as deputy mayor and now as mayor.

New York State Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo presented a copy of a New York state legislative resolution marking August 24 as Ukrainian Independence Day.

Community leaders also received a "Proclamation from Senator Lea Webb," who is a state senator representing New York's 52nd district. The community also received a similar proclamation for Ukrainian Independence Day from Broome County Executive Jason T. Garnar.

Mr. Czumak introduced Eugene Czebiniak, choir director at Sacred Heart Ukrainian Catholic Church, who led the singing of the "Prayer for Ukraine" (Bozhe Velykiy Yedyniy).

Mr. Czumak introduced Nadya Petchenyi, who gave an English introduction of a Ukrainian prayer for victims of Russia's war on Ukraine. Ms. Petchenyi was joined by Julia Kadylyak and Leo Pradun, who sang the emotional song with accompaniment on violin.

Christina Charuk, chairwoman of the Binghamton branch of the Ukrainian National Women's League of America (UNWLA), provided an English introduction to the Ukrainian patriotic song "Oy u Luzi Chervona Kalyna," a song that dates from the era of the Sitch Riflemen of World War I. She introduced the Berehyni vocal group, which sang the song in Ukrainian.

Anatoliy Pradun, president of the Together for Ukraine Foundation, spoke of his organization sending aid to Ukraine. Ukrainians chose freedom showing the world that liberty and independence are worth defending and fighting for, he said.

Ukrainian American Veterans (UAV), represented by Commander Michael Dobransky of UAV Post 43, explained how the organization collected medical and humanitarian supplies for Ukraine. Mr. Dobransky led everyone in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag.

Children assisted the mayor in raising the Ukrainian flag with everyone singing the Ukrainian national anthem. The event attracted media coverage from three local television news stations and a newspaper.

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U.S. Sen. Blumenthal, supporters gather in Connecticut to mark Ukrainian Independence Day

Senator urges Biden administration to lift restrictions on Kyiv's use of long-range weapons

by Alex Kuzma

NEWINGTON, Conn. – Hundreds of Ukrainian Americans and supporters of Ukraine from across Connecticut gathered on August 24 to celebrate the 33rd anniversary of Ukrainian independence at Churchill Park in Newington, Conn.

The program featured musical performances by vocalist Olha (Olichka) Borshch and the women's ensemble "Lanka Halychanka."

Leaders from the state's Polish, Lithuanian, Romanian and Irish communities offered personal greetings and pledged support for Ukraine's heroic struggle for freedom and thanked Ukrainians for their resistance to Russian aggression.

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, who had just returned from his most recent visit to Ukraine, shared his impressions from

meetings with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other officials.

The senator pledged his support for Ukraine's rapid integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and assured supporters that he has been urging the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden to lift all restrictions on Ukraine's use of long-range weapons and to expedite all Congressionally approved military aid currently in the Defense Department pipeline.

Ridgefield, Conn., resident Tedrowe Bonner offered poignant descriptions of his July visit to the northeastern region of Sumy in Ukraine, where he personally witnessed Russia's brutal bombardment of civilian targets in villages along the border with Kursk, Russia.

Attorney Dana Bucin, honorary consul-general of Romania in Connecticut,



Alex Kuzma

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (right) greets Irish American activist Alan Dornan who has maintained a daily vigil for Ukraine in his neighborhood in Wethersfield, Conn.



Ukraine supporters gather at the August 24 picnic and cultural program in Newington, Conn. Pictured (from left to right) are Marcia Amidon of New Hampshire who taught English at the Ukrainian Catholic University's Summer Language School, Tedrowe Bonner of Ridgefield, Conn., humanitarian aid coordinator Natalia Hryniuk and Romanian community leader Dana Bucin.



Alex Kuzma

The women's ensemble "Lanka Halychanka" under the direction of Stella Oshur performs a humorous traditional folk song for the audience.

expressed her homeland's unwavering solidarity with Ukraine and shared the good news that Romania's Air Force will provide advanced training for Ukrainian F-16 fighter pilots at its Black Sea base in Constanza, Romania.

The picnic featured exhibits by numerous corporate sponsors and various community organizations involved in providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

Russian air...

(Continued from page 1)

gency power outages due to the attack. In a statement on Telegram, the ministry did not detail the damage at six energy facilities but said there were ongoing risks to energy supplies as the government reduced output at a southern nuclear power plant.

The barrage followed one of the deadliest attacks in a single strike when at least 53 people were killed and 271 injured by Russian ballistic missiles at a military facility in the city of Poltava in central Ukraine, according to the State Emergency Service.

More than 60 of the people injured were in serious condition, the regional military administration said. Regional Gov. Philip Pronin declared a three-day mourning period starting September 4.

The director of the Energy Research Center, Oleksandr Kharchenko, said a power unit at the South Ukraine (Pivdennoukrayinsk) nuclear power plant had added two more periodic shutdowns on September 4.

He said that "high-voltage networks are being restored" by state operator Energoatom but warned against exceedingly optimistic predictions for continuing repairs.

The further concerns about energy supplies come as a United Nations nuclear team led by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi is visiting the Russian-occupied Ukrainian nuclear power plant at Zaporizhzhia to "continue our assistance & help prevent a nuclear accident."

Mr. Grossi met with senior Ukrainian officials in Kyiv on September 3 before saying he was setting out for Zaporizhzhia, which is near an area of near-constant shelling.

Russian forces have waged an intense bombardment campaign on Ukrainian power infrastructure throughout the 36-month-old invasion but particularly over the past six months.

Russia's Foreign Affairs Ministry said that Ukraine was already seeing Moscow's response to Kyiv's attacks in an apparent reference to Kyiv's incursion into Russia's Kursk region, which began a month ago, and frequent shelling and drone attacks on Russia's Belgorod region.

Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said on September 4 that three people had been killed by shelling in the village of Novaya Tavolzhanka.

The September 3 attack by Russia on Poltava sparked fresh pleas by Kyiv for Western partners to allow long-range strikes into Russia and a strong condemnation

of Russia's "deplorable attack" by U.S. President Joe Biden.

In Kryvyi Rih, local politician Oleksandr Vilkul said five people were hurt but none seriously when a rocket hit a civilian infrastructure facility in the center of the city. He said that at least 10 high-rise buildings including a hotel were damaged.

Ukrainian officials also said that objects in the Black Sea were targeted by Russian fire including Snake Island, a strategically located piece of land that Ukrainian forces retook in the initial days of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian officials are grappling with fallout from the dual Russian strike on the Military Communications Institute in the city of Poltava.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Prosecutor-General's Office announced separately that investigations were being launched into the circumstances of the incident.

Criticism emerged soon after the blast as reports suggested that cadets were gathered in large numbers for an outdoor graduation or other ceremony, providing an opportunity for Russia's military to target them.

The attack is believed to be the deadliest single attack since May 2022, when Mr. Zelenskyy said that 87 soldiers were killed

at a military training center in the northern Chernihiv region.

Vladyslav Seleznov, a Ukrainian military analyst and former spokesman for the General Staff of the Ukrainian military, said the Kremlin was to blame but added that there must also be a clear understanding of Kyiv's responsibility.

Mr. Zelenskyy again urged Ukraine's supporters to step up the supply of air-defense systems and long-range missiles that can "defend against Russian terror," he said. "Every day of delay, unfortunately, means more lives lost."

U.S. President Biden called the Russian missile attack on the Poltava facility "deplorable" and pledged more military aid to Kyiv.

"I condemn this deplorable attack in the strongest possible terms," Mr. Biden said, adding that further aid to Ukraine would include "providing the air defense systems and capabilities they need to protect their country."

(With reporting by Reuters)

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Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Convention elects new president, unveils Ukrainian Study Bible



Courtesy of Alex Harbuziuk

The Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Convention unveiled the Ukrainian Study Bible (Українська Навчальна Біблія) by Rev. Roman Kapran, the director of the project.

by Alex Harbuziuk

FAIRLESS HILLS, Pa. – The Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Convention (UEBC) in the U.S.A. announced the election of a new president, the Rev. Ioann Ustenko, pastor of Regeneration Church in Fairless Hills, Pa.

