

MINNESOTA VOICE

Boryspil, Ukraine: A sister city with Polish roots under siege

by Mark Dillon

In June 1920, Polish Gen. Edward Rydz-Śmigły knew the importance of an airfield in Boryspil, a suburb south of Kyiv. A squadron of French-built, Polish Air Force reconnaissance bombers were stationed there to keep tabs on Russian troop movements during the Polish-Soviet war.

On June 2 of that year, fearing an assault on the airfield, Rydz-Śmigły ordered two battalions of infantry to attack the city, occupied by the Soviet 58th Rifle Division. Although numerically inferior, the Polish forces managed to take the enemy and their supply depot by surprise, and the Russians then withdrew eastward.



Dr. Irina Fursman, Ukrainian-American co-founder of the HueLife management consulting firm in Minnesota believes lessons that exchange students learned in Minnesota about the value of civil society and the passion to build a better future will be retained in Ukraine no matter what actions Russia takes in the coming months.

Today Boryspil is home to Ukraine's largest international airport, and again on the potential front lines amid Russian threats. It's where U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken landed in January to attempt to talk down the Putin regime-engineered crisis and where the United Kingdom has delivered antitank guns.

Boryspil is also sister city to Hopkins, Minnesota, an older suburb of Minneapolis in a metro area with a very active Ukrainian community. That extended group includes several thousand people of mixed Polish, Carpatho-Rusyn, Russian and Belarusian heritage.

A decade ago, 17 teenagers and three adult chaperones visited Hopkins from the Boryspil area under a student exchange program developed by Dr. Irina Fursman, a first



Sokoty in happier times. Ukrainian teenage exchange students from Boryspil gather at City Hall in Hopkins, Minn. in the summer of 2012 to learn about American democracy and culture. Today the youngest would be age 22.

generation Ukrainian American and co-owner of a St. Louis Park, Minn. management consulting firm. Then Hopkins mayor Eugene Maxwell visited Boryspil in 2012 as part of the program, and September 26 was recognized as Boryspil Day in his city.

As evidence of a possible Russian invasion mounted in early February, Fursman and the program's alumni in Poland, Minnesota and other parts of the U.S. watched with both concern and courage. Some declined to speak publicly amid concern for relatives and friends in central and western Ukraine, and those already trapped in Russian-occupied territory in the eastern parts of the country.

"We are stronger now than we were in 2014. Putin's aggression has united us, and strengthened our resolve," Fursman said. "It is different world now."

Luda Anastazievsky, a native of Mariupol, a Ukrainian port city that was shelled by Russian artillery a few years ago and would likely be on the front line of another Russian attack, organized a Stand With Ukraine rally on the steps of the Minnesota State Capitol February 19.



Boryspil 1920. A crew poses with a Polish Air Force Breguet 14 bomber stationed at Boryspil airfield near Kyiv during Polish-Soviet War in the spring of 1920. Some 70 such bombers were acquired from France after World War I and helped defeat the Russians.

"We are very grateful for the support we've seen in Poland, and in Chicago (rallies organized by the Ukrainian Congress of America were held in January that attracted members of the Polish, Lithuanian, Estonian, Latvian and Belarussian diaspora), Anastazievsky said.

AN ESTIMATED ONE MILLION UKRAINIANS live and work in Poland and officials in Warsaw believe that number would rise significantly if refugees are forced to flee from the path of Russian artillery shells and aerial bombardment.

"If need be, Ukrainians are prepared for the worst," Anastazievsky said.

As of Valentine's Day, communications between Minnesota diaspora and family in Ukraine remained largely intact, she added, with Facebook and instant messaging services providing an opportunity for daily connections.

Cultural links between American and Ukraine people forged in the past decade have created an enduring understanding and respect for civil society that can survive war and fear, Fursman says. Students coming to or otherwise interacting with America have learned what it means to live by the rule of law, and how democracy should work, how to organize community groups, and the lessons of this experience will not be forgotten, she added.

