The Ukraine List #484

compiled by Dominique Arel (darel@uottawa.ca)
Chair of Ukrainian Studies, U of Ottawa
www.chairukr.com
www.danyliwseminar.com

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#1
Deadline Reminder: 28 June 2017

13th Annual Danyliw Research Seminar on Contemporary Ukraine
Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Ottawa, 16-18 November 2017
http://www.danyliwseminar.com

CALL FOR PAPER PROPOSALS

The Chair of Ukrainian Studies, with the support of the Wolodymyr George Danyliw Foundation, will be holding its 13th Annual Danyliw Research Seminar on Contemporary Ukraine at the University of Ottawa on 16-18 November 2017. Since 2005, the Danyliw Seminar has provided an annual platform for the presentation of some of the most influential academic research on Ukraine.

The Seminar invites proposals from scholars and doctoral students —in political science, anthropology, sociology, history, law, economics and related disciplines in the social sciences and humanities— on a broad variety of topics falling under thematic clusters, such as those suggested below:

Conflict
- war/violence (combatants, civilians in wartime, DNR/LNR, Maidan)
- security (conflict resolution, Minsk Accords, OSCE, NATO, Crimea)
- nationalism (Ukrainian, Russian, Soviet, historical, far right)

Reform
- economic change (energy, corruption, oligarchies, EU free trade, foreign aid)
- governance (rule of law, elections, regionalism)
- media (TV/digital, social media, information warfare, fake news)

Identity
- history/memory (World War II, Holodomor, Soviet period, interwar, imperial)
- language, ethnicity, nation (policies and practices)
- culture and politics (cinema, literature, music, performing arts, popular culture)

Society
- migration (IDPs, refugees, migrant workers, diasporas)
- social problems (reintegration of combatants, protests, welfare, gender, education)
- state/society (citizenship, civil society, collective action/protests, human rights)

The Seminar will also be featuring panels devoted to recent/new books touching on Ukraine, as well as the screening of new documentaries followed by a discussion with

filmmakers. In 2016, four book panels (Lawrence Douglas/*The Right Wrong Man*, Catherine Gousseff/Échanger les peuples, Serhii Plokhy/*The Gates of Europe*, and Ioulia Shukan/*Génération Maidan*) were on the program and two films were screened (Elena Volochine/*Oleg's Choice*, Antony Butts/*DIY Country*). Information on the 2016 book panels and films can easily be accessed from the top menu of the web site. The 2017 Seminar is welcoming book panel proposals, as well as documentary proposals.

Presentations at the Seminar will be based on research papers (6,000-8,000 words) and will be made available, within hours after the panel discussions, in written and video format on the Seminar website and on social media. The Seminar will privilege intensive discussion, with relatively short presentations (12 minutes), comments by the moderator and an extensive Q&A with Seminar participants and assembled public.

People interested in presenting at the 2017 Danyliw Seminar are invited to submit a 500 word paper proposal and a 150 word biographical statement, by email attachment, to Dominique Arel, Chair of Ukrainian Studies, at darel@uottawa.ca AND chairukr@gmail.com.

Please also include your full coordinates (institutional affiliation, preferred postal address, email, phone, and Twitter account [if you have one]). If applicable, indicate your latest publication or, in the case of doctoral or post-doctoral applicants, the year when you entered a doctoral program, the title of your dissertation and year of (expected) completion.

Books published between 2016 and 2018 (as long as near-final proofs are available prior to the Seminar) are eligible for consideration as a book panel proposal. The proposal must include a 500 word abstract of the book, as well as the 150 word bio and full coordinates.

Films produced between 2015 and 2017 are eligible for consideration as a documentary proposal. The proposal must include a 500 word abstract of the film, as well as the 150 word bio, full coordinates, and a secure web link to the film.

In addition to scholars and doctoral students, policy analysts, practitioners from non-governmental and international organizations, journalists, and artists are also welcome to send a proposal.

The proposal deadline is 28 June 2017. The Chair will cover the travel and accommodation expenses of applicants whose proposal is accepted by the Seminar. The proposals will be reviewed by an international selection committee and applicants will be notified in the course of the summer.

To celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Danyliw Seminar in 2014, a special website was created at www.danyliwseminar.com. The site contains the programs, papers, videos of presentations and photographs of the last three seminars (2014-2016). To access the abstracts, papers and videos of the 2016 presenters, click on "Participants" in the menu

and then click on the individual names of participants. The 2016 Program can be accessed at https://www.danyliwseminar.com/program-2016.

Check the "Danyliw Seminar" Facebook page at http://bit.ly/2rssSHk.

For information on the Chair of Ukrainian Studies, go to http://bit.ly/2r7Hl8L.

The Seminar is made possible by the generous commitment of the Wolodymyr George Danyliw Foundation to the pursuit of excellence in the study of contemporary Ukraine.

#2
Kule Doctoral Scholarships on Ukraine

Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Ottawa
Application Deadline: 1 February 2018 (International & Canadian Students)

The Chair of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Ottawa, the only research unit outside of Ukraine predominantly devoted to the study of contemporary Ukraine, is announcing a new competition of the Drs. Peter and Doris Kule Doctoral Scholarships on Contemporary Ukraine. The Scholarships will consist of an annual award of $22,000, with all tuition waived, for four years (with the possibility of adding a fifth year).

The Scholarships were made possible by a generous donation of $500,000 by the Kule family, matched by the University of Ottawa. Drs. Peter and Doris Kule, from Edmonton, have endowed several chairs and research centres in Canada, and their exceptional contributions to education, predominantly in Ukrainian Studies, has recently been celebrated in the book Champions of Philanthrophy: Peter and Doris Kule and their Endowments.

Students with a primary interest in contemporary Ukraine applying to, or enrolled in, a doctoral program at the University of Ottawa in political science, sociology and anthropology, or in fields related with the research interests of the Chair of Ukrainian Studies, can apply for a Scholarship. The competition is open to international and Canadian students.

The application for the Kule Scholarship must include a 1000 word research proposal, two letters of recommendation (sent separately by the referees), and a CV and be mailed to Dominique Arel, School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences Building, Room, 7067, University of Ottawa, 120 University St., Ottawa ON K1N 6N5, Canada.
Applications will be considered only after the applicant has completed an application to the relevant doctoral program at the University of Ottawa. Consideration of applications will begin on **1 February 2018** and will continue until the award is announced.

The University of Ottawa is a bilingual university and applicants must have a certain oral and reading command of French. Specific requirements vary across departments.

Students interested in applying for the Scholarships beginning in the academic year 2017-2018 are invited to contact Dominique Arel (darel@uottawa.ca), Chairholder, Chair of Ukrainian Studies, and visit our web site (http://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/ukraine)

#3

Vladimir Putin Refers to "Territories Now Called Ukraine" in Ominous Comments During Annual Phone-In

by Samuel Osborne
The Independent (UK), 15 June 2017
http://ind.pn/2sDyXBb

Vladimir Putin has referred to «the territories which now belong to Ukraine» in ominous comments during his annual phone-in.

The Russian President made several remarks about Ukraine, recent anti-government protests and his country's relations with the United States, during A Direct Line With Putin.

"I hope at some time this period in the life and history of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people will come to an end," Mr Putin said.

Mr Putin used the question and answer session to talk to voters about key issues ahead of next year's presidential election, which he is expected to contest.

He went on to say how much he values the views of Ukranians who remember the "common history" uniting Russia and Ukraine. "We grasp it and we value it highly, believe me."

Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and is supporting pro-Russia insurgents in eastern Ukraine, leading Western nations to place sanctions on Moscow. "If it wasn't for Crimea, other problems, they would have invented something else to deter Russia," he said.

During the tightly choreographed marathon TV appearance, Mr Putin gave a rare glimpse into his private life, saying he has two grandchildren whose privacy he wants to respect, and even spoke to a man whose wife had given birth moments ago.

He described Ukranian nationalists as “swastika-brandishing loonies” and added the fathers of Ukranian nationalism believed the country should be a federal state.

“We have many friends in Ukraine,” he said, before going on to say the Ukranian nationalists “all believed Ukraine should be independent but it should also be a federal state.”

He added that “over-centralisation… would lead to domestic conflicts in Ukraine. This is what we have been witnessing.

“By the way, some of the defenders of the Ukrainian independence and the Ukrainian nationalism did not see Crimea as part of Ukraine.”

He said construction of a bridge to connect mainland Russia with Crimea is on schedule “and even slightly ahead of it”. It is meant to be operational by the end of next year.