The election took place on August 31 during the 78th annual conference of the UEBC, which was held during Labor Day weekend at Regeneration Church.

Also elected to the new executive board for four-year terms were Vice President for Domestic Missions Rev. Roman Kapran, pastor of the Slavic Baptist Church in Newark, Del.; Vice President for Foreign Missions Rev. Anatoliy Sakhon, pastor of the Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Church in Vineland, N.J.; Secretary Rev. Denis Sichkar, pastor at the First Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Church in Philadelphia; Treasurer Alex Kolesnik, deacon at the Slavic Baptist Church in Stevens, Pa.; and Financial Advisor Rev. Paul Vashchishin, pastor of the Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Church in Crum Lynne, Pa.

The women's division elected Angelina



Courtesy of Alex Harbuziuk

A view of the audience at a morning service held on September 1 in the auditorium of Bensalem High School in Bensalem, Pa. In foreground at right is Rev. Ioann Ustenko, the new president of the Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Convention.

Prokopchuk from Church of New Hope in Charlotte, N.C., as the leader of women's ministries. The youth division elected Vlad Shanava from the Ukrainian Evangelical

Baptist Church in Vineland, N.J., as its leader. Rev. Ustenko replaces Rev. Kapran, who

(Continued on page 12)

Turning...

(Continued from page 6)

home the released prisoners at Kyiv's Boryspil International Airport.

Leaders from the United States, Germany, France, as well as the European Union welcomed the move, with U.S. President Donald Trump signaling that the move showed a major first step toward peace.

Among the controversy was the release of a potential witness, Vladimir Tsemakh,

who was linked to Russia-backed forces and the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) over Ukrainian airspace that killed all 298 people on board. Mr. Tsemakh was captured by Ukrainian security forces in June 2019 in a covert operation behind enemy lines.

Analysts appeared to agree that the decisive factor that influenced Vladimir Putin in the exchange process was the Tsemakh issue.

Twenty-four Ukrainian Navy personnel were also released as part of the exchange.

The sailors were seized along with three naval vessels by Russia in the Black Sea in November 2017. Their case was considered by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, which called for the immediate release of the Ukrainian servicemen as well as the return of their vessels.

Mr. Sentsov and his colleagues emphasized that there should be no easing up of Ukraine's efforts to defend itself, restore occupied territories and, in the meantime, free other prisoners.

Warning against naivete, Mr. Sentsov

explained, "As to the statement that Russia wants peace, even the wolf wearing sheep's clothing keeps his teeth sharp. ... Don't believe it. I don't."

The prisoner exchange, Ukrainian authorities said, had encouraged cautious optimism that there could be more prisoner exchanges by the end of 2019.

Source: "Ukraine welcomes home 35 political prisoners in long-awaited swap of detainees with Russia," The Ukrainian Weekly, September 15, 2019.



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National Bank...

(Continued from page 1)

Bank of Ukraine said in a statement. The name kopiyyka has a Moscow, imperial origin. In the context of a full-scale Russian invasion, replacing kopiyykas with shahs is an essential step, as today, kopiyykas are only in circulation in countries hostile to Ukraine, Mr. Pyshniy said.

Decommunization, de-Russification and decolonization of Ukraine are processes that began with the collapse of the USSR and surged at the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014. Those processes are at their peak today. The uncompromising cleansing of centuries-old layers of Russification in Ukrainian society is the duty of every state institution, the NBU said in a statement.

The NBU said now is the right time to restore national traditions in money circulation.

"Modern sociological studies show that the vast majority of Ukrainians are now interested in the history and culture of Ukraine, proud of its state symbols, including the Ukrainian language and national currency. And money is an important symbol of statehood that every Ukrainian holds in their hands daily," the NBU said in a statement posted to its website.

The possibility of renaming Ukrainian coins from kopiyyka to shah was studied by NBU historians who work in the bank's Museum of Money.

"We have studied in detail the usage of coinage names, the peculiarities of monetary counting and the traditions of wealth accumulation in Ukraine," said Andriy Boyko-Haharin, senior curator of the NBU Museum of Money who holds a doctoral degree in historical sciences in Ukraine.

"The evidence we have obtained gives us grounds to boldly assert that the purely Ukrainian name for small coins is 'shah.' Therefore, its return to modern monetary circulation is logical and scientifically justified. Our hryvnia is of the princely family, and the shah comes from the glorious



The Ukrainian People's Republic issued Shah stamps in 1918.

Cossack family," Mr. Boyko-Haharin said.

The conclusion of the NBU experts was supported by the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, including positive expert opinions from the Institute of History of Ukraine and the Potebnya Institute of Linguistics.

"The name 'shah' for a small coin has been known in Ukrainian since the 16th century. The return of this name to the modern Ukrainian currency would not only revive national traditions in the denomination of money but would also forever break the connection between the practice of naming Ukrainian coins and colonial Russian linguistic culture," said Oleksandr Skopnenko, deputy director for research at the Institute of Linguistics of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine who also holds a doctoral degree in philology.

For his part, Vladyslav Bezpalko, a senior researcher at the National Museum of the History of Ukraine, said that already in Cossack Ukraine from the middle of the 17th century, the name shah was widely used in the language of documentation

work.

"The short and capacious word 'shah' perfectly illustrates the ability of the colloquial language of that time to serve linguistic needs," Mr. Bezpalko said.

"Therefore, it quickly became a popular and essential name for counting small amounts of money deeply rooted in the language and Ukrainian culture. And today, we finally have the opportunity to revise the Soviet names and revive what was lost," Mr. Bezpalko said.

"Specialists of the National Taras Shevchenko Museum have studied the use of names of monetary units in the works of the great Kobzar. We found 11 cases using the words 'shah' and 'shazhok' in his texts, which are used in the sense of an ancient coin. This gives us an idea of the linguistic composition of the Ukrainian language of the second half of the 19th century and confirms the existence of such a monetary unit in the commodity-money relations of that time," said Yulia Shylenko, a graduate student at the National Academy of Management of Culture and Arts and the

chief curator of money at the National Taras Shevchenko Museum in Kyiv.

The NBU does not plan to withdraw kopiyyka coins from circulation and exchange them for shahs because of the name change. The kopiyyka and shah coins will continue to circulate in parallel. Citizens will not need to take additional steps to exchange kopiyykas for shahs. This will help avoid extra costs associated with the disposal of kopiyykas and the production of shahs to replace them.

The gradual introduction of shah-denominated coins into circulation will not affect inflation, as it is not expected to increase the amount of cash in the economy, Ukraine's National Bank said.

From the time of the Hetmanate until the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-1921, a small coin called the shah was used on the territory of Ukraine.

Thus, on March 1, 1918, the Central Rada passed a law on the hryvnia as the currency of the Ukrainian People's Republic, which provided for the issue of state credit notes in denominations of 2, 5, 10, 20, 100, 500, and 1,000 hryvnias, as well as coins in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 20 and 50 shahs. However, the minting of coins was not implemented due to economic and technical difficulties.

Instead, small-denomination money was issued in the form of change stamps issued by the State Treasury in denominations of 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 shahs. They had an inscription on the back that read as follows: "Walks on a par with a ringing coin." They were in circulation until March 1919, at which time the Soviet government canceled them.

When Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the issue of introducing its currency became prominent. The potential name for the coins was a subject of debate, with various names suggested, including shah (samples of such coins were even produced by the Luhansk Machine Tool Plant in 1992). Instead, on March 2, 1992, the name kopiyyka was approved by a resolution of the Presidium of Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada.

Pro-war policies...

(Continued from page 5)

the 2018 decision that granted the Orthodox Church of Ukraine independence from Moscow.

