

Rada canteen offers healthy, cheap fare

By Maria Romanenko. Published March 31. Updated March 31 at 1:31 am



A meal of steamed chicken cutlet, Caprese salad, baked apple and kompot costs Hr 83 (\$3) at the parliament's cafe.

Photo by Anastasia Vlasova

Myths abound concerning the Verkhovna Rada canteen, one of the capital's most exclusive eateries. Only lawmakers, parliament workers and accredited journalists are permitted to enter.

The rumors include stories of the finest food and champagne being available almost for free.

So I and a Kyiv Post photographer went to search for the facts in the canteen, located in the basement of Ukraine's splendid parliament building. This is unknown territory: the session hall, lobby and staircases of the Verkhovna Rada are familiar to most in Ukraine from television coverage, but the rest of the building is largely unknown to the public.

First glance

First impressions: The canteen is underwhelming. Sparkling clean, in white, beige and blue colors, and by no means small (about 10 meters wide by 20 meters long). But the underground room is windowless and the space is broken up by two rows of square, beige marble columns supporting the three-meter-high ceiling.

This gives the space a slightly claustrophobic, airless feeling that is not dispelled by the bright white strip lights on the ceiling or the warmer, yellow incandescent spotlights that

dot the large square ceiling panels.

One side of the canteen is taken up by three large buffet counters. Each offers the same selection of hot food, salads and desserts, so visitors can skip to another counter if the line is long, or if their chosen dish has run out. In effect, the Rada canteen is a self-service place with rather similar prices found in other such establishments.

Once you have your tray of food, you can sit at one of the tables that line the other walls, which are set with white tablecloths and blue place coverings. The chairs are simple, chrome tube affairs.

In addition to these tables, there are round, Soviet-style “standing” tables, about midriff high, where patrons can stand to drink or eat.

Apart from that, the parliament canteen seems slightly more sophisticated than the average buffet, but it’s not fancy enough to be intimidating. Sadly, taking photos of the canteen interior is forbidden for reasons of privacy and security.

But nobody objected to me and my colleague photographing our food.

Healthy, hearty meals

I’ve heard from colleagues and fellow journalists that the Verkhovna Rada has very healthy food, and it didn’t disappoint.

There is a good variety of meat and fish, most of which come with rice, potatoes or boiled buckwheat. For dessert, there are baked apples, pancakes stuffed with pear or “tvorog” curd cheese (“They are to die for,” my friend tells me), muffins, cookies, sweet pastries and branded chocolate bars such as those that can be found in most local supermarkets. Drinks-wise, there are a variety of local traditional fruit drinks like kompot and uzvar, and tea and coffee.

The cooked foods in the buffet have no descriptive labels or prices next to them, which makes it difficult. Luckily I am not too picky with my food, but I imagine those with allergies might consider this a bigger issue.

We experienced some staff haughtiness when my colleague asked how much the baked salmon and asparagus was. “All the fish is around Hr 200 (\$7.4),” the buffet lady said.

Neither I nor my colleague look like we’re officials or made of money, so maybe lawmakers themselves get better treatment. In fact, nothing on the menu costs more than about Hr 50 (\$1.85).

Feasting away

After asking a couple of questions, I decided to go for something that looked like fried potatoes, vegetables and pork. Later from the receipt I found out it was called “Azu,” a

Tatar meat stew (costing Hr 34 (\$1.26)). It tasted fine but, determined to save my appetite for other dishes, I abandoned the plate after a mouthful.

The tvorog pancakes, which I had yearned for since my friend's recommendation, were not available, so I resorted to syrnyky cheese pancakes with raisins (Hr 24 (\$0.89)) instead. I threw in some jam for an extra Hr 6 (\$0.22) too.

I randomly pointed at something that had a lot of double cream and chocolate flakes on top of it. It turned out that underneath all the double cream there were some prunes stuffed with walnuts.

The dessert went by the name "Snow White" and cost Hr 26 (\$0.96). I finished and felt content with my Hr 91 (\$3.36) meal.

My colleague was mostly satisfied with her even healthier choices. She ordered a steamed chicken cutlet, tomato, mozzarella and pesto salad, which went by the name "Caprese", a baked apple, and a glass of kompot, which was too sweet for her liking.

She paid Hr 83 (\$3) and couldn't stop raving about the apple: "It tastes just like the ones from my childhood!"

Healthy in body, mind

Overall, the Rada canteen is a good place to eat. It offers big names for eating companions and comfort. The food is simple yet nutritious. The service wasn't the best, but understandable given the buffet-style setting. While the napkin holder at our table was empty when we sat down, one of the cleaning ladies noticed after a few minutes and replenished it.

It's good to know my country's representatives appear to be getting the right amounts of carbohydrates, protein and healthy fats. And if they end up passing some lousy laws, at least we know it's not for the want of a nutritious, healthy meal in the workplace.