During the four-hour show, Mr Putin accused his opponents of “abusing” and exploiting problems in Russia rather than offering a solution.

He said that while “street protests always emerge as part of democratic procedures,” they were “not being done to improve the situation in the country.”

He also said Russia’s campaign in Syria had allowed the military to test its state-of-the art weapons in real combat.

The experience allowed engineers to polish weapons designs and has given a “new quality” to the Russian military, he said.

Mr Putin also joked that Russia would offer asylum to former FBI director James Comey, who was fired by Donald Trump.

He said it was “very strange” the FBI official had leaked details of conversations with the US President and compared his actions to those of Edward Snowden.

The Russian President said his country was “ready for a constructive dialogue” with the US.

Mr Putin said Moscow and Washington could cooperate in efforts to prevent the proliferation of mass destruction weapons, including the North Korean nuclear and missile problem.

He said the two countries could also cooperate in dealing with global poverty and efforts to prevent climate change.

"As far as the flashpoints are concerned... there are positive examples of our cooperation. Syrian problem, Mid-Eastern problem on the whole... There are other flashpoints and we are very hopeful for the United States' constructive role in the resolution of the Ukrainian crisis... We are ready for a constructive dialogue."

#4

Navalny Promises Withdrawal of Russian Troops from Donbas, Fair Referendum in Crimea

UNIAN, 9 June 2017
http://bit.ly/2sQx3gy

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny claims, if he is elected president, he is ready to withdraw Russian troops from the occupied areas of eastern Ukraine and hold a fair referendum in the Russian-annexed Crimea, according to the Russian independent television channel Dozhd.

"I will implement the Minsk agreements. The world demands we implement them, Ukraine demands their implementation... I will fulfill the Russian part of the Minsk deal, will turn over control of the border [to Ukraine]," Navalny told in an interview with Russia TV host, journalist and public figure Ksenia Sobchak on TV Channel Dozhd on Friday, June 9.

He did not deny the presence of the Russian army in the occupied Donbas.

"There is no doubt that our troops are there. Of course, there are armed groups that maintain direct [communication] with Russia – this has repeatedly been acknowledged by the leaders of those self-proclaimed republics [the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic]. They openly assert that they are unable to fight without Russia's support, without Russian troops," he said. "

And how do you think, tell me, Ksenia, please – who is paying pensions there now? And who is paying wages there?" he said, addressing Ksenia Sobchak.

Speaking about the Crimea annexed by Russia in March 2014 on the basis of the outcome of a fake referendum, Navalny said that an honest referendum needs to be held on the peninsula.

"What should any good president do? He must hold another normal, or rather, not another, but the first normal, fair referendum, which Ukraine, of course, won't recognize with a high degree of probability, and we are well aware of this," he said.

Navalny says he knows that many in Ukraine and Russia do not like his words, but he is still confident that Crimea will remain unrecognized by anybody in the foreseeable future and "will virtually remain part of the Russian Federation."

"It's not about Ukraine or Russia – it's about the true will of residents of Crimea, which should be expressed in a real way, not the way it was," he stressed. Navalny says he considers the March 2014 referendum to be an "obvious fake."

#5
New Hope in Ukraine Conflict?

by Gwendolyn Sasse
ZOIS Spotlight, 7 June 2017
http://bit.ly/2rPbgkK

Gwendolyn Sasse is the Director of the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS).

On 7 June another round of negotiations about the implementation of the Minsk II Agreement of September 2015 got under way in Minsk at the level of the four Working Groups of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) under the auspices of the OSCE. The TCG brings together representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. While nobody is expecting a breakthrough in the stalemate characterizing the Minsk process, this week's negotiations at the detailed operational level highlight the most pressing humanitarian issues on which agreement has to be reached, the need for a reform of the institutional mechanisms of the Minsk process, and the extent to which the notion of "freezing" the current conflict is misleading.

The Minsk process aimed at securing a ceasefire and resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine proceeds at two levels: at the diplomatic level there is the Normandy format, referring to the talks between the heads of state (or the foreign ministers) of Germany and France, jointly representing the EU, and Ukraine and Russia. And at the operational level there are the Minsk talks centred on the Trilateral Contact Group. It is here that concrete steps towards the implementation of the Minsk agreement are being negotiated. The four Working Groups of the TCG focus on security, humanitarian, political, and economic issues. While progress has been slow in general, the political working group is the one that is most deadlocked. This is due to the inbuilt tension between the security and political dimensions of the Minsk agreement. The security dimension includes restoring Ukraine's control over the border, while the political dimension includes holding local elections in

the occupied territories and implementing a special status for these territories. Russia and Ukraine do not agree on the order in which these steps should be taken.

Over time, more of the political content of the Minsk talks has shifted to the level of the Normandy talks, which have taken place twice a year since their inception in June 2014. Each time, the talks have signaled a commitment to conflict management, in particular on behalf of Germany and France, and these summits have succeeded in restoring at least a temporary ceasefire or decreased the fighting. In-between the high-profile Normandy summits the heads of states, their foreign ministers and advisers remain in regular contact, thereby making an overlap with the four TCG Working Groups unavoidable. This relationship between the Normandy format and the TCG needs to be readjusted in order to strengthen the link between the diplomatic and political levels.

As the ongoing war is getting little coverage in the Western media, issues like internal and external displacement and the humanitarian crisis in the Donbas, especially in the occupied territories, are not part of the public discourse. The International Red Cross cannot access the self-proclaimed People's Republics, although access, including to detainees in prisons, is common in many conflicts. OSCE officials involved in the TCG estimate that even if an agreement on the occupied territories were to be reached immediately, the demining and reconstruction process would take at least five years. The humanitarian issues need to be given more attention by Western governments, media and international institutions.

Officials and observers from Ukraine, Russia and Western countries increasingly present a "frozen conflict" as the best possible option for eastern Ukraine. This expectation is borne out of a misconception about the concept of "frozen conflicts" and of the situation in eastern Ukraine. The description has been used extensively with regard to the other conflicts in the post-Soviet space (Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia), although the situation in these cases has been evolving continuously. The case of the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 illustrates that so-called "frozen conflicts" can easily be reignited.

The notion of "freezing" a conflict reflects an adaption of the concept to not just describe a presumed outcome of political developments but a political strategy to maintain the status quo and thereby deliver a degree of stability. In the case of the Donbas, however, there is no such option, as a continuation of the current situation would lead to a deepening of the humanitarian crisis, further displacement from the occupied territories, a spread of criminal structures, including to both Russia and Ukraine, and a political vacuum that is most likely to be filled by local actors taking matters into their own hands. Compared to the other post-Soviet conflicts, the immediate implications for Europe would also be more serious, as this strategy would effectively perpetuate the stand-off between Russia and Europe or the West more generally. There is nothing stable to this status quo, given the military build-up on the Russian side and the deployment of additional NATO troops, and an increased likelihood of a serious military incident, for example over the Baltic Sea.

In sum, the latest round of negotiations in the TCG Working Groups will not end the stalemate. But they highlight the need for a reform of the Minsk process, both institutionally with regard to the relationship between the Normandy talks and the TCG and in terms of complementing Minsk II with a more targeted agenda on specific issues. Such a discussion could benefit from widening the circle of participating states. In this add-on format small-scale experiments with local elections in the occupied territories, the modalities of a swap of prisoners and amnesty provisions, as well as steps towards at least a temporary special status of the occupied territories that leaves their long-term perspective open, have to be discussed.

#6
Ottawa Quietly Eases Restrictions on Canadian Military Mission in Ukraine

by Lee Berthiaume
Canadian Press, 14 June 2017
https://tgam.ca/2tHjlcF

The military has quietly expanded its footprint in Ukraine, giving commanders free rein to send their troops anywhere — except where they might run into Russian forces or separatist rebels.

Canada first deployed about 200 troops to Ukraine in the summer of 2015 to help train government forces in their fight against Russian-backed separatists in the eastern part of the country.

But the Canadians were required to stay in the western half of Ukraine, far from the conflict that has continued to rage over the intervening two years, leaving more than 10,000 people dead.

Those restrictions were eased in March when the government extended the mission for another two years, the mission's commander, Lt.-Col. Mark Lubiniecki, said in an interview Wednesday.

While Canadian troops are still required to stay away from the border with Russia and the fighting in eastern Ukraine, he said, the rest of the country is now fair game.

The change, Lubiniecki added, has given welcome flexibility to the Canadian mission, which has so far trained nearly 4,500 Ukrainian troops, many of whom have since been sent into the conflict zone.

The number of Canadian soldiers in Ukraine remains the same.