Last year's expulsion of three Russian priests – who were affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church in Bulgaria, not the Bulgarian Orthodox Church itself – had a different dimension.

The chief priest who was expelled, Archimandrite Vassian, was kicked out on national security grounds in a decision that appeared to stem from his work in neighboring North Macedonia.

Archimandrite Vassian had repeatedly visited North Macedonia "to perform the functions of Russian intelligence with the aim of dividing the Macedonian church," Atanas Atanasov, a lawmaker with the Democratic Bulgaria party, said at the time.

The two other Russian Orthodox priests expelled by Bulgaria were Belarusian citizens. One, Yevhen Pavelchuk, served in a secret military unit near Moscow prior to joining the priesthood. He also, according to an investigation by RFE/RL's Belarusian Service, helped found an Orthodox youth club that taught troubled teenagers military skills as well as Russian-centric, nationalist ideas broadly known as "Russian World."

After the expulsions, the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry announced that the main Russian church in the capital, Sofia, would be shut down.

Patriarch Daniil, who was elected head of the Bulgarian church in June, publicly criticized the closure of the church and the

priests' expulsions and, more recently, the Ukrainian move to criminalize Russian-linked church entities.

"Patriarch Daniil has categorically proven himself as a pro-Russian Bulgarian bishop," historian and publicist Goran Blagoev, a Sofia-based historian and commentator, told RFE/RL's Bulgarian Service.

Czechs, very Much. Georgian, not so much.

Bulgaria is far from the only country where the Russian Orthodox Church is under growing pressure.

In the Czech Republic, authorities have tightened the screws as part of a multiyear campaign to restrict the activities of Russian officials and related entities – a campaign that gained new momentum after revelations in 2021 that Russian intelligence agents were responsible for blowing up two Czech ammunition depots in 2014.

Czech authorities sanctioned Patriarch Kirill last year and have expelled one Russian cleric. Some lawmakers have called on the government to investigate whether Russian churches were involved in "influence operations" in the country.

"I do not consider the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate to be a church and its representatives to be clergymen," Czech Foreign Affairs Minister Jan Lipavsky said earlier this month. "It is part of the Kremlin's repressive machine that is involved in Russia's influence operations."

In other countries where local Orthodox churches are considered subservient to Moscow, there have been tangible efforts to weaken ties with the Russian church.

In the Baltics, Lithuanian and Latvian

Orthodox church authorities, with the backing of political leaders, have moved toward independence, though the Orthodox Christianity's communal organizational structure has made that difficult.

By contrast, in Georgia, the situation is quite different.

After the 2018 decision by Patriarch Bartholomew granting the Ukrainian church independence from Moscow, three of the world's bigger Orthodox churches that are self-governing – Greek, Alexandrian and Cypriot – recognized the decision.

The Georgian Orthodox Church, which is also formally independent of Moscow, was one of the national churches that did not.

Georgian scholars said that decision contrasted sharply with a decision in February 2023 to recognize the independence of the Orthodox church in North Macedonia.

Fear of angering the Russian church was the main reason for not recognizing the

Georgian church's independence, Georgian theologian Lela Jejelava said.

"The issue of Ukraine has much deeper content," she told RFE/RL's Georgian Service last year. "It's a political issue rather than a canonical one."

"We have a purely political subtext," she said. "In this case, the Georgian Church confirms its presence in the orbit of the Russian Church."

(Correspondents Zmytser Pankavets of RFE/RL's Belarus Service, Gvantsa Nemsadze of RFE/RL's Georgian Service and Dmitry Gorelov of Current Time contributed to this report.)

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Ukrainian Evangelical...

(Continued from page 11)

was ineligible because of term limits.

Rev. Ustenko and his wife, Olga, have five children. Rev. Ustenko, who was born in Cherkasy, Ukraine, has been pastor of Regeneration Church since 2015.

One of the guest speakers, Dr. Barry Whitworth, executive director of the Baptist Resource Network, urged his listeners on Saturday evening to adopt a biblical worldview.

During a seminar on Saturday afternoon, Rev. Valerii Antoniuk, president of the

Baptist Union in Ukraine, pointed out that hundreds of churches stopped functioning in Ukraine during the war perpetrated by Russia against Ukraine.

Rev. Volodymyr Omelchuk, pastor of Grace Church in Irpin, Ukraine, also preached and led a seminar during the event.

Many prayers for Ukraine were lifted up throughout the conference for God to end the war, and the congregation joined in singing a prayer for Ukraine: God, I Pray for Ukraine (Боже, я молю за Україну).

Another highlight was the unveiling of the Ukrainian Study Bible (Українська Навчальна Біблія) by Rev. Roman Kapran, the director of the project.

Ukrainian civilian...

(Continued from page 1)

Kharkiv and Sumy in the northeast, and the southeastern city of Kryvyi Rih from where the current president hails.

Altogether, at least 58 civilians were killed and more than 1,500 civilians were injured the previous month, said Ukrainian Deputy Prosecutor General Gyunduz Mamedov.

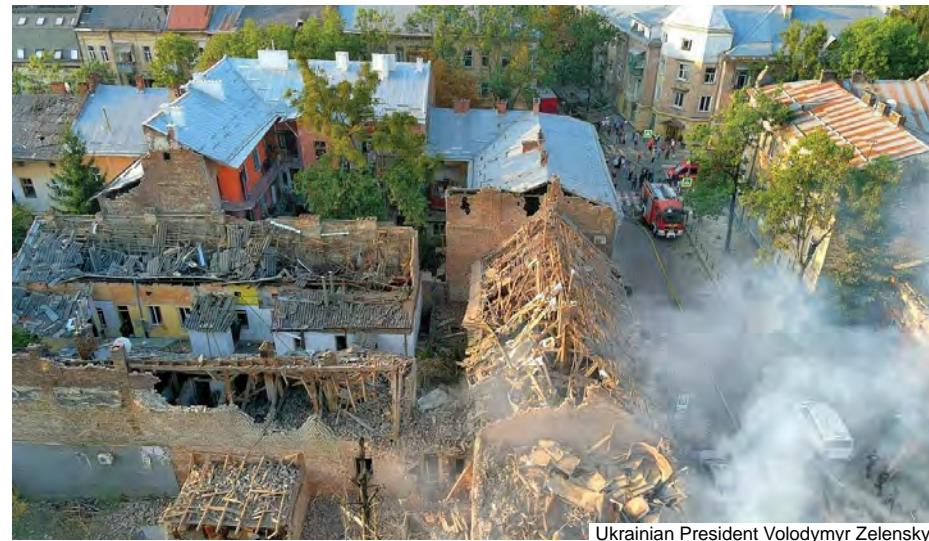
"These horrific figures confirm the indiscriminate and disproportionate shelling of civilians in violation of international humanitarian law," he said on X, formerly Twitter.

Kryvyi Rih experienced power outages as a result of aerial strikes and after a projectile struck a hotel, injuring at least five civilians, including a 10-year-old child, Mr. Mamedov said.

On the first day of school in Kyiv a barrage of cruise and ballistic missiles targeted the nation's capital along with kamikaze drones. Civilian targets that included two primary schools and a university were also targeted.

In Sumy on September 1, a children's psychological rehabilitation center and orphanage were struck, leaving 13 civilians injured, including four children.

"All our schools, all higher education institutions that are working today are proof of the resilience of our people and the strength of Ukraine," Mr. Zelenskyy said on his Telegram channel.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

Western Ukraine's largest city, Lviv, was struck by a massive Russian aerial attack on September 4 that mostly targeted its city center.

August territorial gains

Meanwhile, Ukraine gained twice as much territory in Russia after its invasion of the Kursk region in early August than Russia did toward the Donetsk regional town of Pokrovsk – one of the main Donbas hotspots along with Toretsk and Chasiv Yar.

Verified open-source intelligence specialist War Mapper said that Kyiv forces control nearly 300 square miles of Russian territory while Moscow's military gained 135 square miles in the Donbas that encompasses two of the easternmost regions of the country.