"My heart is torn over what is happening since I am half Ukrainian, half Russian," Fursman noted. "We have the knowledge, means and will to resist. We will continue to fight."

THE MINNEAPOLIS AREA has been home to immigrants and refugees from the Ukraine for more than a century – including the period prior and after World War I, Stalinist communism, Nazi occupation, antisemitism, the Holodo-

munity Center near the Mississippi River waterfront park, a Ukrainian Byzantine Catholic Church (St. Constantine), two Ukrainian Orthodox Churches (St. Katherine's and St. Michael's).

ON MARCH 8, the St. Paul (Minn.) Jewish Federation is hosting a talk by Ukrainian Jewish expatriate Mascha Shumatskaya, who will detail a "story of escape from her war-torn hometown and her work with other Jews in Ukraine to provide food and essential supplies to displaced families affect by ongoing violence."

Boryspil's city identity has shifted

from the time it was part of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth in the 16th century. After the Union of Lublin, the southern regions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were given to the Polish Crown and in 1590, the Boryspil area was given to Wojtech Czonowicki. In 1596 Polish King Sigismund III Vasa made the town a royal estate.

The Boryspil town's original coat of arms contained an image of Saint Stanislaw (Stanislaus of Szczepanów) but today features a commercial jet set against a church facade.

Are Cargill's Ukraine grain operations a Putin target?



The \$250 million Neptune port grain terminal near Odessa is majority owned by Minnesota-based Cargill Inc., and one of the largest American investments in Ukraine. Rail lines from the port connect to most of the country. Cargill also has large operations in Poland.

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supplies from Ukraine, industry trade journals report.

One Minnesota agricultural company's operations in Ukraine appear to be vulnerable to an expected Russian naval blockade involving warships that appeared to be developing off the coast of Odessa in the Black Sea in early February.

Cargill Inc., based in Minnetonka, Minn., is the majority owner of the Neptune port terminal at Port Pivdennyi, which is a few miles east of Odessa. The company, one of the world's largest privately-held agribusinesses, employs about 200 workers at the port and has invested about \$500 million in Ukraine since 1991.

With a shipping capacity of 5 million tons annually, the Neptune terminal at Port Pivdennyi is one of four in the region that handles about three quarters of Ukrainian grain exports, which have been mainly to China, Africa and the Middle East.

This past season, Ukraine enjoyed a strong harvest and the country's wheat exports rose 29%, according to S&P Global Platts, an industry newsletter. Meanwhile, amid a drought in growing regions, Russia had a weak harvest, with output down about 10%, spurring a sharp increase in consumer food prices in Russia, and political unrest.

Last year Putin imposed consumer price controls on items such as sunflower oil and raised export taxes on Russian agribusinesses, making them less competitive globally for key grain customers such as Egypt, which then switched to getting more to

As of Feb. 12, Cargill had not commented publicly on risks or changes to its Ukrainian operations. However, on Feb. 11, the company posted a new job opening in English for a field representative in the western growing region of the country.

In 2014, Russia seized a sunflower oil manufacturing plant owned by Cargill in Donetsk when it invaded Crimea. In Poland, Cargill has about 3,000 employees at about a dozen locations.

Cargill opened the Neptune terminal in mid-2019, describing it as providing deep-water berth of 16 meters that can accommodate high tonnage vessels, with the potential to create as many as 1,000 new jobs at related businesses.

For agriculture, the plant has meant ships can easily transport more corn, barley and wheat to developing nations where food supplies have been compromised as a result of COVID-19 related supply chain disruptions, notably in Africa.

For military purposes, the port could be used as a staging area to supply troops by rail if Russia were to invade along Ukraine's Black Sea coast. Six Russian amphibious assault transports were reportedly steaming in the Black Sea as of mid-February.

When it opened, Andrey Stavitsky, the Ukrainian co-owner of the terminal said in a press release that "Neptune's major goal is to provide every Ukrainian farmer with access to the global markets."

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