Lubiniecki would not reveal how far his troops have to stay from the Russian border, except to say that it is far enough away to keep them safe and prevent anyone from misinterpreting they they are in Ukraine.

“We’re here to provide mentorship and training, we’re not here to be operating on the front line,” he said. “So making sure we maintain that buffer is extremely important for us.”

The training mission is set to expire in 2019.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights released a report this week on the conflict in eastern Ukraine, asserting that an end to the three-year-old war was nowhere to be seen.

Fighting continues to erupt despite the existence of a ceasefire, while more than 1.6 million people have been forced to flee their homes and another 3 million are struggling to make ends meet.

Canada’s presence in eastern Europe is actually set to expand over the next few months, as about 450 troops arrive in Latvia to lead a NATO force that will serve as a check on Russian aggression.

One of the concerns trumpeted by both Canadian and Latvian officials is that Russia, or at least pro-Russian agitators, will attempt to spread lies and false information about the mission there.

But Lubiniecki said his troops in Ukraine have so far been spared from any such information attacks, saying: “I’m just not seeing it (on the ground) right now.”
That applies to cyberattacks, as well.

Moscow and its separatist allies in eastern Ukraine aren’t the only threats that Kyiv is struggling to address: corruption is also one of several significant problems.

The Ukrainian military and its defence sector have not been spared, as outlined in recent months by various media reports as well as investigations by NGOs such as Transparency International.

Much of the concern has focused on whether Ukrainian government officials have been enriching themselves by skimming defence contracts or diverting equipment donated by countries like Canada.

Transparency International released a report last month saying improvements have been made, but more needs to be done to ensure foreign donations get to the Ukrainian troops who actually need it.

Canada has so far provided about $16-million in non-lethal equipment such as helmets, bulletproof vests and winter clothing to the Ukrainian military, and promised another $7.25-million by 2019.

Lubiniecki said he has not seen any evidence of corruption during his time in the country, and that the Ukrainian soldiers his troops are training are well equipped and motivated.

#7

The Senate Just Passed a Monumental New Russia Sanctions Bill—Here's What's In It

by Edward Fishman
Atlantic Council, 14 June 2017
http://bit.ly/2tzDMYO

Edward Fishman, a fellow at the Atlantic Council, served as a member of the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff and as the Russia and Europe Lead in the State Department's Office of Sanctions Policy during the Obama administration. He tweets @edwardfishman.

Today, the Senate overwhelmingly approved a bill that would fortify existing sanctions on Russia and add new restrictions. If the bill becomes law, it would mark the most significant step taken by Congress on Russia policy in recent history. Though not perfect, the bill would substantially strengthen the West's negotiating position vis-à-vis Russia on the conflict in Ukraine and send a strong message to Moscow that efforts to undermine US elections carry costly consequences.

It is not yet a sure thing that the bill will become law. While the legislation has bipartisan support in the Senate, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson signaled on June 13 that the Trump administration might oppose it. The White House's opposition could give House Republicans cold feet about voting on the bill.

But for now, it is worth examining the contents of the bill and explaining what it would mean for US policy toward Russia.

1. The bill locks in existing US sanctions against Russia and gives Congress a check on the president's ability to lift sanctions.

The most basic element of the bill is that it codifies existing US sanctions against Russia—including three executive orders tied to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, one tied explicitly to Russia's annexation of Crimea, and two tied to malicious cyber activities. Absent such codification, President Donald Trump could terminate US sanctions against Russia with the stroke of a pen. By codifying the executive orders, the bill constrains the executive branch's ability to remove any of the sanctions currently in place.

Moreover, the bill spells out what the president must do in order to remove sanctions: submit a report to Congress explaining the rationale, including what the United States expects to receive in return. Within thirty days of the submission of such a report (sixty if it is submitted during summer), Congress can approve or reject the president's decision to remove sanctions.

By itself, this measure greatly strengthens US policy toward Russia. On Ukraine, it will give America's sanctions partners (the European Union, Japan, Canada, and several others) confidence that Trump will not unilaterally back away from sanctions—which, in turn, will make it less likely that America's partners will remove sanctions. Equally important, the provision will give Moscow clarity about America's position: the United States will maintain sanctions until Russia changes the behavior that led to the imposition of sanctions in the first place.

2. The bill significantly expands US sanctions on Russia's energy sector. If implemented proactively, it would cut off Russia's hopes for developing its next-generation oil resources.

Current sanctions prohibit Western companies from providing goods or services to next-generation oil projects in Russia: specifically, Arctic offshore, deepwater, and shale projects. The bill expands US restrictions in two important ways. First, it brings projects in which Russian companies are involved—regardless of where they are located—under the purview of sanctions. That means Russian companies will be denied the opportunity to amass expertise in advanced drilling techniques by learning from Western partners.

Second, the bill requires the executive branch to impose sanctions on foreign firms that make significant investments in next-generation Russian oil projects. This provision—a classic case of secondary sanctions—will discourage companies around the world from investing in Arctic offshore, deepwater, and shale oil projects in Russia, diminishing the risk that lost US business will be backfilled by foreign competitors.

Taken together, the energy sanctions in the bill will likely block Russia's development of next-generation oil resources, which can take many years to develop, for as long as the sanctions are in place. For Russia's oil-dependent economy, this is a big deal.

3. The strongest sanctions in the bill concern transactions with Russia's intelligence and defense sectors. These measures are the bill's most important counterpunch against Russia's interference in the 2016 US election.

As a response to Russia's interference in the 2016 US election, the bill includes a number of sanctions that make sense thematically but will likely have minimal economic impact. But it does include one provision that packs a major economic punch: mandatory sanctions on any "person" (i.e., individual or entity) "that engages in a significant transaction with a person that is part of, or operates for or on behalf of, the defense or intelligence sectors

of the Government of the Russian Federation." If the Treasury Department implements this provision aggressively, it will amount to a threat of secondary sanctions against any company around the world that buys substantial arms from Russia (which, as of 2016, accounted for roughly 8 percent of arms sales globally).

With Russia investing heavily in arms while it increasingly uses its military to defy international norms, it behooves the US government to take steps to impede the development of Russia's military capabilities. This provision, therefore, not only represents the muscle of the bill on cyber deterrence but also advances strategic objectives by hindering Russia's military modernization and incentivizing foreign militaries to diversify away from Russian arms purchases.

4. The bill includes an optional tool that could help the US government impede Nord Stream II—and enhance European energy security—if the White House decides to use it.

While most sanctions in the Senate bill are mandatory, one important measure is discretionary: sanctions on investment in the construction of Russian energy export pipelines. If the Treasury Department opts to use this provision aggressively, it could threaten sanctions against any company that makes a significant investment in Nord Stream II, the controversial gas pipeline that would connect Russia to Germany by way of the Baltic Sea. And if Treasury were to levy such threats credibly, the parties involved in Nord Stream II may well decide it is too risky to proceed with the project.

This would be a big deal, as it would scupper Russia's efforts to deliver gas to Europe while bypassing Ukraine, and it would help the EU diversify away from Russian energy. It could also be a boon for American companies seeking to export liquefied natural gas to Europe.

5. Other sanctions in the bill are mostly symbolic.

Under current sanctions, American financial institutions cannot provide credit to the six largest Russian banks with maturity of thirty days or more. The bill tightens the debt maturity threshold to fourteen days. While the symbolism is clear—sanctions are tightening and inching closer to blacklisting the Russian banks entirely—it is doubtful such a move will have significant practical impact. Other measures included in the bill, such as sanctions on the corrupt privatization of state-owned Russian assets, are difficult to judge in terms of projected impact.

6. This bill sounds great—what's the catch?

There are several loopholes in the bill. One obvious loophole is in sanctions on investments in next-generation Russian oil projects. The text of the bill allows the White House to opt not to impose the sanctions if "the president determines that it is not in the national interest of the United States to do so." While waiver authority is necessary, the provision would be improved if it required a report to Congress each time the president

decides not to penalize a worthy target. Thankfully, the strongest provision in the bill—which restricts transactions with Russia's intelligence and defense sectors—includes a waiver that mandates Congressional notification.

Other quibbles with the bill are minor. The bill requires several reports from the executive branch, including a study on the potential impact of a ban on dealing in Russian sovereign debt. Reports, unfortunately, can suck up precious staff time that is better spent enforcing sanctions proactively. The bill would be much stronger—and more effective—if it simply imposed restrictions on dealing in Russian sovereign debt.

Nevertheless, senators on both sides of the aisle deserve much credit for designing legislation that will clearly advance US interests.