The speculated objectives of the [Ukrainian] operation vary from regaining

the initiative and compelling the Russian offensive in the east to culminate by diverting troops to Kursk, to establishing a buffer zone, gaining leverage for negotiations and much more," said Estonian military expert Artur Rehi.

"In Ukraine, intense fighting continued in the east, mainly in the Donetsk region, with Russian forces advancing towards the key city of Pokrovsk and occupying 10 settlements along its southeastern flank," said the non-profit organization Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Regarding the invaded Kursk region, Ukraine's president told NBC news that Kyiv plans to hold the conquered land "indefinitely," though Kyiv's goal is not to

Putin puts...

(Continued from page 2)

no new sacrifices are required and that rumors about a new mobilization are growing old (The Moscow Times, August 23; Svoboda.org, August 30). The families of conscripts are anxious about the fate of poorly trained soldiers, and the approaching autumn conscription cycle casts a gloomy shadow over the situation (Svoboda.org, August 21; Vedomosti, August 26).

Putin's uncharacteristic timidity has granted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy an opportunity to ridicule Russian "red lines" drawn by a "sick old man from the Red Square" (Current Time, August 24). Putin was prone to threatening nuclear escalation for breaching hypothetical "red lines," leaving their exact location and content conveniently vague (The Insider, June 13). The Ukrainian occupation of some five percent of the territory of Kursk Oblast could have qualified as such a breach, but it apparently does not as the official signaling about forthcoming revisions of Russian nuclear doctrine and the lowering of the Kremlin's threshold for a first strike have stopped (Forbes.ru, June 20). The choir of hawkish pundits led by Russian political scientist Sergei Karaganov has also become silent on the matter of breaking Western unity by delivering a series of nuclear strikes. Dmitri Trenin, a formerly pro-West Russian political scientist turned pro-Kremlin Putin supporter, now merely argues for a firm response to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) dominance in the Baltic theater (Profile.ru, August 13).

Another issue that used to be portrayed as a possible trigger for nuclear escalation is the long-awaited arrival of the first squadron of F-16 fighters to Ukraine (Meduza, August 5). Russian commentators speculated at length that the deployment of these planes to airbases in Poland and Romania would make NATO countries legitimate targets for Russian nuclear strikes, but the appearance of F-16s in Ukraine was in fact barely noticed (Nezavisimaya Gazeta,

August 1). The steady expansion of Ukrainian long-distance strikes on Russian airfields and energy infrastructure is also reported as a stream of routine news, and the catastrophic fire at an oil depot in Rostov Oblast, which has continued for two weeks, never so much as made the headlines (Fontanka.ru, August 28; Kommerzant, September 1). What is covered in much detail, however, is the question of approval from the Biden administration for the use of U.S.-supplied weapons systems for long-distance strikes into Russia. Additionally, the list of targets provided by Ukraine's Defense Minister Rostem Umerov to U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is clearly a matter of concern (Izvestiya, September 1).

Putin's indifferent stance on the protracted Kursk battle may be influenced by his understanding of the U.S. attitude toward this Ukrainian attempt to alter the course of the war (The Insider, August 29). The Russian Foreign Intelligence Service went public with accusations that four NATO member-states – the United States, the United Kingdom, Poland and Germany – were directly involved in planning and organizing the Ukrainian offensive operation, but the real assessments reported to the commander-in-chief were probably quite different (RIA Novosti, August 21). Despite whatever noise "patriotic" pundits are producing, experts in Moscow are keenly following domestic debates in the United States and are aware of the high priority that the Biden administration has placed on avoiding escalation in the course of Moscow's war (RIAC, August 28).

Russian high command could have assumed that, without a massive increase in Western supplies of weapons and ammunition, the Ukrainian offensive into the Kursk region would soon outstrip its logistical capacity and lose its initiative (Republic.ru, August 27). Jingoist bloggers may entertain visions of a swift and decisive counteroffensive expelling Ukrainian brigades from Russian soil (TopWar.ru, August 31). The Russian General Staff, however, is set on sustaining the attacks toward Pokrovsk and re-deploying only minimally

necessary reinforcements to contain the threat to the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant (Meduza, August 31).

Putin's fixation on demonstrating Russia's control over the strategic initiative in waging the long war is aimed at undercutting Mr. Zelenskyy's diplomatic maneuvering toward organizing a second peace summit by the end of the year (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, August 29). While China remains uncommitted to this forum, India has taken the lead in promoting this proposition for ending the war, and Mr. Zelenskyy is prepared to grant it the privilege of hosting his summit (RBC, August 30). Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid visits to both Moscow and Kyiv, noting the difference that the Kursk battle has made between these talks. Still, his mediation will hardly be able to dissuade Putin from his intention to dictate Ukraine's conditions for capitulation (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, August 27).

keep the territory.

"We don't need their land," Mr. Zelenskyy said. "We don't want to bring our Ukrainian way of life there."

Over the course of a week, almost 300 people from Pokrovsk, Kherson and ZapORIZHIA were evacuated to the Lviv region.

Displaced people

The latest Russian barrage led to nearly 300 displaced people being relocated to the Lviv region, the oblast's regional military administration reported.

They were evacuated from August 26 to September 1 from localities near the zones of active hostilities. In total, 270 people arrived in the Lviv region, mostly residents of Pokrovsk, Kherson and ZapORIZHIA. Volunteers of the Medical and Psychological Assistance organization met them at the train station.

Moscow targeted again

Ukrainian drones again targeted Moscow and the surrounding area over the week amid restrictions from the West that limit the use of their projectiles to hit legitimate military targets.

A record 15 Russian regions overall were targeted over the past week, with most of the attacks hitting energy facilities.

Russian officials said that nearly 160 unmanned aerial vehicles took part in the aerial attack and that all had been intercepted, although The Ukrainian Weekly has seen geolocated visual evidence that contradicts the claims of Moscow's Defense Ministry.

Both war leaders have taken a gamble with the Kursk battle: Mr. Zelenskyy by throwing his best brigades into a surprise offensive, and Putin by opting to absorb those attacks rather than countering them. Ukraine has succeeded in altering the narrative of Russia's dominance, sending a shock wave through Russian society. Moscow expects that the capture of Pokrovsk will restore its position of power. Putin's belief that time is on his side may be false, but Ukraine can only do so much alone to prove him wrong. The Western "as-long-as-it-takes" commitment to aiding Ukraine in this war must be reaffirmed again and again by deepening and widening its support of Ukrainian defiance.

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NEWSBRIEFS

(Continued from page 2)

NBC in English: "I will not tell you. Sorry, I can't speak about it." (RFE/RL)

Romania will donate Patriot system to Ukraine

Romanian lawmakers on September 3 passed a draft law backing the donation of a Patriot missile-defense system to Ukraine in a contribution the Defense Ministry says boosts the region's support effort for Kyiv and bolsters Bucharest's relationship with the United States. The measure got 245 votes in the Chamber of Deputies versus 29 "no" votes and one abstention. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union member Romania has a 403-mile border with Ukraine and has seen occasional intrusions of Russian drone fragments since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began 36 months ago. The Patriot donation still requires President Klaus Iohannis's signature and a government decision on implementation. The draft by Romania's Defense Ministry called it a move that "will contribute to strengthening Romania's position as a regional security provider and to strengthening the partner-

ship relationship with the United States of America." (RFE/RL's Romanian Service)

