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Ukraine: corruption scandal involving senior government officials continues

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On 11 May, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) charged former head of the Presidential Office Andriy Yermak with money laundering. Investigators allege that 460 million hryvnias (almost €9 million) were used to finance the construction of the luxury Dynasty residential complex near Kyiv. The following day, the High Anti-Corruption Court of Ukraine commenced hearings on a motion to detain Yermak, with bail set at 180 million hryvnias (almost €3.5 million).

On 28 April, the news outlet Ukrainska Pravda published the first transcripts of recordings obtained by anti-corruption agencies during Operation Midas (see: '*Operation Midas: the larges corruption scandal within Zelensky's inner circle*'). The transcripts indicate that businessman Timur Mindich, a close business associate of Volodymyr Zelensky prior to his presidency, coordinated funding for the construction of the residences. According to the reports, the properties are linked not only to Mindich, but also to former deputy prime minister Oleksiy Chernyshov and individuals identified by the media as Yermak and Zelensky. In another recorded conversation, Mindich allegedly pressured then defence minister Rustem Umerov to award military contracts to Firepoint, a company under his control which produces equipment critical for the Ukrainian armed forces, including drones and medium- and long-range missiles.

Further recordings were released on 1 and 8 May. According to the transcripts, Mindich's business partner Oleksandr Tsukerman and businessman Vasyl Veselyi, who is reportedly linked to Yermak, discussed appointing loyal associates to the supervisory board of Sense Bank, which was nationalised in 2023 (see: '*Ukraine: Sense Bank nationalised*'). The materials also suggest that the deputy head of the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAP) informed individuals under investigation about developments in the case, allowing Tsukerman and Mindich to leave the country before formal charges were brought against them. On 2 May, in connection with the scandal, Zelensky signed a decree imposing sanctions on former head of the Presidential Office Andriy Bohdan for actions allegedly deemed to threaten national security, although no details were made public. Media outlets interpreted the decision as retaliation for providing journalists with the transcripts.

The release of the transcripts marks a further stage in 'Mindichgate', the largest corruption scandal involving Zelensky's inner circle during his presidency. The restrained and dismissive response from the authorities suggests an attempt to minimise the political fallout, although the decision to bring charges against Yermak is likely to make that

increasingly difficult.

Commentary

- **The publication of the leaks and the motion to detain Yermak deal a major blow not only to the president's image, but also to Zelensky personally.** The transcripts confirm many of the suspicions surrounding 'Mindichgate'. They support allegations that funds obtained through corruption were used during the full-scale war to finance the construction of luxury residences, one of which was reportedly intended for Zelensky. This undermines the president's attempts to distance himself from the scandal by suggesting he had no knowledge of the scheme. At the same time, the authorities are not investigating the head of state, as Ukraine's constitution prohibits this while a president remains in office. However, the possibility that charges could be brought after Zelensky leaves office cannot be ruled out. The published conversations also strengthen claims that Mindich controlled the company Firepoint and that the firm secured numerous contracts for the supply of military equipment and drones through his personal connections with Umerov. In addition, the recordings link several scandals that previously appeared to be unrelated, including those involving Firepoint, Energoatom and the unexplained origin of the funds used to construct the Dynasty complex.
- **The sanctions imposed on Bohdan suggest a nervous reaction from the ruling camp, including Zelensky himself.** The president not only took the controversial step of sanctioning a Ukrainian citizen — despite Ukrainian law prohibiting such measures against the country's own citizens — but also failed to provide any explanation for the decision. The Presidential Office most likely concluded that Bohdan was behind the leaks and sought to deter other potential whistleblowers from Zelensky's former inner circle from undertaking similar actions. Bohdan, for his part, claims that the sanctions are punishment for criticising the government. The move could also damage the government's image by reinforcing accusations of authoritarian tendencies and attempts to silence political opponents.
- **The absence of any reaction from Ukraine's top leadership to the corruption scandal suggests an attempt to downplay both the scandal and the public attention it has generated.** This is reflected in statements by deputy heads of the Presidential Office: Mykhailo Podolyak questioned the credibility of the leaks, while Dmytro Lytvyn dismissed the scandal as insignificant. Such a strategy, however, is unlikely to remain effective for long. Journalists and MPs with access to the materials have already announced that further leaks are expected to be published soon.
- **Now that charges have been brought against Yermak, it will be far more difficult for Zelensky to distance himself from the scandal.** The recorded conversations and statements by investigators indicate that the Dynasty complex was financed with funds derived from corruption and that the project was managed by some of the president's closest associates. The charges also weaken the narrative promoted by pro-government media, which had argued that NABU's earlier failure to act against Yermak reflected a lack of evidence linking him to the scandal. The case against Zelensky's former closest ally is likely to further damage the president's reputation, reduce public trust in his leadership and increase frustration over corruption at the highest levels of government during wartime.