7. Keep your eyes on the EU's reaction.

Had Congress passed such a bill during the Obama administration, the EU would have opposed it vocally. That's because the bill alters certain sanctions that were initially negotiated multilaterally, without giving the EU or others a chance to weigh in. Moreover, because of the reach of the US financial system, European firms will likely comply with the new American sanctions whether or not their governments approve. And of course, the bill includes a number of secondary sanctions—which no foreign government likes.

In ordinary times, France could be expected to oppose the bill as a unilateral use of American power. But having been victimized by brazen Russian cyberattacks during his own campaign, President Emmanuel Macron may be tempted to support it—or at least to remain quiet. The same is true for German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who may view the legislation as an opportunity to reestablish a degree of transatlantic unity on Russia policy.

Regardless, Secretary Tillerson and Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin would be wise to send envoys to Europe to try to persuade US allies to sign on to similar sanctions. The West's leverage in negotiations with the Kremlin is strongest when America and the EU project a united front.

8. What does the bill mean for broader US policy toward Russia?

One interesting hypothetical is what will happen if the bill becomes law but the Trump administration is apathetic about enforcing it. Such a move would muddle US policy toward Russia. After all, sanctions are only as useful as the policies they are meant to advance. But the executive branch will be required by law to implement most provisions in the bill, and the Treasury Department will take its legal obligations seriously.

Even if Trump persists in his pro-Russia rhetoric, the bill will provide much-needed clarity to US policy toward Russia. It will end worried speculation about the White

House's intentions on sanctions, and it will indicate once and for all that America remains committed to combating Russian aggression. That the US Senate was able to pass such a significant piece of legislation during a time of intense partisan division is no small achievement.

#8

Berlin Hits Back at US Move to Tighten Danctions on Russia

by Henry Foy and Demetri Sevastopulo
Financial Times, 15 June 2017
http://on.ft.com/2rmRg9w

Germany and Austria have castigated new American sanctions on Russia that target Moscow's controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Europe, describing them as an illegal threat to EU energy security.

Sending a strong message to Moscow, the US Senate on Wednesday voted 97-2 to approve measures that toughen existing sanctions on Moscow and create new restrictions that target companies which support Russian "energy export pipelines".

In a joint statement on Thursday, Berlin and Vienna said the amendment heralded a "new and very negative quality in European-American relations".

The Senate move threatens to break a delicate transatlantic consensus on Russia sanctions orchestrated by Chancellor Angela Merkel, which has until now excluded Russia's export pipelines partly because they involved key German interests.

It adds to the conflicts between Washington and Berlin that have developed since Donald Trump's election, following the US president's attacks on Germany's defence spending and trade surplus, and his criticisms of global economic co-operation.

"Europe's energy supply is a matter for Europe, not the United States of America," said the statement, issued by Sigmar Gabriel, German foreign minister, and Austrian chancellor Christian Kern.

Ms Merkel is likely to be more cautious of criticising the Senate proposal as she has long been wary of the Nord Stream project, which is strongly opposed by Poland and other eastern European EU allies.

But the joint statement was unusually strongly worded. "We cannot accept…the threat of illegal extraterritorial sanctions against European companies that participate in the development of European energy supply," it said.

The Russia sanctions outline opposition to Nord Stream 2, a pipeline that will double capacity for Gazprom, the Kremlin-controlled gas monopoly, to supply gas to Europe under the Baltic Sea. The measures could affect European energy companies, including Shell, Engie and OMV, which are financing the pipeline. Shares in all four companies tumbled on Thursday.

The rare bipartisan move by the divided Senate underscored the anger in Washington over allegations that Russia conducted cyber attacks on the US last year that were an effort to interfere with the election.

The amendment was attached to a broader bill that imposes sanctions on Iran over its ballistic missile programme. The overall bill also requires approval from the House of Representative where there is not expected to be much opposition.

The Senate measure also codifies existing sanctions into law and makes it harder for the White House to ease punitive actions — an element that was included because of concerns earlier this year that President Trump was considering easing sanctions on Russia as part of a deal to spur more co-operation with Moscow on various issues.

The Kremlin had hoped that Mr Trump would adopt a softer stance on Russia than Barack Obama, but those hopes have diminished as the US president has become more engulfed by the FBI investigation into alleged links between his election campaign and Moscow. Robert Mueller, the special prosecutor leading the FBI investigation, is looking into whether Mr Trump tried to obstruct justice by urging an end to the investigation.

Nord Stream 2 is under regulatory scrutiny following claims that it would increase European reliance on Russian supplies and reduce lucrative gas transit through Ukraine, a US ally. But Mr Gabriel and Mr Kern said the US was keen to expand its exports of liquid natural gas to Europe, and views the new pipeline as a competitor.

“The goal is to secure jobs in the oil and gas industry in the USA,” they said. “Who gives us energy and how we decide is according to the rules of openness and market competition.”

Following the first US shipment of LNG to Poland last week, the Trump administration said exports “support American jobs, lower energy prices for our partners abroad, and contribute to Europe’s energy security goals using a reliable, market-based supplier”.

Russian President Vladimir Putin brushed off the sanctions. “Now we know that another draft bill has appeared in the US Senate on toughening these sanctions. Why, by the way?” Mr Putin asked during an annual televised call-in show. “This is, of course, a sign of continued political infighting in the US.”

The Senate amendment requires the imposition of sanctions against entities that make an investment or sell, lease or provide “goods, services, technology, information, or support” to projects for the export of energy from Russia. Mike Crapo, an Idaho senator

who co-authored the measure, said it would sanction entities that "invest or support the construction of Russian energy export pipelines".

Nord Stream 2, the company managing the pipeline, said the move was a sign of "increasing politicisation of Nord Stream 2 driven by commercial interests", and suggested it was part of the US's intentions to become a major gas supplier to Europe through exports of LNG.

"This unprecedented course of action is clearly aimed at undermining the position of a future commercial competitor in an already diversified market," it said. "It follows similar scare tactics by some European countries with existing or planned gas import infrastructure to protect their own commercial interests by using political arguments."

Alexander Medvedev, Gazprom's deputy chairman, shrugged off the impact of the Senate amendment on his company. "I think the bill is aimed at US companies. This is a case of cutting off your nose to look beautiful. If senators believe that they can block the US-Russian co-operation, god be their judge," he said in comments reported by the Interfax news agency.

#9

EU Rolls Over Crimea Sanctions For Another Year

AFP, 19 June 2017
http://bit.ly/2sLKfnb

Luxembourg—The European Union on Monday rolled over for another year sanctions imposed to protest Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, which the bloc deems illegal.

The Crimea sanctions prohibit certain exports and imports, and ban investment and tourism services by EU-based companies there.

"The Council (of member states) extended the restrictive measures in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by Russia until 23 June 2018," a statement said.

"The EU continues to condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation and remains committed to fully implement its non-recognition policy," the Council statement added.

The sanctions were imposed in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 as the Ukraine crisis deepened with the ouster of a pro-Moscow government.

Efforts to resolve the conflict have failed repeatedly, with the death toll rising to more than 10,000.

The EU insists Russia must be held to account for its support of the rebels but Moscow says Brussels is at fault for aiding and abetting the overthrow of a legitimate government in Kiev.

In addition to the Crimea measures, the EU imposed damaging economic sanctions against Russia after the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in July 2014, blamed by the EU on the rebels.

The EU extended these sanctions for another six months in December and they are widely expected to be rolled over again in July.

In March, the 28-nation bloc also extended for six months its asset freezes and travel bans on Ukraine and Russian figures held responsible for supporting the rebels.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, in a tweet, hailed the EU's move on Monday but said "the price" Moscow should pay "for this attempted annexation should be higher."

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesman Dimitry Peskov said that for Russia, the sanctions were not "legitimate."

"These sanctions not only harm us but also the countries that initiate them," he argued.

#10
Ukraine Ready for Economic Liftoff Soon

by Anders Åslund
Kyiv Post, 16 June 2017
http://bit.ly/2sjTN7k

Anders Åslund is a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council in Washington and a former economic advisor to the Ukrainian government.

Ukraine is at the beginning of its economic recovery. It has gone through a severe economic crisis but undertaken the necessary adjustments. After two years of severe output contraction in 2014–15, the economy saw a hesitant recover of 2.3 percent last year. The standard forecasts suggest growth will continue at 2–3 percent a year. That is unlikely — a higher growth rate seems more probable.

While Ukraine's recovery remains fragile, the preconditions look pretty good, especially the macroeconomic fundamentals. Two key conditions are the budget deficit and the current account deficit, which Ukraine has reduced to about 3 percent of gross domestic product.

