

The ecological crisis in Lviv

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A huge fire broke out on 29 May at a municipal waste disposal site near Velyki Hrybovychi (around 10 km from the centre of Lviv). This is Ukraine's largest landfill (26 ha) containing dangerous chemical and industrial waste. During the intervention by the fire brigade four people died buried under the trash. On 9 June, nationalists in Lviv tried to capitalise on the tragedy—insisting that Mayor Andriy Sadovyi resign, they stormed city hall. This led to clashes with National Guard and a session of the city council being disrupted. The fire and the deaths of the firefighters have provoked criticism of Sadovyi from the camp of President Petro Poroshenko, who has over the past few months been in dispute with him and his Self-Reliance party.

Commentary

- The fire at Hrybovyske landfill has provoked an extensive debate on municipal and industrial waste disposal in Ukraine. The country has only one operating waste incinerator (in Kyiv). In effect, only around 5% of waste in Ukraine is recycled while the rest is stored at around 6,000 official landfill sites and at dozen of thousands operating illegally. According to the government's estimates, as much as 24% of monitored waste disposal sites fail to meet ecological safety standards. Many toxic chemical substances are not properly monitored, and they frequently make their way into groundwater and rivers.
- The ecological situation in western Ukraine also poses a threat to Poland. Municipal and industrial waste water from the Lviv urban agglomeration and mining waters from the area around Sokal are discharged into the Bug River and its tributaries, and this is an important part of the water supply for central Poland and the Warsaw agglomeration. Substances from improperly stored waste can also leach into rivers and groundwater. This means that the worsening of the ecological crisis and further pollution of the waters and rivers might be dangerous to Poland.
- The fire at the landfill and the deaths of the firefighters immediately became an element of the political struggle. The municipal government, has been unable to close or tidy up the waste disposal site appropriately, despite criticism from environmentalists. This fact, in the context of the recent tragedy, has been used by the mayor of Lviv's political opponents to decrease his popularity. Sadovyi, with 34% approval ratings, has become a possible candidate for the most senior positions in the state. Self-Reliance is supported by around 10% of voters and has been trying to present itself in parliament as a

constructive opposition to the government, but during most votes it has voted against the government majority. This is provoking increasing tension between Sadovyi and Poroshenko. Deputies from the presidential party have severely criticised the mayor of Lviv since the tragedy at the landfill site. Lviv-based nationalists, who have been in conflict with Sadovyi for years, are also trying to capitalise on the situation. The Lviv government's negligence with regard to the landfill will affect Sadovyi's reputation. Until recently he was viewed as one of Ukraine's most effective mayors.