IAEA chief meets officials in Kyiv

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv on September 3 before a planned visit to the Russian-occupied Zaporizhia nuclear plant, where he said the situation is "very fragile." Mr. Grossi said on X that he was on his way to Zaporizhia to "continue our assistance & help prevent a nuclear accident." The Zaporizhia plant has been occupied by Russian forces since shortly after their country's all-out invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and has frequently had its power cut by shelling or been caught in the cross-fire of nearby fighting. In addition to meeting Mr. Zelenskyy, Mr. Grossi met with Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko; Petro Kotin, head of state nuclear power company Energoatom; and Oleh Korikov, acting head of Ukraine's State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate. Mr. Grossi said they exchanged views on the IAEA's support of Ukraine's nuclear power plants ahead of his visit to the Zaporizhia Nuclear Power Plant. The visit follows the IAEA chief's visit last week to the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant

in Russia, which is about 25 miles from the part of the region that Ukrainian forces have occupied since the start of their August cross-border incursion. Moscow has accused Ukraine of trying to attack the Kursk plant. Mr. Grossi said after meeting Mr. Zelenskyy that he wouldn't compare the situation at the two power plants. Ukrainian officials reported multiple civilian deaths from overnight Russian attacks in Zaporizhia and an attack on the country's railway infrastructure. The number of people injured as a result of a Russian missile attack on the building of a hotel complex in Zaporizhia on September 2 rose to six, the State Emergency Service of Ukraine reported on September 3. Two more women sought medical treatment independently, and one of them was in serious condition with a concussion, the Emergency Service said. Ukraine's General Staff said early on September 3 that around a quarter of the clashes with Russian forces over the past 24 hours had taken place in the east near the strategically significant Donetsk region town of Pokrovsk, where Russian troops have reportedly made significant gains in recent weeks. Ukrainian Railways said on September 2 that it was continuing evacuation efforts for families from Pokrovsk, which is now only about 6 miles from the front line. The state rail operator said on September 3 that an enemy drone had struck a locomotive on a Korchakivka-Sumy train but no injuries were reported. It also said that overnight attacks had targeted rail infrastructure in the northeastern Sumy and the southern Dnipropetrovsk regions. Ukrainian officials said an 8-year-old boy and his mother were killed in Russian shelling overnight in the Zaporizhia region. Ukraine's military said on September 3 that it had downed 27 of 35 Russian drones overnight around the country. Antiaircraft defenses functioned in the Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Chernihiv and Sumy regions, but two ballistic missiles that hit the eastern city of Poltava killed scores of people at a military training facility and nearby hospital. The Russian Defense Ministry said early on September 3 that it was deploying more air-defense systems in the southern Belgorod region that borders central Ukraine's Kharkiv region and in the Russian region of Kursk where Kyiv launched its surprise incursion last month. Meanwhile, Reuters quoted multiple anonymous sources on September 3 as saying that Russia's Gazpromneft oil refinery suspended work at the Euro+ combined processing unit in Moscow after a fire two days earlier. The sources said the plant was expected to be back online within six days. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service and RFE/RL's Russian Service)

of various types and 26 Shahed drones at Ukraine overnight on September 1-2, adding that nine ballistic missiles, 13 cruise missiles and 20 drones were downed. Air raid alerts went out across Ukraine for nearly two hours before the air force declared the skies clear early on September 2. Neighboring North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member Poland activated Polish and allied aircraft to keep its airspace safe during the attacks, according to Reuters. Meanwhile, in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, two drones hit a residential building and a school, Ukrainian media reported. No casualties were reported in that attack. The barrage comes a day after Russia's military reported intercepting and destroying 158 Ukrainian drones targeting multiple Russian regions in what was described as one of the biggest Ukrainian attacks since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. It also comes weeks after Ukrainian forces launched an incursion into Russia's Kursk region, which Moscow's forces have struggled to push back so far and to which the Kremlin has vowed to respond. Russian President Vladimir Putin said on September 2 that Ukraine's Kursk assault wouldn't prevent Russian forces from advancing in eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian forces haven't achieved their goal of diverting Russian troops from the fighting there, he said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said last month that the aim of the Kursk incursion was to create a buffer zone that might prevent further attacks by Moscow across the border. Mr. Zelenskyy on September 2 met in the southeastern city of Zaporizhia with visiting Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof and repeated his plea to allies to provide additional long-range weapons and to allow his forces to use them to fire deeper into Russian territory. "For today, only to allow - is also not enough," he told a briefing, adding that additional supplies of such weapons are desperately needed. (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, with reporting by Reuters and AP)

HRW urges Mongolia to arrest Putin

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has urged Mongolia to either deny entry or arrest Russian President Vladimir Putin, who visited that country on September 3. Putin is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC), which Mongolia joined in 2003, for the unlawful deportation and unlawful transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia. "Mongolia would be defying its international obligations as an ICC member if it allows [Putin] to visit without arresting him," Maria Elena Vignoli, senior international justice counsel at HRW, said in a press release issued on September 2. The Kremlin said on August 30 that it had "no worries" about the trip, adding that Russia has "a wonderful dialogue with our friends from Mongolia." (RFE/RL)

Serbian deputy PM assures that Russia is an 'ally'

Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandar Vulin has offered assurances to Russian President Vladimir Putin that Belgrade is an "ally of Russia" as well as a strategic partner. During a meeting on the sidelines of an economic forum in Vladivostok on September 4, Mr. Vulin also said that Serbia would "never become a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] member, will never impose sanctions on the Russian Federation, and will never allow any anti-Russian actions to be carried out from its territory." European Union foreign affairs spokesman Peter Stano said on September 5 that, "Maintaining or even increasing the ties with Russia during the time of its illegal aggression against the Ukrainian people, is not compatible with E.U. values and is not compatible with the E.U. accession process." (RFE/RL's Balkan Service)

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Ukraine at the 2024 Paralympics

by Ihor Stelmach

Ukraine has won 45 medals at 2024 Paralympics

Ukraine's Para athletes won 45 medals halfway through the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris. Ukraine ranked seventh in the medal tables and fifth overall in total medals. Ukrainian Paralympians have won nine gold, 15 silver and 21 bronze medals. Ukraine has thus far won 27 medals in swimming and 13 medals in athletics. Swimmer Anton Kol (silver in the men's 100-meter backstroke S1) won Ukraine's first medal while Oleksandr Komarov (men's 100-meter freestyle S5) claimed the country's first gold medal.

Other Ukrainian gold medalists included Oksana Zubrovska (women's long jump T12), Ihor Tsvietov (men's 100-meter T35), Oleksandr Yarovy (shot put F20), Yuliia Shuliar (women's 400-meter T20), Nataliia Kobzar (women's 400-meter T37), and swimmers Mykhailo Serbin (men's 100-meter backstroke S11), Denys Ostapchenko (50-meter backstroke S3) and Yurii Shenhur (100-meter backstroke S7).

Serbin set a new world record in his event, becoming the first swimmer in his category to break 1:06 seconds for two lengths of backstroke. His time of 1:05.84 seconds broke his own previous record of 1:06.01 seconds, which he set in 2023. Serbin also broke the Paralympic record of 1:06.66 seconds, previously held by his compatriot Dmytro Zalevskyi.

A pair of 38-year-old Paralympic veterans were chosen as Ukraine's flag bearers to lead Team Ukraine at the Games' opening ceremonies: wheelchair fencer Olena Fedota-Isaieva and rower Roman Polianskyi.

Romanchuk medals in first two events

When a correspondent from The Ukrainian Weekly asked Daniel Romanchuk if he would be following his coach's suggestion to cut back on an event or two at the 2024 Paralympics, he responded by saying, "It's so hard to choose. I love the 400, 800 and marathon, so then it seems like I should just do the events in between, too." He proceeded to medal in his first two events, winning gold in the 5,000-meter T-54 race and following up with a bronze medal in one of his favorites, the 400-meter T-54 event.

Romanchuk finished fifth in the 1,500-meter race.

Kolinko realizes dream in Paris

Artem Kolinko was awakened by bombs and sat up in his bedroom some two and a half years ago. He logged onto Facebook and saw a slew of messages saying that Russia had attacked and was bombing Ukraine. It was an emergency situation for a family with a disabled member. Kolinko was living with his parents and all parties agreed it was essential to leave their house in Zhovti Vody, Ukraine, as soon as possible.