Inflation has fallen to 12 percent and is set to decline further. With $17.6 billion in international currency reserves, Ukraine can cover four months of imports, which is sufficient. The hryvnia exchange rate is highly competitive and has stabilized, being more likely to rise than to fall.

Better than normal

Two big risks have gone away. Naftogaz's extraordinary victory against Gazprom in the Stockholm arbitration on May 31 saved the country the risk of a Russian claim of $40 billion or more. Ukraine might even get substantial compensation for Gazprom overpricing. The nationalization of PrivatBank last December eliminated the risk of financial chaos. Ukraine's current debt is 83 percent of GDP, less than anticipated, and it will decline with the likely appreciation of the hryvnia and growing GDP.

Ukraine has not only returned to normal but improved. The fiscal burden on the Ukrainian economy has eased. Public expenditures have been slashed heroically from 53 percent of GDP in 2014 to 40 percent of GDP, mainly cutting corrupt subsidies to energy traders and state enterprises, which has leveled the playing field. The ProZorro electronic procurement system has accomplished the same. The reduction of the payroll tax from 45 percent to 22 percent was a great improvement. Ukraine's banking sector has been cleaned out, and is ready for a sound expansion. The arrest of much of the former leadership of the State Fiscal Service can lead to a cleansing of the tax collection and customs. The notorious value-added tax refunds for exports are supposed to be automatic now. Ukraine has come out with a much more liberal market economy that is now ready to grow fast.

Land market reform

The next big step should be land market reform. Farmers need to own their land to invest fully and to be able to use it as collateral for bank loans, so that they can invest more and so that the banks can expand their lending securely. The Ukrainian myth is that the "oligarchs" will buy all the land, but they cannot. Land prices will rise with the development of a land market, probably by three times, and the "oligarchs" have too little capital.

The current large agroholdings do not have sufficient capital to buy the land they now lease so cheaply. Ukraine's current agroholdings are often too large to manage. Latifundias work for extensive agriculture, but not for intensive cultivation. The large farms will have to reduce the size of their holdings, rendering them more manageable and efficient.

Instead, medium-sized family farms of some 2,000 hectares are likely to develop, as is predominantly the case in Illinois, where the agricultural conditions are very similar to Ukraine. Ukraine can no longer afford to deprive itself of its greatest asset.

Property rights

After years of resistance from the old judges and prosecutors, some progress is finally visible with the formation of a new Supreme Court and mass arrests of corrupt tax officials. Admittedly, this is only a first step, which is not all too convincing, but at least something is happening. I would much rather see the sacking of all old prosecutors and judges and their replacement with a new guard. The essence is that property rights must be secured, which is the ultimate duty of the president.

An economic recovery is under way. GDP grew by 2.3 percent last year and by 4.8 percent during the last quarter of 2016. Ukraine was set for a take off, but then some politicians in the Self-Reliance party started a blockade against Rinat Akhmetov's transit of coal from his coal mines in occupied Donbas to his power stations in free Ukraine.
Everything was wrong with this action. Foreign policy should be the monopoly of the government, and not in play for activists. This action alone shaved off at least 1 percent of 2017 GDP, and it offered Russia an excuse to confiscate 40 private Ukrainian companies in the occupied territories, and incite their further integration into Russia. This wrong-headed action continues to drive down Ukraine's industrial production.

More political fireworks can delay the badly needed land market reform, but the fear of early elections has abated. Growth continues, though on a lower trajectory. It is driven by investment, construction, consumption and recently exports.

One often-posed question is which industries will drive Ukraine's economic recovery. Two of the growth engines are already in place, the quickly expanding agriculture and related industries, and computer programming, accounting for more than 3 percent of GDP.

The third latent growth engine is the European supply chain, the European outsourcing of manufacturing and services to Ukraine now when the border barriers have largely come down. Why produce in Poland, when the salaries are one-fifth on the Ukrainian side of the border?

#11

Russia is Shooting Itself in the Foot by its Trial of Journalist in Occupied Crimea

by Halya Coynash
Human Rights in Ukraine, 15 June 2017
http://bit.ly/2rxK9LL

The verdicts against Ukrainian journalist Mykola Semena and Crimean Tatar Mejlis leader Ilmi Umerov may be predetermined, but nothing else about Russia's 'trials' is going to plan. In both cases, these pretend trials are, on the contrary, highlighting the fact that it is Russia that is violating its own laws through its ongoing occupation of Crimea, and the level of hysterical surveillance and repression under Russian control.

Both men are charged with 'separatism', and specifically with having made 'public calls to action aimed at violating Russia's territorial integrity'.

The charges against Semena are over an article on the Crimean civic blockade which the journalist supported as a peaceful move towards ending Russia's occupation of his homeland. The article was written as part of a debate on the Blockade and was thus clearly presented as the author's opinion. Russia's prosecution of Semena is also useful in countering Moscow's denial that its invasion has resulted in restrictions on press freedom. Semena was forced to write under a pseudonym, yet was still 'caught' due to a level of surveillance reminiscent of the worst Soviet days.

The hearing on June 14 was due to examine correspondence in Ukrainian, but that had to be adjourned since the Russian translator did not appear. Semena's lawyers are unclear what the prosecution is hoping to prove by presenting such correspondence as 'evidence', and assume it to be part of the general efforts to imitate court proceedings.

With the poring over Semena's correspondence deferred, the defence seized the opportunity to read out an alternative expert assessment, produced by Mikhail Savva, a Russian political scientist and former Professor of the Kuban State University.

Professor Savva is clear that what Semena wrote in his article was his opinion. It cannot be considered as calls to violate Russia's territorial integrity, since Crimea is not part of the Russian Federation in international law.

Semena later explained to Krym.Realii that the prosecution in this case is following a political line. Every piece of supposed 'evidence' is politically coloured, while the defence is determined to bring the case back to a legal framework. He outlined the fundamental principles on which the court should be based, namely, the fact that in international law, as well as Russian legislation, Crimea is not a part of the Russian Federation. "Therefore the accusation that during a discussion I tried to encroach in some way on the Russian Federation's territorial integrity is unproven and without foundation".

As reported earlier, Russia has changed the domestic legislation it can since invading and annexing Crimea, but remains a signatory to international agreements according to which Crimea is unequivocally part of Ukraine. These are unquestionably also part of Russian legislation and binding upon the country.

By staging show trials aimed at silencing opposition to annexation, Russia has drawn attention to the fact that its own legislation indicts Russian President Vladimir Putin and all those who helped him invade another country's territory.

This is a political trial and the fact that the 67-year-old journalist has already been added to Russia's so-called List of Extremists and Terrorists leaves no place for illusions about a real trial.

Semena is charged over an article entitled "The Blockade – a necessary first step to the liberation of Crimea". The text was written in September 2015, and polemicized with another writer who had expressed concern about the hardships that the civic blockade, initiated with detailed human rights demands, could cause.

The author of the article points out that Crimea had been under Nazi occupation for 2.5 years and must not be under Russian for any longer. He uses 'military' language about the Blockade, but very clearly as a metaphor for the degree of determination and organization involved.

"The Blockade must be full, systematic and designed so that it is followed by liberation."

"Yes, Ukraine will never bring war to Crimea, that's true. Because it [war] was brought there by Russia. The fact that in Crimea there is no military action now, is to the credit of Ukraine, not of Russia. Ukraine handed Crimea over when it was not in a position to defend it, but that doesn't mean for ever."

Semena's 'trial' has been internationally condemned and recognized as an offensive against freedom of speech and independent journalism. Both Ukrainian and international rights groups have called for maximum attention and a "strong and clear reaction" from the international community.

#12
The Forgotten Ukraine Conflict

Evidence of War Crimes Emerge from the East
Sunday Times (UK), 18 June 2017
http://bit.ly/2sgp1wp

It was the goldfish that led to Oleksandr Grishchenko's arrest, torture and near-execution. The middle-aged veterinary surgeon decided to flee the embattled city of Luhansk in eastern Ukraine in July 2014 as Russian-backed separatists seized control. First, though, he needed to visit his clinic. "We had a small aquarium and the fish hadn't been fed for days," he says. "They were starving."

An armed separatist cornered him outside, demanding to see his papers, which Oleksandr had left at home. The gunman, increasingly aggressive, accused him of being a spy and ordered him into a car. “There was no reason to run away — I was innocent — so I went with him.”

He was about to join the hundreds of people locked away in basements and jails in the lawless, rebel-controlled areas of the Donbas region, where Ukrainian government forces have been fighting Russian-backed separatists since April 2014. Many of these victims remain in captivity, having been subjected to forced labour, public humiliation, beatings, sexual violence and torture. Grishchenko got away shortly before he was about to be shot.

