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HOW CAN UKRAINE STEER AWAY FROM DETERIORATING RELATIONS WITH THE US IN LIGHT OF RUDI GIULIANI'S ACCUSATIONS?

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The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Embassy of Sweden in Ukraine, the International Renaissance Foundation, and the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE)

The President-elect in Ukraine got a complex heritage regarding Ukraine's relations with the US. The first serious test on this topic could have taken place if Rudy Giuliani came to Kyiv to talk about continuing the investigation of cases which are of interest to Donald Trump. The visit was canceled with an argument: Zelensky is surrounded by people hostile to Trump (and even to the US). Therefore the current priority is to understand how President Zelensky should respond to new claims from Washington in order to get out of this complex situation. With this in mind, the New Europe Center contacted American experts with the following question: **How should President Zelensky act regarding Ukraine's relations with the US in view of Mr. Giuliani's accusations?**



DANIEL TREISMAN,

Professor of political science at the University of California,
Research associate of the National Bureau of Economic
Research



DAVID J. KRAMER,

Former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights
and Labor in the George W. Bush administration, now a Senior
Fellow at Florida International University

At present, the Trump administration seems to view Ukraine primarily as a source of rumors and invented scandals that can be used as ammunition in political battles against the leading Democrats in Congress and candidates in the 2020 presidential campaign. Responding to this will require discipline and focus. Ukraine's president should state clearly that his law enforcement bodies will investigate any concrete evidence provided to them by the FBI of alleged crimes committed in Ukraine by Americans. After stating this, he should refuse to get drawn into further discussion of rumors and endeavor to refocus the bilateral conversation on the issues crucial to Ukraine. He should decline to get into substantive negotiations with informal representatives such as Giuliani and insist on communicating via the formal channels at the appropriate level (e.g., minister to minister, president to president). To the extent possible, the administration should simply refuse to comment on sensationalistic news stories in the US.

President Zelenskiy's initial handling of the requests by Rudy Giuliani, President Trump's personal attorney, has been very good. He was right to turn down the request by Giuliani for a meeting, and he should do his best to stay out of this matter. It is regrettable that Giuliani and others are trying to drag Ukraine's new leadership into American domestic politics. During a recent visit to Kyiv, I encountered many Ukrainians worried that U.S.-Ukraine relations would suffer if Giuliani continued to use Ukraine as a tool in America's upcoming election. Zelenskiy's instincts to stay out of this morass are exactly right. Changes in the prosecutor general's office are also important. Perhaps most unfortunately, given his position as lawyer for President Trump, Giuliani is sowing doubts about America's commitment to Ukraine, and one person likely happy about that is Vladimir Putin.



MATTHEW ROJANSKY,

Director, Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars



PAUL R. PILLAR,

Nonresident Senior Fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Security Studies.

President Zelenskiy is in a uniquely good position to engage not only with adversaries like Russia but with friends like the United States and the EU. First, he has a strong popular mandate, having won majorities in nearly every region of the country and nearly 3/4 of the vote in the country overall. Second, he has delivered a powerful opening salvo for his presidency by using his inauguration address to stress the unity of all Ukrainians and the need to show their commitment to European values in their daily lives, not just in protests or at the ballot box. Finally, he has raised the possibility of a new path forward for the country with early parliamentary elections, though this carries with it the risk of challenging entrenched interests represented in the current Rada. He should bring to engagement with Western leaders that same consistent and clear message, and he should distinguish himself as a Ukrainian politician who does not just ask others to pay to solve the country's problems, but rather leads his country first in becoming an attractive partner for international supporters and investors. As he himself has said, this is about more than promises and speeches—the proof will be in the results. Americans will be eagerly watching and hoping for Ukraine's success.

President Zelenskiy should avoid any involvement in U.S. domestic politics. This means avoiding any dealings with an American political figure's personal attorney who, like Rudy Giuliani, is trying to get Ukraine to take actions that could embarrass a political opponent back in the United States. Russian interference in U.S. elections is worthy of condemnation, and will be a subject of opprobrium in U.S. politics long after Donald Trump has left office. It is in the interests of Ukraine, and of good Ukrainian-U.S. relations, for Ukraine not to go down the same path as Russia.



MELINDA HARING,

Editor of the UkraineAlert blog at the Atlantic Council, Senior
Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute

Mr. Zelenskiy should ignore Mr. Giuliani's false allegations and pursue a strong relationship with the United States. In spite of Giuliani's cooked up and baseless theories, support for Ukraine remains very strong in Washington, especially on Capitol Hill. Foreign policy professionals and diplomats are eager to engage with the new president and his team. Mr. Giuliani's accusations are irresponsible and do not represent official US foreign policy. Aimed at a domestic audience, Mr. Giuliani is trying to change the narrative of Russia collusion to Ukrainian collusion. Mr. Zelenskiy would be wise to ignore Giuliani, and when he comes to Washington, he should spend most of his time on Capitol Hill.