Kolinko has required a wheelchair since age 12 because of his muscular dystrophy. He needs assistance getting in and out of bed. Ahead of him was a 24-hour train ride in a packed train car with barely any room to move. And then there was the challenge of simply getting to the train.

Kolinko took with him what he could: an electric and manual wheelchair, a bag of clothing, his passport, laptop, money and his prized possession, his boccia set.

He is representing Ukraine at the 2024 Paralympics in Paris, successfully navigating an excruciating ordeal amid the war between Russia and Ukraine. The 40-year-old fled to the Netherlands to live with his brother in a 215-square-foot room where he has practiced boccia, a sport similar to lawn bowling played by people with a physical disability.

The morning of the train ride out of Ukraine had him fearing for his life. He was one of 10 passengers crammed into a carriage designed to fit four people. He was lifted into an upper bunk so he could lay down, which made going to the toilet a herculean task. The scariest part of the journey was the night when shooting was heard and panic ran rampant throughout the train, which ended up stopping several times because of potential danger. Cellphones were turned off and the train's lights flickered on and off.

Kolinko took up boccia 11 years ago in 2013 at a rehabilitation center in Crimea, Ukraine. He always held out hope of competing in a Paralympics, and he would not allow the fact that he was forced to flee his homeland to interfere with his dream.



Facebook.com/Peter.vanderhart.3

Artem Kolinko (seated), seen with supporters, represented Ukraine in boccia at the 2024 Paralympics in Paris.

He is competing in the BC4 class, beaming with pride and thankful for the opportunity to pursue the sport that has brought him great happiness. He has managed to fine-tune his technique and strategy of rolling boccia balls down his ramp while living with the assistance of his brother.

The room in which he lives has no bathroom, so Kolinko is reliant upon his brother to carry him up one floor to use a bathroom and take a shower. He lives day to day, misses his home and his friends and prays that the war ends soon

(Continued on page 19)

Ukrainian pro sports update

by Ihor N. Stelmach

Patriotic uniform approved for Ukraine Paralympians

Ukraine's 140 Para athletes at the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris proudly showed off a three-colored parade uniform, adding green to their traditional colors of blue and yellow. The successful approval of the controversial parade uniform was announced by Ukraine's National Committee of Sports for the Disabled of Ukraine President Valerii Sushkevych.

"For the first time, the parade uniform of Ukrainian Paralympians will feature not only yellow and blue, but also the color of our soldiers – green, which has a 'defensive' military look. It resembles the military uniform, and while it is not a military uniform, it says a lot. We are here not just for a sports festival, but to fight for peace as well," Sushkevych explained at a press conference in Paris on August 29. Team Ukraine is outfitted with several different uniforms for these Paralympic Games.

International Paralympic Committee officials originally did not approve the Ukrainian design, saying it was too political. The uniform has a map of Ukraine with its internationally recognized borders including Crimea and Donbas.

"They categorically banned the map of sovereign, independent Ukraine on the uniform, but we insisted on having Ukraine's internationally recognized borders on our uniform. They argued that our uniform had too much of a military design and prohibited the additional green military color that appeared on our uniform," Sushkevych said.

Ukraine's National Paralympic Committee was able to successfully defend its updated design. "We were able to prove our legal right and the Ukrainian significance of all the colors of our uniform! And you, our fans, Ukrainians, will surely understand the deep contemporary and national philosophy of our uniform at the highest sports forum of the quadrennial," Sushkevych said.

88 Russians competing as neutrals at 2024 Paralympics

On August 26, the International Paralympic Committee announced that 88 Russian and eight Belarusian Para athletes would compete under a neutral flag at the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games minus national anthems and flags. The athletes allowed to compete successfully completed a detailed inquiry showing that they did not actively support the war in Ukraine or have any association with their country's military or security agencies.

Unlike the Olympics, Russian and Belarusian Para athletes will be allowed to compete in Para Athletic events otherwise known as track and field.

Neutral athletes will compete under a white flag with the word NPA in black letters. Medals won by neutral athletes will not be counted in the official medal tally for the 2024 Paralympic Games. They will not participate in the opening or closing ceremonies.

Bidnyi meets with WADA president

Ukraine's Minister of Youth and Sports Matviy Bidnyi held a meeting with World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) President Witold Banka on August 27, during which time the two discussed the fight against doping and the challenges Ukraine faces because of its ongoing war with Russia.

Bidnyi expressed thanks for WADA's support of Ukraine and their position condemning the aggression by Russia and Belarus. He also spoke about Ukraine's continuing development of its national anti-doping policy. This includes new legislation in cooperation with the Council of Europe and WADA in compliance with international conventions and the WADA Code, which completely resets Ukraine's anti-doping infrastructure and launches new ini-

tatives to fight doping in sports.

WADA's president expressed solidarity with Ukraine and emphasized that his organization was one of the first international sports institutions to strongly condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Ukraine finishes fifth in canoe sprint championships

Ukraine won four medals, two gold and two bronze medals, at the 2024 ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on August 23-25. Three-time Olympic medalist Liudmyla Luzan won gold in the women's single sculls 500-meter race, while Liudmyla Kuklinowska earned a gold medal in the single kayak 200-meter competition. Bronze medalists were Valeria Tereta in women's 5,000-meter single sculls and the duo of Yurii Vandiuk and Pavel Borsuk in the doubles 1,000-meter event.

Dynamo Kyiv fails to qualify for Champions League

Dynamo Kyiv was on the verge of qualifying for the 2024-2025 UEFA Champions League season and joining Shakhtar Donetsk as Ukraine's two football teams competed in UEFA's world club competition until encountering Red Bull Salzberg (Austria) in the playoff round. A 2-0 loss followed by a 1-1 draw on August 27 eliminated Dynamo (3-1 on aggregate), earning them a transfer to the UEFA Europa League phase of the competition.

In second-round qualifying league path action, Dynamo defeated Partizan (Serbia) 6-2, 3-0 (9-2 on aggregate). In third-round play, Dynamo Kyiv took down Rangers

(Continued on page 17)



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Ukraine at the 2024 Paralympics: Dmytro Melnyk

by Ihor N. Stelmach

Dmytro Melnyk is a drone operator who drops bombs on enemy positions or monitors troop movements from the air. He is based near the northeastern town of Vovchansk, an area of harsh fighting in the Kharkiv region.

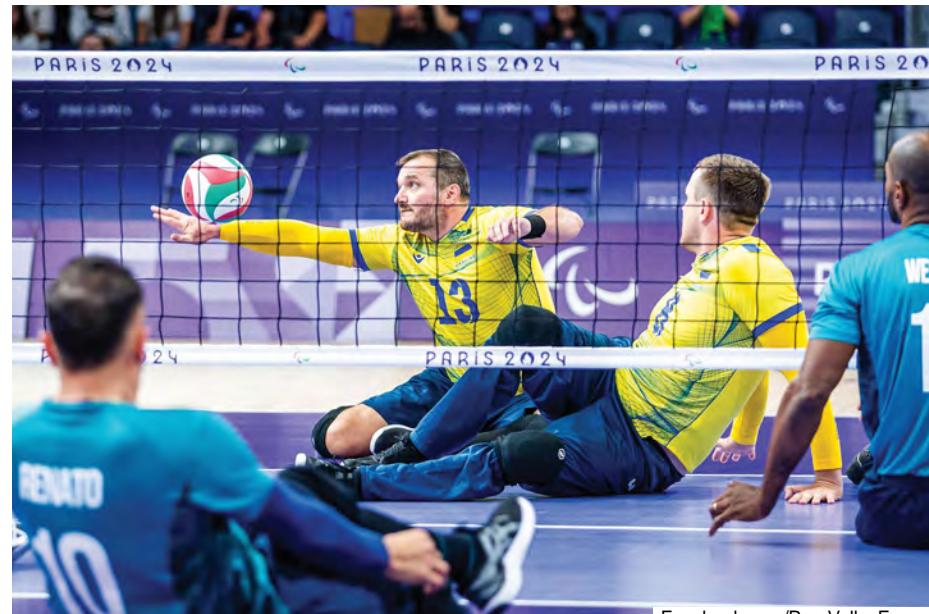
He's also a skilled volleyball player who has dreamed of competing in the Paralympics for many years. However, as it did for everyone in Ukraine, the Russian invasion in February 2022 changed his priorities. The sport of volleyball took a back seat to his plans of joining the Ukrainian army. These days his drone-flying shifts last 12-18 hours, leaving little time to practice his digs, sets and spikes.