When I meet him in Kiev three years later, the 56-year-old vet is pleasant and softly spoken, but overshadowed by a profound air of sadness, pain and exhaustion. We talk late into the evening as he relives the day of his arrest and descent into hell.

Browsing through Grishchenko’s phone outside the vet’s clinic, the gunman came across photos of pro-Ukrainian demonstrations. With a menacing smile, he said this was enough to get Grishchenko killed — “but we’ll hand you over to a counter-terror unit instead”.

He was frogmarched to a damp basement on a university campus where a single bulb hanging from the ceiling lit up the faces of about 20 other captives. “One man’s face was all cut up,” Grishchenko recalls. “Another lay crippled on the floor from a beating. The room smelled of sweat and shit.”

The soldiers returned a few hours later and hauled Grishchenko upstairs to a torture chamber run by a notorious separatist commander nicknamed Batman. He was kicked to the ground then repeatedly throttled with a rope, causing him to black out. His torturer, who gave his name as Maniac, shouted: “Admit you’re a spy. Admit you’re a f****** spy.”

Grishchenko was stripped naked, tied to a table and beaten. After failing to extract a confession, Maniac bent each of his fingers back until they broke, then cut the skin between them with a surgical blade. That night, he was left naked and handcuffed to a chair alongside other detainees. “It was humiliating. My cuffs were so tight my hands turned blue. The guard refused to loosen them for two days.”

For four months, Grishchenko stayed in that basement, only once allowed to wash himself. Maniac dealt out frequent beatings. Power cuts often kept the prisoners in total darkness. Grishchenko saw one hostage beaten to death, and encountered imprisoned teenage girls who were allegedly used as sex slaves at the front line.

One morning, he and the others were loaded onto a bus and driven to the city outskirts. “They wanted to liquidate us,” he says. “We had seen too much.” But a rival rebel faction attacked the guards: Grishchenko escaped and lay low with some trusted friends. Later that freezing winter, he sneaked into his house, grabbed his passport and boarded a bus

to Moscow. After taking another bus to Kiev, he eventually secured work at a veterinary practice, sleeping at a run-down hostel.

A few months into this new life, still deeply traumatised, Grishchenko logged onto VKontakte, Russia's version of Facebook. Scrolling through absent-mindedly, he suddenly noticed a photo album of a Russian whom he recognised as a former guard from the torture chamber.

"This guy had returned home to Murmansk [in the far northwest of Russia]and posted a collection of pictures," says Grishchenko. "The album was entitled Memories of Donbas. His photos made him out to be some kind of hero fighting for freedom, fighting for a better life." He slowly exhales. "But not one of the photos showed his crimes."

Above a sunless courtyard in downtown Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, lies Office 25: a nerve centre of activists and lawyers fighting to expose the dark secrets of the Donbas dungeons. This is the headquarters of the Center for Civil Liberties (CCL), which investigates human-rights violations across Ukraine, including annexed Crimea and the war-racked east.

Hundreds of Ukrainian servicemen and civilians are missing or held as prisoners of war in abysmal conditions in the east's breakaway regions. They are pawns in a wider geopolitical game, and campaigners fear that time is running out for them.

At CCL's offices, I meet some of the victims helped by the organisation. Among them is 50-year-old Iryna Boyko, who has travelled to Kiev from her hometown, Poltava, in central Ukraine — the region that gave 19th-century Russia, which ruled much of Ukraine, one of its greatest writers, Nikolai Gogol. Stout and sunny, Boyko greets us with a cheerful grin, but her jocular bearing belies a terrible ordeal. It is some time before I notice that half her little finger is missing.

Boyko lived a simple life before the turmoil of revolution and war set in motion a devastating series of events. The daughter of chemical workers, she grew up in what was then the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, part of the Soviet Union. She joined a construction firm in another Soviet territory, Armenia, before returning home, where she had children. Her husband died 11 years ago. Boyko established a small charity in his memory and took a sales job to support her family. Then the protests began.

Through the long winter of 2013-14, hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Kiev after Ukraine's pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovych, rejected a far-reaching deal with the European Union in favour of stronger ties with Moscow.

"My granddaughter spent the last of her pocket money buying food for a protester," Boyko recalls. "That's when I joined the movement. How could I stand back after that?" She started helping demonstrators, donating provisions, organising meetings. "It was tough but exciting."

The mass rallies eventually toppled Yanukovych, but triggered a greater crisis. Moscow dispatched its forces to seize Crimea in February 2014 and the industrial east subsequently descended into bloody anarchy. Russia's military covertly began arming, co-ordinating and reinforcing the separatist insurgency, which declared independence in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions — known collectively as Donbas.

With astonishing bravery, Boyko began smuggling families out of the breakaway east. She and her team repeatedly travelled into volatile, separatist-held territory to secure safe passage for dozens of civilians, duping checkpoint militants with fake stories to gain access. "We never asked for any money," she says. "We'd flay our own skin to help these people."

In late June 2014, Boyko rose at 4am with three colleagues to deliver aid to under-supplied government troops. Later that day, in the sweltering heat, they drove into the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic to collect a pensioner and a pregnant woman desperate to escape. By 5pm, they were still on the road — hot, tired and far from government-controlled territory. In a coalmining town near the Russian border, a separatist stopped Boyko's minivan and made a call on her mobile. Within minutes, a unit of pro-Russian Cossacks sped towards them in a convoy of battered cars. Stepping out, they began aggressively interrogating Boyko's group, accusing them of supporting the "enemy". Then the militants ordered them at gunpoint into a car.

As they drove down a potholed road in silence, thuds of artillery fading into the distance, Boyko stared out of the window, her heart pounding. The soldiers pulled into an abandoned factory, locked the group inside and left. Later that night, the men returned, some stinking of alcohol, and forced their captives into the yard. Shouting at them to face the wall, the soldiers fired their assault rifles. Jaw clenched and eyes screwed tight, Boyko felt bullets zip past her head to ricochet off the wall.

On the second night, the beatings began. "It was hell. There was no reason — they did it for fun, for sport," says Boyko with a sigh. "I tried counting each blow, to maintain control, but I lost count."

The following morning, they were transported to the separatist stronghold of Horlivka, then ruled by Igor Bezler, a feared rebel leader known as Demon. A mob of locals threw punches as the captives arrived, fracturing Boyko's jaw, cheeks and eye socket in seven places. But the real torture was yet to begin.

Boyko's face darkens, her voice becomes quieter. "We were dragged into a back room. They pinned me down, grabbed my hand and chopped off my little finger with cable cutters. Next, they tried to break my toes with pliers. I refused to scream, so they grabbed a hammer and smashed my knees so hard the hammer broke. One of them drilled an electric drill into my foot, then, more than a dozen times, into different parts of my body." Finally, a soldier dug a spoon deep into her eye in a bid to gouge it from its socket. He eventually gave up and Boyko passed out, her right eye permanently blinded.

On day four, Boyko was transferred to a filthy garage, where she remained in solitary confinement for two months, before being moved to a cell shared with 20 others. Twice a day, they were allowed out; by night they slept on ammunition crates, the light permanently on.

“The other prisoners chatted with each other, but at first I stayed silent. I prayed all the time. Every day, the guards threatened to shoot us. One of them was OK and sneaked me extra rations. Not all of them were bad.”

The weeks rolled by. Beyond her secret prison, full-scale war raged. But, inside, Boyko grew close to her guards, dressing their wounds from the fighting and tending broken limbs. “For me, it wasn’t strange. They’re human beings too. It didn’t mean I loved Ukraine any less. Anyway,” she adds, “it meant I got better food.”

Deliverance came without warning. Unknown to her, the warring parties had agreed to a prisoner exchange. In late September — the day after her birthday and 103 days after her capture — a guard escorted her from prison, bought her lunch and a new tracksuit, then drove to the buffer zone. “I felt nothing as I crossed,” Boyko recalls. “It was a blur. I didn’t understand what was happening. But as soon as I saw the Ukrainian flag, I fell to the ground. I thought I’d never come home.”

For months, she was terrified that her tormentors would hunt her down. Her physical scars were healing, but the psychological wounds led to black periods of depression. Through therapy and willpower, she has overcome the worst — the anger, the engulfing sense of isolation, the inconsolable sadness — but she does not yet feel fully free, because some of the friends captured with her on that rescue mission three years ago are still imprisoned.

