

## **Ukraine Fears Fall Out From Trump Impeachment**

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Leaked call highlights Volodymyr Zelensky's political inexperience.

Ukrainian analysts fear that their country's role in President Donald Trump's impeachment scandal may cause them wider strategic problems on the world stage.

In September, it emerged that Trump had used a phone call to press Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate his main Democratic rival, Joe Biden.

The case concerned Joe Biden's son, Hunter, and his work at Burisma, a Ukrainian gas production company owned by Mykola Zlochevsky, who served as minister of ecology under former president Viktor Yanukovich.

After Yanukovich's departure, Ukraine's prosecutor general began to investigate the company's alleged embezzlement of state funds and tax evasion.

In the July call, the US president repeatedly stressed the need to look into Biden and his son and noted the 2016 dismissal of the prosecutor, presumably Viktor Shokin, conducting the investigation.

"I heard you had a prosecutor who was very good and he was shut down and that is really unfair. A lot of people are talking about that, the way they shut your very good prosecutor down and you had some very bad people involved," noted Donald Trump, according to a **rough transcript** released by the White House.

While Trump denies any improper behaviour, others argue that he was expecting a clear quid pro quo, not least because of his recent decision to review military aid to Ukraine.

Daryna Kalenyuk, executive director of the Anti-Corruption Action Center (AntAC), said that she believed the call's meaning had been explicit.

"Donald Trump expected Zelensky to 'investigate' Biden, that is, his opponent," she said. "This was very clearly seen from this call, that is, he directly said - call and talk with [Trump's lawyer Rudy] Giuliani and with my American attorney general. You will agree there, and I want you to help me with this investigation. That is, this was the main message from Trump, and apparently Zelensky did not find the strength and opportunity to say no. Instead, he mumbled something about the '100 per cent' [loyalty] of his prosecutor who would look at this case."

The call has highlighted how new Zelensky - a former comedian - is to the world of international politics.

Hanna Shelest, editor-in-chief of the Ukraine Analytica journal, stressed what she called Zelensky's "certain inexperience in conducting appropriate negotiations. Perhaps it would not be a bad conversation at the level of a well-known comedian and a celebrity somewhere at some event - at a party or somewhere else, but for the president it was not a professional enough and politically correct conversation".

Zelensky had been rash in giving such assurances, she continued.

"The question is: not knowing the full case to promise something or give some hope, which is heard in those phrases that he tells Trump about a possible investigation - this is, of course, his mistake."

Analysts agree that this kind of high-profile role in US politics is not a positive development. Up until now, support for Ukraine has been a bipartisan issue in Washington. The US has long supported Ukrainian interests in the ongoing conflict with Russia in the country's east, and has maintained pressure on the EU to extend and strengthen sanctions against Moscow.

Washington has also provided Kiev with some 1.5 billion US dollars in military aid since 2014, although in August, Trump ordered a review of this funding programme.

These latest developments may threaten both Republican and Democrat support for Ukraine.

"Next year, for the whole year, we are embroiled in the role of the ball on the US political soccer field," said Kalenyuk. "That is, it will be very difficult to hold the support of both parties for Ukraine in the United States. The policy of the White House and the Congress as a whole will be unpredictable regarding assistance to Ukraine in the war with Russia," she noted.

Shelest also stressed the risk of Ukraine becoming a divisive issue.

“Ukraine may become hostage to the fact that one of the political parties will want it [Ukraine] to make a choice. I think that a lot will depend on representatives of both parties in the Congress and in the Senate, and on how carefully Ukraine will act in order not to make statements that could be interpreted as support of one or the other side.

“Much will depend on the appointment of the Ukrainian ambassador in Washington – on how quickly he can establish good working contacts with both political parties in order to prevent such situations before they could proceed to a new scandal.”

The conversation between Trump and Zelensky also touched on the former US ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Jovanovic, as well as supposedly insufficient support from the European Union.

“Of course, for international partners, all these statements will not be received very positively, and trust and relations will need to be restored, first of all with the Europeans,” said Kalenyuk.

Shelest said that the entire affair would make other countries wary of dealing with Ukraine and more careful in its support.

“Ukrainian diplomacy needs to double its own efforts with explanations... of course, this will lead to some complex negotiations with our European partners.”

Kalenyuk also predicted a deterioration in the country’s wider global image.

“This is a negative story and great efforts must be made to turn this story from negative into positive,” she said. “Because Ukraine, not only in America, but also in the world, will gain the image of such a toxic country that if you help, then you’ll [drown] in the swamp,”

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