Melnyk is one of some 3,000 Ukrainian athletes currently serving in the military. Nearly 500 have been killed in action, according to Ukraine's sports ministry.

He will be in Paris for the 2024 Paralympic Games and has tried to keep up his training so as not to let his team down. He has applied for a leave from the army in order to compete at the Paralympics.

Melnyk qualified as a Paralympian because his left leg is three inches shorter than his right, the result of a six-story fall from a balcony he was helping his father repair when he was 18 years old. He broke his pelvis, pelvic joints and fractured his left hip. By rolling in the air and falling on his legs he avoided even more serious injury.

Eighteen months of serious rehabilitation had him try several sports before he accidentally stumbled on sitting volleyball,



[Facebook.com/ParaVolleyEurope](https://www.facebook.com/ParaVolleyEurope)

Dmytro Melnyk (No. 13), seen competing in sitting volleyball at the 2024 Paralympics in Paris, also serves in Ukraine's military.

which uses the same skills as standing volleyball except athletes play in a seated position, using their arms and legs to move across the court.

For 22 years, volleyball has been a pleasant distraction from the constant pain he suffers from the fall. He spent whatever free time he had from his restaurant job in Dnipro playing the sport.

He became so proficient that he was selected to play for Ukraine's team at the 2016 Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro where the Ukrainian team finished fifth. He has hopes of improving on that in 2024. Ukraine's team did not qualify for the 2020

Tokyo Games (held in 2021), but in April 2023 Melnyk was given special dispensation to travel to Dali, China, where the team qualified for Paris.

After falling in love with volleyball, everything changed when Vladimir Putin decided to invade Ukraine. His attempts to sign up to help defend his country were rejected because of his disability. He invested his own money to train as a civilian drone operator, and eventually was accepted into an aerial reconnaissance unit in March 2023.

His attitude is very patriotic – if there is any way for him to help in the cause of

defending his homeland, it is his obligation to do so. He believes he is a better than average drone operator and an asset to his unit.

Melnyk has been described as a unique disabled athlete and soldier. Although he does not possess a completely healthy body, he makes up for it with his spirit and his strength to fight.

His commander, Lt. Georgiy Volkov, said he was proud that such a determined man was defending Ukraine.

In August 2023, on a mission along the frontlines of the Donetsk region, Russian artillery injured the same leg he had damaged in the balcony fall. Two surgeries were needed to remove five pieces of shrapnel, and Melnyk spent several weeks rehabilitating with the help of teammate Oleksiy Kharlamov last fall.

It took quite a while and lots of effort to get back in shape, and even getting into the position required for sitting volleyball proved to be a challenge.

Melnyk was angry to hear that Russian and Belarusian athletes would be permitted to compete as neutral athletes at the 2024 Paralympic Games. Since only individual athletes can participate, Melnyk would not face competitors from either country because he plays a team sport. He could not comprehend how an aggressor nation destroying sport in his country could then compete against Ukraine.

After finishing the Para volleyball tournament in Paris, Melnyk plans on immediately returning to the battlefield and his drone operator duties.

(Based on reporting by NBC News.)

Ukrainians Melenka and Kozun team up for Canada

by Ihor N. Stelmach

Ukrainian Sarah Melenka has been a member of the Canadian national sitting volleyball team since 2017, winning a bronze medal at the 2019 Parapan Am Games and a silver medal at the 2022 World Championships in Sarajevo. She competed for Team Canada at the 2021 Tokyo Paralympics and is in Paris representing her country at the 2024 Paralympic Games.

She was on the track and volleyball teams at St. Mary's Catholic High School in her hometown of Vegreville, Alberta, and experienced severe pain and weakness in her right leg at age 15. In 2014, she was

diagnosed with compartment syndrome, which prevents the movement of blood and oxygen to nerve and muscle cells. By 2015, after nine surgeries, her leg was saved, but with 30 percent muscle deficiency in her right calf.

While attending Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and playing volleyball, Melenka suffered a stress fracture in her right leg, and she eventually transitioned from standing volleyball to sitting volleyball.

The massage therapist was named top setter at the 2020 Paralympic Qualification Tournament in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her mother has worked as a volleyball coach in Canada.

Ukrainian Julie Kozun was concerned

she would never play volleyball again after losing her left leg in a lawnmower accident in 2015. Almost a decade later, the Melfort, Saskatchewan native is representing Canada in sitting volleyball at the Paralympics for a second time. The 24-year-old joins fellow Ukrainian Canadian Sarah Melenka as teammates on Team Canada in Paris.

Kozun joined the national sitting volleyball team a few months after her accident, left the team for a year, and returned in 2017.

She helped Canada qualify for the 2024 Paralympic Games in 2023 tournament play, earning one of the last available spots. She assisted Team Canada in earning a spot in the 2020 Paralympics by winning gold at

the February 2020 World Para Volley final qualification tournament in Halifax.

In 2018, Kozun was recognized for her community involvement as an ambassador for the non-profit "The War Amps," which supports people with limb deficiencies.

Canadian Ostepchuk honored to hoop in Paris

Twenty-four-year-old Ukrainian Garrett Ostepchuk made his wheelchair basketball debut at the age of 7 after seeing the sport played at his school in Regina, Saskatchewan. He quickly embraced the sport and has spent more than a decade refining his

(Continued on page 19)

Ukrainian pro...

(Continued from page 15)

(Scotland) 1-1, 2-0 (3-1 on aggregate) to earn their berth in the playoff round against Red Bull Salzberg.

Ukrainians try to block Datsyuk's Hall of Fame induction

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) has put at risk Russian Pavel Datsyuk's upcoming induction into the Hockey Hall of Fame by publicly calling for the Detroit Red Wings legend to be banned from entering Canada and his induction into the Hall to be reconsidered.

The request from the UCC is based on Datsyuk's appearance at an event in Russia that honored soldiers involved in the war against Ukraine. At the end of July, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress issued a statement denouncing Datsyuk's involvement in the event through its CEO and



Uniforms for Ukraine's Paralympic Team, which were worn during the opening ceremonies of the 2024 Paralympics in Paris on August 28, drew criticism for being "too military and political" by the International Paralympic Committee.

Executive Director Ihor Michalchyshyn. "According to reports, in February 2024,

Pavel Datsyuk attended an event to honor members of the Russian Armed Forces who

participated in Russia's genocidal war against Ukraine," UCC wrote on Facebook. "He should not be inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame or allowed entry into Canada."

Michalchyshyn emphasized the significance of Datsyuk's presence at the ceremony, arguing that it is inappropriate to honor an individual associated with such a politically charged event.

The UCC's statement could put pressure on Canadian authorities and the Hockey Hall of Fame to reassess Datsyuk's upcoming induction, although it will not in all likelihood affect it.

Datsyuk is widely recognized as one of the most skilled NHL players of the 2000s and is scheduled to be inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in November.

(Based on reporting by Ukrainian World Congress, Inside the Games, Ukrinform and San Luis Obispo Tribune.)

Ihor Stelmach may be reached at ihorgenia@sbcglobal.net.