“The best therapy for me is to try to free others in captivity. The worst is past. My only aim now is to save those left behind.”

Why are civilians subjected to such horrors? The Kiev government says there are 128 prisoners in the east, with a further 400 listed as missing. The true numbers are likely to be far higher. The Kremlin — which has long denied having a significant military presence in the war, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary — is accused of exploiting the captives as tools for propaganda and as bargaining chips to obtain pardons for separatist militants.

One theory is that Moscow’s strategy is eventually to wind down the conflict and secure semi-autonomy for the unrecognised republics, which would then be reabsorbed into Ukraine. This course — which is likely to include an amnesty deal — would furnish the Kremlin with a Trojan horse: pro-Russian regions ruled by compliant governors that carry out Moscow’s bidding, thereby granting the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, influence in Kiev, impeding Ukraine’s further integration with the West.

Oleksandra Matviychuk, head of the CCL, tells me: “In Donbas, we’re seeing kidnappings, executions of civilians, crimes against humanity. This happens regardless of a person’s age, gender or health. All face torture and abuse. It is a sustained campaign — the same things happen again and again. The purpose is to deliver a powerful message and control the population with terror.”

Disregard for the Geneva Conventions is not restricted to Russian-backed forces, however. Human rights groups also accuse Ukraine of abducting, torturing and secretly detaining separatists, albeit on a different scale. The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) — a successor to the KGB — has held prisoners incommunicado for up to 15 months, while the country’s court system is deeply corrupted. In April, rogue militiamen from the pro-Ukrainian, now-disbanded “Tornado” battalion were convicted in Kiev for the torture and sexual assault of civilians in a case that has tested the government’s ability to rein in its own paramilitaries and hold them to account.

International watchdogs say abuses are greater in Crimea and the separatist east. “In Crimea, it is a hidden war that uses fear and oppression,” Matviychuk says. “There is the simulacrum of a legal framework — police, courts, judges — but it is an empty facade. Donbas exists in a total grey zone. If you’re arrested, you cannot protect yourself. There is no legal framework. This is a real military dictatorship.”

Prisoner exchanges — like the wider peace process — have stalled. Liberation of captives was a cornerstone of a ceasefire agreement reached in February 2015, but has been sidelined by continuing hostilities.

There is an official Ukrainian body to negotiate the release of prisoners of war, but the process is haphazard and impenetrably bureaucratic. Volunteer groups and private figures have secured releases where the government has failed. Relatives of captive soldiers may resort to enlisting well-connected mediators to negotiate the release of loved ones — a route beset with bribery and betrayal.

The war is in its fourth year. About 10,000 people are dead, more than 2m have been displaced and artillery attacks continue to hit civilian areas. While many are repulsed by the prospect of a political settlement that lets off the worst offenders, an amnesty could reinvigorate prisoner exchanges and open a dialogue for reconciliation. Surely, I ask Matviychuk, this course is preferable to protracted armed conflict?

On this, she is intransigent. “There can be no compromise,” she insists. “There can be no amnesty for human-rights violations. We have done this before and it does not fix the root of the problem. We must stop the cycle of impunity.”

#13

Pro-Ukrainian blogger disappears in separatist-controlled area of eastern Ukraine

by Tanya Lokshina
OpenDemocracy, 17 June 2017
http://bit.ly/2rOurv6

Two weeks ago, Stas called his mother to say he was on a bus entering Donetsk city, in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) in eastern Ukraine. He was planning to visit her and his grandmother the next morning. She was excited. Stas had been traveling for work for days in other parts of Ukraine, and she missed him. However, Stas did not show up at her home that morning. He has been missing since that phone call on 2 June, feared forcibly disappeared by the separatist Donetsk authorities.

I met Stas, 27, in Donetsk last year. A pro-Ukrainian blogger and a regular contributor to RFE/RL, he wrote under the name of Stanyslav Vasin. An underground reporter in an area controlled by Russia-backed separatists, Stas published compelling chronicles of life in the DPR, from shooting and shelling to local infrastructure and cultural events. With the war in eastern Ukraine dragging on for three years and no end in sight, his blog became a unique window into life on the other side of the "line of contact" for many Ukrainians who have no access to separatist-controlled areas.

Stas made no secret of his pro-Ukrainian views and hopes for ultimate defeat of the Russia-backed separatists. I read his blog once in a while and on a work-trip to Donetsk I sent him a message introducing myself and suggesting we meet for a coffee. He asked me to call him Stas, short for Stanyslav, but it never crossed my mind this was his real name. Only after his disappearance did I find out from RFE/RL and other media that he had changed his surname for security purposes, but kept his first name as part of his Internet identity.

Late in the evening, we sat in an almost deserted café for over an hour speaking mainly about the climate of raw fear in the DPR. He described himself as "possibly the only person in Donetsk who dares speak his mind freely [online]."

He said that he also knew a few others in the broader separatist-controlled territory who spoke critically of the de-facto authorities on social media but he had never met them in person. "When I say I know these people, it's not quite accurate," he explained.

"It's rather that I know of them and they know of me. We don't know the real names. We don't know where the others live, except that we're all on this side of the line of contact. The prerequisite of survival is total anonymity. I keep a super-low profile, stay away from people. Even my mother has no idea what I really do and how I live."

On 3 June, when Stas didn't show up, his mother, overcome with worry, went to the apartment Stas rented in Donetsk. The door to the apartment was locked. She waited until late at night, to no avail. The next day, the landlord opened the apartment for her. The place looked like it had been ransacked. She rushed to the police and filed a missing person report. She went to the DPR's Ministry of State Security to enquire if they had detained her son, but they refused to let her in. The Ministry is the most feared agency in the DPR, due to its reputation of operating without oversight, arbitrarily detaining people and holding them incommunicado.

Two weeks later, the police still have no information about Stas – or at least none they're willing to share. Neither Stas' mother or editors know where to turn. Stas' role as a pro-Ukrainian blogger and journalist, coupled with the DPR's disturbing record of detaining dissenters incommunicado for prolonged periods, give strong grounds to be concerned that local security officials have forcibly disappeared him. Human Rights Watch has documented numerous cases when DPR State Security ministry officials have forcibly disappeared people who were, or were thought to be, pro-Ukraine, holding them without acknowledging it for several weeks.

If Stas is indeed in DPR custody, the de-facto authorities should immediately end his forcible disappearance by acknowledging his detention, and release him.

#14

UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine: 36 Civilians Killed and 157 wounded in Donbas over Three Months

Ukraine Crisis Media Center, 13 June 2017
http://bit.ly/2sjONQh

[The latest UN OHCHR report can be downloaded at http://bit.ly/2rOLtJv]

From February 16 to May 15, 2017, as a result of combat operations in Donbas 36 civilians were killed, 157 were injured. "This is a 48 per cent increase compared to the previous reporting period, and a 70 per cent increase comparing to the same time period one year ago. Shellings accounted for 42 per cent of the casualties. Almost an equal amount – 41 per cent – was caused by mines and other explosive devices. [...] We call on the parties to the conflict to implement their commitments to the Minsk agreements, including to strictly adhere to the ceasefire and withdraw weapons and fighters from the contact line. This

is particularly important as we move into the summer, where hostilities may escalate," stated Fiona Frazer, Head of the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, presenting the report of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine at a press briefing held at Ukraine Crisis Media Center. The report is based on interviews with 252 witnesses and victims of human rights violations as well as on observations during monitoring visits to both parties to the conflict.

The report focuses on persistent problems with infrastructure as a result of attacks, difficulties in crossing the contact line, prohibition of movement of goods between government-controlled and uncontrolled territories, the production cutback or closedown of a number of companies in the temporarily occupied territories, which resulted in people losing jobs. It is also noted that the forced termination of operation of the Rinat Akhmetov Humanitarian Staff, which has provided humanitarian aid to half a million civilians, deteriorated the condition of the most vulnerable and poor population in the temporarily occupied territories.

Illegal detention

The report contains information on new cases of unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, abductions, enforced disappearances, in particular, on the territory controlled by militants of so-called "LPR-DPR". There were recorded the new cases of tortures inflicted on detainees on both sides of the contact line. "We do not have full and unrestricted access to detainees held by armed groups. Nevertheless, we continued to document cases of deprivation of liberty perpetrated by members of armed groups of the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk people's republic' and self-proclaimed 'Luhansk people's republic'. The practice of the 30-day so-called 'administrative arrest' continues, which is often prolonged, without any legal redress, while detainees are denied access to lawyers or visits by family members," noted Fiona Frazer. She added that in the government-controlled territory the Monitoring Mission had unimpeded access to the places of detention.

During the period covered by the report, 14 people imprisoned before the conflict were transferred to the government-controlled territory. However, 9,500 persons imprisoned before the conflict still remain on the other side of the contact line.

Situation in Crimea

For the first time since the annexation of Crimea 12 persons imprisoned before the conflict were transferred to mainland Ukraine as a result of direct negotiations between the Ombudsmen of Ukraine and Russia.

The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission interviewed all transferred persons and documented serious violations of their rights to physical and mental integrity committed during their detention in prisons in Crimea and Russia, where they were transferred to in violation of international humanitarian law.

The report recorded violations of the Crimean Tatar community's right to a fair trial and restriction of the use of Ukrainian language in education. Besides, concern is expressed about the development of parallel structures in the territory of self-proclaimed "republics". It is noted that the Monitoring Mission has documented a number of violations of fundamental principles and standards of the trial, the right to liberty and security of a person committed in these "republics".

#15

Ukraine's Ultra-Right Militias are Challenging the Government to a Showdown

by Joshua Cohen
Washington Post, 15 June 2017
http://wapo.st/2tGT1ze

As Ukraine's fight against Russian-supported separatists continues, Kiev faces another threat to its long-term sovereignty: powerful right-wing ultranationalist groups. These groups are not shy about using violence to achieve their goals, which are certainly at odds with the tolerant Western-oriented democracy Kiev ostensibly seeks to become.

The recent brutal stabbing of a left-wing anti-war activist named Stas Serhiyenko illustrates the threat posed by these extremists. Serhiyenko and his fellow activists believe the perpetrators belonged to the neo-Nazi group C14 (whose name comes from a 14-word phrase used by white supremacists). The attack took place on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday, and C14's leader published a statement that celebrated Serhiyenko's stabbing immediately afterward.

The attack on Serhiyenko is just the tip of the iceberg. More recently C14 beat up a socialist politician while other ultranationalist thugs stormed the Lviv and Kiev City Councils. Far-right and neo-Nazi groups have also assaulted or disrupted art exhibitions, anti-fascist demonstrations, a "Ukrainians Choose Peace" event, LGBT events, a social center, media organizations, court proceedings and a Victory Day march celebrating the anniversary of the end of World War II.

According to a study from activist organization Institute Respublica, the problem is not only the frequency of far-right violence, but the fact that perpetrators enjoy widespread impunity. It's not hard to understand why Kiev seems reluctant to confront these violent groups. For one thing, far-right paramilitary groups played an important role early in the war against Russian-supported separatists. Kiev also fears these violent groups could turn on the government itself — something they've done before and continue to threaten to do.

To be clear, Russian propaganda about Ukraine being overrun by Nazis or fascists is false. Far-right parties such as Svoboda or Right Sector draw little support from Ukrainians.

Even so, the threat cannot be dismissed out of hand. If authorities don't end the far right's impunity, it risks further emboldening them, argues Krasimir Yankov, a researcher with Amnesty International in Kiev. Indeed, the brazen willingness of Vita Zaverukha – a renowned neo-Nazi out on bail and under house arrest after killing two police officers — to post pictures of herself after storming a popular Kiev restaurant with 50 other nationalists demonstrates the far right's confidence in their immunity from government prosecution.

It's not too late for the government to take steps to reassert control over the rule of law. First, authorities should enact a "zero-tolerance" policy on far-right violence. President Petro Poroshenko should order key law enforcement agencies — the Interior Ministry, the National Police of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Prosecutor Generals' Office (PGO) — to make stopping far-right activity a top priority.

The legal basis for prosecuting extremist vigilantism certainly exists. The Criminal Code of Ukraine specifically outlaws violence against peaceful assemblies. The police need to start enforcing this law.

Most importantly, the government must also break any connections between law enforcement agencies and far-right organizations. The clearest example of this problem lies in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which is headed by Arsen Avakov. Avakov has a long-standing relationship with the Azov Battalion, a paramilitary group that uses the SS symbol as its insignia and which, with several others, was integrated into the army or National Guard at the beginning of the war in the East. Critics have accused Avakov of using members of the group to threaten an opposition media outlet. As at least one commentator has pointed out, using the National Guard to combat ultranationalist violence is likely to prove difficult if far-right groups have become part of the Guard itself.

Avakov's Deputy Minister Vadym Troyan was a member of the neo-Nazi Patriot of Ukraine (PU) paramilitary organization, while current Ministry of Interior official Ilya Kiva – a former memberof the far-right Right Sector party whose Instagram feed is populated with images of former Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini – has called for gays "to be put to death." And Avakov himself used the PU to promote his business and political interests while serving as a governor in eastern Ukraine, and as interior minister formed and armed the extremist Azov battalion led by Andriy Biletsky, a man nicknamed the "White Chief" who called for a crusade against "Semite-led sub-humanity."

Such officials have no place in a government based on the rule of law; they should go. More broadly, the government should also make sure that every police officer receives human rights training focused on improving the policing and prosecution of hate crimes. Those demonstrating signs of extremist ties or sympathies should be excluded.
In one notorious incident, media captured images of swastika-tattooed thugs — who police claimed were only job applicants wanting to have "fun" — giving the Nazi salute in a police building in Kiev. This cannot be allowed to go on, and it's just as important for Ukrainian democracy to cleanse extremists from law enforcement as it is to remove

corrupt officials from former president Viktor Yanukovych's regime under Ukraine's "lustration" policy.

It's still not too late for Poroshenko to end the far right's growing sense of impunity. But he must act now.

#16
New Book

Near Abroad
Putin, the West and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus
Gerard Toal
Oxford University Press
ISBN: 9780190253301
http://bit.ly/2swoapW

Before Russia invaded Ukraine, it invaded Georgia. Both states are part of Russia's "near abroad" - newly independent states that were once part of the Soviet Union and are now Russia's neighbors. While the Russia-Georgia war of 2008 faded from the headlines in the wake of the global recession, the geopolitical contest that created it did not. Six years later, the spectre of a revanchist Russia returned when Putin's forces invaded and annexed the Crimean peninsula, once part of Russia but an internationally recognized part of Ukraine since the Soviet collapse. Crimea's annexation and follow on conflict in eastern Ukraine have generated the greatest geopolitical crisis on the European continent since the end of the Cold War.

In Near Abroad, the eminent political geographer Gerard Toal moves beyond the polemical rhetoric that surrounds Russia's interventions in Georgia and Ukraine to study the underlying territorial conflicts and geopolitical struggles. Central to understanding are legacies of the Soviet Union collapse: unresolved territorial issues, weak states and a conflicted geopolitical culture in Russia over the new territorial order. The West's desire to expand NATO contributed to a growing geopolitical contest in Russia's near abroad. This found expression in a 2008 NATO proclamation that Georgia and Ukraine will become members of NATO, a "red line" issue for Russia. The road to invasion and war in Georgia and Ukraine, thereafter, is explained in Near Abroad.

Geopolitics is often thought of as a game of chess. Near Abroad provides an account of real life geopolitics, one that emphasizes changing spatial relationships, geopolitical cultures and the power of media images. Rather than being a cold game of deliberation, geopolitics is often driven by emotions and ambitions, by desires for freedom and greatness, by clashing personalities and reckless acts. Not only a penetrating analysis of Russia's

relationships with its regional neighbors, Near Abroad also offers an analysis of how US geopolitical culture frequently fails to fully understand Russia and the geopolitical archipelago of dependencies in its near abroad.

Gerard Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) is Professor of Government and International Affairs in the School of Public and International Affairs at Virginia Tech's Washington metro area campus.

#17
New Book

Transnational Ukraine?
Networks and Ties that Influence(d) Contemporary Ukraine
Timm Beichelt and Susann Worschech, eds.
2017
Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag
ISBN 978-3-8382-0944-9
http://bit.ly/2sm1E4t

The Euromaidan protests highlighted Ukraine as a state between East and West European pathways. It became obvious that Ukraine's search for identity and future is deeply rooted in historical fragmentations of the country which indicate Ukraine's long-standing and multiple ties beyond its borders.

In this volume, distinguished scholars provide empirical analysis and theoretical reflections on Ukraine's transnational embeddedness which surfaced with an unexpected intensity in the recent political conflict. The contributions focus on such phenomena as the role of international media and of diaspora communities in the Euromaidan's aftermath, on the transnational roots of memories and the search for collective identity, and on transnational linkages of elites within Ukrainian political and economic regimes. The anthology demonstrates the theoretical and analytical value of the concept of transnationalism for studying the ambivalent processes of post-Soviet modernization.

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