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OUT & ABOUT

Through October 17 New York	Art exhibit, "Tatiana Levitskaia: Selections from the Kolodzei Art Foundation," Harriman Institute Atrium, Columbia University, https://harriman.columbia.edu (opening reception September 12)	September 16-19 Ottawa	Exhibit featuring works by visual artists Nadiia Kushnir, "The Worm was Born," Club SAW, www.eventrbite.ca
September 10 New York	Film screening and discussion, "Antytila. Culture vs War," Columbia University, https://harriman.columbia.edu	September 18 Cambridge, MA	Book talk, "The Voices of Babyn Yar" with Marianna Klyanovska, Oksana Maksymchuk and Max Rosochinsky, Harvard University, https://huri.harvard.edu
September 12 New York	Networking evening with KOLO (young professionals' group), The Ukrainian Museum, www.theukrainianmuseum.org	September 18-28 Ottawa	Performance, "First Metis Man of Odessa," National Arts Center English Theater, https://nac-cna.ca/en/tickets/under30
September 13-14 Parsippany, NJ	Ukrainian themed market, Ukrainian National Women's League of America, Sheraton Parsippany Hotel, https://unwla.org or region-nj@unwla.org	September 20 New York	Presentation, "In Tribute to Mark von Hagen's Contributions to Ukrainian Studies," Columbia University, https://harriman.columbia.edu
September 13-14 Parsippany, NJ	Convention, Ukrainian National Women's League of America, Sheraton Parsippany Hotel, https://unwla.org or region-nj@unwla.org	September 21 Lehighton, PA	Potato Bake and Pig Roast, Ukrainian Homestead, www.ukrhomestead.com
September 13-15 Toronto	Bloor West Village Toronto Ukrainian Festival, https://ukrainianfestival.com	September 21 Syracuse, NY	Pig Roast, Syracuse Ukrainian National Home, 315-478-9272 or events@syrucc.org
September 14 Jenkintown, PA	Ukrainian Flea Market, Ukrainian Educational and Cultural Center, www.ueccphila.org	September 21 Jenkintown, PA	Ukrainian Flea Market, Ukrainian Educational and Cultural Center, http://www.ueccphila.org
September 15 New York	Concert, "A Tribute to Virko Baley, 85th Anniversary Celebration," Shevchenko Scientific Society, Ukrainian Institute of America, www.ukrainianinstitute.org	September 22 Ottawa	Lanark County Ukrainian Fest, Carleton Place, www.uflc.ca
September 16 New York	Book presentation by Andrea Chalupa, "In the Shadow of Stalin: The Story of Mr. Jones," in conversation with Terrell Jermaine Starr, Ukrainian Institute of America, www.ukrainianinstitute.org	September 22-25 Washington	Ukraine Action Summit, American Coalition for Ukraine, Capitol Hill, https://americancoalitionforukraine.org
September 16 Cambridge, MA	Book presentation, "Chernobyl Roulette: War in the Nuclear Disaster Zone," Harvard University, https://huri.harvard.edu	September 25 Cambridge, MA	Presentation by Martin Schulze Wessel, "The Curse of Empire. Ukraine, Poland, and the Fallacy in Russian History," Harvard University, https://huri.harvard.edu

Entries in "Out and About" are listed free of charge. Priority is given to events advertised in *The Ukrainian Weekly*. However, we also welcome submissions from all our readers. Items will be published at the discretion of the editors and as space allows. Please send e-mail to mdubas@ukrweekly.com.

Moscow church...

(Continued from page 2)

former Soviet space to challenge the pretensions of the Moscow church and to rein it in or even ban it outright. The three formerly occupied Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, have moved the furthest in this direction and have been denounced by Moscow for what the Russian government says is a replication of Ukraine's moves (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, February 13; Rubaltic.ru, August 28). Moscow analysts suggest that Moldova and Belarus are following in their wake, albeit at different speeds (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, August 12, 2021; Rubaltic.ru, August 19). Both the Russian government and the

Moscow church are worried that the smaller Orthodox communities in the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia may be about to do the same (Window on Eurasia, March 10, July 6).

The greatest impact of what Ukraine has done, however, may well be in Russia itself. The new law may affect not only the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (ROC-MP) and the Kremlin but also the actions of the ROC-MP among Russians inside Russia and elsewhere in the world. The loss of unity implied by the ROC-MP losing its position in Ukraine and elsewhere in the former Soviet space continually pushes it toward becoming little more than a national church of the Russian Federation. In this way, the ROC-MP is far less useful to the

Kremlin not only in maintaining its influence in all those countries and more generally in the Orthodox world but in insisting on the validity of Putin's "Russian world." Unsurprisingly, that development has reduced the influence the ROC-MP has in government circles.

It has also had two other effects on the Moscow church itself. On the one hand, Ukraine's actions have prompted the Moscow Patriarchate to be even more outspoken in its defense of the Kremlin and its war as well as more active in promoting Kremlin actions elsewhere, such as in Africa, where the ROC-MP continues to make inroads (see Eurasia Daily Monitor, February 3, 2022; Window on Eurasia, September 1). On the other hand, it has exacerbated fissiparous trends within the

ROC-MP inside Russia that some argue could lead to its splitting apart. This might lead to a renewal of Orthodox religious life beyond the control of the Moscow Patriarchate and promote regionalist political challenges to Moscow as well (Window on Eurasia, January 14, April 29; Nezavisimaya Gazeta, August 20). Consequently, what may seem to some to be a narrowly religious dispute in Ukraine may very well play a far larger role in the social and political fate of Russia, the post-Soviet space and hence the world than most Western analysts and policymakers understand.

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Ukraine has won...

(Continued from page 15)

so he can return to Ukraine.

He believes the sport of boccia gives him power, a goal in life and helps him live. He also believes not having goals while living day to day is very difficult. Boccia has helped him through a very tough time.

Kolinko's dream of competing in the Paralympics has come true. On September 1 he took his dream a step further, winning a bronze medal in the men's individual BC4 class. It was a victory for himself and his country.

Oksana Masters carries torch for Team U.S.A.

Seventeen-time medalist and Team U.S.A. representative Oksana Masters was selected to carry the torch that holds the traditional flame during the opening ceremonies of the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris.

The Ukrainian American has found her-

self on big stages in the past, but on this occasion she said, "I have goosebumps underneath the blazer of Team U.S.A. The unity and power when we all come together and walking in as one, there's something so powerful with it. The visibility of it, knowing everything we've put into being here, it's going to be incredible."

Masters has undertaken quite a journey to reach this moment. Born in Ukraine, she suffered from birth defects caused by radiation poisoning and had to have both legs amputated above the knee. She spent 7.5 years living in Ukraine's orphanage system before being adopted by Dr. Gay Masters, a speech pathology professor in Louisville, Ky. She blossomed into an international sports star winning a total of 17 medals at the summer and winter Paralympics.

In Paris, the Para cyclist is competing in the hand-cycling category's road race event.

(Based on reporting by The Age and KSR.)

Ihor Stelmach may be reached at ihorste@sbglobal.net.

Ukrainians Melenka...

(Continued from page 17)

skills on the court. Ostepchuk competed at his first Paralympic Games in Tokyo 2021 and followed up with a second appearance at the 2023 World Championships. He finished 2023 playing for the Team Canada squad that won the bronze medal at the Parapan Am Games in Santiago, Chile. He helped earn Canada's spot in the Paralympics by participating in a qualifying tournament. He will team up with his role model, 32-year-old Nik Goncin, also a Saskatchewan native.

His Team Canada tenure has seen him winning roster spots on the Senior Men's National Team in 2017 and the Men's U-23 National Team. He considers it an honor to play wheelchair basketball at the highest level, competing against the world's top athletes. Ostepchuk was born with muscular dystrophy.

(Based on reporting by the Canadian Paralympic Committee.)



Facebook.com/UkrCanCongress
Ukrainian Canadian Paralympians Garrett Ostepchuk (wheelchair basketball, semifinalist), Sarah Melenka and Julie Kozun (both sitting volleyball) are chasing medals at the 2024 Paralympics in Paris.



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